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An Unconventional Startup Strategy

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May 07, 2014

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/3335/An-Unconventional-Startup-Strategy>

"Stalking is an underrated startup strategy," says Linda Rottenberg, co-founder and CEO of Endeavor Global, who illustrates this through the story of Josephine Esther Mentzer, whose relentless salesmanship led to huge success in cosmetics. Mentzer came to be known as Estee Lauder.



Transcript

Stalking is an under rated startup strategy. And one of my favorite entrepreneurs started this way. Her name was Josephine Esther Mentzer. So Esther Mentzer, she was known, was born to Hungarian Jewish parents in Queens, but she coveted luxury. One day she was at a saloon and she noticed this beautiful blouse that a women was wearing, she said, "Where did you get that blouse?" The women looked at her dismissively and said, "Why would you care? You could never afford it". And at that moment Esther vowed that she was going to have it all. The jewels, the exquisite homes, the arts, she was going to have everything. So her uncle John was a chemist - struggling chemist, who couldn't sell his lines of creams. So Esther took to stalking, she would stop unsuspecting victims on their way to a Salvation Army meeting in the elevator, on the street, she would point out their wrinkles they didn't even think they had, whip out her super rich all purpose cream and say that she could help them glow. When the ladies said "we have somewhere else to be", she said, "No, no just give me five minutes".

And when Esther was successful enough to have her own business, the first thing she did is change her name to appear more in the realm of luxury that she desired. She took her married name Lauder and changed her first name to Estee. Now Estee Lauder also stalked retailers because her dream was to get into Saks Fifth Avenue. But the Saks buyer did not want this untested brand with this unknown women. So Esther waited for her opportunity. And one day, now Estee, at the Waldorf Astoria charity meeting, she actually handed out these lipsticks in a metallic sheath, which are a big step up from the plastic. The women lined up and said, "Okay, where can we get more of these?" Estee smiled and said, "Why didn't you try Saks". The line at Saks went out the door across the street, the next day the buyer called and placed an order for \$800. Stalking is an underrated startup strategy.