



Stanford eCorner

Understand the Essence

Ron Gutman, *HealthTap*

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Ron Gutman, founder and CEO of HealthTap, discusses the need to balance broad strategic thinking with a granular-level understanding of the fundamental human experience that a new product seeks to improve or create. As an example, Gutman explains how his digital-health app is just an extension of the archetypal interaction between healer and patient.



Transcript

At the end of the day, maybe as a product guy sometimes for a hammer, the entire world looks like a nail a little bit, but it's okay, right? So I think it's all about the product. I think it's all about the people that you are serving. If you decide to change the world in a certain way and just have a big strategy, we love thinking strategy, we love thinking big things without thinking about, oh, if we do this and how it impact that and the markets and the - we can think big. (22:54) think big, right? So think strategy. And I will tell you think about the use case. Boil it down to the need, think about what there - if you look at the big picture of what you are trying to solve, trying to boil it down to the essence, what really matters, where is the need and where it lies and once you understand the need and it's very, very granular, how can you build from this particular need to the big thing that you want to build. When I started HealthTap at the beginning and I wanted to change healthcare, I really wanted to change healthcare, I thought that healthcare is broken, I thought that there is so much to solve in it, like it's impossible if you look at how people manage their health, if you look at healthcare cost, I mean there is - it's a huge global challenge to solve. But we had five people when we were in University Avenue trying to think in a tiny little office of how can we change the world and how can we change healthcare. As a product guy, I had to think about the basics, the most granular thing and the way I did it was very, very simple. I went all the way back to caveman time and this is how I think about the product.

At the beginning, it's been very, very good for me throughout my entire career to really take the experience all the way back to caveman time because if you think about it for a second, any successful and extremely useful digital experience that you are using extensively in your life, if you boil it down to the essence, it was extremely similar to the ways things were done in caveman time. If you boil it down to - by the way, I am a huge believer that as human beings, we have not changed a lot since then. I am very serious about that. Think about it, the essence, right, of what really matters and particularly if you want to build something that scales that we need to be applicable to all people, you need to go to the granular essence of it, you need to understand what are the underlying human factors that will impact everyone, think how simple and granular they need to be. I went back all the way to caveman time and asked myself how was healthcare practiced in caveman time? It's a good question, right? So there is a person that didn't feel well, they had something in their hand maybe and they went to a healer, right, which was how humanity was passing the health knowledge from generation to generation, so they are the wise people that had the health knowledge and they were the healers and the person went to the healer and told them I have a pain in my hand, it's been going on for about four, five days and it's kind of like blue, what should I do? And the healer gave them spell and a potion and send them back home and 33% of the time they felt better because of the placebo effect and it worked, right? But interestingly enough when you think about it, healthcare hasn't changed much since then. The healthcare experience is exactly the same. When you're not feeling well, you go to wait or to a doctor, right, and you tell them this is and what's going on and they give you maybe more than a potion and a spell but you know, maybe there's a little bit more science there, right? But the experience - the healthcare experience remains the same. So I said to myself, okay, so what's the granular experience, what's the question and answer. You have a doctor, you have a healer, you have a doctor on the one hand and you have a patient or

a person on the other hand and the first interaction is question-and-answer. So we took that, put it in digital channels, we started with the pregnant women and moms with pediatrician and obstetrician and magic.

Everyone understood it very quickly. It was very easy to communicate to the moms and the pregnant women, it was very easy to communicate to the doctors that you know what they are going to do exactly what they always did, they're just going to do it using mobile devices or web interfaces. And everyone's like oh, great. Now I can, instead of going and reading on the website some articles, I can go and ask doctors questions. That's awesome. I understand the value proposition. Doctor understood it really well because they answer questions all day long, now they did it just in digital channel, that's how it all started with a handful of pediatricians and obstetricians and a bunch of pregnant women and moms.