



Stanford eCorner

Invite Honest Feedback

Mike Rothenberg, *Rothenberg Ventures*

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Mike Rothenberg discusses the importance of letting others know that you want to hear their brutally honest feedback. The founder and CEO of Rothenberg Ventures says listening carefully can reveal the kernel of truth couched in politeness, adding that his decision to be a venture capitalist was largely based on feedback from a trusted acquaintance.



Transcript

One thing that I started doing in earnest there that I haven't stopped doing and hope to never stop doing is I started asking everybody that I trusted really what they think and being relentlessly open to feedback. And one interesting thing about feedback is the first time you ask for it even from somebody you really trust is that they will tiptoe. If they're a good friend, they will tiptoe, because it's really hard to tell somebody go for the jugular the very first time, because you're not really sure if they mean it. People like can you give me feedback? And you say, yes sure, your shoe is untied and they're like okay what else? And you have to kind of tease it out. And then finally when they say it - when you get to the thing that's like really maybe different from your worldview at the time, but they say it in a loving way they care about you and they're right, then that cognitive dissonance is the moment where you need to actually embrace that. And that is hard to do, but you have to say thank you. And so what I learned to do over those few months is to ask people in my life what - for advice and all kinds of things personal and professional and say thank you. And then really think about what mattered and resonated. And one of the things professionally I got advice from including people who are professors, including people I worked for in the past and stuff is you should - you have a good eye for entrepreneurs. One of the professors at Harvard said, how many of your friends that you were friends with at Stanford are now entrepreneurs and CEOs of venture-backed companies? He was trying to get data to help me, help coach me, I said more than 50, maybe 100.

He said that's not very normal. To have made friends with people and then they did that and then he said you maybe an entrepreneur talent scout, you may really like the kinds of things in people that help them do that.