



Stanford eCorner

The Importance of Mortar to Bricks

James Beshara, *Tilt*

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James Beshara, co-founder and CEO of Tilt, uses the metaphor of bricks and mortar to illustrate the relationship between the individual and the team, strategy versus culture, and results versus process. "The difference between bricks and mortar is ... a single finger can push over a stack bricks," Beshara says. "The mortar can help it withstand a hurricane."



Transcript

But I'm going to talk about bricks versus mortar and kind of the stuff that goes in between the bricks that makes all the difference. Going back to this slide and telling for the folks on the podcast, it is just a picture of bricks and mortar. And it is so easy to look at that photo and think, that's bricks. But a few years of doing this, I'd say, the mortar is more important. The difference between bricks and mortar is the difference between just-- a single finger can push over a stack of bricks. The mortar can help it withstand a hurricane. So, in that vein, bricks versus mortar, I'm going to talk about what I thought was really important versus what I now think is really important. And, by the way, it's not x versus y, and x isn't important. They're both important. It's just that I would have thought x is the thing I would think about.

And it turns out y, the why, is all I think about. A little wordplay there for you. So, the person versus the people. The perception is it's a person that does something. That's what we see on the cover of magazines, is a person, a face. It is kind of what we see in every heroic novel, is the person. That is the brick. That's the thing that you think it's built on. The mortar is really the people. I would have thought, OK, be really smart.

Have high integrity. Have a can-do attitude, persistence, and just think about all the qualities of that person. Man, our company has taken off the more and more we stopped thinking about ourselves and really started thinking about the people around us, the network around us. Whether it is investors that have helped refine the idea, whether it is the recruits that we brought on that are 10 times smarter than ourselves, whether it is even bringing Khaled on as a co-founder, it is the person versus the people. The people are the thing that help you withstand that hurricane. The people at Tilt-- whether it is the advisers, the investors, or our colleagues-- that is the most important thing. The people, it is all about the people. Strategy versus culture. Peter Drucker has a quote that goes, culture eats strategy for breakfast. And another way of looking at this slide is strategy versus execution.

To get anything right, you need strategy and execution. You need both. And you need to be right about both. You need the x and the y. But you end up thinking a lot more about the culture, the execution. And I compare culture, execution kind of like when you meet someone and you have body language. And in their face, the 16 different muscles, there's micro expressions. And you can pick up on these micro expressions. I look at culture as kind of these micro strategies. How things are done on a Tuesday.

What strategy did someone take? Culture is also simply defined as how we treat people and how we treat each other. Bill Campbell said that. I think it's one of the best definitions of culture. How we treat each other-- that's part of our strategy. Treat each other well. Care about each other. Love each other. We use the word love maybe too much in the office. But strategy would be the bricks. But the mortar is the culture.

Results versus process. I used to think winning is everything. In fact, one of my favorite baseball coaches told me winning solves everything. Jack Welch's book is literally titled Winning. But I think that's the brick. Process is the mortar. The simple line there is, focus on the process and the results take care of themselves. The results are a byproduct. The aim is getting the right process. When we were super focused even just three years ago on just results, we really lost sight at how can we make sure these results compound? How can make sure these results go on for a long time? We really focused way too much on monthly goals rather than yearly, rather than culture, rather than all of the things that I think go into process.

We really focused too much on results. Now we focus very little on results. We focus all of our energy on process. And we have the best results we've had to date.