



Stanford eCorner

Be Decisive and On Trend

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Entrepreneur James Beshara discusses how a habit of decisiveness is more important to a venture than any one decision, and how the success of any technology company is judged by its trends over time, not by individual metrics or an initial spike in popularity.



Transcript

Decisions versus decisiveness. The brick would be decisions. You think an aha moment or decision, you hear the story of-- I remember the story of Bill Gates and being in the meeting with IBM making a deal where they didn't get license to the software and they could sell it to other computer manufacturers. And that was this brilliant moment, this decisive genius move. It's not the decision that matters. It's being decisive. And the decisiveness and being able to take advantage of one of the greatest things you have going for you in starting a startup is that you have rapid feedback loops, extremely rapid feedback loops. It's not really about the decision. It's actually about being extremely decisive so you can have feedback loops on as many things that you decide as possible. It is one of the greatest things about starting a startup, is the rapidity of these feedback loops.

You make a decision. You try something out. You A-B test it. You ask a customer. You ask a colleague. You can move so quickly. Take advantage of that and know that the value, the mortar, is the decisiveness. The brick is the decision. You might be remembered for the right decision. But if you're successful, you know that you made 99 wrong ones.

But you just made them so fast that you got to the right one. A great Marine Corps quote on this one is, there is no wrong decision. I know the only wrong decision is indecision. I think it's a great, great quote. Number versus the trend. The brick is the number. The mortar is the trend. It's not the number. It's the trend. If I wrote a book for startup founders, I would write, it's not the number, it's the trend.

That is-- like, that's it. That's probably the theme that I think about most. I used to think about numbers. I used to think about headline-grabbing numbers of, man, this thing got to a million customers. This thing got to 10 million users. But it's not the number. It's the trend. The saddest graph in the world is one that looks like this. The second saddest graph in the world is one that looks like this. There are a lot of viral apps out there that might get to 10 million users, that might hit a nominal number.

And it might sound like, holy crap, they've got it all figured out. But you check in with them six months later, a year later, and that high watermark might still be there. But the trend is definitely going in the wrong direction. That trend is the health. And if there's anything that every single technology company in the world is judged on-- whether it's Google or whether it's two folks in a garage just getting started-- it is the trend. And it really simply all comes down to that trend. The thing about this one is it allows you to also care a lot when the numbers are small, but the trend is good. If you're just getting started, a week-over-week trend-- 5%, 6%, 10%-- that is much better than hitting some nominal number that sounds really big. It's not the number. It's the trend.

And this correlates to the best advice I ever got from one of my basketball coaches. It's not how you start. It's how you

finish. So that I told you the third part was going to be about cliches. But I've included all the cliches in the last slides. They were the mortar in between all the slides. It's all about the people. Culture eats strategy for breakfast. Manage the process, and the results take care of themselves. Simplify, simplify, simplify.

The journey is the destination. The only wrong decision is indecision. And it's not how you start, it's how you finish. Those seven cliches, they're the mortar. I heard all seven of those a thousand times growing up. You guys have probably all heard them a thousand times if not 10,000 times. And yet we still look at the bricks. Whether it's through trial or tribulation, or whether it's through a piece of advice you can grab from this podcast or this lecture, it is to try to see the mortar. And maybe take a flier and trust me that that mortar is the thing that you start to look at and think about much more than anything else. And these seven cliches, there are a lot of cliches that don't really amount to truth.

But I have a feeling these seven cliches stand the test of time because they do.