



Stanford eCorner

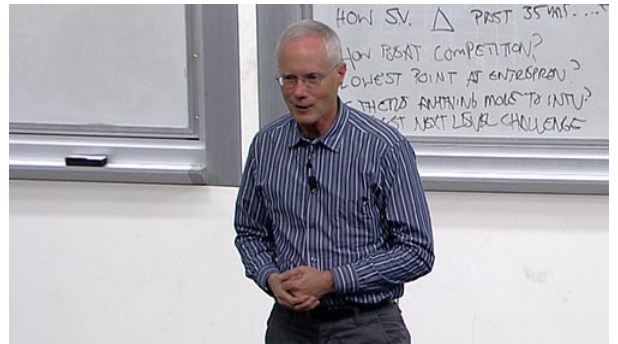
A Candid Lesson in Humility

Scott Cook, *Intuit*

November 04, 2015

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/3599/A-Candid-Lesson-in-Humility>

Intuit Co-Founder Scott Cook shares the story of stepping down as CEO of the company after 11 years. He describes how leaders who subject themselves to the same performance reviews as their subordinates may well discover shortcomings that stand in the way of personal and organizational growth. Cook underscores how essential coaching is to addressing weaknesses.



Transcript

There is another thing that I wish I'd learned early on. Not in 1983, but soon thereafter. The company grew and we were really growing fast. and the company got big. And I began to see my skills-- maybe I wasn't growing as fast as the company was. And I could see things I didn't like to do or were lousy at were starting to hold the company back, particularly when we got to about 500 employees. I wasn't growing as the company was growing, personally. And so I made the decision after 11 years as CEO that I should hire a CEO who had the skills I didn't. Because I felt I was holding the company back. And after all those struggles and pains, I didn't want to be the guy hurting us.

So we hired a guy. Great guy. Bill Campbell. Some of you have seen him. He and I have the same values but we're totally opposite, how we work. Great complements to each other. And that solved that problem for a while. But I still look back and say in a sense, I failed. The company succeeded marvelously, but I kind of failed at being able to keep growing with the company. And I failed myself.

And about nine years ago, I noticed we'd hired an executive coach for some of our execs. And the coach would go out and interview a bunch of the co-workers of an exec and get the skivvy. And then tell the exec, hey, here's what people you work with-- your colleagues, your direct reports-- here's what they're saying. Here's what you're awesome at. And here's what you've got to change. And I looked at him to do that. And I said, boy, you know, I'm the only guy here that doesn't get a performance review. I might benefit from that. So I had him do it for me. And he came in and gave me the-- all anonymized, so I could never hear who said what.

I didn't really care who said what. I wanted to know what they said about me. And there were some things I did well. But, oh, the other list. Oh, god. There was stuff I was really screwing up on. Badly. Painful. Demotivating teams, getting in the way of progress, causing people to cycle, distracting teams, not helping them focus. Oh, there were some bad stuff.

Some of this I had no idea. Others, I was dimly aware of, but I was shying away from looking because it was painful. But now with him, it's like the results of an experiment. You can deny the experiment, but the data sits there. And I couldn't deny what he was saying. So I went on a tear saying, I got to fix this. I got to change. And so I've been working with him since. And together we've worked on some-- and I've made giant progress. It's like the best thing in the last nine years.

So my advice is the most important thing in the world to change is yourself. View yourself as a canvas for change. Because you leave here with one set of skills and a lot to learning and a lot of that. But no one's got a full deck coming out of here. Even if-- and I was running a very successful company at that point-- I had a lot I needed to change and grow. And because I didn't have a coach, I didn't improve. So get a coach. Find somebody who will tell you the truth about your performance and then kind of beat on you to change. Get a coach. All great athletes have a coach, no matter how talented they are.

Whether it's Tiger Woods or the best quarterbacks, they've got a coach. And if they need a coach, what about us regular people? So that would be my one piece of feedback. Most important thing to change is yourself and get a coach. And best of luck.