



## Stanford eCorner

### Calming Effect of a Co-Founder

DJ Kleinbaum, *Emerald Therapeutics*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/4221/Calming-Effect-of-a-Co-Founder>

Emerald Therapeutics Co-Founder and Co-CEO DJ Kleinbaum describes how valuable having a co-founder is when an early-stage startup faces challenging moments. Entrepreneurs will eventually have to make difficult decisions, and at times, feel like crisis is upon them. In both cases, Kleinbaum says a co-founder can commiserate and help put things in perspective.



#### Transcript

- So, every startup that's doing anything remotely innovative is inherently risky, because there are a lot of smart people in the world and there are a lot of smart companies in the world. So, I think it's wrong to think that large companies are not innovative or are somehow not as open to change as others because there are really smart people that work at these companies. And so there's probably no idea that you'll have that someone else, probably someone at one of these giant companies, hasn't already had. The difference between you as a start up founder, as an employee at a young startup, and them is that you said, I think that's a good idea, I think we should do that. Where as they said, no way, that'll never work, or that's a dumb idea, or it's not time for that. So that's really the difference, is that you decided, where everyone else said no, you said yes. And so that means, just by it's very nature, that you're going to be faced with some sub-optimal sets of choices in your decision making because there's no sort of prescriptive path to startup success. And that's very weird for people, it was kind of weird for me. So, you know, you go through high school, you do these things, that will make you a successful high school student. Same thing in college, kind of the same thing in graduate school.

But, with a startup, there is no formula that you can follow that will guarantee you success. And, often times, that means that you're faced with a set of decisions and you have option A and B, and what you really want is option C, but option C doesn't exist. And so it's really valuable to have someone who can say, listen both of these options are bad but which one is the least bad? And to be okay with, to have someone tell you that it's okay to take a path that you know isn't great but that, you just sort of have to, it's the reality of the situation, that you have to take this route that you know is not optimal. So that's one of the really valuable things about having a cofounder, just someone who can share that burden with you. And, similarly, there's a time, if any of you are thinking about or have started companies and you're lucky enough to have a good cofounder, I promise you will have this interaction, where you will go to your cofounder and you will say, we are screwed. For reasons X, Y, and Z, we are totally screwed and the sky is falling and this is it for us. And they have one job in that situation, is to say, it's gonna be alright, don't worry about it, here are the things that we are going to do, we'll get through this. 'Cause that happens a lot and all these things that seem like dire situations end up not being, but when you're so invested in the company yourself, it really feels like everything is a crisis, especially early on. So, again, your job as a cofounder is to say, it's going to be alright.