



Stanford eCorner

Keeping a Fresh Perspective

DJ Kleinbaum, *Emerald Therapeutics*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/4223/Keeping-a-Fresh-Perspective>

Emerald Therapeutics Co-Founder DJ Kleinbaum describes an exercise that allows his company to constantly re-examine its operations and culture, where all new employees are asked to keep a journal and write down their initial impressions of anything unusual. They are then asked to turn to coworkers with more tenure for an explanation, and possibly suggest solutions.



Transcript

- So the last thing that I want to talk to you about in terms of the sort of present day stuff is something that we call our Fresh Eyes journal, and this is something that came out of the idea that we have all of these amazing employees and we wanted a way to capture their sort of initial feedback on the company because when you're in something and you're working at something for years, things that seem bizarre and unusual to other people just begin to seem commonplace to you and so it becomes very easy to sort of, to become immune to things about the way your organization operates that are strange or maybe incorrect. So one of the things that we do is every employee who joins Emerald gets one of these journals and they keep it for their first quarter at the company and so any time they see something that seems weird to them, some issue, something that we do that seems unusual, they write it down and then they're tasked with going and talking to other people at the company and saying "Why do we do things this way, "like, what's our reasoning for doing this," and then once they do that, then they have to say like, "Okay, I like, I understand that, I've like reframed that "in my own words, but are there still "remaining issues given that rationale?" And if there are they have to come up with some potential solutions. So what are some ways that we could fix this? What are some things that we could do better? And then after three months that gets sent to me and my co-founder and also their manager and we read them, and reading these things is painful and the reason it's painful is because when you're building a company, you grow to love it and so you sort of apologize to yourself for its faults and you make excuses for it and so having people point out to you the things that you can see are actually wrong with that thing you love is a very strenuous and stressful process, but it's also a really healthy one because it stops us from drinking our own Kool-Aid and from getting to this point where we're sort of in this echo chamber because everyone has just bought into everything or has sort of been bullied into like the way that we do things. So we found this to be an incredibly useful exercise. The one thing I will say is, so my co-founder insists that if you decide to do this, that reading a Fresh Eyes journal has a two drink minimum, so you've been warned.