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Steve Garrity, founder of Hearsay Systems and Juliet Rothenberg, product manager at DeepMind, discuss the setbacks that occur in life, in conversation with Professor of the Practice Tina Seelig. Juliet explains how progress is not going to be "up into the right". When your path doesn't make sense, change course. When you learn to pivot, that's where the biggest growth opportunities happen.



Transcript

- I think there's this notion that you have when you're at Stanford that the world is your oyster, and to a large extent it is.. Right, it is something that you can take advantage of, because there are so many opportunities and so many opportunities to contribute.. But I also think there's this notion that life is gonna be up and to the right.. You know, the same as start up returns are.. And you're gonna go and you're gonna get the perfect job after you graduate and you're gonna have figured out what you wanna do.. And I think what's the most beautiful about finding your superpower and also finding out what you're really called to do is that it's a really messy process.. And if you want, you can be methodical about this messiness I've, uh, I haven't read that much of *Designing Your Life* but I read sort of 20% of it, enough to get the gist, and uh, I think that the idea of testing out different areas and deciding which one of them is gonna be most suitable for you is a really good one.. The problem is that when you find out that an area isn't the area that you wanna go into, you have a moment, that, where you have to pivot.. And pivots are not, they're not easy if you're a start up.. They're probably just as hard, if not harder, if you're a person..

And I think pivot is a nice word for what this feels like.. I prefer Ben Horowitz's WFIO acronym.. (male panelist chuckles) which stands for we're fucked it's over.. Tina told me I could swear.. (panelists and audience laughs) and it feels like we're fucked it's over, right? It's a really harrowing moment when you think I was on this path, and this is what I was gonna do and this was gonna be my identity, and oh crap it did not work out, what am I going to do now? And those moments feel the scariest, but they don't mean that you're doing it wrong.. They mean that you're doing it right.. They mean that you tried something so hard that you really could get a great insight into whether it was right for you or not.. You gave it a solid go, and this applies to all aspects of your life.. And then when you're able to pivot from that and say, okay, what do I learn from this? And how does it make me stronger? That's where the biggest growth opportunity happens as it happens in those moments.. One of my favorite meditation teachers says that, you know, in meditation, the actual part of meditating is when you figure out that you're screwing up, and your mind is getting off in your thoughts..

And then you bring yourself back to your thoughts.. That's meditating.. And that is life, and that is learning too in the we're fucked it's over moments.. Where you're realizing that you've screwed it up and you need to find another path.. And what's that path gonna be, and how are you gonna get there? And so you know, Stanford makes a lot of things really easy for us.. I definitely felt like Stanford was a nice and easy and safe environment.. And the real world can be that way, but it also can be more challenging, and endurance and perseverance help, but so does an attitude of willing to learn through whatever life throws at you, and being willing to pivot through those moments.. - Thank you.. - I think that's, yeah, I think that's awesome.. And the way I would, the add on to that, I would say is don't take it so seriously..

(panelists and audience chuckles) Like life is a game, and, yeah, I find, when I was here, I was so worried about what was next, and was I maximizing everything and was I improving by one percent a day? And was I going? And just the more I go through stuff the more I kinda like let go a little bit.. And it doesn't mean you don't work really hard, and it doesn't mean you don't learn a ton of stuff, and it doesn't mean you don't go through really hard stuff cause sure that's absolutely right like the more of those you go through, the more fun it is at some level, and at some point you begin to embrace the suck and just like, you know, this is hard, and we're fucked it's over, and oh wow, okay I feel that it's comfortable.. I'm there again, like what do I do next? But it's, like enjoy it, like just go through it and have fun and relax a little bit.. That doesn't mean you know, like go

smoke weed in Tahoe all year, but.. That's not as bad as cursing right? - No, no.. - Kay.. (panelists and audience laugh) - And it's legal, it's okay, you can do it! - It's okay, it's legal, that's okay then.. - Obviously you can do it! - Okay, I'm sorry.. Um, no but it's not, that's not to say you know, don't work hard, don't try to excel all these things, but like, just enjoy the whole thing and realize that like, there's a bit of chaos to this all, right? And I've read just enough chaos theory to know the name, and it's true, like it makes sense.. Everything's kinda chaotic and you can be the most put together, planned out, methodical, intense type A person and like the optimal Stanford student, like genetically engineered Stanford student (audience laughs) and it won't all work..

And that's okay, like, the most interesting, some of the best thing's I've done in my life have been things I did merely for the reason that it seemed like it would create a good story.. And like, sure enough it did create a good story but it actually turned out to be really fun and memorable.. Whether or not I ever told that story to anybody...