

URL: https://ecorner.stanford.edu/?post_type=snippet&p=58765

Emily Melton, partner at the venture capital firm DFJ, shares how she felt like an imposter early in her venture capital career. She recommends that entrepreneurs embrace their past experiences and fields of study.



Transcript

- One of the things that I have found as I've gotten older and you can start to actually be authentic and have real conversations with people, is you think it's just you.. You think it's your insecurities or your issues.. I can't remember Heidi's exact phrase, but you're in your 20s, you think everybody's thinking about you.. In your 30s you don't worry as much about it (laughs).. In your 40s you stop caring, your 50s you realize no one was thinking about you at all in the first place.. I was so focused on, I didn't have a technical background, how was this going to work that I was leading and feeding my own insecurities and I really remember, because there was a period of time where people talked about the pipeline problem.. There aren't enough women to come into venture capital.. And there was a panel that was going on where they were all men and they were all talking about this challenge they all face.. "There's not enough technical women to deal with this." And someone sent it to me, one of my girlfriends, and put arrows above and it was like BA History, BA.. None of them had a technical background..

And I was just like, you know, the ability to actually say that you have to be, you have to have this, but I somehow am different.. That was a big moment for me cause that freed me.. In recognizing that people will say things but then everyone wants to be the exception.. And if you ask most of my entrepreneurs or founders what they do when they're, if I know the business better than them, if I'm the one actually doing the programming, I'm the, like we're in a whole world of hurt, right? What they really want is someone who is strategically helping them think through the challenges that they have.. Those are regulatory issues, those are market issues, those are hiring issues, and that is actually an area where I had, philosophy served me very well.. It was very, very good training for strategic thinking and learning to question things and deeply question things and challenge assumptions.. And so instead of like, I felt like there was a phase where I was leaning out and I did feel like an imposter.. There's a break in my life where I kind of just stopped caring and then I leaned in and embraced it more.. It was amazing to me once I stopped worrying about what people thought and just leaned in, was very honest about who I was, how much more the world opened up to me and how much more I was accepted...