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Entrepreneurial Reality Distortion

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Capella Space founder and CEO Payam Banazadeh describes the central lesson from his time at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory: The idea that anything is possible, which Banazadeh reframes as "entrepreneurial reality distortion." But just because everything is possible, he finds, doesn't mean that the first iteration of a product needs to be perfect.

Transcript

- In your career you had this opportunity if I understood correctly, you worked at NASA JPL, Jet Propulsion Lab down south.. It's an iconic place in this field.. What about that environment did you, you spend enough time there to kind of know, what are things that exist in that world that you have taken to Capella? And maybe what's something not that it's inherently good or bad, but you just decided that's not for us, that's for them.. - JPL is a magical place.. They built all the essentially robots that we've ever sent into space.. The one that you guys might be familiar with is the mars rover, the Curiosity Rover, that landed I believe in 2012.. Just magical place.. I obviously learned a lot of aerospace there and processes and management but what I took away the most was this mentality that anything is possible and it's just an engineering challenge.. So if there is someone that wants something, we can make it happen and that was so much of the mentality at JPL.. For God's sake, we built a rover that was one ton and we used this sky crane to literally put it down on the surface of Mars, right? Who imagines that? Then, who can actually build that? So I guess my entrepreneurial, the reality distortion came from JPL..

That was really helpful.. I thought anything in the world is possible and you do need a little bit of sort of, naive, ignorant thinking when you're starting a company.. That's what I took away and there's stuff that I didn't take away, right? JPL what I didn't take away from there is this sense of perfectionism.. Anything that JPL builds needs to be perfect and it needs to work the first time.. If it takes us ten years and three billion dollars to do it, we will do it that way but it will be a perfect product.. And I left that right there.. So what we do at Capella is we try not to be perfect.. We try to be quicker and we try to bring sort of this what's been known in the software industry as agile software into Harper and Aerospace which is really really difficult.. What if the first one doesn't work the way that the ultimate product.. I'm going to learn so much more through that process and it's going to cost cheaper and it's going to be faster..

That's something that kind of I left behind at JPL...