

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/podcasts/hire-values-it-takes-all-kinds/>

When it comes to building teams, it's all about the blend. You need optimists and realists, dreamers and doers, yes-idents and CE-nos. In this episode, Tina Seelig, Professor of the Practice in Stanford's Department of Management Science & Engineering, and guests Justin Rosenstein of Asana and Elizabeth Weil of 137 Ventures compare notes on finding the right balance of backgrounds and personalities. It's not enough to say you want diverse perspectives—you have to make it safe for people to be who they really are at work.



Transcript

(upbeat music) - If you can create a culture of candor where people can freely discuss the problems that they're experiencing, then you can often create an environment in which you can actually solve any problem.. - I am the only female general partner.. I am the only person with young children, and it's taken me being vocal internally sharing why I'm asking for something.. - Welcome to LEAP! I'm Tina Seelig.. I'm passionate about helping people craft the futures they dream of creating, and that's what I do at Stanford University where I teach classes on creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship.. This podcast takes a deep dive into how to launch your career by unpacking the often overlooked and under-taught soft skills critical to the success of every entrepreneur.. In each episode, we'll invite two people from very different career stages to discuss real life scenarios.. - I'm Justin Rosenstein and I'm the cofounder of Asana.. - I'm Elizabeth Weil and I'm a general partner at 137 Ventures.. - Today, we tackle teamwork..

- When we're thinking about building our team, we look at what are perspectives and viewpoints that are either underrepresented or overrepresented? Do we have the right balance of people who are hyperrational and data-oriented versus people who are more intuitive? Do we have a good balance of people who have worked at big companies versus small companies 'cause those bring different kinds of experience? - I think it gets to coming out with the best outcome and when there's a lot of perspectives contributing to that outcome and that can be gender, race, socioeconomic.. There was a JobRack, and of course we were looking to the typical tech company person that this seemed to fit, and when we started peeling apart what was that job actually going to do, we started to look at different candidates and it turned out that the person that was ultimately hired was a high school teacher and they came armed with a set of skills that were extremely different, but could accomplish it just coming at it from a different perspective.. - So I'm curious, are there specific things that you try to optimize for? Do you fit the organization to someone who might be different or do you have to have someone who fits? - So when I say fit, I mean someone who believes in Asana's mission, has the talent and experience that is useful to being able to help us in fulfilling that mission, and shares the core cultural values that we share which are very basic and they're things like mindfulness and equanimity, clarity, but those things don't correlate with any particular demographic.. People of all kinds of demographics and all kinds of different perspectives can be great participants in helping us succeed in that mission.. - I think it comes down to how do you craft that diverse team? How do you find a language, a common language that the team can use even when you're looking at different things? Motivating around a common goal and the shared purpose, and then having common values that everyone can also operate under.. We also required it at Twitter until Twitter was fairly large that all of the employees that were hired in our global distributed offices actually went through the onboarding back at the headquarters so you did have that presentation of shared values, shared common language, what we're operating around as a company all coming from one source.. (upbeat music) - When you start a new job, often you don't have to worry about building a new team.. You're the new person joining so you need to focus on how you can best serve the needs of the existing team.. I love what Elizabeth has to say about finding a common language because it's so important to the success of every organization.. You might have a different job than most of the other people in your team..

That alone can cause communication problems, but creating a shared language around values, goals, and a mission that everyone can agree to helps make communication much easier and efficient, but how do you communicate those values to potential candidates? And Elizabeth's question, how do you craft that diverse team that will bring a variety of perspectives and experiences to the table and how do you ensure your company's attracting the right candidates to the job? Now

Elizabeth, you come at this from a very different perspective being a woman in venture.. - I am the only female general partner and we have a small team, just 10.. I am the only person with young children and it's taken me being vocal internally sharing why I'm asking for something, but needing to really come at it even though they're coming at it from a different perspective.. - Often people opt out of even applying because they look at the company and they go, wow, those folks don't look like me or sound like me and I'm not gonna be comfortable there.. How do you get folks to actually apply for the positions? - You need to be a bit more prepared for the search to take more time.. I've found that you really have to weight the ultimate funnel more with what you're thinking you want to ultimately be the outcome and really pay attention to that.. I had one candidate last year that actually chose to take themselves out of the running midway and it was a diverse candidate and one that I thought was fairly exceptional and it took having a conversation and saying very directly that I thought they were pulling out for the wrong reasons and because they didn't feel like they measured up, but they were bringing different perspectives and she ultimately got the job, but it put her back in the running and gave her some more confidence around why she could do that role and why she could knock it out of the park.. - I think it's not just enough to strive for diversity, to have just representation of people on the team.. You need diversity and inclusiveness.. You need a place where everyone can really feel like they belong and bring their full selves to work in order to be able to harness the power of that diversity..

We strive to be the change that we want to see in the workplace, and the workplace that we want to live in is one that is radically inclusive.. I just frequently hear how difficult it is to feel like you really belong if you see a very small number of people around you who look like you.. So you need to achieve a level of diversity beyond just tokenism.. As an example, I recently sat down with the community of non-male engineers at Asana and a number of people shared that they felt like it was difficult to be on a program team if they were the only female engineer even if there was a female product manager.. (upbeat music) - One of our classes recently had a session on women in leadership roles.. A large portion of the class was made up of male engineers and it was fascinating to watch these men listen to the women share their experiences of being a new mother in the workplace.. These conversations are essential to have if we're going to succeed in creating a more inclusive environment.. It's critical to create a place of honest and open communication where all employees feel as though they can and will be heard when they speak.. There are lots of potholes along the way.. There are different working styles, different etiquettes, and I bring this up because there are people who want to do the right thing who just aren't even prepared for the potholes that they inevitably step into..

- If you can create a culture of candor where people can freely discuss the problems that they're experiencing, then you can often create an environment in which you can actually solve any problem 'cause you can just face it down and be real about it.. I also find that just coming to all of these situations with a lot of humility is essential.. I try to be mindful all the time of the experiences other people are having, and yet I consistently find that whenever I go and meet with people who are different from me that I learn about a lot of problems that I was blind to, and in some cases learn about things that I'm contributing to.. - One of the Twitter values was something along the lines of communicate to build trust and by getting that out there, you could use those potholes as a teaching moment too.. I think this helps streamline a cloudy conversation.. Even if you do get those things across, I think having a shared language to deliver that feedback's great.. - When you're a small team, especially when you're a very small team and you can actually see everyone physically in person on the same floor as you, there's a lot of rapport that builds up and there's a lot of benefit of the doubt.. The bigger a company gets, and especially when you're talking about distances across timezones, then it becomes easier and easier when problems arise to start to create an us versus them mentality.. To be like, it must be because they're lazy, it must be because they're incompetent instead of giving them that same benefit of the doubt.. We, of course, want to always be holding each other accountable to really high standards, but assuming a level of competence and respect for your colleagues is really important, and so part of that is just developing that mindfulness and remembering that and there's a lot of things you can do around making sure that at least multiple times a year people do physically get some time to spend time with each other and bond and you can do a lot of proactive communication..

- When we started growing and we actually called them distributed offices so people didn't feel isolated.. One of the things was how quickly can we get that communication, and to Justin's point, about you assume the worst when you have nothing to assume except the worst? And how do you really communicate and build those channels even in the early ways of video and phone? - If you have a mismatch in values, if you're not all on the same page on common goals, on a common mission, it just goes awry and then suddenly when you get into disagreements, there's nothing to come back to as common ground for how we're gonna make that decision 'cause you want different things.. (upbeat music) - My team at Stanford started asking new employees to create their own personal user manuals as part of their onboarding process.. There are questions ranging from how can someone get a gold star in your book? To how do you prefer to get feedback? There are 10 questions that give the rest of the team some insight into how you like to work.. Each user manual is posted on a shared drive, so when someone new starts, they have access to all the user manuals and can get a sense of how their new coworkers interact and what motivates them.. - When you understand that people are motivated by different things, then you can start to interact with them in a different way, and especially as a leader, some people are more motivated by intellectual challenge, some people are motivated by feeling creative, some people are more motivated by their coworkers praising them and thinking well of them, and those are often pretty staple personality characteristics that just don't change, and if you can talk to people in their language, it goes a long way.. - One of the things that I've started doing in our interviews when we're looking at candidates for jobs is using something I actually use in my classes.. It's the De Bono's Six Hats model.. It's super simple and I love it because it's very quickly you ferret out what makes people different.. So there are six thinking hats, six ways in which you engage with the world possibly, and the wonderful thing about hats is of course you can take them on and off..

It's not like saying, this is my Myers-Briggs or my horoscope.. So it's sort of your dominant working style.. So the green hat is the person who leads with creativity.. They're always generating ideas.. The red hat is the person who leads with intuition.. The white hat is the person who really wants all the facts.. They are data-driven.. The yellow hat is the person who just wants everyone to get along.. The blue hat is very process-oriented.. You know, the one who's more likely to make spreadsheets up, and the black hat is the devil's advocate..

It's the person who looks at where things are gonna go wrong and during the interviews I'll share my hat colors and we have a discussion of how we work together with different hat colors.. Do you know what your hat color would be? - Definitely the creative one.. - Green, right, and you know.. The point is I could give you a test, but you know.. You know that, but do you have any that are right behind that? So green with what else? - Yeah, I feel like pretty well-distributed after that.. - Well-distributed, so green with everything well-distributed.. - What would you say, Elizabeth? - I think I'm a blue green.. I like the creativity piece and that keeps going, but I'm also very practical.. Quick to think of could these things actually work? And wanting to jump in and try to put some methodology around how we're going to talk of something.. - It's interesting because I am definitely a green hat to a fault, right? Like too many ideas, but I have blue and yellow right behind so process and wanting everyone to get along, but it's interesting..

I'm very allergic to the black hat, but I need the black hat.. I don't love it, but I need it.. It's like a vitamin.. - So I actually actively seek out these black hat people.. My cofounder, Dustin, and I have this joke that I'm the yes-ident, so the president, the yes-ident, and he's the CE-no.. (laughing) - That's so great.. - And while sometimes it's certainly annoying or disheartening to have 90% of your ideas shot down by someone, in the long run it actually brings me a lot of comfort because when you're just creative and generative, it can start to feel ungrounded of like, there's so many things we could do.. Is it really going to work? And partnering with someone who is a strong devil's advocate and can see all the way through to the flaws in ideas means that the ideas that do get through all of their devil's advocating are pretty good.. (upbeat music) - Learning what motivates your coworkers is an important part of working as a team.. Understanding what drives people you collaborate with can mean the difference between project success and project failure..

Being on a team is invigorating, but it can also be a challenge.. People communicate differently, have different behaviors and working styles, and if you're brand new or in a position of lower power, sometimes it can feel as though you've jumped into the deep end without first knowing how to swim, but you do have options.. Start out going with the current, moving with your team, and learning what you can.. Then as you feel more confident, you can start to swim, pausing and getting a signal that you might have an idea that you want to bring to the table.. Eventually as your confidence grows, you can even swim against the current and at least at your own pace.. A lot of what we're talking about has to do with power, and people who come into organizations often feel as though they don't have as much power as the people who are there.. What can someone who's a young person coming into an organization do to help mitigate that problem? Do you think you should amplify your differences and celebrate them or try to be like the organization that you're joining? - In my first job, I was at a very corporate bank and where they put my intern desk was by one of the stodgiest departments, and I remember getting the feedback that I was too peppy and that I needed to tone it down a bit and not smile as much, and I came to work the next day.. That hit me hard because my overall vibe is fairly upbeat.. I came to work the next day and I was sullen and I just drab face, I just did my job, I didn't ask questions, I didn't ask people about their day, and by the end of the day, actually more by like late morning, people are saying, are you sick? What's going on? Did anything happen at home? Are you okay? And I realized, and I feel so fortunate that that happened when I was still in my late teens, I believe I was 18, to think I was working in a false me and I didn't feel like me, I wasn't doing the job nearly as well, and there was no way I could force myself to be somebody different and now throughout a lot of years since then, I really have realized that I am me and take it or leave it.. It's hard to change and you want to embody the things that really make you tick, hold onto the ones that help make you successful, and of course grow and change along the way, but you really can't change some of those fundamental things..

- Something I found early in my career was that I often had intuitions that were different than the intuitions of people who were more experienced, more senior to me and that they would question me and even though intellectually it kept feeling like I was on the right track, it was hard to handle the feedback of people who were senior to me telling me that they were skeptical of my ideas, and over time I learned to develop more confidence and be more willing to accept that sometimes people who've been doing something for a long time don't actually know the right answer and it does take a fresh, new perspective.. While you want to have the humility to be able to really listen to people and incorporate their wisdom, you want to also have the confidence to sometimes go at it alone and say, I'm just gonna try this even though other people are telling me it's crazy.. - What about the average employee in the firm? What's their responsibility? - I think having an environment of open communication can really help to foster that culture of giving everybody a voice.. This comes in with everyone should be empowered to say something, but then the company as a whole should find ways to also solicit that feedback.. This is really by defining values that empower individuals.. I think the colleagues of those people also need to be empowered to speak up and give feedback.. Even though I now feel comfortable speaking up, it would be so much easier, and would've been throughout my career, had a male colleague or a diverse colleague speak up on my behalf.. - Becoming aware of one's own unconscious bias I think is really important.. Becoming aware of those patterns and working through those and correcting for them in oneself is something that everyone can participate in.. - I mean, should we punish ourselves for our unconscious biases? - I think there's no reason to punish ourselves, but be more aware, be empathetic, and to really drill into what you know about yourself, but questioning a lot of those things that pop up as well..

- Yeah, I try to have a growth mindset versus a fixed mindset.. I just assume in all aspects of my life I'm constantly going to be making mistakes and if my response to those mistakes is, oh, I'm a bad person or I'm always gonna be bad at this skill, then that could be a self-fulfilling prophecy.. If I instead see life as just a constant, ongoing opportunity to learn from mistakes and keep getting better and better a little bit everyday, then I can keep improving.. (upbeat music) - I think back to my first jobs and I made so many mistakes and I had to decide each time was I going to let those mistakes define me or could I learn from them and grow as a person? After lots of reflection, I chose to make each mistake an opportunity for personal and professional development and I encourage each of you to do the same.. LEAP! is about finding the agency to thrive in our lives and careers.. Remember, we create more value when we work together, so please spread the word about LEAP! and rate and review us on iTunes.. LEAP! is a Stanford eCorner original series.. The videos, podcasts, and articles in Stanford eCorner are designed to help you find the courage and clarity to see and seize opportunities.. Stanford eCorner is led by the Stanford Technology Ventures Program and Stanford's department of Management Science and Engineering.. LEAP! is produced by Alli Rico and Rachel Julkowski..

Jake Smith and Stanford Video are our editor and audio engineers.. Susie Allen is our writer, Daniel Stussy is our designer and digital product manager, and I'm Tina Seelig.. Thanks for listening...