

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/cultivate-creativity-and-courage/>

Olympian in luge, television reporter, airline pilot, and venture capitalist... Bonny Simi's career path has been anything but linear. Simi is now the president of JetBlue Technology Ventures, the venture capital arm of JetBlue Airways that invests in and partners with early-stage startups that are improving the future of travel and hospitality. In this talk, she shares how she leaned into her creativity and curiosity, and found the courage to blaze her own path.



Transcript

Narrator Who you are defines how you build.. 00:00:07,020 - Welcome Bonny.. 00:00:09,502 - Thank you, I'm excited to be back.. 00:00:12,890 (indistinct) need to be virtually at Stanford even if I'm on the other side of the country right now.. - Well, I have to say your talk is one of the most inspiring 00:00:21,900 that I have ever listened to.. It just blew my mind from the moment you got going.. So what we're gonna do today is we're gonna take some of the old clips.. In fact, I have so many, it was hard for me to choose.. Some old clips to play and then reflect on them.. So I wanna start with one about when you were 14 years old..

I think it was 14, right? - Yep, I was 14 senior in high school.. 00:00:41,553 - Okay, and someone-- 00:00:43,285 - Or Maybe no actually 00:00:44,720 I think I was a sophomore in high school at Chaffey high school in Ontario, California.. - Well, someone came your school 00:00:50,620 and had a list of all the things that they wanted to accomplish, and you thought I'm gonna do the same thing.. And so you put together a list at that young age of all the things that you wanted to accomplish.. And the amazing thing that we will refer to throughout this time together, is how you systematically check them all off in your life.. So let's play this first clip to get this started - what I lacked in resources I had in imagination.. 00:01:15,840 And you know when you're young, you don't think of obstacles.. And so I thought well I can't think of a hundred things to do, but I could think of five things.. And this is my actual list that I wrote, when I was 14 years old.. Now putting it in context..

So going to a good college, I think that's something pretty normal for a kid who's in high school.. But to go to the Olympics, now where did that come from? Well, it happened to be an Olympic year and I was watching the Olympics on TV.. And that might have been what inspired me.. Now, again, I'm going back many years so I can't exactly remember what was going through my mind.. One of the time, so I was watching the Olympics and it was on ABC TV.. And so I thought, well, I want to be a TV commentator.. And I wanna become a pilot.. I didn't even know anybody who was a pilot.. My mom was a school teacher and she used to bring us to the local airport, and we used to watch airplanes take off and land.. And so I assume that has how come I wrote that down..

Now for those of you who are parents or someday will be parents, think about exposing your kids.. I don't know if I would be here today if my mom hadn't brought us to the airport so I could watch airplanes take off and land.. - So I just love this.. 00:02:24,650 I love this story for so many reasons.. And it's about the fact that anything can be a stimulant of your passions.. Now I'm curious, if we don't have someone in our life who is methodically or accidentally introducing us to lots of new things, what are the things we can do ourselves to help spark our passions? - Well, I think a lot of times people feel constrained 00:02:49,650 and they're like, well, I need to do because somebody told me to do it or whatever.. And as you get older, you tend to become less creative.. And I think even your kindergartners, first grade, on up into high school, which tend to be very very creative.. And then we get these bounds.. And so I always tell people to think back what times in your life were you doing things that you just loved doing them? And what was it about that, that you enjoyed? And for me, I grew up in a ski area and I love to ski, so I love speed, I love the freedom of that sort of thing..

And so some of that comes about.. And so it's thinking back when you were a child, what did you like doing? Another way to explore I mean, nowadays of course there's so many different courses on internet and they're free.. So just explore.. What are something you've always been curious about? Where is a place that you've always been curious about? Or talking to

different people.. Going up at Stanford, of course, taking courses, or at least visiting with a professor in an area that you absolutely knew nothing about.. Now it doesn't always mean that it's gonna work.. I still remember, I took a class at Stanford, I was doing luge and I was trying to figure out the metallurgy of the runners, which are the steels that touch the ice.. And I thought there was a lot of science behind it.. I thought, I wanna take material science.. That sounds really interesting..

It was awful.. I hated it.. So I decided definitely was not gonna be into material science engineer.. But I didn't know until I took it.. You gotta explore.. - So you're obviously extremely curious and imaginative.. 00:04:22,990 Do you think this can be cultivated? I mean, I think one of the problems that I often talk about cause I teach creativity, is that we all are creative, but a lot of people are in environments where their creativity is squashed and their curiosity is squashed.. They're always given assignments as opposed to allowing them to explore their own interests.. How do you cultivate this? I think, and again, I'll come back to in growing up, I read a lot, and reading is a way to kind of put yourself into a different environment.. Nowadays a lot of people will explore and watch different YouTube videos..

Will just kind of put themselves into place and just allow them... Giving themselves time.. I mean, that's the thing is people get so over-scheduled, giving yourself time, going away for a weekend, just exploring, say, this is my weekend to explore passions, things that I might be interested in.. Not because somebody told me to, just because I've always, it's just because.. I think that creativity is most definitely learned, but it is done in an environment where there are no constraints.. And so you have to set yourself up into that environment.. And also, so not only is creativity learned, I think courage is learned.. People think that you're just born courageous or something.. I actually think it's the opposite.. I think that by testing and trying, and learning and putting yourself out there, when I first started lugging, I was scared of it..

But once I took the first run I'm like, wow, that wasn't so bad.. I can keep doing this.. And then I thought, well, if I can do luge, I can fly a plane.. And if I can fly a plane, well then I can start a company.. I can do all different types of things and you learn to become, you expand and realize you don't have constraints.. So creativity and courage actually have the same areas.. You just have to let yourself try.. - It's interesting 00:06:17,097 I often reflect the fact that people say those who are courageous, it's not that they don't have fear, it's that they have fear and still do it.. You do it despite the fear instead of saying, oh my gosh, I'm afraid I'm not going to.. One of the things I'm most interested about your story is that you set a lot of intentions for yourself..

Whether it was back when you were 14 and made this list and set some very clear intentions.. And I wanna talk about the role of intentions and play this short clip, where you talk about the role of dreams in shaping your life.. So let's play the second clip about dreams and then talk about how those dreams shape the directions we go.. - The first intent, really, that kind of guided my life 00:06:58,450 is that you have to have a dream, for a dream to come true.. People talk about dreams coming true, but have you ever stopped and thought about what are your dreams? And a lot of people, sure they have some thoughts and such, but they typically hold themselves back because, well, I can't do that, I don't have enough money.. There's some, I don't.. I'm afraid I'll fail.. I want you to stop for one second right now and think if you were a hundred percent guaranteed to succeed, what would you do with your life? - What a brilliant question.. 00:07:35,230 If you knew you were gonna succeed, what would you do? And I think that's such an interesting question.. What's the role of intention? I mean, versus being sort of opportunistic to things that just sort of come your way..

I mean, because you said these intentions so long ago, how did that relate to also sort of opportunities that materialize, that you might not have thought about? - First of all I don't wanna say that, 00:08:04,040 that was an assignment actually in school.. So it wasn't I just sat down and have such forethought at the age of 14.. But then once it was written down and there's something about writing things down, some say, you'll share it with others.. And I say, you don't need to share with others I think it's more about just maybe it's journaling, some people like to journal.. But when you write it down and you sort of committing to yourself.. And most of those things with the exception perhaps of going to a good college were kind of way out there.. I mean, we didn't have the means to do any of those kinds of things.. But I think people think, okay, so the Olympics is way out there.. But how difficult is it to just do one lesson or one, if you wanna become a pilot, I always tell people, go take couple of lessons, three lessons and then you'll learn.. Or if you wanna be in the Olympics..

Well, at high school I was on the JV team in track and swimming.. So I wasn't gonna be, I didn't think, in the Olympics, but I actually did very well on field hockey and field hockey was the path that I was going to go.. And because I had written it down I said, well, how do you actually become an Olympian in field hockey? Typically through the college process.. And I was actually working my way up and made what they call the national squad, which is like the top hundred athletes.. But at that time is when I was exposed to luge.. And so I thought, well, I'll do that too.. And we'll just see where it plays out.. When I started luge, I did not think, oh, I'm going to do this because I can become an Olympian.. I just decided to do it because it looked like it was fun.. And typically when things are fun is when you tend to be more successful..

So I love the story and for those people who haven't heard it, you had in your dream, your list, that you wanted to go to the Olympics.. And then there was an opportunity to be a torchbearer at the Olympics.. And you thought, well, that will get me sort of there.. So you sort of re-modified your college essay, got it accepted and became a torchbearer, and then realized that really wasn't checking the box of being in the Olympics as if you were at the Olympics.. And so I love the fact that you happened to be there and just sort of discovered luge, and decided to take a little risk and try it.. So I wanna play this clip because I think it's really powerful about taking, as you said, really small risks, And it's about how you decided to take one

lesson and that led to the next and the next.. You didn't need to have an enormous goal.. You just needed a little goal to get to the next day.. So let's play clip number three.. - When the Olympics ended I had nothing to do 00:10:48,140 and no money to do it with..

And I didn't have to be back here until the end of March.. And the Olympics ended in February.. And thinking about that goal I had in my mind, it's like, well, should I check off that I had been to the Olympics? Well, there was a sport that I saw called luge.. And I thought, they had a beginner's camp, it was only \$8.. Even I could afford it.. And this is another one of those things of just taking those risks and just going for it.. So I decided to apply for the camp and started competing in the sport of luge.. When I saw that and a little bit of the backstory to that is in the Olympics one of the other Torchbearers, was a former bobsledder and he brought us to watch bobsledding.. And I said, I wanted to do bobsled.. And he said, "Women are not allowed to do bobsled..

"They're actually banned from bobsled".. This was back in the day.. And he said, "But you can do luge".. So that's kind of how that story.. Now, that little kernel thing you can't do that, kind of stuck with me.. And then many, many years later, I mean, it was kind of like a list, I went back to do bobsled.. Again, it's sort of that some of that intention.. And when I did start lugging, I came back to Stanford and of course I had to take winter quarter off every year, which meant I couldn't take, those who are Stanford students will know this, this physics course physics 51, physics for engineers because I wanted to be an engineer.. And I couldn't become an engineer at Stanford because I couldn't take that class.. But I always said, I want to be an engineer..

And that's why I came back to do Management Science and Engineering 25 years later.. - You got that engineering degree.. 00:12:25,780 - So I got that engineering degree.. 00:12:26,943 - Again so great.. 00:12:30,090 I wanna remind the students who are watching that you can start asking questions at any time.. We'll start collecting them and voting them up and down, and see which ones you want answered by Bonny.. I wanna ask you, at what point after you started taking one, two, three luge lessons, when you were sort of just hanging out after the Olympics, did you say, actually I'm pretty good at this and I could really exceed 60? - I think I remember at that time 00:12:59,130 I was also doing field hockey, and this is another one of those lessons and taking risks, you try to overlap things.. And so when I took my first lesson, I was just doing it because it was fun.. But sports and actually many different occupations in life, there's a certain sort of mentality or physical capabilities that one kind of needs.. So for example, I can never be a gymnast cause I'm too big to be a gymnast..

I couldn't be a basketball player cause I'm too small to be a basketball player.. But in luge, there's a certain quality where you need to have strong upper body skill.. And you also need to be, I guess fearless as a way of saying we respect fear, but you're able to relax.. So being able to really relax under pressure because the sleds do not have shock absorbers and your body is the shock absorber.. So you have to be relaxed going 80 miles an hour.. And that is a skill or a capability that I had.. And so because of my physique, my strength and sort of my mentality, I was told very quickly within the first week.. And I can tell people.. I've coached thousands of kids in the sport.. And I can literally tell now even within their first day, whether or not they would have the capabilities of being good..

Doesn't mean they will be, and it'll take many years to be good.. But I had those raw capabilities to be good and enough people told me that.. I thought I could do this.. So I went back to Stanford, but then I pursued that over the course of the next two years, parallel to field hockey.. And ultimately I ended up making the Olympic team, three and a half years from that time I first tried.. - So it took three and a half years.. 00:14:42,440 So the next Olympics.. - The next Olympics, yes.. 00:14:44,373 - Isn't that amazing.. 00:14:45,920 I mean, if someone had told you, when you were a torchbearer that the next winter Olympics you were gonna be competing in luge..

- I would have never, ever imagined that.. 00:14:56,223 And that's why I think for people, kids who say, I wanna be in the NBA or they wanna be a doctor, or a lawyer, or a pilot, or whatever.. That seems so far away but the first steps don't, and that's the thing I keep telling you, it'll just take the first step.. So if you want to be an entrepreneur, just go out and start, just go on and try.. Because I see this often and you can't win the lottery of life if you don't enter.. - People also ask me about writing books 00:15:25,610 cause I've written about the books I like.. Just write a table of contents.. Just write the introduction, just write something.. The only way to do it is to just do it.. So I love this..

I mean your fearlessness.. One of my favorite though Clips is the one we're going to play next, about your crazy confidence.. I mean, here you were, you'd taken two weeks of luge training, whatever classes.. Crazy taking two weeks of classes.. And then you decide to go to Germany, to train with some of the best luge coaches in the world and you show up there like, okay, I'm here.. And what happened? So let's play this clip about the failing and failing until you succeeded.. So this is the clip number four.. - I showed up in Germany 00:16:15,480 and I didn't know a whole lot of German.. Try to explain that I was just a beginner, but they figured I came all the way from the US so I must be good.. One of the best in America..

I didn't even know who one of the best in America was.. So they put me in with the German national team and I proceeded to crash.. I only had two weeks in the sport, but obviously figured it out pretty quickly.. I crashed 52 times in a row.. No you don't get too hurt in the sport.. It does look crazy.. But when you crash you actually only fall this far off because of the sled is that close to the ice, even with the drift force.. But I was so determined and the coaches had mercy on me or also would kill myself they thought.. But then really that I had the confidence and I wasn't gonna leave.. And because of that confidence, they

kept coaching me..

And by the time I finished that three months, I came back and became the best in the US.. - Pretty remarkable.. 00:17:14,073 Is this sort of the fake it till you make it approach? Is that what this is about? How would you view this, your philosophy here? - I would say that first of all 00:17:25,980 I would not be successful had they not helped me.. And so you need others to to help you along.. So I think the way I look at it is confidence is contagious.. So if you believe in yourself, others will.. And so if the fake it till you make it piece was I was shaking inside.. I was scared cause I kept crashing.. But on the outside, I wouldn't show that I was scared.. When I go do a talk, even though I've done so many of these talks in front of thousands of people, I'm shaking inside before I get up onto the podium and talk, but people don't see that on the outside..

And so they'll see this strong, confident person.. So that's the part.. Is you just need to convey that confidence and then they reflect it back.. If I'm confident in myself, they become confident in me, which then makes me feel more confident.. It's that virtuous wonderful cycle.. So that's really what happened.. They took me under their wing.. They saw I wasn't gonna quit.. They were determined to help me.. And of course they figured I would never beat them, but I made that my internal goal that I would then beat the Germans someday..

And I did but that took another couple of Olympics.. - That's fabulous.. 00:18:45,680 I'm just looking at the questions from the students they're starting to roll in.. So one of them says, "I'm reading a book about discovering your strengths, "underlining what you say about success "naturally coming with what's fun and fits your personality.. "But when do you know that you found your strengths "and decided to go with it?" Like when do you know there's a match between like, okay, I'm actually good at this and it's fun.. What's that process like? - There's two parts to it 00:19:14,800 because you can be very, very, good at something but not passionate about it.. And if you aren't passionate about it, then you probably longterm will not be successful.. Because ultimately in most endeavors, I'd say it's about 10,000 hours.. And although maybe I compress it over four years, I was a lot of hours of training and you have to really like it.. And so go test these things out and see if you have some natural skill..

If you really like it and you just can't wait to get to practice, or you can't wait to get to class, or you just can't wait to learn more about them.. And so you start getting into a flow.. There's a book called "Flow", which I highly recommend people read.. It really helps you think.. And when you're in flow of something, that is something we're ultimately you could be very good.. If you match that up within the skills that you develop.. - So a lot of people are super curious 00:20:08,560 and I'm not sure if this is two things that they're conflicting or whether this is true.. They're worried about the balance between saying yes and taking risks, and then getting over committed and overwhelmed.. So are those opposite sides of a spectrum or are those different things? - Well if there were one of my challenges, 00:20:28,800 I mean, we all have, as my mother used to say, you all have your assets and liabilities.. Just hope you build upon your assets and take care of your liabilities..

So one of my liabilities is I do take on too much.. And so I'm always having to kind of, okay, what can I load shed? What can I drop off? Because it is easy to go off in 27 different directions.. But you do have to check yourself and begin focusing.. And Tina you do a lot in design thinking.. And so there's this thing called you flare and then focus, and then flare, and then focus.. And so in that exploration phase, it's flare, it's like all those puts and notes that are behind you in your background.. But all kinds of different ideas and explore.. Find those things where you both have a passion and some skill, and then start focusing on it.. And I also think of doing things in chapters and in life.. So one chapter is a student another chapter's an athlete, another chapter's a TV reporter, another chapter is becoming an airline pilot..

And as passion maybe wanes in one area, you begin picking up in another area.. Life is too short to not love what you're doing.. And so the moment you feel, maybe I've been doing this too long, maybe I should do something else.. That's a time to flare again and start exploring other items, other areas.. And then you can start lashing on things and do things in parallel to de-risk it a little bit, and then you can move on to the next area.. - I love that answer.. 00:21:55,083 In fact, one of the questions that builds on that is, I love getting inspired and coming to events like this and writing in my journal about my ideas, but then I've got to do work.. And how do I balance being inspired and having my dreams versus the things I actually have to do.. And I think one of the things you talk about is doing things in parallel.. Can you talk a little bit about how you started as a pilot when you were a newscaster, and how you were able to transition from one to the other? Because I think that's an interesting example..

- So I was at Stanford, 00:22:31,910 and originally I had planned on being an engineer as I had mentioned.. And turns out I couldn't become an engineer and I remembered my list, but I also was taking different classes and I had explored.. I was in that flaring phase.. Well, if I can't be an engineer, what do I wanna be? And I took a wonderful class in film and broadcast, and I really enjoyed it.. And I was graduating, leading into ultimately ended up majoring in communication.. And I was graduating going to another Olympics.. And the local TV station, KGO TV in San Francisco, came down to interviewed me.. And they said, "So what are you going to do after the Olympics? "What's your job gonna be?" And I said, I wanna work for you.. And he said, "Oh, okay.. "Would you like to file some stories from the Olympics?" Which I did..

So that was my entry into television.. I was doing that for several years finally earning some money.. And I remembered saying, look, I really wanna learn to fly.. So now I had money, I was just gonna do it as a hobby.. Wasn't gonna be a career.. And I started flying at an airport near Stanford in Palo Alto.. And very quickly moved to teaching flying.. So now during the

day I'm a TV reporter and during the evenings and weekends, I'm a flight instructor.. And one weekend the news director called me and he said he wanted me to come into work.. And I would have had to cancel several of my students..

And I thought to myself I would make five times as much working the day as a TV reporter, but I loved teaching the students.. I loved flying.. And that's when I realized it was time for me to change careers.. So it didn't happen instantly.. But I started spending more and more time in building my hours and experience while I was at the TV station.. So that's, that overlap.. And once I achieved enough hours worked some corporate jobs, I ended up getting hired and I was a United pilot for 13 years.. - That is so amazing.. 00:24:22,403 First of all, I think you skipped over this wonderful little point at the beginning where this person in the media basically said, what are you gonna do next? You said, I wanna work for you.. I mean, the boldness of saying that..

First of all if you hadn't said that the opportunity never would have existed.. Now, it doesn't mean if you always ask, if I say hey Bonny I wanna work for you, hey, Bonny I wanna work for you.. (guests laughing) I'm saying it publicly.. But sure it might not happen, but if you don't say it, put it out there-- - You have to enter the lottery of life to win.. 00:24:55,330 And I had a degree and I was graduating.. I actually had a skill and that I was going to be doing something in Olympics and they were going to be sending a crew to the Olympics.. So I had taken some courses in it.. So it wasn't completely out of the realm of possibilities.. But I hadn't actually thought of asking him until he asked me that question.. And I will say this for the women in the audience..

It's interesting and studies have shown this, that women, when they see a job to apply for they tend not to apply until they are 100% confident that they meet all the qualifications and they can do the job.. Whereas men tend to apply earlier.. And so I always tell people, raise your hand, apply for jobs, apply for jobs.. Apply for jobs that you think that you're not ready for.. Go for that promotion, maybe you're not ready for it.. And I often thought I was ready for promotion when I wasn't.. And eventually I did get there.. So it's raise your hand, just lean in.. - Pick me, pick me.. 00:26:02,570 So we've got a question about the airline industry..

So wow, COVID, pandemic.. Where do you see the future of the airline industry? What what's gonna happen? What do you think? - Well, I think in part and you saw obviously, 00:26:17,110 not only the US government, but most governments around the world, see the airline industry as part of both national security, part of the economy.. And so people will always need to fly.. And so there will be airline travel.. Right now in most cases it's only if you need to.. Not just doing it more.. So leisure travel is a little off.. In business travel, a lot of businesses are saying, well, they're not gonna travel until there's vaccines or whatever.. But we're starting to see spark for people coming back.. And you know what, the industry is adapting too..

Putting in a lot of safety measures, social distancing, et cetera, and people are managing themselves better as well by masks.. I was a pilot during 911.. And that was an incredibly challenging time as well.. People were very afraid to fly.. I was a captain at the time.. I was actually on leave cause I was competing in bobsled this time.. Cause I did finally go back to compete in bobsled.. I came off of leave to fly because I felt it was important.. I was a mother.. As a female I felt if I start flying the very first day after we were allowed to fly again, just to be out there to be a public face..

To be of figure.. Because the airlines very quickly had adapted on security, to address the challenges of what happened in 911.. And just the same the industry is adapting very much around safety.. So when you think of safety and security as they adapt.. So it will take time before to get back to the same levels, call it three, four, five years.. But this is also a time for industries to adapt.. Industries to innovate.. That's what we're doing here, I run the venture arm for Jet Blue.. Finding new ways to innovate.. How do we continue to make it even safer? So I'm very bullish on the industry, it just takes time..

- So what kind of innovations are you saying? 00:28:15,330 I mean, obviously there's ones around safety and sanitation.. But what other interesting innovations are you seeing that we can adapt? - So we and my team, an awesome team, 00:28:24,567 and we run these thing called innovation sponge.. Who would have thought that there would be a need to go out and find how do you use UV light to kill germs on an aircraft? So we went out and found all the different startups that might be doing that.. We've looked into everything from the health passports that are out there.. How do you do contact tracing? Because that's now gonna be a federal mandate.. How do you track people coming in and manage privacy, and all of that? So there's a lot of different companies exploring that.. So we're able to surface all of those.. We're also in the middle of doing an innovation spread.. Where we flare, find all the different startups, not the big large public companies, but the quick and nimble startups that are evolving.. Coming up with solutions in contactless travel..

So the fewer times you actually have to touch something, whether it be a kiosk or going through security, or a ticket, or anything through the travel experience.. How can we remove those barriers so that you can go through with your phone, which you're used to carrying and that's yours? Got your own little germs on it and that's it, and know nobody else wants to touch it.. So how can you move through the entire travel experience with just your own devices? So we're doing quite a bit of exploration in that right now.. - Very interesting.. 00:29:42,443 very, very interesting.. - And for any entrepreneurs, we have a challenge out there.. 00:29:47,740 So they can go to jetblueventures.com and take a look at our latest medium post about it.. And it explains how to submit your ideas into our innovation space.. - Well, who knows, maybe someone in this class 00:30:01,240 will end up winning that challenge.. So one of the things that a number of people are curious about as well..

You are so impressive in the number of things that you've done and the number of things you often do at the same time.. Can you talk a little bit about your time management strategies? What does a typical day, week, month look like that you're able to accomplish so much? - Well, first of all, I do think it's important.. 00:30:26,333 Yes, I do a lot and I'm very busy.. My husband says my hobby is my work.. I love what I do.. So I don't consider it work.. In fact, if you love what you do you never work a day in your life.. So in part it's, again it's getting into that flow.. And so I love what I do.. Also building a good team is really important..

So the people that you work with are incredibly important.. Yes, I work more than a 40 hour week.. I work more than 50 hour week, probably a 60 hour week.. And I do that over and over, and over again because I love what I do.. But also by building a great team, you're able to delegate things.. So part of what I enjoy doing is coaching and developing people.. And so as people build a skill, I can take what I'm doing, and then now they can do it.. And that frees me up to go do more on something else.. And then they like doing that.. So that stretches that person on that skill..

So, it's a force multiplier to have a great team.. So that's part of it.. And then I do spend, family's important, so I do spend time with family.. I don't need to do new explorations outside of my work and family at this point, cause now I'm really focused on giving back.. So those are the things that I do and how I fill my time.. It's family work, giving back and of course doing some working out.. I'd like to do more of that.. I should be doing more of that.. - Maybe there's another Olympics in you.. 00:32:00,060 (laughing) One of the questions is, "You have demonstrated these amazing leadership skills..

"Are these similar skills that you look for "in those founders who are coming to pitch you?" - Yes, absolutely.. 00:32:15,070 I'm just gonna keep coming back to if you love what you do, you never work a day in your life.. Typically, we invest in early stage startups.. We invest in the entrepreneurs more than the idea.. How are they incredibly passionate about what they do? Remember their confidence is contagious.. So are they incredibly confident in what they're doing? Do they love what they're doing? They work all day long because they want to, because they're just so passionate about their ideas.. And this is why you have serial entrepreneurs because they learn, they find something, they find a problem, they get passionate about it.. So most of all, I will be looking for people's passion and then also for the team.. And it is a pretty rare, it's not impossible.. and we have investment in startups where there's just one founder..

But usually co-founders a team, and the team that they build underneath them.. Because we just believe team is so important.. So those are the kinds of the things we look for.. - Your story is so amazing.. 00:33:19,090 And people are wondering about whether you need to pick a few things.. This is kind of the flare and focus.. Do you need to pick a few things that you're gonna go deep into? And when do you decide that you finished flaring and you're ready to focus? - Again, I'll re-pitch your books and your ideas.. 00:33:41,300 And then some of the stuff at the d.school and everything.. Learning about flaring and focus, because this flare and focus idea is not just for your own life, it's for your businesses, for your startups, it's for everything.. And so there's a time in life to flare and there's times where it is to focus..

I believe that people focus in too soon, too early and cut out things.. So I actually encouraged people to flare for a little longer.. And because you want to explore these ideas that you become passionate about.. I mean, I would have never thought of luge.. I didn't even know what that was.. I wouldn't have thought of it.. I didn't even think of becoming an airline pilot.. I thought about I wanna become a pilot.. You have to explore and test these things, and test many of them.. And then once you find what you find, you need to really focus..

So when I went over to Germany, I was seriously focusing on the sport of luge.. I just went all in, that's part of the reason why I went there.. And then I did three Olympics.. During the summertime I was doing the TV and I was then learning to fly.. And then the opportunity came up for the job at United.. And I remember I was going to the interview and I knew they were going to ask me, cause this was 1990, prior to the 1992 Olympics.. Going to an airline is kind of like going to the military.. You don't really have a choice of your schedule if you're junior or anything.. And I was like, well, I know they're gonna ask me if I would quit the Olympics to do this.. And I was at that point in my life that I loved flying so much..

But yeah quit.. Now I hope that I didn't.. And of course I didn't have to, I was very supportive and I did compete in the next Olympics.. But I didn't do as well.. And I remember my coach telling me, "Bonny, your head's in the clouds".. My head was in the clouds cause I love flying so much.. And so that was that time to make that jump.. Even though the next Olympics was only two years later, cause they actually changed the schedule at that time.. They were at the same year as the summer Olympics.. And then they changed it..

So the next Olympics from 92' was 94'.. No other athletes retired cause they wanna do one more Olympics and I very easily could have.. But I was ready to become a full time pilot.. - So I love this because what you're talking about 00:36:07,510 is you're doing one thing and then you sort of have, it's almost like a relay race.. The next thing is sort of speeding up and then when you're ready, you sort of switch gears as opposed to feeling like you need to jump and have nothing, that you're constantly sort of weaving things together.. And then it ends up becoming seamless transitions.. - Now there are times 00:36:28,523 where you do have to like, no kidding jump.. And you just have to have confidence that it's the right choice.. - One of the things that you said 00:36:38,340 reminded me of something that I always say, which is before something's your passion, it's something you know nothing about.. You need to realize that you can be out in the world saying, I don't know what I'm passionate about..

But unless you start exploring you're never gonna figure it out.. - And there's a reason why people, 00:36:56,640 whether it's for those who are in the class, or other college students that are out there, that you're required to take breadth.. There's a reason for that.. Because that's kind of a forced to go out and test all these things.. But even after you're graduated in college and you're in life, and if you're an entrepreneur, it's go test these different ideas.. A whole bunch of different ideas.. To see what sticks and what you're passionate about.. So speaking of flying, one of the people in the class asked, "Did you ever consider joining the air force "and flying some super fast planes?" (guest chuckles) - I did but I did not have 20/20 uncorrected vision, 00:37:35,470 that was required at the time.. I think they now accept some waivers on it.. And even when I started becoming an airline pilot, they had just relaxed it enough..

I think I had 20/70 vision.. And so I was able to get into the airline.. So yeah remember what I said, there are certain things, whether it's a sport or a profession, where there are certain raw attributes that you must have.. I'm just never going to be a gymnast cause I'm just not the size of a gymnast.. I'm never going to be a basketball player.. Well, I wasn't ever going to be an air force pilot because I didn't have 20/20 vision.. Now that's changed, but I didn't then.. - So speaking of constraints, are there some questions 00:38:16,220 about whether you ever felt a glass ceiling? Of course it sounds like you did with regard to bobsled, and then you found your way around it.. Are there other places where being a woman in a leadership role you find to be challenging in some way? - I can kind of look through my life 00:38:34,610 and most of the jobs that I've had, whether it was as an athlete and then bobsled where women couldn't do it and then ultimately found a way, or sports reporter.. I was a sports reporter..

There's not a lot of female sports reporter particularly then.. And then a pilot, not that many female pilots.. There's about 5% of pilots are female.. It was a lot less when I started.. And then venture capitalists, there's not a lot of female there.. I don't go into things because I'm going to break some kind of gender barrier.. I go into it because I want to, because I like to.. And if you feel there's a barrier, you will become your own barrier.. And yes, there are times where you just have to try harder perhaps.. I remember getting in a cockpit way back in the day and I could tell the captain, I was a first officer..

And he didn't think that women could be good pilots.. Well, I'm like I'm going to show this guy.. Cause you know what? The airplane doesn't know if you're male or female.. And ultimately build everybody's confidence.. So sometimes you have to try a little harder, but I'm gonna keep coming back.. The biggest barrier's typically yourself.. Is if you don't have confidence yourself, it's hard for other people to have confidence in you.. But the reverse is also true.. If you have confidence in yourself or display confidence, even if you're shaking inside, you display that confidence others will, and it becomes a virtuous cycle.. And so I think for women is just lean in and just do it..

- So, speaking of leaning in and just doing it.. 00:40:06,870 I mean, you went from being a pilot then to being a venture capitalist.. I mean, that's a huge shift.. How did you learn the world of VC? - I'm still learning.. 00:40:19,977 I think that VC's are lifelong learning.. I've managed Jet Blue now for 16 years.. I left United as a pilot I became a pilot at Jet Blue because Jet Blue was a startup and I just wanted to do something entrepreneurial.. And it just was a nice transition.. And I also wanted to do more.. And also I worked in a lot of different departments at jet blue besides becoming a pilot..

And ultimately became the head of talent.. Talent is something that I'm very passionate about coaching, helping people, developing people.. So that was my role in it.. Also, we had sort of the strategy team.. And so when Jet Blue was thinking about expanding a business model and becoming... Cause it was starting to become a big company, how do you maintain that innovative spirit? One of the ways to do that is through venture capital.. But they came to the strategy team and said, "well, what are some different ideas?" And that was one of them.. And in the venture world, as you know a lot of it is about the network and I already had a network.. It's out on the West coast and of course Jeff was on the East coast and I was really excited to be able to move back.. And so volunteered and then tapped into all the different friends that I have including you Tina and many others..

And part of it is about building a team.. So I said, I would do it, but only if I would be able to hire my managing director who was an experienced VC.. And so that's where we in corporate VC a lot of times you'll take someone like myself, who I know the industry very well, but I don't know venture, or you'll take a venture capitalist who wants to do corporate VC but they don't know the corporate side.. So it's really a match of two.. I remember I said, it's all about a team.. And so bringing on that team brought in Raj Singh who's an experienced VC.. And then my background is all in operations.. And so brought on another managing director to the team from the commercial side of the industry.. So we have an awesome team.. So I'm constantly learning..

I mean Raj is constantly, every year or so we do term sheet 101 with our team.. Cause we have new analysts coming in and we're always teaching people.. And I learn every single time.. - So I'm super curious and I'm sure other people are.. 00:42:36,440 What has been some interesting things you've invested in, given your knowledge about the airline industry and the opportunity to invest for the future? - Sure, we invest in not just aviation, 00:42:48,003 we invest broadly in travel.. But I am an aviation nerd at heart.. I love flying.. We have 27 different startups and they're all my children and I don't want to have a favorite child.. But people do know that I love aviation.. So we have a startup named Joby aviation, which is building electric air taxis called eVTOL, electric vertical takeoff, and landing..

It's the leading.. There's about 300 companies around the world now, that are building these, but Joby is the lead.. We

expect to be FAA certified 2023, probably in commercial operations.. And they're in Santa Cruz.. So very close and also have an office in San Carlos.. That one I'm super excited about cause we're literally have a seat at the table and helping evolve.. I think I look at electric propulsion to transform aviation just like jet propulsion did back in the 60s.. So this is the next change.. It's about sustainability.. It's about urban mobility..

It's about getting rid of traffic jams.. Imagine if you could go from San Jose to San Francisco in 15 minutes for the same cost of what it would take for an Uber or less.. So this is all possible.. So that's super exciting.. I'm also really excited, we have several startups who are taking massive amounts of data whether it's in the hospitality industry, travel industry, airline industry, and then marketing analytics.. Massive mal data and applying machine learning to it.. I think it's using taking machine learning and applying those algorithms to be useful.. Because there's so much data in our industry, but it's all been trapped in these legacy servers and everything.. So pulling it up into the cloud, applying the algorithms and everything from revenue management to better schedule planning, to better marketing.. All of these areas are things that we're working on..

So I'm pretty excited about those as well.. I could go on and on but I-- Can we find out these things 00:44:54,200 if we look at the Jet Blue website.. - Yes, just go to jetblueventures.com.. 00:44:58,070 And when you go there, you're also, here's something for everybody.. When you go onto our website, it'll pop up we do a newsletter.. And this again, I'm gonna talk about team and evolving teams.. So we send out a newsletter every two weeks.. And it's curated by my team.. We have a Slack channel and we see cool articles and travel and we curate it.. And it's what is going on around the world in travel and travel tech, that is new and exciting and interesting, and it helps you to keep abreast of what's going on..

So I encourage them to do that.. - So I have one final question I'm gonna ask.. 00:45:33,263 What is the best leadership advice you've ever been given? - I'm gonna come back 00:45:42,550 to sort of some of the things that I've talked already.. And again, my mother always talked about the assets and liabilities.. I think it's really important for a leader to know where are their strengths and to lean into those strengths.. But really to know where their areas of opportunity are as well.. What I know you don't know.. And build an awesome team around that.. So it's about building a team and it's also about helping people grow and develop.. So we have our team and some of the junior members will spend three, four or five years with us..

They'll move out into the industry.. They're friends of what JTV would call it.. So it's it's team.. You can't do this alone, it's team.. (upbeat music)..