

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/they-wont-steal-your-idea/>

GoldieBlox founder and CEO Debbie Sterling describes her early insistence on nondisclosure agreements and secrecy. Doors only began to open, she observes, after she let go of her obsession with intellectual property and began talking about her idea and sharing her passion with everyone she met.



## Transcript

- I have so many NDAs from my early days (laughing) 00:00:08,820 that I made people sign 'cause I was so worried, and it's so funny.. Nobody was gonna steal that idea, I mean, nobody, no big toy company was ever going to try what I was thinking because it was so against all the things that they had learned over the years that work for girls, like, no one was ever going to try it.. And look, like, I think there are tons of ideas out there every day, and there's probably a lot of people who had had the idea that I had before.. And the point is, like, it all just comes down to who's gonna put in the time, and who's actually gonna execute it, right? And I have really, like, I have not yet regretted sharing any of my ideas with anybody, period.. I mean, even, I've had many meetings now with big, other toy companies, media companies who could be competitors, and I've shared proprietary ideas with them, as well.. And you know, I think worst case scenario, they copy it, and/or they try to copy it, or they do it in their way, and then there's something out in the world that's beneficial to girls, so in my mind, that's a win.. I mean, maybe that's a stupid business, you know, maybe that's a stupid thing to say for my business, but nobody's done that yet, really.. People have tried to knock us off after we've launched something, that will happen with any business.. But nobody has copied just an idea before it has actually gained traction in the marketplace because everybody's too afraid.. So my advice is, you know, now, I'm not saying, like, go and give away some, like, proprietary algorithm or something that you come up with that's really novel, like, you don't wanna do something like that..

But if you have, you know, if you have a big idea or something that you're excited about, like, I mean, I remember reading this book by Blake Makowski, who was the founder of TOMS shoes, and I loved this thing that he said where he would wear two different-colored shoes around, and because he wanted to talk about what he was doing with everybody, like, even a stranger on an airplane.. And so by wearing two different-colored TOMS shoes, like, everybody would come talk to him about it, and then he could talk about his idea.. And it's so true.. Like, I would start to talk about GoldieBlox, or I'd have some of my prototype pieces that I'd be holding or I'd have a drafted book that I was working on.. And literally, in the early days, I mean, waiters at restaurants I would talk to about it.. And they would be like, "Oh, like, my aunt is a writer at the Atlantic.. "Like, I'll hook you up with her." And I'm like, "Really?" And they're like, "Yeah." Like, I'm not exaggerating, like, talking to, when you're genuinely passionate about something, and you start sharing that and talking to people, it's amazing, it's like this interesting exploration into human nature where people wanna help.. They almost, like, they wanna show off, like, who they know, right, and how they could be helpful to you.. And so I think that a lot of my early wins came from just sharing, sharing the ideas around with everybody who would listen.. And I couldn't believe how many people would just open up their Rolodexes..

Like, I mean, people would give me amazing connections, and I don't think it's ever really too early to start sharing even just a rough idea or a sketch on paper, I really don't.. I have not yet had an experience where a half-baked idea of mine got stolen by somebody else or executed any better than I would've...