

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/listening-mode/>

One of Sarah Friar's first projects after becoming CEO of Nextdoor was to go on a world tour, visiting ten of the 11 countries where Nextdoor operated. That time spent in "listening mode" helped her understand both the different needs of different countries, and also a common theme: Nextdoor was facilitating powerful community groups and in-person engagement between neighbors, but there was also an epidemic of loneliness in our hyper-connected world. That realization inspired her to focus on infusing "soul" into the Nextdoor platform, and helping users turn online connections into resilient offline support structures.



Transcript

- You really wanna make sure 00:00:05,020 you're more in the listen mode in the beginning.. You need to learn, you need to come up to speed quickly.. What I usually tell newer managers or newer executives that are coming to work with me is yes, you should take 90 days.. But in reality, you have about 30 where you really can just get away with listening and then you need to start putting a few scores on the board so that you're starting to gather that credibility, but I would still hold back from any large changes unless you're in triage mode.. Like unless you're joining a company, for example, that's truly on the brink of a disaster, but if the company's kind of doing what it needs to do, you really, I think, want to hold yourself back from too many big decisions till about day 90, but then I think you need to put forth what's your forward vision as you look out over the next 12 months.. So in my case, in that listen mode, of course I was listening to my employee base and really understanding where they were coming from, but more importantly, listening to our customers.. So I actually went on a bit of a world tour, which thankfully I did in 2019, not in 2020, because I wouldn't have gone that far.. And I literally visited 10 of our 11 countries that next door is live and working well in.. The one I missed was Italy, ironically, which would have been a great place to go visit.. And what you find when you're out on the field is of course, every country, every culture, every neighborhood is slightly different and yet these commonalities begin to arise..

And that's actually where I could see, of course every country has slightly different needs from a utilitarian perspective, but the commonality was a lot around this community piece.. And it was two sided.. On the one hand, there was so much hope and kindness and great everything from kind of small acts of kindness on the platform to really, really big things that I would see happening.. You know, for example, when I was in Melbourne, I met with a community group where a woman who had lost her husband had just started having a weekly breakfast on a Sunday morning.. Darlene is just a fantastic personality.. And since she started finding her breakfast, more and more people have shown up, in fact, she's had two engagements happen.. So turns that next door, it can even be a dating platform for some, but the flip side of that is what I heard consistently was also this conversation about loneliness and about how even in a hyper-connected world, more and more people were feeling stuck behind panes of glass, but not having real world interactions.. And that really kicked off a lot of the work about how do we bring soul into our platform.. So it isn't just utilitarian that it has this spirit behind it of building social capital and helping communities unite from online to offline.. And that's founded a lot of the work we've done even in 2020 where of course COVID now is really amplifying, I think those feelings of social isolation and loneliness...