

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/clips/the-chance-of-a-lifetime/>

MasterClass founder and CEO David Rogier tells the moving story about how MasterClass was partly inspired by his grandmother's experience fleeing the Holocaust, becoming a pediatrician, and realizing that "education is the only thing that someone can't take away from you." He urges prospective founders searching for startup ideas to choose something that they will be proud of building, even if it fails.



Transcript

- After school, 00:00:02,950 I went and worked for Michael Dearing.. And I was working for him.. I was investing in startups.. And after a while I miss, I miss building things and I miss creating things.. And I talked to Michael about it and Michael said, well, why don't you propose something to me? And I was like, okay, what if I go work on a bunch of things I have in my mind, ideas.. And I could use some funding.. And Michael funded me, which was amazing.. And cause I didn't have, you know like a locked in idea or locked in team or anything.. And so you know, I was thrilled right? I mean, this is a chance of a lifetime.. It's a once in a lifetime opportunity..

I was also terrified because it was a once in a lifetime opportunity and I knew this was gonna be a chance I wasn't gonna get again.. And so I felt my own pressure without any structure to think of a great idea.. And there are lots of books on it.. There's lots of podcasts on it, but there's no, there's not one prove one way that for sure works.. And so I started thinking of my own needs in my life.. I started thinking of trends happening in the world.. I started talking to other folks to hear needs of their own.. And I was trying all those ideas and somebody gave me a great piece of advice.. She said, choose something that even if it fails you are gonna be proud of it.. That was an amazing constraint..

And I think sometimes having those constraints can make you more creative.. And so then for me, it was like the optimization of a sales, flow and funnel wasn't gonna be the thing.. I had to think What are things that actually drive me in life? And you know, I thought a lot about my grandmother.. So I was in part raised by her.. And I remember in second grade I would always stay.. I would always go on the way back from school.. I'd always stay with, I would stay with her after school.. I remember in second grade I go to her house and I would complain to her about all the math homework I had.. Which obviously I didn't have a lot because I'm like nine years old.. And my grandma, I'm complaining to her and I'm, I am whining about it..

And my grandma tells me, I want to tell you a story, which is like the last thing you want to hear when you're like nine years old.. And my grandma starts, she was 16 years old, living at the, in the time in Krakow, in Poland.. Her and her mom go on a family vacation.. Dad's going to join but stays home a couple extra days to finish some work.. While they're on vacation, the Nazis invaded.. They killed her father.. Took everything.. She flees to New York City.. The only job her and her mom can get is on the factory floor of a factory.. They're working side by side and my grandma decides she wants to become a doctor..

She finds every medical school in the state of New York and applies to them.. She gets a no from every single one.. She applies to every, every school she can.. She gets no from every single one.. Keep working factory.. Applies again.. She starts calling the deans of admissions and asking why am I not getting in? And they all hang up on her except for this one guy who says, I'll be honest with you.. You have three strikes against you.. You're a woman, a foreigner, and you're Jewish.. Hangs up the phone..

She keeps working the factory.. Applies again the next year and gets into one school and becomes a pediatrician.. And I'm eight or nine years old and I'm staring at her because this is intense stuff to be hearing from just having complained about math homework.. And she goes, David the point I'm trying to make to you is education's the only thing that someone can't take away from you.. And that lesson stuck with me hard.. And I realized if I have this one chance, I want to try to build

something that other people can't take away from others.. With that as a constraint like all of a sudden the world of what I was going to work on got much, got much smaller.. And I knew it was gonna be in education.. And then it was about evolving and iterating and figuring out what was that going to be inside education? (digital melody begins)..