

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/clips/people-over-product/>

Techstars CEO Maëlle Gavet discusses an early management mistake: focusing exclusively on her senior team, and then facing a rebellion from her junior staff. That incident impressed on her the importance of valuing the contributions of team members from the most junior to the most senior. More generally, she observes, technical founders often focus on product more than people. She advises founders to flip those priorities, focusing on building an organization that can recruit and mentor the great people who make great products possible.



## Transcript

- The most impactful mistakes, 00:00:07,910 meaning the one that really made it hard at some point to be sure that I would be successful were always people related mistakes.. Anything from when I was very young, my second business, I was 23 at the time.. So I, for example, I decided that I needed to, because I had very little time and I should be focusing only on my senior team because the junior team didn't matter.. Guess what? When your junior team goes on strike because they hate the way you treat them, you can't run your business anymore.. So like thinking about your team globally and thinking about the fact that even the most junior employees actually do bring value to the table.. And that may not be the value that you see immediately because you do not interact with them all the time.. I find to be a very common mistake.. One that I definitely made in the past, but one that I see very regularly.. This idea that somehow people are disposable and that the more junior they tend to be, the more disposable they are.. I've seen that over and over again with a lot of founders..

And I think it's a terrible mistake because again, like, you're only as good as your team is good.. And then the second mistake, again, very people related because at the end of the day, everything is about people is also one that I made which is to believe that to build a great company, you have to have a great product and that your focus should be on the product rather than the people who build the product.. So it's back to the people thing.. And it sounds kind of obvious, but the reality is most founders, especially the one with technical backgrounds, have a natural bias towards, and especially in tech, have a natural bias towards, I need to build the best product possible.. So they will get very passionate about how to build the best algorithm or how to build a proper UI, UX.. And they will not spend that much time talking about how do you recruit the people to build this product? How do you engage these people so that they really want to build this great product? How do you make sure that you coach them, mentor them, develop them? How do you make sure that you exit them also in a proper way when they don't meet expectations? And so you tend to see first-time founders, especially in tech, very focused on the product rather than the team in the way they allocate their time.. And in my view, that's a huge mistake.. Like, look at your time, look at how you spend it.. You should be spending as much time, if not more, on the people who build the product rather than on the product itself..