

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/clips/optimism-and-momentum/>

Scale AI founder and CEO Alexandr Wang explains the benefits of optimism and exploration for founders, even when the end goal of a project is not yet clear. Exploring interesting opportunities often creates momentum, he says, which can help you persevere through the uncertainties of an early-stage startup.



Transcript

- I think that early on, you know, sort of, 00:00:09,142 it always is helpful to be wildly optimistic, I should say, or at least, or at least dare, maybe the proper terminology is to dare to dream big which is that even early on, I think this sort of like this thread of thought, which was, Hey, you know, if we actually do solve this sort of like data problem for, for the machine learning community that is big, and I don't know exactly what it's going to look like to, to build from that point, but we're gonna be able to do a lot of interesting stuff if we get there.. And so that thread of, of idea did emerge and it didn't become, it honestly wasn't relevant for us for the first many years of the company 'cause we were just focused on data labeling, data annotation, we were just focused on like, solving that but then you sort of, you know, we solved that problem we're really focusing on, we got scared and then we picked our heads up and we're like, "Wow, we're actually at this sort of like the promised land that we thought at the very beginning that like, we can, we actually have a shot at like building a lot more, doing a lot more, more industries to sort of accelerate AI and machine learning development." And so, you know, I would say that it was a, maybe early on, it was a pipe dream and then it was sort of like, you know, many years later before it actually felt like, hey, this is like a real, a real opportunity for us.. And the second part of the question, which was at what point did I decide I was ready to pursue it, building it full-time? I actually like, I wish I could say, "Oh, it was just like so convicted and so I just, and so, and so I just like went for it." But actually it was, I really started working on it in earnest when school ended.. I remember even like I put working on all of it on hold, went to get through, like my finals and my final projects and all that stuff and then the summer started and I was like, all right, I have nothing else to do and then, and then I was, we were very fortunate that we'd got over the course of the summer months, enough momentum, where it was like, hey, there's kind of no option but to just, you know, keep going at this thing.. And so I think it's, I think that's sort of like this barrier, this mental barrier feels very large, oftentimes around like, hey, I have a life right now, at what point am I going to be ready to like sacrifice my life today and then go do, and then go approach this other life.. I think the, and I think a lot of times it'll seem very irrational and my, maybe my advice is to like, not actually be quote, unquote, trapped in that false dichotomy, but actually just put yourself in situations where you have sort of freedom and flexibility to explore and then like, see how you gain momentum in that scenario...