

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/clips/transitioning-to-a-new-company/>

Claire Hughes Johnson, corporate officer and advisor for Stripe, advises operators who move to a new company not to replicate and imprint their past company's practices but instead study the company's current systems, ask many questions, avoid reinventing core practices, and prioritize which changes to advocate for. She shares the lessons she learned when she moved to Stripe after many years at Google.



Transcript

Interviewer So my question is about moving 00:00:04,680 from one company to the other.. - Mm.. 00:00:06,346
Interviewer I have this experience 00:00:07,560 of building a team, creating a culture, creating some operational tactics, and then moving to a different team, and it's like how much you kind of try to, like what is working in one company, take it to another one, and how much you have to let like kind of grow and blossom on its own.. - Yeah, that is a terrific question.. 00:00:27,720
And when I started at Stripe after being at Google for almost 11 years, there was a high degree of suspicion (laughs) from the employees that were there, which was about 160 at the time, that I was gonna just try to take Google's practices, and just imprint them onto this young company.. And that would've been a terrible mistake, whatever role I was entering at.. I really needed to study Stripe, the product, the business model, the founders, and the culture they were working to instill, and also just what had already started to develop in terms of practices and culture, and be really curious, and ask a lot of questions, and I will admit, I was so gun shy that we put in a goals process.. And I didn't call it OKRs, because I was like, they're gonna think I'm trying to bring Google in the room, and I'm not, I really not.. But we needed a goals process, because everybody didn't know what everyone else was working on.. We were past Dunbar's number, right? They were like, "Well, I don't know if I trust that that team over there is doing the thing that we need to get done." And I was like, "Why don't we all share? Why don't we write our goals and share them?" But it is about studying, and it is about looking, but I also came in from studying..

There are some practices that you don't wanna reinvent from one place to another.. I mean, that's what a lot of the book is abstracted versions of practices I think you don't wanna have to reinvent.. And I'll never forget a moment when a fairly early employee, kind of frustrated, came up to me and he was like, "Claire, you are sharing all these ideas.. I have already had all these ideas, and I have shared them, and no one is listening to me." And I said, "I hear you.. I think sometimes a company's not ready, by the way, to hear." And I even, for me, I shared some ideas, and I was like, "Oh, put that back on the shelf.. We are not ready." But do respect how decisions get made, and figure out how do you get in the mix when you see it, but really prioritize the order of operations.. Say you have 10 ideas of things that could be improved.. You cannot come to the table and say, "Here's 10 ways we need to be better right now." You wanna say, "What are the ones that really matter right now to advocate for?" And explain and pilot.. Piloting is your friend.. Tell everyone, "Let's just try this thing for a few weeks, and see what feedback we get." And so those are just some thoughts off the top of my head, but it is, proceed carefully, but don't, you

know, don't be intrepid...