

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/clips/maintaining-values-as-you-grow/>

David Allemann, co-founder and executive co-chairman of On, explains how he and his co-founders built their team by creating a clear mindset and making it generational. He urges aspiring entrepreneurs to consider who they want to have next to them if they scale quickly and advises them to know when to let go.



Transcript

- All of this wouldn't have been possible, 00:00:06,330 without this incredible team.. And let me tell you a little bit how we built this team, because I think that's important for any one of you who's at some point starting a team, leading a team, probably starting your own company.. So, when we started out, we were already a team.. So, we were three founders and we said, we hired our first two team members and we felt, "Hey, it's an amazing culture in this small team." So we said, "Hey, for every person that we are gonna hire next, "we're gonna do interviews "and they have to interview with all of us." And so that of course broke when we were around 10 people, because it's impossible.. But we had cultivated a spirit of, "Hey, we want to have very clear mindset "and not just primarily skillset in the people we hire." And so that happens to this day, we noted down our spirits that guide us, because we feel that's what is present in that team.. And it has become generational, because now when our latest generation of team members, hires the next generation of team members, they basically go back to these spirits and ask, "Is the explorer spirit there?" Something that we talked at the very beginning.. Is the athlete spirit there? Something that's very close to innovation, because athletes, when they win, they have to get up the next morning and start to train again.. So, thinking about failing in innovation and getting up the next morning again to do the next prototype.. And so these spirits together with the positive spirit and with the team spirit, they all have to be there.. And we probe first and foremost for these spirits, because we feel, whenever you write, you go into a company headquarter and you see excellence written somewhere on a wall, you're probably not gonna believe that it's really there or that this makes something happen..

So, it comes through people and by bring the right people around you, we feel you have a shot at building a great culture that then is not just there as your first product, but it becomes generational.. And these next generations built the next product, because products are probably there for five, 10 years, depending whether you do a digital product or a physical product.. But the team is there in eternity if it becomes generational and if really kind of that spirit is present in the team.. So, I would urge any of you who build a team, first and foremost, to think about who do I want to have next to me if I scale really, really fast? And if I have to scale product, if I have to scale geography, if I have to scale channel like retail, direct to consumer, probably even wholesale, you need a lot of shoulders.. And don't kind of pull everything to yourself, but make sure that you have amazing people around you.. And I have to tell you, that's not always easy.. For me that was hard because when you're starting out and you're building your baby, then sometime it's hard to let go.. So, I went out and built all the factory relationships at the beginning and then at some point, despite having built all of this, I had to let go and say, "Hey, now I hand

over to Mark "who's gonna continue to do that." And at the beginning, that is hard or when you have built products or when you have launched a digital experience, or now lately retail and you have to ran that over to a team to the next person.. If you're a builder, that's sometime hard.. But I learned that I have to let go, because it creates so much space..

First of all, it creates space for the team to have to take over and not always somebody watching over your shoulder.. It's very hard to lift the explorer spirit if somebody watches over your shoulder.. But then also for me to create space for the next thing.. So, if you wanna create the next thing, if you're really on that journey, let go to create that space for the team and for yourself..