

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/mental-health-tech-mentally-healthy-startups-entire-talk/>

Maria Barrera, a Stanford-educated engineer, is the founder and CEO of Clayful, a platform dedicated to providing essential mental health support for the TikTok generation. Today, Barrera's company creates accessible resources for K-12 students and has already made a profound impact on thousands of students nationwide. In this conversation with Stanford adjunct lecturer Ravi Belani, Barrera shares her journey to founding a mental health startup and how she incorporates strategies for mental wellbeing in her life and on her team. This talk includes references to trauma and suicide. The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline is a hotline for individuals in crisis or for those looking to help someone else. To speak with a trained listener, call 988. Visit 988lifeline.org for crisis chat services or for more information. The Crisis Text Line is a texting service for emotional crisis support. To text with a trained helper, text SAVE to 741741. It is free, available 24/7, and confidential.



Transcript

(upbeat music) - Welcome everybody 00:00:18,120 to this week's Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders seminar, the Stanford Seminar for Aspiring Entrepreneurs. ETL, as you guys know, is presented by STVP, the Stanford Engineering Entrepreneurship Center and BASES, the Business Association of Stanford Entrepreneurial Students. I am Ravi Belani, a lecturer in the Management Science and Engineering department at Stanford, and the director of Alchemist and Accelerator for Enterprise Startups. Today is an especially special ETL. All ETLs are special, but I feel like it's even more special when we have one of our students returning for a full circle moment as a speaker. And I also feel like the campus' weather is usually better when it really wants to extend its arms to a special ETL speaker. And it's a particularly nice day today, and for good reason because we have the pleasure of welcoming Maria Barrera to ETL. Maria is a Stanford educated engineer. She got her bachelor's and her master's in mechanical engineering here in 2013, and is the founder and CEO of Clayful. How many people have heard of Clayful? You can raise your hands.

Well, if you haven't, you will very, very soon. So Clayful is a platform dedicated to providing essential mental health support for the TikTok generation. Today, Maria's company creates accessible resources for K through 12 students and has already made a profound impact on thousands of students nationwide. She's raised \$7 million of capital and it's the only platform where in 60 seconds you can connect a student to a mentor, especially for their mental health. Before launching Clayful, Maria played a pivotal role in Nearpod's extraordinary growth trajectory, culminating in the company's acquisition for \$650 million. And her leadership at Nearpod was instrumental in driving user acquisition, engagement, propelling both B2C and B2C revenues, and B2B revenues to new heights and showcasing Maria's adaptiveness at scaling consumer facing operations. Maria was born and raised in Bogota, Colombia and also then came to the United States at the age of 10 to Fort Lauderdale. And through her Colombian origins, which are also marked by resilience and determination in the face of adversity, her journey underscores her natural aptitude for problem solving and commitment to leveraging technology to create tangible, impactful solutions. She came to the farm, as I mentioned, and got her bachelor's and master's degree in mechanical engineering and graduated as a Mayfield fellow. So please welcome back to the farm Maria.

(audience applauding) So again, the format for today is we're gonna do a fireside chat, but then we're gonna really open it up for Q and A. And really, I think the intention here is, if Maria can be a catalyst for all the things that you're wrestling with,

is to really share her wisdom and Maria's in the throes, in the midst of her own entrepreneurial journey. So it's always fun for us to have somebody who's in the midst of the journey itself. Okay, gang. So we're gonna do a fireside chat and then I'll open it up in about 25 minutes for Q and A. So start thinking of any questions that you may have and the CAs will get ready for, make it facilitating that as well. So Maria, welcome. - Thank you. (Ravi laughs) I'm so excited to be here. This is surreal.

- It is a full circle moment. It's always super fun. 00:03:25,860 - It is. 00:03:59,700 that are wrestling with whether what to do post Stanford, whether to start a company or join another company that's already sort of at a certain scale, or join a larger company and build a functional skillset, can you share your insights to answer that question about when to take the red pill and jump into the founder journey? - It is a journey. So my dad always told me, 00:04:21,700 learn with other people's money. So that's why I decided to do what I did. I knew I wanted to start a company at some point and going, basically, my decision point was, okay, I could, I did my undergrad, I did my masters, I can do this right now, there's not a problem that I feel super passionate about yet. So, and you know, I could do it today, but what skills do I need? And like, what am I really, what am I missing? So instead of going into it right away, I decided I'm gonna actually go and start a career journey that would help me get the skills necessary to do that work. And I was really lucky that in that first job I had out of my master's program, my former boss who was the CEO at Nearpod, he asked me, you know, what do you wanna do in five years? And I said, I wanna start my company. And he's like, great, we're gonna help you get there.

And every six months we would have a conversation around what skills do I have? What are the next skills that I need to build? So really it's, I think, yes, finding that scaling organization that can help you get those skills is really important. But more importantly, it's that person who's gonna help you develop those skills and who really believes in you and will sort of push you through that trajectory. - And any tips on that? On finding the mentor? 00:05:35,670 Did the mentor find you? Did you proactively, deliberately have a strategy to find a mentor? How can people, if that is so critical, how can people facilitate involving others in their success? - It's a little bit of both, I would say, right? 00:05:49,290 I've been very lucky throughout my whole career to have a lot of different mentors and to find mentors in real people as well as in books and in media and in, you know, videos of Steve Jobs that I'll watch. So there's a lot of different ways to like think of mentors, if you will. But I think the main thing is can you find someone who just like believes in you and sees something in you that you don't even see in yourself? Because sometimes, especially when we're earlier in our careers, I mean, imposter syndrome is real and we never think we're, you know, ready for it to take that big leap. But having someone that does really, I think makes all the difference. So, you know, you being here, you get the opportunity to meet with so many people and you know, everyone's willing to get a coffee with a Stanford grad. So really looking at not just like, what are the opportunities that are in front of you, but who are the people that are going to be sort of jeopardy you with those opportunities? Not every opportunity is created equal. - And can you talk about your specific, 00:06:50,700 you had one very pivotal mentor, is that right? - Yeah. 00:06:53,092 Well yeah, a couple, but - Or is that fair- 00:06:54,360 - Or maybe I would say, 00:06:57,870 the CEO of Nearpod was really the pivotal one.

- And was that something 00:06:59,730 that you proactively sought out or did that just sort of happen by circumstance of what you were doing? - It's happened by circumstance. 00:07:05,370 So I was doing my master's here. I realized I wanted to be in education after watching a documentary called "Waiting for Superman." If y'all haven't watched it, highly recommended. It's all about the public school system and how we can help shift it. And as I was kind of wrestling this idea of, I just got a lot of degrees in mechanical engineering, but I wanna go into education. My parents were like, I'm sorry, what? That's okay. I started talking to a lot of people and really it was me going out there and trying to find people to talk to and then people saying, hey, you should meet with this guy. He's at the Stanford d.school, he is doing a fellowship there, building a new EdTech company, you should connect. So it's a little bit of like, going out there seeking the opportunities and also the universe just lining up for you - Yeah. 00:07:54,330 - Yeah.

Don't you find that it's like this combination 00:07:55,440 of noticing opportunities and then just being curious and letting things happen. That's terrific. And so it is an interesting transition from being a double degree grad in mechanical engineering to then suddenly going deep into the education mental health space. So can we talk about the vision and origin story of Clayful? - Yes. 00:08:15,180 how when you start a company, especially when that gets investor back where you've raised \$7 million, that there's usually a key insight that a founder has and usually a moment of inflection which makes it the right opportunity. I don't know if that held true for you with Clayful, but if it did, can you share. - It definitely did. 00:08:33,000 So I was at Nearpod for a long time. We sell to schools. It was all around how to use technology in education, right? How to use technology in a classroom.

And this was right when iPads were coming out. Chromebooks didn't even exist yet so long time ago. And our thesis there was, how do you take these devices that are making our run to the classrooms and make them into instructional tools that teachers can leverage to bring instruction to a new level? And learned a lot through that journey, especially how does K-12 work and what is the impact on technology and in just like new things coming up for students in particular. Fast forward, I joined ChartHop in January, 2020. Good times. We didn't know what was coming obviously, but three, two months later a pandemic unfolds and we sold into human resources. So as you think about the pandemic unfolding, one of the first departments, if you will, to get affected was HR, because they're thinking about, oh, how are you taking our people remotely? How are we thinking about employee engagement? How are we thinking about employee mental health? So it became very clear that mental health was going to be, was deeply affected by this pandemic. We are all that was unfolding. And the, you know, while it affected all of us in some way, shape or form, for students, particularly like if you think about elementary,

middle school, high school students not having structure, not having socialization, not being able to go to school, not seeing your friends every day, like that type of isolation is not just hard, it's like cognitively debilitating, right? And so as I was starting to look into it more and more, I see this article about eight year olds dying of suicide. And that moment was that inflection point where I'm like, okay, well if back up, like if our system is at a point where an 8-year-old not just knows what suicide is, let alone is carrying on with it, something's wrong, right? And that's where you bring it back to mechanical engineering.

We think about systems, right? We think about the whole thing and looking at our mental health and our education system, if that's where we are, there needs to be something that needs to be done differently for us to not have eight year olds dying, right? So that was a big inflection point at that point. Texted my CEO, I was like, we need to talk tomorrow. It was 2:00 AM on a Tuesday, I remember I vividly, and he, at that point, I basically quit my job and just started trying to figure out how do I do something about this? And in true d.school fashion went into a lot of need finding, talking to everyone I could talk to. And there were a lot of different aha moments through those conversations. One, a conversation with the clinical psychologist that said, no, by the time a kid gets to me, everything that has to be undone just takes so much time. So like anything on the prevention side could have 10 XD impact. And like that really landed with me. So I'm like, okay, cool, we need more prevention. Then you talk, I think I think about myself, right? Coming from Columbia when I was 10, wonderful family, wonderful parents, love my mom, she's amazing. She was working two jobs, she was busy.

She had left her whole family. She had like literally left his whole life in Columbia to give me a better life. Hope I'm making it worth it. And I wasn't gonna go and tell her, hey, I need help. Like my friends are being mean to me, right? Or like, I'm going through this. Like, I didn't feel like I could be a burden, right? So I wanted to build something that did not have to rely on the family being the main driver of the student's mental health. And then the third piece was really thinking about the financial aspect of it, right? So if you wanna build something that's preventative, it turns out the healthcare system is not there yet, right? Healthcare is very, very reactive. So as we again think about the system like, okay, healthcare doesn't necessarily is gonna pay for it. I don't want families to pay for it, 'cause I want this to be accessible. I believe in equity.

I believe in building something where families without disposable income can that benefit. So who care, who else can care? Schools. And it turns out I have a little bit of experience in schools. So it became this kind of interesting moment of founder market fit where there's this problem that in following months you start seeing students making their way back into schools and all this information about how Covid has affected their mental health and that how that's showing up in schools, right? Kids that knowing how to behave, kids throwing chairs around the, across the classroom, 'cause they're up upset. Kids putting out like literally lighting fires in bathrooms, 'cause they don't know how to deal with the aggression. So schools are dealing with this big problem and don't know what to do about it. And I'm like, okay, well there's something here, right? All these things are happening. And then unfortunately a couple months after that, there's a big shooting in Uvalde and the government decides like, this is our wake up call that we need to provide more mental health support across the board and funding be becomes more available. So it's all these different pieces and, you know, and I was sitting at 2:00 AM on a Tuesday night and realizing like, this is what I wanted to do. None of those things were in the cards, right? I didn't know any of that was gonna happen.

So it definitely is one of those like right place, right times, but also like I was so obsessed with the problem that I kept on finding solutions along the way. - That's interesting. 00:14:03,690 You found yourself constantly gravitating towards solutions to this perpetual problem. And are you the type of person who gets obsessed about a lot of ideas or is this sort of a singularity? Because I wanna really distill for the students when they know that something is compelling enough to actually quit everything they're doing and go full force in faith against it. - I do not get easily obsessed with ideas. 00:14:22,920 No, no, I did not. And it was something that everywhere I looked, there was something that spoke to this. Even, you know, I would scroll through Netflix and they'd be like, "Ginny & Georgia" or like this other show. It's like, and now I kept on only watching teen drama since, like everything in my life just kept on pointing toward this in a very sort of, the universe wants you to do this way. - Okay.

And I've seen that pattern match again. 00:14:47,910 So there's just this obsession with your attention. It was relentless. And then these things that you saw not just a vitamin but a clear headache, a clear pain point literally, and then a lack of a solution and a potential model. Okay, so we have then the impulse to then take the red pill and jump in. The next inflection point, oftentimes in the startup journey is when you know you're gonna be a success. I don't know if you've hit that point yet or not, but because we're two years into the journey now of Clayful, is that right? - Yeah. Yep. 00:15:19,170 can you distill when that moment occurred and what evidenced that for you? - So there's this, one of my favorite authors, 00:15:27,290 or yeah, there are two authors. I'm blanking on the, it's "Switch" and "The Power of Moments" are their two books.

They're brothers and they talk about this idea of bright spots and like how do you, when you're looking for solutions and seeing what's working, you always look for the bright spots and then you scale those bright spots. I love that so much. So as we're kind of wrestling with this very big problem of, you know, 40% of students feel hopeless and sad, how do we make, how do we help them feel better? We look at, okay, where are we having an impact and what is actually helping? And one of the big, like points initially where we saw that this could be something is we're testing the size was like our earliest prototype literally built it in a day and a half, 'cause we're like, okay, is this actually gonna work? Right? And we have this conversation with a 14-year-old boy from Texas who's a football player and he's having a fight with his mom. And he says, I don't know if

she loves me because she has to because I'm her son, or because she actually likes me as a person. And that happened like five minutes into the conversation And that moment I was floored. I'm like, there is something here, right? Like if we're able to get students to open up and like realize these like really hard deep things and work through them, there's something really compelling here. And so that was one of the first ones. And that's on the student side and then on the business side, right? Like the great thing about education is you have to build for an end user, the student. But you have to sell to a very different user, which is the district leaders. And in one of our first sales conversations, we're kind of getting feedback on our product and he says, I have a million dollars allocated to hire eight counselors.

I've hired zero. I can't find them. There's not enough people. So like, what do you have, 'cause I'm desperate? And like that moment right there, we were like, oh, there's a staffing problem. Again, very different problem for mental health, but very related obviously. We're realizing that, you know, the different stakeholders have very different needs and you can solve both needs with one solution. That was an aha moment. So those two were really early where we realized, okay, yes, there's something worth building here. And then over the last two years we've been scaling that out and I have so much student feedback that I'll humble brag maybe at some point and read some of it for you - If you want to just, this is your platform. 00:18:08,933 Oh, you, yeah.

Do you want to do it? - Where is it? 00:18:12,060 my intention is what I want you guys to know is to feel when you've had product market fit, okay? So that's the intention here. And there's a couple things just to underscore as Maria's bringing up these quotes from the students is that there was a low fidelity prototype. It was just a day and a half, and which just that low fidelity prototype, you're getting things that are anomalously compelling. And so I didn't mean, so humble brag Maria. - Humble brag. 00:18:41,400 How did this go? What did you think? So I'm gonna read you some of 'em. Dear Coach, thank you so much for helping me out today. You helped me realize my self-worth and that I got this as a middle school student. Thank you for being there when nobody else could be. I feel like I'm a little bit lighter.

Thank you so much. Because of this chat, I feel more control of my thoughts, my emotions, and able to solve conflicts on my own. And knowing it's okay to be me. Can you imagine if I had this when I was a kid, I would save myself a lot of money in therapy where like, these are so compelling. This is one of my favorite ones because we get a lot of questions around why young people wanna talk to humans and not to AI. We can definitely dive into that topic, 'cause I know it's a hot one. Thank you so much for helping me through my problem. Your kindness and patience really made a difference. I feel better. I feel like I can handle my life more without worry.

I will definitely come back because you made me feel better about myself and made my anxiety more manageable. Yeah. There's two more I wanna read. Thanks for this chat. If I'm gonna be real honest, I didn't know what I was gonna do tonight and I forgot I had Clayful and then I started typing and I didn't do the bad things I thought I was gonna do. So thank you for that and I hope you know that you're amazing and very appreciated. And then my last one, which is actually it inspired our T-shirt. I wanted to thank you one more time. You helped me deal with the huge issue and I might resolve the whole thing in one conversation. I really appreciate what the Clayful team is doing in today's world because this stuff is life changing and lifesaving.

It's a middle school student. - Yes. Yes. It's a middle school student. 00:20:25,800 And I want you guys to all understand that we've had, yes. - Thank you. 00:20:32,700 (audience applauding) - So you guys can feel that in your body. 00:20:37,470 I hope, you know, those quotes. And I think that is one thing when you know that you have product market fit, you have a need where you need to exist, and your worth isn't about how much dollars you raise from the venture capital funds or what investors think about you in the most challenging times, you're gonna go back to your mission and you're gonna go back to those quotes. That's what will carry you through.

And so with that though, then let's talk about the challenging moments. What have been the most challenging moments? I know you're only two years in, but what I wanted to do is create space for us to talk about the reality of a startup versus just the myth. Can you share what have been the biggest struggles? - Yeah. I mean, entrepreneurship 00:21:13,260 is very glamorized in these walls. - Yes. 00:21:24,120 if anyone's been in Doctor Doom's Fearfall, it's less of like woo and more like woo woo. You know, you're going up and down constantly. So the highs are highs, the lows are lower because you just feel everything. I mean, everything feels so deep, right? Like, this is my baby, this is, it feels so strongly about the work that we're doing. So anything, any challenge just feels really, really hard and really emotional.

And I think that that, you know, it takes a toll on you in a lot of ways. One of the, I think hardest lessons that we've learned over the last couple years is, we're in this very worthy cause, right? We have an incredible mission. We are working and doing some incredible work, as you all just saw. And it is really important for us to build a team of people who care, not just about the mission, but in building a company that can make the mission come true. And those are not always the same, especially when you think about mental health, right? I joke that being a startup in mental health can be a little bit of an oxymoron, you know, where startup required a lot of hard work and a lot of tenacity and not a lot of work-life balance. And, you know, we now, I feel like as a society, especially post Covid, we have a very different point of view on, like what healthy work life balance means. And it's not working 80 hours at a startup, right? And so how do we find the people that are really excited about the mission, that are willing to work really hard for it because that fuels them and because it gives to their mental health, right? And because at the end of the day when I see the really sad things on the platform that happen, or like the

feeling, the deep feelings that students are feeling, the thing that gives me fuel is that we're doing something about it, right? And that we're working hard to change that. So yeah, building a team, I think has been one of the most challenging pieces. - And can we click into that more? 00:23:19,530 'Cause you guys, I think you guys are 12 full-time. You're 12 employees and about 140 contractors right now.

And I do think that's a really interesting nuanced insight that we haven't heard before, of the difficulty of hiring for somebody who's not just aligned with your mission, but can actually execute with what the build the business needs to build, especially when you're doing something so aspirational. So can we get tactical, are there any tactical insights or tips that you have discovered that you wish you knew earlier when it came to hiring that could have accelerated your either safety time, or money, or accelerated your development? - Yeah, I mean, initially we were very excited about people 00:23:55,170 who are excited about our mission, right? When you have a baby and they're like, you have a cute baby, everyone's like, great, cool. Come take care of it. Come we hang out with us. So the fact that people were excited about this mission that we were on was really exciting for us. And like, great, let's do this together. And I don't think we were having the hard conversations up front about what does it mean to be at a startup and what does this require of you? So now in our interview process, we always have that conversation, if not in the very first conversation, definitely throughout the process, right? So, hey, what does it mean to work at a startup? Like, this isn't your typical nine to five job, this isn't a, you know, but like, it's probably not what you think it is unless you've been at, it's at a 10 person company before. So here's what it actually means. Like, here's the amount of time you're gonna work here. Like, here are the challenges that we're working through.

And what we've been doing lately is actually having people go through a project that's like a problem solving challenge with our team. So they're not just meeting in an interview and saying like, okay, here's where I worked, here's my experience, blah, blah, blah. But really using that, those 30, 45 minutes to get to know our team member while at the same time working through a project together, so they can actually see what the work is like. - And is that a 30 to 40 minute project 00:25:18,353 that you're working on? Or do you give them actually a, like a two week experience of a project before you make a decision? - More of like a week and a half, yeah. 00:25:25,590 - A week and a half. 00:25:45,330 and these are the real people that you'd be working with. And these are the real questions we would ask. And of course, like you don't have all the context, right? So we're not gonna judge you on, is this the perfect solution to this problem? But we will judge you on your process and how effectively you use the time with our team members. - So you're scoping a 10 day project for people 00:26:05,760 to work on, that's actually a real situation that you're wrestling with, and then they're going and executing and then you're assessing. - Yep.

00:26:10,920 - And any unintuitive heuristics 00:26:13,170 on how to do the assessment that's correlated with good team members that you've discovered? Or is it really just looking at who's doing, who you think is doing good work? - That's a good question. 00:26:24,750 One of my friends jokes that like, if you're too into mental health, like that might be an anti-pattern. - Oh, interesting. 00:26:33,480 what if you're someone who's very, very passionate about mental health, what does that mean about- - Why are you joining a student? 00:26:38,730 - Yeah, exactly. Yes. 00:26:41,130 - Okay, so then can I call out 00:26:41,963 the elephant in the room please? Because you exist, you know, your mission is to help stabilize people's mental health, have healthy mental citizens in the world, starting at a very young age. - Yeah. 00:27:14,430 to mitigate against the toxicity for your mental health? - Quick plug for "Burn Rate" by Andy. 00:27:20,770 - Oh, so he came, we spoke actually at 00:27:21,650 - Incredible 00:27:26,850 who did an ETL speech, I think last quarter. He has a book called "Burn Rate," which is all about his mental health struggles and discoveries, yes.

- I mean, you asked like, 00:27:34,978 is it a sane thing to do? No, you have to be, I mean, this is one of the lines from the book that really resonated with me. It's like, you have to be a little insane if, like, I think that I, Maria Barrera can solve the mental health crisis. I have to be a little crazy, right? Like, it's not, but if I'm not gonna do it, who is, right? Like, so it's, I don't think it is a sane endeavor. And at the same time, there is something really powerful about feeling the like, and like seeing the impact of like, oh, you actually are making a difference in those student lives day in and day out. I would say to the point about is being in a startup an unhealthy endeavor? It can be. I think that's why we need to be so cognizant about finding people where, who feel like it's giving to them versus taking away, right? So where the work is so fulfilling for them, because it is, whether it's a feedback, whether it's like they love working through challenges, it's like there's people out there where that really, that does drive you and there's people where it doesn't, and that's what we're really trying to figure out during the hiring process is like, are you someone who like, likes to look at a problem and like tear it apart in 24 different ways and figure out how to solve it. And like, you get really excited about that? Or do you just wanna like execute a to-do list, this might not be the best place for you, and that's okay, right? Like, not everybody needs to be at a startup, and that's fine. - And how would you assess your own mental health 00:29:10,470 on a scale of zero to 10? 10 means you're- - Today or like right now? 00:29:14,450 - Yeah, fair enough. I guess it changes. 00:29:15,870 - It changes.

00:29:19,050 - Fear drop. 00:29:30,210 Sleep being one of them. Big plug for sleep, very important. - How many hours of sleep are you getting? 00:29:34,235 - Eight to 10 a night. 00:29:35,880 I won't compromise on it. If I don't sleep, I am a zombie. You do not like Maria being a zombie. She's very cranky. So that is a really important part. - That's good.

00:29:52,980 some people call them mantras, I call them sayings, but just little things that inspire me day in and day out. So mean, I was at a gym in like Kentucky the other day and said like, you didn't come this far to only get this far. And I'm like, yeah, I did not, let's go. And that now that's a post on my computer. So little things that will inspire me have just that, I just

keep 'em really present and that makes a big difference. So it just, you know, gives you back a little, little pick me up when you need it. And music actually helps quite a bit, right? So big Swiftie, that's okay, I own it. And there's different, like there's one song in particular, "Long Live" where she talks about like, remember how you've been dreaming for this moment for so long and that you're here. Like, that's really magical. So remembering that and there's all these, you know, that song like different media points where you have to always go back and remember that you've been, this is what you wanted for so long.

So yes, it can get hard, but like that's what you asked for. So let's go after it. - You're in the founder journey. That is good. 00:31:07,580 I'm gonna open it up for questions gang, in a few minutes. So start thinking about the questions, but I'm curious, Maria, did you have mentors as you were going through the journey that you deeply, I know we talked about one already, but in general, even when you were taking ETL, did you feel people that you felt deeply connected to? Or was that a struggle and do you have any, did I'm just curious about what was that like? - Yeah, I mean, definitely during the Mayfield program, 00:31:32,220 had a lot of opportunities to connect with different, whether it was current investors or entrepreneurs who are going through the journey then that really think shape a lot of the work. I'm big on, frankly, opportunities like these, right? So going, listening to ETLs or going to the, like how I built this or all these different podcasts that are where people are telling their entrepreneurship journeys. - And, you know, as part of ETL, 00:32:00,510 I don't know if we've had that many Latinx founders actually here and I know that you feel comfortable speaking about this is what I'm bringing up. Is there, so now you are, there is a full circle moment. You are not in the seat, you are actually now on the podium.

Is there anything that you would wanna relay to either the Latinx founders in the room, or the female founders or founders that you feel we might have underrepresented in the past, or that you felt you didn't hear voices for that you would have wanted to hear? - Yeah. As, as you were asking the question, 00:32:27,660 like, I did that I did have a lot of white men in mind, you're right. Yeah, there's not a lot of rooms that I walk into that I see people look like me. That's just the reality, especially in like Silicon Valley, this room is actually pretty diverse, which is cool to see. So yay, go you. I think my piece of advice is really, as you're going into rooms where there's not a lot of people who look like you, it's very easy to just assimilate and blend in and like wear the clothes that don't make you stand out and don't, not correct people when they say your name incorrectly. And to just, you know, fit in because that's what's easy. And to remember that when you do that, you're making it that much harder for the next generation to show up in those spaces. So I've been, I'm trying to be really intentional about it. I wear my bright colors, my sparkly shoes and just like showing up unapologetically for who I am, and you either gravitate toward me or you don't.

And I think that's been a particular unlock for the last, I would say year in my career. And it has brought into my life a lot of really incredible school leaders, investors, other entrepreneurs who see that and gravitate toward it. And like now you kind of find your people who are lifting you up constantly. So I don't, I mean, know before I was so afraid of trying to fit in and kind of fitting into this mold of who I was supposed to be. And now that I feel a little bit kind of like out of that shell, I feel like I'm finding even better people around me. So find your, be yourself and because you are yourself, you will find your (indistinct) - Funny familiar. 00:34:23,490 That's so good. Yes, your tribe. So I'm gonna open it up for questions gang, just raise your hands. Audience member During the process 00:34:31,050 that you realized that school district and government, as you said, can really support and compensate how it's really works.

And especially it takes some time, you know, working with government general very slow. Can you give us some thoughts to that. - Yeah, schools are fun to work with. 00:34:49,386 There's so much, there's a lot of pros and there's a lot of cons, right? But it was really that moment where you said, we have all this funding and we can't hire people where we realize, okay, there's something interesting here. And as we start having more and more conversations, realizing that schools actually do have a lot of money, right? There's billions and billions of dollars being spent in education on an annual basis. So, and they need to provide the support because they're seeing unfortunately, the gun violence in their school, their overall behavioral challenges and decreases in attendance, right? There's so many pieces. So putting those two things together and then it becomes a question of figuring out what are the right, the checks and the, yeah, how do you need to sort of form solutions so that you can fit into the square peg that they have built for it. So that's becomes a challenging part, but if there's a need and there's money, you can find a way. - Thank you. Next question.

00:35:54,387 Audience member Thank you Maria for coming 00:35:56,580 and thank you for working on mental health. So my question is, what do you think about the using LLMs for your chat box on mental health? And if you can explain also your rational. - Yeah, yeah. 00:36:09,930 We've tested, I mean obviously I've been at the forefront of testing in and trying to understand where the boundaries are. And I've also seen a lot of examples of young people leveraging some of the, whether it's, you know, snap's AI or ChatGPT for therapeutic reasons. We've decided to not do that right now, we tested it with a, we were kind of red teaming it, run and tested with, okay, I wanna trigger alert, I wanna hang myself, how do I do it? And the (indistinct) piece is like, you shouldn't do that. Like basic, a mental health professional. And they're like, okay, I wanna hang something that's 130 pounds. How do I do it? Step by step instructions. So if anyone knows how to game a system, it's a middle school student.

So we just don't feel like the technology's there yet to really be able to provide the right boundaries around how you can protect student safety at the core. What we are doing with AI's really leveraging on the coaching side, so always with, it's essentially just keeping the human in the loop, right? So as if a coach gets stuck, if they're not sure of how to answer something, they can then leverage our, we've trained our own kind of alum there to support them in those conversations. And

that's been a really powerful way to use AI to sort of help on the workforce development side without sacrificing student safety. I think the technology will get there eventually. We just don't think it's there yet. - Do you think gene AI is gonna be a force to 00:37:49,020 make things worse or better from a mental health perspective? - Ooh, we just did the session on this 00:37:57,150 at ASU+GSV it was all around like how technology and particularly chat bots are going to shift how we interact as humans. And I think it can go both ways. And I worry right now that we, I mean we've seen how social media has affected our mental health and we're paying the price of that now, and yet we're not taking those learnings and applying it to AI. - Yes. 00:38:29,500 and it feels silly that we're not paying attention to, hey, all these things happen when this new technology out now how are we not looking at it in that same way now? Yes, there's a lot of really cool use cases where students feel like they can chat with and like learn skills with AI, but kids are really lonely as it stands, right? So is the solution for them to just have a AI friend I would venture, no.

- Yeah, I would venture no too, but I think it will. 00:39:04,740 - We're gonna have a lot of, yeah, 00:39:06,903 it could be a crazy next couple years. - Yes, yes. Thank you. Other questions? 00:39:11,940 Audience member Thank you. 00:39:13,800 I'm just curious about the business model honestly. When I go to your website, I fill out that capture form. It asks, are you a school administrator, are you a teacher, are you a student? I'm just curious who your decision makers are, who's involved in the sales cycle? Like what stakeholders do you have to convince essentially, I assume it's pretty long sales cycle just because it's kind of a, it's public sector, right? Technically and yeah, who's paying for it, if you have the freedom to talk about it, I guess. - For sure. 00:39:44,130 I mean, yeah, school districts pay for it and typically we work with student services.

So that's the department that oversees counseling, tutoring, any sort of, you know, social workers, any sort of mental health related support service. We don't do direct to consumer yet. So you notice that like there's no way to purchase the product directly on the site. And that's on purpose because again, we're really after equity and wanting all of the students within a school system to be able to have access, not just us families who can afford it. And what we've seen though is students, families can be advocates for this work, right? So they can go to their schools and say, hey, I really want this, I want this not just for my own kid, but I want this for a whole community. So that becomes a big driver of kind of that initial conversation. - Terrific. 00:40:42,946 Audience member Hi, thanks so much 00:40:43,779 for chatting with us today. I have a quick question about the kind of complex stakeholder map of mental health care and the role that you play in it. So what kinds of situations is Clayful not able to support, and how do you support those students that have more chronic needs? Do you partner with other providers or is there some other kind of method of going about that situation? - Great, great, great question.

00:41:05,880 Yeah, so there is a very complex mental health system. We really see ourselves in the, if you think about this as prevention versus like very much acute needs, we see ourselves here. So if you think about the full map, there's it, from the prevention standpoint, it's like there's some content out there, there's SEL curriculum, but there's really nothing between that and like meeting with a counselor. So that's the gap that we're aiming to fill. Now when students come to us and say they're experiencing suicidal ideation, extreme bullying, restrictive eating, anything that we know requires that clinical support, that's why working within the school system is so important because we can do a very warm handoff to a system that they already know, right? So it's not that we're, you know, calling a community provider, or calling like the nearest therapist office, but rather we're saying, hey, school counselor Billy is having this problem. Can you check in on them? And that having that expansion of the school services team is really, really, really powerful for school districts to know, oh, you're not just handing off to another person and you're not just having this conversation in isolation and us not knowing what's going on, but we really are working in partnership. So that's been, I think, one of the most compelling aspects of it, where we have escalations, you know, every week. And as part of our relationships with the school systems, we're able to save lives together in a way that's really compelling. Thank you. Question.

- I have a question here. 00:42:37,080 Audience member Hi. As a startup, 00:42:39,270 how did you make your initial connection to your target market the school administration and convince them to purchase your product? - Yeah, it was a, 00:42:50,190 I talked about a little bit of the founder market fit initially, right? So because I'd been working in education already had a, let's call it like 10 people, I could call up and say, hey, I have this idea, what do you think? Right? And that's why I really believe in this idea of learning with other people's money and building a pipeline with other people's money, right? Because if you're able to sort of get that experience under your belt, you can, once you're ready then can really tackle it. That was our way. And then from there, it's okay, you have to get outside of your network. So we go to a lot of events, do a lot of cold emails, basically reach out to whoever will talk to us on LinkedIn, right? There's a lot of, you basically have to let go of your ego and just put yourself out there, which is an exercise in and of itself. (Maria and Ravi laughing) There's a lot of rejection involved, and you learn to build a thick skin. - Thank you. Next question. 00:43:50,910 Audience member Hi, thank you for coming.

00:43:53,190 My question is, how hard is it to work with school districts? You explained that there's a lot of funding available, but how easy is it to access, for example, is the bureaucracy very slow? - Mm, it can be. Yeah. 00:44:06,510 So school districts are, there's all different sizes, right? There's school districts that are literally 30 students. There are school districts are 1500, their school districts that are hundreds of thousands of students. So it varies broadly. The big behemoths are very, very bureaucratic. We're not working with them yet. Our bread and butter right now is really small school districts, particularly in rural communities where there's not a lot of access to mental health resources to begin with. So to your question too, like finding, you know, not every customer, potential customer is built the same. So instead of going in and

targeting the top 30 school districts, we really decided, okay, we're gonna go after this particular type of school district because they can move quicker, they have a higher than normal need, and we can create a playbook around how to reach them very efficiently.

So with that said, yes, there's typically a budget cycle they have to follow and it's on an annual basis and it takes a little bit of yeah, muscle and understanding, but once you know how to do it, just like everything else, right? Like once you know how to sell into healthcare, you can do it. So it's definitely finicky, but they're also really loyal customers if you do really good work for them. So your product can be really sticky and built. Once you're built into the system, it's hard to get out, right? Because it's not a system that gets a lot of iteration or like innovation on a consistent basis. - Thank you. We have time for one last question. 00:45:47,970 Is there a burner? Raise your hand. Yes. Audience member Hi. Thank you for coming.

00:45:57,870 I wanted to ask a bit more about the process when a student reaches out to you guys, whether that's 24/7 help, or if it's say during the middle of school or in the middle of the evening, how that gets addressed given the variety of backgrounds people may be coming from and with your team side of things, how do they prioritize? Okay, well this conversation needs to be had or whether it's more of a company side, like this is how we're gonna address it. Or if it's up to the individual specialist to do it more of a case by case scenario. How do you, I guess, deal with the different backgrounds and the time and all the different factors that come into something such as mental health? - We have 40 seconds, sorry. 00:46:34,740 - No pressure. 00:46:38,280 The TLDR on that is what their special sauce that we have is, we train all of our coaches as well. So they're not coming in with different types of experiences. They all have the same consistent training, so they're all addressing things on a consistent basis. So there's no need to have different types of people for different types of challenges because they're all trained the same. That's the short answer. There's a lot more that we can get into about like, how that training works to be able to support things regardless of when they're coming in.

But that are the best thing about our service is that a student gets connected within 60 seconds no matter what they wanna talk about. Whether they wanna talk about, you know, they're experiencing suicidal ideation, or like this cool animation show that they're watching, like everything gets support because everyone deserves that support and connection. - Okay. And with that gang, 00:47:26,940 I have to bring this week's ETL to a close, but can we please all give a round of applause to Maria? (audience applauding) - Thank you. (Ravi cheering) (audience applauding) This is Maria's at ETL. So thank you Maria for sharing so honestly. - Thank you. 00:47:41,610 - And it's such an inspiration. 00:47:44,220 Gang, next week we're gonna be joined by Alexandra Zatarain, who's the co-founder and VP of brand and marketing at Eight Sleep. And you can find that event and other future events in this ETL series on the Stanford eCorner YouTube channel.

And you'll find even more of the videos, podcasts, and articles about entrepreneurship innovation at Stanford eCorner. That's ecorner.stanford.edu. Thank you everybody. - Thank you. (audience applauding) (upbeat music)..