

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/diversify-your-teams-thinking>

Ali Ghodsi, CEO and co-founder of Databricks, observes that an academic mindset can lead founders to fail because they expect everyone to approach problems the same way they would. He encourages founders to work with people with different backgrounds and ways of thinking.



Transcript

- I think oftentimes in academia 00:00:05,100 we're rewarded for actually understanding everything.. And is it true or was your experience that that was an asset or a liability when you were foraging into these other areas outside of your areas of expertise? - It's an asset and it's a liability, 00:00:16,080 it depends on how you use it.. It often is a liability.. I have a lot of folks that I've seen that come from academia that fail, and then obviously it's a liability.. The reason they fail is that especially if you've done research and so on, you're very detail oriented, you have a certain deductive mindset, it's sort of, you come from this kind of background where you reason through everything and you work with these people that are super smary, so you expect everybody around you to be that way.. So then when you hire someone in marketing, you apply the same kind of judgment on them and you like question what they're doing.. And they're like, oh, you know, we're gonna do a campaign that looks like this.. And then you apply exactly the bar you would apply in academia.. Like, okay, walk me through from first principles why you're thinking through this.. And they usually don't have the backgrounds we have, they don't think like us, they don't speak like us, and we're like, okay, this doesn't even hold water, this person is, what are they even doing here? Like, no, I'm an absolute no, by the way, I'm gonna micromanage and do it right myself..

So now I'm suddenly a marketing expert here in five minutes and I think we should do it this way, that's the failure mode of academics.. - And then what's the right mode? 00:01:21,173 This is so good, and then what does the right mode look like, actually? What's the counterintuitive but correct thing to do? - Yeah, I mean, they speak a different language than you.. 00:01:28,110 - Yeah.. 00:01:32,321 and you find the perfect marketer and sales person and corp dev and so on and okay, but usually they come from a different background.. The people that do sales are a little bit different from the people that do engineering, the people that do marketing are a little bit different.. So I think you should kind of turn off that part of your brain, you should value experience, 'cause it matters.. You know, these fields have been built over the last 40, 50 years in business and they know how to do sales.. There is art to doing marketing, there's art to doing product management, there's a art to do that.. So just 'cause they don't like speak and look and can articulate it the way you would like to, you shouldn't just dismiss them.. So actually as a founder, I kind of turned off, and sometimes I would go and talk to my co-founders and they're like, oh my God, like how can you even stand this person? And I'd be like, give 'em a chance, I agree with you that it didn't add up and yes, that part of the argument didn't make sense..

And yeah, it's like they're a little bit funny like that, but maybe they're right.. Maybe they're right about how they're doing

it, and that way you can kind of broaden the diversity of talent in your company.. So that's the way to do it right.. And the way to fail is to just look to hire all people that look exactly like you, not physically or gender wise or ethnicity, but they're wired, they have the same background, when you look at the CV it's like the same CV as you...