

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/engineering-isnt-everything>

Zillow Group and Glassdoor Co-Founder Rich Barton explains how tech companies that hold engineers in higher regard than employees in other areas of the organization have an outdated understanding of the Internet. It's no longer a place just for the tech savvy, and rising above the online chatter requires experts in marketing, finance and other facets of business, according to Barton.



Transcript

- There actually is a class of tech company where the engineers kind of rule the roost.. And that may sound appealing to you.. Because you're an engineer.. Uh, and by rule the roost, I've been in these companies before, and by rule the roost I mean look down their noses at and kind of disrespect other functions at the company.. Like sales, or marketing, or operations, or IT.. HR.. Those are all just around to support me, the engineer.. I'm the god engineer.. I'm exaggerating here, alright? Um, but, having a company where there is a explicit or implicit class system amongst employees is no bueno.. Okay? That is absolutely not good..

It can work for some companies for a while, but it ain't a happy place to work.. Alright? And, it's suboptimal now.. It's suboptimal.. I think about it as spokes in a wheel.. The wheel is true and spins beautifully with very little friction when all the spokes are tightened to the same strength.. And then the wheel turns.. It doesn't turn if spokes or missing or they're shorter or what have you.. And that's kinda how I feel about all of these different functions at a company.. They have to all be firing on all cylinders to make the machine really work.. And I believe as we enter this kind of next phase of technology oriented company and startup that's being created, I believe that the two geeks in a garage story are gonna become fewer and fewer..

Um, suffer me.. The beginning of the web, the web was a flat, open, egalitarian space.. Two geeks in a garage really could start anything.. And as long as they were discovered by Yahoo! and later Google, you know both Stanford startups, magic things could happen.. Alright? Is that how you feel about the web and opportunity today? Is that the landscape we see today out there? Is it this great open flat web of opportunity? It's really not.. It's really not.. There are these massive companies that control masses of eyeballs and traffic, have huge influence over what people see and what people do and what ads people see.. And they get to decide by and large what companies become successful, and what don't.. And so when you go in to, if you're going into a startup, my advice now would be make sure that, you know, marry a marketer.. (laugh) If you're an engineer, marry a marketer..

Have a marketer as a boyfriend or a girlfriend, okay? Have that marketer be part of your company because you're gonna need to be super clever about how to get your product in front of people.. And then the next person you should get to know is the money person.. And the next person you should get to know is the operations person.. Anyway, you need a full team to be discovered.. It's much much harder these days I believe to break through the clutter and the noise than it was back when I started Expedia.. Which is too bad.. Now that'll be the case until something new comes along.. You know? Maybe there will be a new web.. I can't really envision it.. Some people think Blockchain, that's what you know, Blockchain is gonna be the basis of a new wide open web..

And you know maybe, maybe.. I think more likely Alexa and Google Home and these voice intelligences that are proliferating right now, more likely those are gonna succeed.. And as those succeed, the choke point gets even narrower for companies to fit through.. Okay? Consumer oriented companies.. You gotta come through the voice, and the voice is not a full screen with lots of links on it.. The voice is one answer probably.. Okay? Where should I go for dinner? What movie should I see? Get me airline tickets.. You know, find me a house.. Like you get one answer from these things.. So I actually think about this a lot..

I think power is actually concentrating in the hands of these mega global distributors now.. Not dispersing...