URL: https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/fire-yourself

Kevin Systrom, co-founder of Instagram, observes that his role at Instagram grew and shifted constantly as the venture scaled. To build a productive and scalable organization, he continues, you need to be willing to effectively fire yourself from certain duties, and replace yourself with someone better. This tactic allows leaders to leverage their output, while also learning from colleagues that have expertise in a particular niche.

Transcript

At my heart, I'm a creator.. I like to build things.. And after leaving Instagram, I've spent most of my time getting back into the details of how you build things.. Coding, again, spinning up servers to do things, right, crunching data, and that was my role at the beginning.. Mike and I were able to create the service effectively from scratch, because we paired on it, we sat down and we would code late into the night.. But it quickly became apparent that in order to take care of the other 50% of stuff, that I needed to do less of that, and find people to scale up.. So replace myself.. A mentor of mine likes to say, you have to fire yourself out of the job.. How do you fire yourself and find someone to replace yourself who's better, and there's this financial concept called leverage, right? We all talk about leverage, but let's think for a second about how we get leverage numerically, right, how can you with one hour of your time produce 50 hours of work? Because when you're starting a company, it's one hour of your time is one hour of work.. And your whole job as you scale is to find people to bring in, and make it so that one hour becomes five hours..

And if they're not so good, maybe it's one hour goes to three hours, or in the worst-case scenario, it's one hour goes to a half an hour 'cause you spend time debugging things and managing things, but in the ideal state, you increase your ratio of my hours worked to the output of the company of hours worked as much as possible.. And I think by the end, I would look around at our executive team, and I would say, I'd work for any one of these people.. And I think that's the type of role you wanna have as you grow, you always wanna feel like you would work for the people that you hire, because you're learning so much from them.. And I found it, it was a treat for me, to be able to hire people that I could learn from, that wanted to do these jobs and wanted to be experts in these areas, and that was so fascinating, and so fun, and that's the type of thing you should be thinking about as you scale a company, is that you're not gonna have the same job.. In fact, my job, I felt like every day I showed up, I wish someone would just make a new business card and change the title, because that's what it felt like.. It was every day, I had a new job, and it's like, forget about what you learned in the old job, now you have a new job.. And you just have to become comfortable with that...