

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/from-no-ideas-to-a-great-idea>

You don't need to be a font of wild ideas to start an impactful venture. LaunchDarkly CEO Edith Harbaugh describes how she and her co-founder, John Kodumal, decided to work together for ten hours a week, trading ideas and exploring business opportunities. It took more than a year of "practice," she says, before they happened on the idea of "feature flags," which became the basis of LaunchDarkly.



Transcript

- So in the background this whole time, I'd been wanting to start a company, like I'd worked at these really small, EasyBloom was the smallest, about eight people.. I'd worked in big companies, I'd launched business divisions and I was like well this is great.. I knew that I could go from zero to a million, but I wanna do it for myself.. Like I don't wanna do it for somebody else, I don't wanna do it as part of a spit out, I don't wanna do it as part of a division, I wanna do it for me.. The issue was I had no ideas.. I was like I'm a very boring person.. Like all I really know how to do is build software.. That's it, like I'm not somebody who's like oh I also know how to do crazy ideas all my friends were doing, I was just like all I really know is software itself.. Like I know how to ship a release, I know how to design a release, I know how to bring it to market, but just software stuff that's what I love, I love software.. My friend John Codamull and I who'd gone to college together, we would hang out, he was in engineering and we would just sit around and talk about software..

You know like how should Agile be implemented, silly stuff we'd seen product managers do, how to build better releases, release management, it was all we talked about.. So John and I kept trying to come up with an idea to start our company around.. Finally we decided that we would just start working on something ten hours a week.. So if there's ever anybody you're considering joining a company with, practice it first.. You don't know what it's like until you actually work with somebody what it's like to work with somebody.. Sounds obvious.. So what we started doing is we started working for ten hours a week.. We both kept our full-time jobs.. John was at Atlassian, I was at Concur and we'd work at our idea for 10 hours.. And we cycled through about, depending on how you count it, like three to seven ideas..

Initially we thought about doing an app for children.. Apps for children are actually very hard cause there's a lot of regulations around what content you should show children.. We thought about doing a productization of his PhD thesis, which was around static analysis and we actually worked on this for a long time.. We worked on this for around a year.. So I was out there talking to a lot of developers.. It just didn't feel right.. And then, when we were talking to people about ideas suddenly it became really clear to us that we should do something around feature flags.. I was talking to my developer friends.. They said, you know what I really miss, is the framework that I used to have at Facebook.. Or the framework I used to have at Amazon..

Or I could see what people at Dropbox are building.. Also we'd had an internal framework at Tripit.. We had this internal framework where we could roll features out to different users, we could control it, we could see who was using a feature well, and I'd always complained when I was at Tripit, like, why isn't this a product, why do we have to keep doing it in-house? Even when I was back at Monster.com, I remember we had this catastrophic release once where I really wanted to try two different versions of something and then be able to do a killswitch and there just wasn't a way to do it.. It's like, why don't we build a product that makes software development better? And John said, that's it.. That's our idea.. Like finally we have found an idea that takes advantage of what we're both really good at, which is software.. Like the stuff that we thought wasn't important was actually really important, cause we understood software.. John had been at Atlassian, he had a PhD in software, CS.. I knew software inside and out.. So we started LaunchDarkly..