URL: https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/insight-through-need-finding

Pulse Co-Founder Akshay Kothari describes how he came to appreciate the value of need-finding while working on innovative projects at Stanford. According to Kothari, "Understanding how people live is very important for building your products."

Transcript

The second project that I did was actually in Rwanda.. It was part of the class called extreme affordability at Stanford, it's offered at the design school.. And it was really fascinating because I did my undergrad in electrical engineering and also my Masters in electrical engineering, but we kind of sit in the class and where we get problems, we spend a lot of time in labs, we kind of like talk to some peers, we kind of solve problems on paper and give it to them.. I remember my first project at D.school was to redesign how people eat Ramen noodles and I was like these guys must be kidding, like redesigning Ramen noodles like it's fine the way it is.. And they pushed us to go out there and observe people eating Ramen noodles.. And they pushed us to kind of go to markets and see what people would kind of buy.. And I found that really, really like awkward the first time.. I remember I was at Maru Ichi, in Mountain View, and I was just kind of like staring at people eating Ramen noodles.. And I was like he must be thinking I'm some sort of a freak doing that, and I was thankfully with another couple of people who started talking about oh, that person like the water is kind of coming out of the bowl, that person is kind of eating while he is walking, you start seeing people like doing things that they do, but there are problems with the way they're doing it.. And so when we did - when I did the extreme course, we were trying to essentially improve nutrition for Rwanda and thinking about how we're going to actually improve the nutrition in the country where a lot of people actually die because they don't have enough nutrition..

And it's one thing to think about, okay, well we want to try nutrition, so we have these 10 ideas.. But there is another thing were you actually go out there and you spend 10 days.. So actually sitting with these people like we spent 10 days in Rwanda on the ground, really understanding how they live, what they eat, what is their daily process, what are the things they actually do and how does our solution fit into their daily lives, so that we are not actually trying for a huge behavioral change.. And this was a huge learning for me because this is a project I was doing alongside, courses like machine learning and courses like artificial intelligence where we don't get this experience, but I thing in this case just getting that knowledge, really understanding how people live is very important for actually building your products, because you really need to know how people currently live and what people currently do and what problems they have before you go out there and actually build something for them...