

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/blog/videos/leading-big-visions-from-the-heart-entire-talk>

Asana Co-Founder Justin Rosenstein shares the philosophy and experiences that drive him to create positive impact on the world. Rosenstein also unpacks the values Asana focuses on in creating a thriving culture and offers ways for leaders and individuals to effectively manage their personal psychology.



Transcript

I am super excited to be here.. I think I took 472 like seven times both because it was a good easy credit, but mostly because it was really great to see like so many people who had gone through - had so much experience and to get a share in that.. Throughout this I really encourage or really invite all of us to stay present and engaged if you can, in the sense of like if you are bored, look bored, if you are excited about what I am saying, look excited.. Because I have hours and hours of stuff I could share with you and that will help me calibrate to making sure you are getting the most out of this that you can be.. In fact before we get started you guys have probably had classes all day, and had been doing things all day - I invite you to just take one moment and just maybe exhale and then like a collective inhale, and exhale.. Just come in to the space together.. I feel very privileged and grateful for the fact that I feel like I have a deep-deep sense of calling and purpose and passion.. I am working on technology and helping to build this product and this company and it feels like - it almost feels like I am not building it but like there is something that's coming through me that wants to be expressed in the world.. Something that will help potentially make human beings happier, reduce suffering, make the world a more not only happier but a more interesting place.. Coming from a place of really understanding sort of the connectiveness of the world, and the ways in which I see the possibility for us to come together and really do great things together in this big collaborative endeavor..

So I want to talk today first of all about my own journey in coming to this place in my life, talk about a big vision for humanity that I hope will be inspiring to all of you and sort of can encompass a lot of other visions, as well as how we are manifesting some of that specifically in Asana.. And then in the second half we'll look at some values, some leadership tactics, and some ways of managing your own psychology that I have found invaluable in leading teams that have these big ambitious missions that all the different companies that Tina mentioned.. So practical advice for you as you execute on your own big visions or join other people's big visions.. So, starting with my journey.. I will start when I was 10, I got my first computer, and I was immediately fascinated by this magical box.. It was so incredible to me that I could - I started writing little games that I could give to friends on floppy disks, and it occurred to me even really early on that I was writing code once but then all of these different people throughout my middle school were getting to enjoy the benefits of that and get to play this game.. I didn't have the word "leverage" at the time, but that was a really great taste of that experience.. And as I grew up I wanted to give bigger gifts to more people with even more leverage.. Eventually I ended up at Stanford where I was in the Mayfield Fellows Program which - honestly that and this course like really were quite life changing for me.. I came into Stanford very much a - not particularly socialized, very nerdy, heady person, and being at Stanford and especially these courses really helped me understand that the benefits of being able to work in the much more - in some ways complex juicy space of individual human interactions and how to think about teams and how to lead teams..

A little sad at how little of my job these days involves coding and engineering, but on the plus side I get to enjoy this rich fruitful life of helping people who are doing that come together and do really big things in the world.. Things much bigger than I would be able to do as an individual.. After that I went to Google.. I left Stanford a little early which I have some mixed feelings about, but Google was really taking off and it was a really exciting place to be.. Interestingly, most of the bigger projects that I worked on were total abject failures, and one didn't even see the light of day.. But I managed to - I realized in hindsight make a bunch of little steps along the way.. So, one, for example was - at some point Google was working on a standalone IM client for people that you could - it was like AOL and Instant Messenger.. And I asked at some point, well, why don't we just put that inside of Gmail, because people are already chatting, people are already doing communication inside of Gmail, why don't we just add a real time component.. And my boss at the time said, oh yeah, we thought of that and it's

impossible.. I was like, really, it's impossible to do chat inside of a browser, he is like, yeah, we looked into it, totally impossible..

He was like in fact I'll bet you that it will never be done inside a browser.. And so, I went home that night wrote it or wrote a very simple version of chat, showed it to him next morning and the chat inside of Gmail project started.. So, the lesson there of course is, when people tell you something is impossible be very skeptical.. Also worked on a bunch of early versions of Google Drive, contributing to a bunch of things that are inside this interface as well as actually a full blown version of pretty much the Google Drive product that exists today.. Though, for a bunch of difficulties, or navigating, the organization wasn't able to ship that.. After that I went to Facebook, where I went from product management, to engineering management, and tech leading, did a bunch of things that were really exciting to me, including Facebook Pages, which was a really cool way to allow non-human entities to also participate in the social graph.. And then my Hackathon project was the "Like" button which I helped lead the development of as well.. And that came out of this observation that people were using things like Wall Posts and Comments to express affirmation and positivity and it dawned on me, I was like, well what if we could make it easier, what if we could make it so that the effort required was so low, and eventually realized the lowest effort possible would be one click.. What if we could make it super easy for people to share that kind of positivity with each other, and that led to the design of the "Like" button.. To this day the number one most requested feature that Facebook gets is the "Dislike" button, which is funny to me because it really misses the point of the exercise..

We are trying to encourage and actually design the infrastructure and the social graph in a way that is opinionated, in a way that prefers a world in which we help each other, help affirm each other rather than a world in which we tear each other down.. So, that's why there is a "Like" and not a "Dislike" button.. I will talk in a minute about how we started this but then went on to start Asana, which at this point we are at 40 people, and really proud of where we've gotten so far.. It has become this communication and coordination system that, for a lot of companies, replaces the majority of their email.. We have tons of different tech companies who rely on Asana as a core backbone of what they do.. We also have companies in all sorts of other industries that are using it as this deep improvement to the way they communicate.. People talk about the impact that it's had on their ability to accomplish their missions in life, and achieve their visions has just been so powerful, and for me that's the most gratifying thing of all.. So, that's a little bit about my background.. But probably the most interesting thing for me in terms of - for me what is a source of all passion, of all of my passion, pretty much every single day I wake up, and then multiple times throughout the day have this moment of complete and utter shock and awe and joy that we are alive.. Very easy to get distracted by the day-to-day and have to rush to this meeting or this class or follow this commitment or something..

But, how unbelievably crazy is it that there is a universe at all or that within that universe we are these sentient little monkey beings that are tooling around and that with the first person perspective interacting with each other; I love the universe so deeply with all my heart and I am so inspired by this impossibly rare - you couldn't even compute the probability, impossibly rare gift of being incarnate and alive and on top of that it's finite, where we only get to experience this for a short period of time, and that has inspired me to just want to live every single day to the fullest, and to really enjoy this being as much as I possibly can.. And in some ways that early on led me to, almost a sort of hedonism, I was like I am in this for me, I am going to consume as much resources as I possibly can, get as much out of this crazy experience that I am having as I possibly can.. And what I found - and that's pretty much how I lived for about 20 years.. Until I started to realize that it was not working, you think like the shortest path from here to living life to the fullest would be try to take everything you can, but it turned out that it was really a miserable failure, pretty much over and over again.. And as I have done more personal growth, done more introspection, thought more about it, and just sort of studied the nature of man as a social animal, I realized that we are just - that's not how we achieve that kind of deep satisfaction and joy.. The way we achieve it is ironically by giving of ourselves.. And I don't mean giving of yourselves all day all the time.. I kind of think of it like there is an inhale and there is an exhale.. I spend about half of life being hedonist, and about half of my life contributing back, giving back, trying to do everything I can to help others to show love, to manifest love in the world, and to try to reduce suffering and create joy and explore consciousness, but in partnership with all sentient beings.. In the course of that I have started to just think more and more about what are the most leveraged ways I can actually have this impact..

If I am going to take this sort of Bodhisattva vow and dedicate myself wholeheartedly, you know, I could go and build houses for people, I could go - there is all sorts of things you sort of think of as philanthropic.. But what I realized is that, you know, I could build one person a house and that would be satisfying to them and satisfying to me, I get to look them in the eye.. But technology has been this huge game changer for our ability to have impact at such an enormous scale.. I mean the idea of even like contributing one feature to Google Search, and the way that that helps people gain more access to knowledge which in turn allows them to do important things which in turn allows them to solve world problems, is in some ways so much more exciting than building one house at a time, that I am really drawn to that as this outlet for having huge positive impact on the world.. One manifestation of that for me has been Asana, which I will tell you a little more about how this started and how - of all the things I could work on this feels like the most important thing given my particular skill sets.. So, when I was at both Google and Facebook, when I first started at Google, I had sort of this romanticized notion of, okay, I am product manager, I'd had internships as an engineer, and I am product manager now, I am going to spend my time constructing a vision and a bold way forward and being at all these strategy meetings and thinking at this high level of abstraction.. I was very wrong.. I was spending literally 90 percent of my time on the friction and overhead of coordination.. Making sure that the left hand knew what the right hand was doing, making sure that, you know, running the status

meetings, making sure that when this got completed the next person knew their part was ready.. And I was like, okay, well, maybe that's just how PMing is..

But, what was more tragic was that individual engineers, individual designers, these people who were some of the world's best at what they did, they were spending just sixty - huge percents of their time not doing work, not doing the thing they are passionate about but doing work about work, right.. Reading emails and writing emails.. I don't know how much you guys experience this right now but if you have been business - you're nodding, yeah, you have been in any sort of business context you know this just consumes huge-huge percentages of your day.. It's amazing people just almost accept this as the reality of how it has to be.. And at first I was like I must be doing something wrong, there must be better tools.. So, I tried all the different software, all the different project management methodologies, everything I could think of that was on the market.. And it still just felt like we were going so slowly relative to sort of what it might feel like if we were telepathic, we all knew exactly what each other was doing and thinking and what was more important, how much better it would be.. And so, while I was at Google I actually built sort of this small internal project management system that actually had like a thousand people by the time I left, and when I went to Facebook I thought I had problems.. The person who recruited me, Dustin, who was the VP of engineering at the time, he had problems just so much worse, he had like 20 managers who reported to him, and they each had 20 reports under them.. So, he literally just couldn't figure out what was going on in his own company, let alone steer the ship as he wanted to as a leader..

And so, he and I just started hanging out until like 3:00 in the morning every night just kind of fantasizing, okay, what would the ultimate solution to this problem look like, if we could build anything, like what would the software look like that would get us basically as close to this asymptote of telepathy as we can imagine.. And Dustin being a doer more than a dreamer at some point was like, all right, I am just going to start building this thing.. So he was - being VP by day and writing this software on the side, and this thing just took off so much in the company that eventually he stepped down from VP just to be an individual contributor on this tool set.. Because he found that was more leveraged as a way to help the company than running the engineering.. And the more we got into it, the more we just like saw the impact on our daily lives.. Like the number of meetings I was in dropped dramatically, the number of emails I had dropped dramatically, the speed at which we were going increased dramatically.. And at some point we just stopped and we realized like this is not a problem that's unique to Facebook or unique to Google or unique to tech as a whole, this is a problem of all of humanity.. Because basically all human endeavor, so whether you are talking about starting a small company or a Fortune 500 company, or a non-profit or an art project, or a government but basically everything that we do as a species we do in teams.. We come together, we align our energy in a common direction towards some common vision and execute it together, hopefully harmoniously and hopefully in sync.. That's the idea and it's amazing how much progress we have made given historically how limited our tools were for coordinating our collective action, and obviously email helps a lot, but email has become - we have really reached the limits of what email is capable of..

And so the idea there could be something better was just so enticing to us.. And to see there actually was something better was so amazing that even though we loved Facebook and that was obviously a super leveraged place to be and to be able to create impact, but at some point we realized this was a Facebook sized opportunity, this was just something that was so profoundly, so profound in its ability to change the world.. Because, what if you could take every single project and accelerate it by 10 percent or 20 percent or double its effectiveness, I mean the kinds of things we are capable of doing today relative to the kinds of things we were capable before email or the cell phone or the telegraph, these sorts of communication technologies just keep taking you to the next level.. And so, you know, I make enterprise software for a living, which at first sounds very boring.. But the vision here and what's so enticing to me is that - well, I shall give you a few quick examples and then give the abstraction.. So, for example, there is a company Emerald Therapeutics that's literally working on curing cancer, and they have - I don't really understand what they do, all in white lab coats, but they are a bunch of people with all these interconnected moving parts working on this really complex chemistry process.. And they said that the impact that Asana had on their ability to work together and collaborate and move forward just enabled whole groups of people to start working on this problem who couldn't before, because they were stuck doing middle management.. So, the idea of literally accelerating the curing of cancer through this technological infrastructure.. And similarly there is this NGO Nyaya Health that's working on bringing healthcare to Nepal's rural poor.. So they have hundreds of people across two continents working on this complex operation, and they just described the impact that Asana has had on both the quantity and the quality of care they can provide, has been mind blowing..

So, those are just two examples, either of which would have been such a great thing to devote myself to, and so the idea that we can build that sort of infrastructure layer that helps everyone at the same time is just a super-exciting way to think about this sort of vision.. Even bigger than that though, even bigger than helping individual Fortune 500 companies or individual teams be able to work together, I think what's really most exciting about this vision in the long term - and Asana alone won't do it, but really the bigger vision for this, is imagine if all of humanity could coordinate its collective action seamlessly without effort, imagine if all of us could work together towards a single common goal, a single project.. I think one way to think about this is that - let's step back and put this in even more perspective.. At this point the universe is 14 billion years old, so for the vast majority of that time it was basically just some rocks and some stars hanging out in empty space.. And over a very, very recent time slice of that we've had this big change where there is all this complexity that's arisen on planet earth, and within an even smaller time slice of that we have the evolution of consciousness as we know it.. And within, you know, 200 years ago we were wiping our asses with bark, like technology - again, putting this in context of 14 billion

years, and so now we are at this point where we are on this fascinating cusp, where all of a sudden we are empowered with all this technology in a totally, totally unprecedented way.. And strangely it seems that we're on this sort of cusp where there is two paths that both, to me, seem equally likely.. You on the one hand have the path of that - we won't go into details, but between global warming and biological warfare, and just like a bunch of different problems of global catastrophic risks, we are at this point where the global warming science is, you know, whether it's 30 years or 300 years, we are on an exponentially increasing trajectory, we are going to consume all the resources and very likely leave the earth in a much less pleasant state than the one we are enjoying today.. That's basically just rampant short-sightedness and a rampant inability to come together and solve global problems because everyone is focused on their individual desires.. There is an alternative world which is if we are able to solve those problems, if we are able to come together to coordinate our collective action, to see ourselves not as a bunch of individuals vying for what is in our own interest but to instead think about the we as a whole, to identify with humanity's interest as a whole, which I also think will lead to more individual human happiness..

If we are able to come together and see us as basically part of one big project, not a series of little teams competing with each other, but a single company working toward a single ends.. Instead we could break through, instead of the complexity of earth looking like this exponential trajectory and then kaput it could instead keep going.. We could manage to make the world sustainable, to make our consumption sustainable, to find new ways to do things like solve the sort of ridiculous problem we have that we have enough food to feed everyone but it's not evenly distributed, and to allow everyone to have the resources they need to contribute to the world in the way that they should be capable of, and instead to continue on this exponential trajectory in a world of abundance, in a world where we are all exploring our creative possibilities and our creative potential.. So we really are in this place where we can choose either of these worlds, and it really is a question of do we have the will to come together and see ourselves and align our interest together as a single species, and do we have the actual tools and skills and technology in order to be able to effectively coordinate that will even if we all share it.. So for the rest of the talk, I want to talk about - so Asana is one of these sorts of visions that I think fits into this, what I call the One project, the single human project for global thriving, where we are all coming together and all contributing our particular unique skills to this grand tapestry of creation and doing something great in the world.. But there are all sorts of other pieces of this that are going to be contributing in order to - and it's everything from things that sound philanthropic like healthcare but I would even put something like Uber in this category of or Lyft of - Lyft would probably be even more so in terms of enabling car sharing to allow us to have fewer cars on the roads in general.. So, as you go out into the world I would just encourage you and I would hope that rather than focusing on how do I get as much money as possible, how do I get as much accolades as possible, how do I collect as much resources for myself as I can which both seems to be a fool's errand in terms of happiness and it misses out on the opportunity to contribute to this giant opportunity that we have in front of us to make the world a really much more exciting place than the kaput scenario.. I wanted to give you guys some advice, sort of things that have at least been working for me at the level of values, at the level of leadership tactics and at the level of managing your psychology in order to be able to lead these sorts of big ambitious visions that can be on a day-to-day basis very, very rough on the psyche.. This stuff is not easy.. So, values is actually even a concept as a whole that - or thinking about values as so important to a company's success, it's something I really picked up from Tina and Tom, and I - it just hadn't really occurred to me before being at Stanford, but it has turned out to be so important..

And values are specifically not just things you sort of put on the list of onboarding materials that you give to new hires and then never mention again.. Values are the things that you actually repeatedly come back to - and I don't know, are words for us that are actually used like almost on an hourly basis inside meetings, because they are really deeply embedded in the culture.. I sometimes takes it for granted and then someone who recently joined will be like, never realized that one could talk about egolessness or mindfulness so much.. We have like - we have lots of different values, and a lot of them are more standard.. So I wanted to just focus on a few that I think are a little more unusual for a company to have.. So the first one is mindfulness.. So what I mean by that is knowing what you are doing, it sounds very obvious, but it's amazing how uncommon a value that is for people.. To really be always focused on what do we know about what we are doing and to reflect clearly and deeply on, is this what we want to be doing, is this aligned with our values, are there other things we should be doing instead.. So I'll give you a couple of examples of very concrete rituals that we use in order to be more mindful.. So one is - every other week, we have an all hands, as a TGIF, and everyone goes around the room and says - we are still small enough, we can do this..

Everyone says one thing that they are excited about, about the company and one thing - one area where they think we could be spending more attention, where something warrants more thought, which is interestingly phrased, it's not one thing you think we are doing badly, or one thing you think we are doing well, as Tina taught me, problems are just opportunities.. So it's, what is the opportunity for us to be putting more attention on something, and what's so cool about this process is a few things.. One is the energy that you accumulate going around the room and everyone saying what they are excited about actually makes everyone - first of all, know to do more of that and it celebrates it and by the end of the meeting, we are typically kind of on this high together it's like, wow, we really are doing something really exciting or are emboldened to continue the project.. On the things we could be paying more attention to, what's so great about that is, you never end up in the situation as I have seen before where - a problem festers for six months and everyone is kind of thinking about it in the back of their head, but they are not sure if they are alone, they are not sure if it's okay to voice it to their peers or to management and then it's only six months later that it's not only festered but it has gotten out of control and it's hard.. But the fact on the - at least a biweekly basis we're going through and surfacing what people think we should be spending more attention on means we just don't get - we don't get stuck with those things.. Everyone is very open and honest in contributing

what could we be doing better.. And it's actually gotten to the point where now we go around the room everyone says something they are excited about, but only a few people, sometimes no one says something that could use improvement, because we have just addressed each thing so systematically that every time when those happens the company just gets a little bit better, a little bit better.. A related process is 'Five Whys' which I don't know how many of you have heard of this, it's actually part of the lean startup program.. It was originally at Toyota that they pioneered this.. But, let's say that the site crashes or we have a PR snafu or just something happens that we really wish would never happen again..

We do this exercise called 'Five Whys' where we ask, okay, well, why did the site go down, and it's like, well, we ran out of memory.. Okay, why do we run out of memory.. Well, there wasn't a code in place to check that edge condition.. Well, why wasn't there a code in place.. And you just keep going until by the time you get to your fifth why, you might get something like because we don't sufficiently emphasize test driven development in our engineering onboarding process.. All right.. That's the less interesting part.. The more interesting part is you then say for each of those 'Whys' what is the proportionate response that we can take in order to help ameliorate this and make sure this sort of thing doesn't happen again.. You certainly don't want to go overboard.. But, you typically want to do something to help make sure that this is better in the future..

So, again, it's this process where by taking the time, it doesn't take that long, but by taking the time to stop and reflect and think, we just have very - we have an extremely stable product despite the fact that we push code every day.. And that's just one example, throughout the company and the marketing team all over the company we run this process to get a little bit better.. And so, you know, if every day you get one percent better as a company through this sort of technique, exponentially by the end of the year you will be 40x better.. Another value is balance.. I am actually amazed how this doesn't come up more often for more people, because what we have experienced is that over and over again, almost every time you are faced with a decision which is all the time, there is typically two different extremes that you could take where you go all the way to this extreme or you go all the way to this extreme.. And as a leader it's super tempting to want to say, let's do one of these.. Because by doing so you can be very clear.. There is a lot of clarity, you can tell your reports this is exactly the trajectory that we are taking.. But in general, the extremes are really bad.. The extremes lead to all these negative consequences..

And the solution isn't necessarily even to find a compromise that kind of get you half of the benefits or one and half of the benefits to the other.. Ideally you want to find a middle way that actually transcends the negatives of both of these things.. So, I'll give you a couple of examples on this.. Typically when you are doing any product decision there is a question of should we do this the right way or should we do this the fast way.. This comes within product, this comes within engineering, I mean this comes within everything, right.. And this is a great example where either extreme is clearly terrible.. If you spend all your time - if you spend an unbounded amount of time making things perfect before you ever ship, the market will pass you by and by the time you are ready to launch someone else will have taken that market share from you.. But on the other hand if you just throw spaghetti at the wall and hope to see what sticks and maybe it will work and maybe it won't, then you'll really tarnish your brand because people will know that this is not a quality brand that we can actually rely upon.. So for us the middle way here is what we call pragmatic craftsmanship, which is to say, there really is no intellectual answer to how to make this call, but instead we hire people who have really, really good judgment as in - for example on the engineering side technical chops are, you know, that's the minimum bar or that's not even at the minimum bar.. It's not just the technical ability, it's that sort of wisdom that comes from really deeply understanding should I take more time in this case or should I take less time in this case..

It's really valuing that and empowering people to think about that is really important to us.. Another good example of this is like work life balance, which I think often has this meaning of like, oh don't worry too much about work but I mean it in a slightly different way of like - there are people who work, you know, say 40 hours a week and what I find for myself is that, that wouldn't be enough time to get done all the things I want to get done.. But sometimes I try working 60 hours a week for week after week after week, and I find I get super diminishing returns in terms of - I am actually just burning myself out by week five and not getting as much done as I would if I were spending less time.. So, instead, we invest both in sort of, again the inhale and the exhale, taking the time to - working really hard on the exhale, but then taking the time to replenish on the inhale and so, you know, that takes all sorts of forms including like offering yoga at the company or offering really delicious free food or having social events together.. And then the third and last value that I'll talk about here is radical transparency.. I'll give you a couple of examples of this.. So, when we have board meetings, at the end of every board meeting - first of all sometimes someone from the company is just invited to come to the board meeting who isn't on the board, just so they can actually participate and enjoy the process and learn from it.. But regardless, we always take really copious notes and then send those notes out to the entire company after the fact.. We have a weekly planning meeting that includes me, Dustin, our head of engineering and our head of business.. And there are certainly some things like HR issues where it's not our prerogative to share that with the whole company, not going to share salaries, that's really their personal information to share..

But for almost everything else, again, we take copious notes, send those notes out to everyone in the company, and sometimes it starts a dialogue where people are like, actually, you know, I think that decision you made, you know, you should consider this other option.. Sometimes we either engage in dialogue or sometimes just say we can't respond to every single thing, but for the most part that creates this really collaborative process where people can have a lot of trust that we are thinking about the right things and making the right decisions.. And so the effect of that is, you know; one, trust, and I think this sort of has a lot of value kind of in and of itself.. I think one of the coolest things that you get from this kind of radical

transparency is that - it means that people are empowered with enough knowledge that they don't have to be micro managed and told this is exactly what you should do and this is exactly how you should do your job.. You couldn't even micro manage people at the level of detail required.. Like, even when you are writing an individual if statement or making an individual decision about some cashing scheme or certainly all the time the little product design details, there is understanding the bigger picture, understanding who is the customer, how are we trying to serve them, what are the market conditions we are under, what are the ways in which we are trying to advance our brand.. It can go down to the tiniest little decisions, and so by focusing more on providing people with context about their work, context about the overall goals of the company, context on our values and how we think it's good to make decisions, rather than trying to control people's actions and control people's decisions, we find that that leads to then being able to be much more effective and not surprisingly it means that we can hire people who are much more seasoned and senior who are excited about - who are more excited about contributing in a way that respects the fact that they are peers.. In fact I lied, there's a fourth value and that's the fourth value.. Company as collective of peers.. We make a point - I think one thing to point out is that I think in the last maybe 10 years or so - this is a pretty recent phenomenon even in Silicon Valley, maybe even in five years, there has been this real fetishization of entrepreneurship..

In fact we have people like Paul Graham who are bordering on telling people you are a chump if you go and work for another company.. I think this is really ludicrous.. Sometimes the most leveraged way to impact things is to start your own project, but a lot of the times there are just so many great ideas out there the opportunity to play a big role in making those things a reality is just as interesting, and we are all visionaries if we have environments that allow us to come together and collaborate.. And I can see how people have come to this conclusion because traditional companies are run in this way where there is a really strong two class structure where you have the visionaries on top making all the decisions, and sometimes their peons going out and executing.. But we have the privilege of we are able to hire just extraordinary people who definitely could be running their own companies but instead we have come together and created this kind of super group.. And so, one example of a practice we used to try to respect us as a company of peers is roadmap week.. So every basically quarter - we divide them into episodes instead of quarters.. We do kind of an episode of this is what we want to accomplish in the next few months or so.. At the end of each of these episodes we have a roadmap week where the whole company more or less stops doing normal work and instead everyone is in a bunch of different committees.. So you just have one week of meetings all day, or for all week..

What's nice about this of course is that we have a lot fewer meetings than during the rest of the quarter.. So, it's again this sort of rhythm of concentrated meetings and then concentrated fewer meetings.. And in these committee meetings we'll have a committee about mobile, and our mobile strategy, we'll have a committee about our values, we'll have a committee about how we are going to expand the design team, we'll have a committee about the recruiting team, and sometimes these committees consist of the people that you would expect of, sometimes they consist of people who are, you know, someone in the customer support team who has read all the mobile complaints and so wants to be in that meeting so that they can be the voice of the customer.. And those committees are given again a lot of context ahead of time on overall values and how we kind of broadly see something like mobile fitting in with our strategy, but it's up to the committee to reflect on where are we now, where could we be going, what are the different options, what are the pros and cons of those different options.. Given those pros and cons what is our evaluation of how we should step forward, who are the right people to work on this, what are our requirements, what resources do we need, and they just put forth this plan for the next quarter for what we should do.. Sometimes there will be, you know, all the committees will have more work than we could possibly do, so we have to sort of cut things a little bit.. But, in general, those committees are not really are making the decision.. In theory Dustin or I could override them and say, no-no you've missed the mark entirely, we should do this other thing.. But that's never actually happened.. We really trust people to just make the right decisions, collect input from the right people within the company and then we go forward with those as the plans of record..

So that's, I think, a much better situation for everyone.. Moving on to tactics for leading teams with big visions and one thing about tactics just to say broadly is that, again, as you just think about your company constantly taking the time to reflect on what are the things we could be doing just a little bit better, a little bit better, means that these institutional processes bake in and over time you just get much-much better.. So these are just - we have tons of different things like this.. But here just a couple that were surprising to me in their simplicity and how well they work.. So one is directly responsible individuals.. Basically for any single thing in the company, whether it's something as big as our security or something as small as fixing this bug, there is always exactly one person, not zero, not two, one person who is the DRI, which is the term we actually took from Apple.. And they may have a huge team behind them that's helping them to execute that work, but there is always someone who is accountable and who owns that particular thing.. And that has this great benefit of it's always clear who has the ball, who is driving this forward.. This works really well with the company calendar, and this is again a great example of balance where I think there is - I have always been stuck in the past between these two leadership styles where you want to get a lot done, you want to have accountability, you want to make sure that people do the things that they commit to, and it's always felt like, well, there is the sort of soft leadership style where you are like, okay guys, let's all work together to make this happen.. Oh you missed your deadline, okay..

And then the other side which is the hard driving, you know, yell at people, tell them that they screwed up, and neither of these is appealing to me.. And so what we have done instead is this company calendar, which is a really simple process where every Tuesday, this is our only other all-hands meeting.. Everyone comes together and we go around and every team leader

effectively or sometimes who go on their teams will update the calendar and say, here is a milestone that I commit to, and they say this in front of the whole company.. So, to all their peers, not to us, but to their peers they say, by this date I am going to ship this thing or I am going to achieve this internal milestone.. And then we also go through and people say - we go through the past and we say what are things that we committed to over the last week, since last Tuesday, and people just go around the room and generally say, I said that on Thursday - three weeks ago I said on Thursday I am going to ship this thing, and on Thursday it shipped.. And there is a whole round of applause and everyone is very excited and we support each other and it's great that - 90 percent of the time that really is what happens.. People feel this strong sense of communal pressure, not coming from me, I just set the process, but coming from the team as a whole.. And that sort of comradery of we worked really hard to make this happen, and when, you know, you have a DRI, you guys have four people working with them, the four people are working late into the night not for me or for Dustin, but for the vision and for the DRI who sort of put their name on - you know, put themselves out there and said our team is going to get this done.. And in those rare times when people don't meet their milestones, we don't scowl at them, we don't tell them you screwed up; we have them run a "Five Whys" process.. They go through and they say, why didn't I meet this, why did that happen, why did that happen, they send out those notes to the entire company and everyone gets to communally learn and so we are just getting better over time at accurately predicting when those milestones will actually be completed and being able to execute them effectively which has been really cool..

So it's a judgment free process that empowers everyone to do their best work.. Okay.. The last section is about managing your own psychology.. A couple of years ago, I was in - we were starting to grow the company, we hadn't even launched yet and I was just starting to get extraordinarily stressed.. I felt like the weight of the world on my shoulders, I was very attached to that this thing succeed, but was starting to doubt whether I would be capable of it, and it was getting to the point where I was so stressed that I was just like - I was coming into work for like a whole week and I would just stare at my screen for a couple of hours and not do anything.. At some point, I'd just be like, whoa, I don't know, I just can't handle this anymore.. It was around that time that we had our Series A, which Marc Andreessen and Ben Horowitz participated in, and we were out to dinner with them, Dustin and I were out to dinner with them a little while after that.. I really respect Ben as a mentor and so I wanted to get his advice on this though I was a little intimidated to be like - I didn't want him to be like - I just gave you all this money and you are telling me that you are scared of doing the job I am paying you to do.. But instead he just, very matter of factly, was like, yes, this is actually a good thing for you to know.. The most important part of being a leader is managing your own psychology, and proceeded to tell me all these stories of times that he struggled with this..

So I just want to finish by telling you a few things that I found really helpful - a few things I found really helpful in doing this.. So the first one is - how many people in the room have experienced maybe every day some sort of voice in your head that sounds like it's your voice, but it's telling you, you are doing things badly? There is a voice that is self-doubting and judging.. And it's very easy to confuse this voice for yourself, especially because it speaks in your own voice, but it's not.. It's sort of like having an annoying judgmental roommate living in your head.. You'll notice this now that I point it out.. And every time that you hear that voice - so I - after doing tons of - I don't know, pathways, I've done a ton of meditation work and all sorts of things.. And I still hear this voice.. But the difference is that I now have a new relationship to it.. I hear the voice, I say thank you, I appreciate that you are trying to be helpful.. You can keep hanging out in my head, that's totally fine..

Kick your feet up, make yourself comfortable, but that's not me and I make decisions from a different place.. And so I continue to act in the face of fear, even when those things keep coming up and telling me, oh, you are screwing this up.. Somewhat closely relatedly is Imposter Syndrome.. Have you ever had the experience of finding yourself in a group of people where you thought to yourself, oh, all these people clearly belong here? I understand why they are all here.. But I must have gotten here by mistake.. This is the confusion.. Or worse, you find yourself in a leadership role where you are like, oh man, these people are about three seconds away from realizing the emperor has no clothes.. Like, I do not know what I am doing, they should not be following me, they should just do a coup right now.. Has anyone ever experienced this? Appreciate your honesty.. What I have so far observed and what psychology researchers observe is this is pretty much a universal human phenomenon, at least in the Western world, if not globally..

But again, I find it really cool to recognize that so many of us - I won't project onto you, but at least so many of us experience this so regularly.. Because it's just an opportunity to remember so many people feel this way and it doesn't mean that you are, it doesn't mean that you are an imposter in the situation, it's just a voice in your head that's had some evolutionary purpose and today is vestigial.. Actually, even in writing these notes I had to chuckle because I was like, oh ETL, like I remember being part of that and all these smart people would come with all this great stuff to say.. You know, I really appreciate Tina for having the soft spot for me that she let me slide in.. But hopefully, I was not an entirely inappropriate guest for you.. And I think there's lastly equanimity.. So, again, there are these two, what seem like two extremes that are both pretty unfortunate.. You kind of have the stereotype of someone who very lackadaisical, doesn't really care, isn't really working very hard, is just kind of getting by, doesn't get a whole lot done.. And then you have this other stereotype of someone who is very intensely engaged in their project and passion what they are doing, and is kind of with this little sense of stress and fear all the time that we got to make this happen, we got to make this work.. Both of these seem like really unfortunate outcomes, because the latter - the former is not very effective, and the latter you get burned out and eventually aren't very effective either..

And so all this seems like a contradiction at first.. What I have discovered, and I am not saying it's easy, is that - is willful

intention with non-concern for results.. So what I mean by that is on my best days I come to work and I am fiery and passionate and so excited like the universe is moving through me to build and manifest this vision into the world.. And I recognize that it may not work out, and if it doesn't, that's okay too, the world will go on.. My world will go on, I will be safe, it will be fine, I'll get over it.. Now that doesn't mean that I am going to give up.. If things are going very badly and there is any chance we still might succeed, I will fight and fight and fight to make that thing still work.. But if it doesn't, it doesn't.. So what we looked at today and the thing I am most excited about, you know, we've looked at a lot of different ways that you could - given a very ambitious vision, work with a team of people or even just be the leader of yourself to have these different tools and techniques and tactics to be able to work more efficiently, work more effectively, be able to achieve these visions.. But the biggest thing I think that's interesting here is that I just really hope that you guys maybe already are or would like to join the sort of global cause, the species level cause that is - provides you the opportunity to participate in something that is just much, much bigger than yourself..

We are today writing the story of human history.. This is not a foregone conclusion.. There is not manifest destiny here.. We are the actual people who are going to decide whether we go to the kaput scenario or whether we take off.. And on a smaller scale, just what the future holds for us, the people we love and for the whole of the human race.. And, you know, 100 years ago or something, thinking at that level would have sounded almost crazy, because who could have that much impact? But today we just have countless examples that people really can start projects in their dorm rooms and do things that have massive world shaking impact on the world.. And you guys are those people.. I mean, this is truly a cliché, but like - you guys are the leaders of tomorrow.. I mean, I know I was sitting here 10 years ago and I know tons of people who were sitting here 10 years ago who are doing bigger things than I - who are doing, you know, huge things that are - really movers and shakers in the world, you obviously will be the next generation of that.. And so the opportunity to devote all of that power and all that time you spent investing in your skills and intellect and human capacities, the choices of whether to invest that in something that is something that, you know, will make some money or that will have some short term gain versus the opportunity to find something in the intersection of your deepest passion and the possibility for having a huge positive impact on the world is just so exciting, and the primary reason I came here today to want to share this stuff with you, so thank you..

And we have 10 minutes for questions.. So I am really wonderfully surprised because I don't see it nearly enough, but the principles that you talked about here I believe are at the heart of creating powerful teams.. Is Asana looking to actually incorporate this into its tools and scale the concept of letting teams be able to bootstrap the results? Oh yeah.. I mean, at every level of abstraction.. I mean - so the question was, can we - does Asana incorporate these sorts of abstract principles into the product design? And that is certainly one of the most exciting things about working on infrastructure for teams is that - you know, I could give talks like this, but only a finite number of people are going to hear me.. Whereas if we can build software that everyone on earth is using, I mean, as an example like the DRI concept, that's something where - Asana presents itself primarily as a task list for your team and every single task has one assignee.. We could have easily at a technical level made it so that multiple people could be assigned to a task, but because we have this value around if two people are assigned, no one is assigned, no one is really responsible, there is always one assignee.. You can demarcate that other people are helping out, but they are the person in charge.. And so - or another thing is we just added a "Like" button-esque feature called "Hearts." It is again designed to sort of like engage people in remembering that it's not just - this isn't just work, but there is feeling and emotion here, and in particular, to allow people to - you know, "Like" was about one click affirmation, the Asana Heart button is about one click gratitude, one click recognition.. Because it's a basic human thing that we all want to be appreciated for our hard work and this is an opportunity to do that..

So, I could literally sit here for like four hours and show you every single feature and how each one was mindfully considered in the context of how do we want the world to be.. And Asana is a flexible tool.. So, if you want to run your company in like a top-down hierarchical manner Asana supports that totally fine.. But it also supports that - maybe the structure might start that way, but it makes it very natural to start transitioning into more of a flat structure where people are not just managers assigning things to reports, but everyone assigning things to everyone else, and everyone participating in that planning process.. One could make the claim that the recent internet boom with apps and iPhones and everything are all making us less mindful.. Where do you see and do you see a flip happening, where we move towards this oneness as opposed to this constant expansion into infinity? Yeah.. Well, there is multiple expansions into infinity.. But, yeah, so the question is isn't technology making us less mindful in a bunch of ways.. I think that is definitely true.. It is definitely the double edged sword of like wandering around with a phone that I have access to all of this information but it's so tempting to me that I keep accessing it..

I think there is a number of solutions to this problem.. One is, I really think we just have to - I think that the common success metric that companies use in order to determine whether they are doing the right thing is something like page views or something like minutes spent on the site.. And I think they do that not out of malice particularly but because it's just the easiest thing to measure.. It seems like well surely that is our success metric, and yet I would be much happier to have a product that people were spending five minutes on per day instead of 20 minutes on per day if those five minutes were making them happier.. In fact that would be much, much better because it means they can get back to their lives.. In an ideal world people would spend zero minutes on Asana, it would feel more like the kind of - just as there is telepathy between my hands in a way that feels effortless and that's what allows me to do complex things or play a guitar, it would be great if it were effortless for us to coordinate our collective action among the different nodes that are different people.. So we don't use that kind of time-on-site as a success metric.. Moving to a world where you instead think about the impact, and as a product

designer think what am I actually trying to accomplish in the world, not just how much are people engaging with this product right now is something that I think is a mental shift in values that is desperately needed in our industry and part of why I am now going around preaching this.. Given the wide array of Asana at least in my reflection, of others.. How do you go about prioritizing obviously new features, but also communicating the point with your enterprise clients who might not be as familiar with Asana? Yeah..

So given Asana's flexibility because Asana ends up being just useful for a huge different array of things, and we use it for everything from, yeah, managing our bugs list to managing what snacks we want for the kitchen, to managing meeting notes, to managing our applicant tracking pipelines to managing our press, it does everything.. So how do you explain that and how do you prioritize given all those use cases.. The way that we explain it is definitely a challenge.. I mean it's so much more convenient when you can have a product like Google Docs where it's like "it's Word for the web", or Dropbox, which is like, "it's your file system in the cloud".. You know, those are really important products to build and it's really nice that it works out to be that simple.. Asana just ends up not having that simple a value proposition.. It's more like invest in this and you will become more efficient.. And mostly it's just we spend a lot of time thinking about it.. We spend a lot of time specializing to like different audiences; if we are talking to this kind of person, we want to show them this message.. This kind of person we want to show that message..

We focus on sort of the effects rather than the individual pieces like, you know, you go to the website and it says "Do great things." It has inspiring stories of people who have been successful with the product, and then starts to introduce you to the individual features.. But, I mean it's definitely a fascinating challenge working on something that isn't - something that already exists with a slight tweak.. And I think what's been most successful so far is just - the product is like - there are enough of you who love the product that they evangelize it and they spread it to their friends, and we actually think that is the primary, for all the work we've done on like Viral Growth Mechanics, we actually think that word of mouth and love is the primary driver right now.. You can like do a Twitter search for Asana Love, and like every 30 minutes there is a tweet about it.. In terms of prioritization of features, yeah, Asana also just has this huge surface area.. You could just work on so many different components of it.. And there we do a mindful process of making a giant list in Asana of all the things we could work on, we collect input from different people in the company about what they would like to see, we collect input from the customer support team about what they are hearing the most requests for.. We survey users inside the product every six weeks where we ask them like how much are you enjoying this, like what would you like to see changed.. Talk to the sales team about what they are hearing from our bigger customers, and then just use balance and judgment to try to try to integrate that into a list combined with like a vision of - there's all these different places that we want to expand, what's the next big step.. And another big input to that frankly is just our own energy and our own enthusiasm..

You can take that to an extreme to balance that against the other variables, but a lot of times it feels right to do this next thing and we are willing to trust that gut a lot.. So one question is at Facebook your kind of dominant metric might have been, say, session time.. .. It might have been a metric that you guys cared about to drive ads and other things too.. But when you are talking about Asana you want to enable people.. How did you personally, and maybe with Dustin, evolve your psychology to say this is what we care about, and how did you go and measure that.. Because it's a very different shift in psychology about what you care about.. How did we evolve our psychology to care about... What are we enabling with Asana compared to how are we getting people to spend more time on this product and making new connections.. Yeah..

And then the second question was how do we measure that? I'm not saying measure, but how did you get to that and evolve yourself into the thought.. I am not sure what level of abstraction you're looking for but to be perfectly honest, I have spent almost every day of the last like five years either meditating or doing yoga.. And I have spent like - I once spent a week sitting in the forest alone, fasting, and just like meditating for 16 hours a day.. I have just like done a bunch of work in the direction of really quieting my mind and seeing - once all the distractions are gone who is left.. Like what is my actual essence as a person after all the kind of noise that surrounds my day-to-day obligations disappears.. And as I've come deeper and deeper into that sense of quiet, things just become astoundingly clear and I just have this overflowing sense of love for the universe and my fellow man, and it just becomes very clear that what I want to do is devote myself to the service of others which then it becomes very obvious.. So let's leverage and help others by giving them the tools to enable them to be more effective at fulfilling their particular missions and capabilities in the world..