

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/listening-to-feedback>

Virgin Hyperloop co-founder Josh Giegel shares that he struggled with communication when first starting out as a CEO. He has since learned the importance of listening to feedback when making bold, controversial decisions, and emphasizes that you can create an appropriate space for feedback without making decisions by consensus.



Transcript

- There's actually a sticky note 00:00:06,617 that fell off my computer that says, "Do the right thing, you're gonna be criticized anyway." (both laughing) I'm a person who really likes to get to know people.. I really like to understand where their concerns are, what their opportunities to engage in a human to human level.. But at the end, one of the things that I think is really important is just like what makes people tick? And the things that I learned, I'll say very painfully at times, especially over the last year, has been communication is paramount.. If you're tired of speaking it, if you're tired of communicating it, your people are probably starting to hear it.. I'm a guy who likes to make a decision, go.. But you've got kind of the group, you've got the inertia of the group and you have to bring them along.. It doesn't mean you need to have a consensus.. I don't believe in consensus.. I believe in discussion and then single points of decision-making and empowerment.. But you've got to kinda listen to feedback..

Feedback will come in, you'll understand.. And feedback helps you craft the story about the direction that you're going.. Right.. Just like if everybody's telling you it's the wrong idea.. So when we made, let me give you an example, when we made the shift to putting everything on the pod, my whole team was telling me, "This is a bad idea.. It's never gonna work." And I said, "Okay.. Let's let the math prove it." And by the end it was like, okay, this is the only way that we can see it working now.. But like, if you're reasonable in a sense that like, you're not just making buying decisions but you're explaining why you're making the decisions.. And sometimes that still won't be enough for people.. But if you're sticking to kind of your guns, you're working through, you're communicating, you're getting the feedback, you're adjusting because, inside of feedback is people's fears..

It's their concerns.. It's their hopes.. It's their dreams.. It's all of those things that they want.. And so if you're not listening to it, if you're not including it in your thought process, then I think you're destined to just be kind of removed in an ivory tower somewhere from that.. And so it's engagement.. It's getting to know people.. Getting to know them, their families, their lives, whatever it might be.. It's hard to scale, but at the end of the day people are like, "Josh cares about the company.. He knows about the company, he cares about me..

Even if he makes a decision that I don't agree with, I understand his principles.. I understand where he comes from.. And I have to trust that he's gonna be in the right way." And they only get to know that if they understand you as a man or a

woman, as a leader.. And if you're not willing to open up and be candid about that, then people aren't gonna really know who you are in the first place...