URL: https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/product-management-as-ceo-training

If you can be a product manager, you can acquire the experience of acting as a CEO. The skills gained in product roadmapping, prioritizing tasks, interoffice communications, customer understanding, and product marketing are absolute necessities for being an effective enterprise lead. So says Mark Pincus, CEO and Founder of Zynga, who suggests this necessary on-the-job training for aspiring entrepreneurs. Be strategic. Take your times. Build yourself at world class companies before stretching your own ideas to task.

Transcript

I was lucky enough that in one of my last jobs, I was at a venture capital firm, and they had a weird way of doing their VCness.. And they had me go and work as a product manager at a company we invested in.. Lucky for me, because all the learning that has helped me since then, I got in that one job.. And I'll tell you why.. So, if you can be a product manager, you get to be a CEO.. To be a great product manager, you have to be good at road mapping.. You have to be good at prioritize feature lists.. You need to be good at understanding all of the pieces.. You got to be good at understanding engineering.. You have to figure out how to be best friends with engineers, some of you are engineers..

You have to figure out how to talk to business people.. But you need to talk lots of languages and if you get a good product management job, you are a CEO.. You are going to bring a product to market.. You are going to make all this, the prioritization decisions and I say you have a limited number of bullets you can fire.. So, your engineering mandates; those are bullets and you have only so many that you can fire.. And everyone that misses the target is missed opportunity.. So, you have to be really good at figuring out, at calibrating your predictive ability and measuring and metric'ing and all those skills.. And you have to have a good knack and sense for the customer.. And if it's a good product that can make money, you need to understand basically a PNL and revenues.. Everything you need to know to be a CEO at least of a consumer Internet company, you will get in that job..

And so I would say, go somewhere that you can be a product manager and then you can learn.. I wouldn't be in a hurry to start the company.. Figure out what your goals are.. I'm sorry if I'm saying, "Don't go be an entrepreneur." And you can learn fine as an entrepreneur but I wouldn't be in such a hurry that you slow down getting there.. That my sense is, if you want to be an entrepreneur, that's awesome.. I think it's the best career path.. It's a life you're choosing, not just a career.. But be strategic.. So it maybe that you're going to put yourself on a 10 year path.. Decide how high you want to set your goals..

If you want to create a world class, world changing company, it probably won't be your first idea or your first attempt.. That's fine.. Take a 10-year approach.. Over 10 years, you could go and get the skill set you need.. Go to world-class companies.. Go to place like Amazon or Facebook.. Go to companies that are rebuilding, reinventing companies...