URL: https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/redesign-yourself

Lever co-founder and CEO Sarah Nahm left a comfortable and growing career at Google to venture into the unknown. She describes how that openness to self-reinvention created the space that allowed her and a few friends to co-found Lever.

Transcript

   - So, for better or for worse every time I face, like, a juncture in my life I look down one path, and you can see it really clearly, you can see it all mapped out.. You know exactly how it's gonna go.. Then there's this other path and it makes no sense, and you can't see anything about it.. I always choose the second path.. And so, I had been pretty comfortable at Google.. I'd been growing a lot in my role.. I'd gotten to work with some incredible people, and then I chose to leave.. And I think I chose to leave because I didn't know what would happen, and I knew that at that point in my life having been on this straight and narrow path of Stanford and then Google, I wanted to put myself in a position where I'd have to take real agency over my choices and over my life.. And yeah, I don't know if any of you have had that chance to really be put in a position where the only thing nudging you forward is gonna be you taking that step, and you kind of making a concrete decision.. And so I cut myself off from all the paths..

   And in doing that really discovered a lot about myself, and I think probably the number one skill that I discovered about myself was how to design myself and how to redesign myself, and that has been a skill that I use constantly because as CEO at Lever, I have to reinvent myself and my job every six months.. And so, what it was like in that period was really trying to understand, like, what I valued, what I saw on the world, like, what resonated.. And I think more than anything the people that I gravitated to in the values we might share together.. So, you know, at that time I was working with a lot of different entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley on a lot of different problems.. Just putting myself in situations where I had to see how I'd react and see kind of what, what I would end up gravitating to.. And I ended up falling in with some old friends of mine, some folks I knew from Stanford and Google, and we had kept in touch through the same Burning Man camp, who would eventually become my co-founders at Lever.. And you know, there's all these mythologies, right? That exist about how companies get founded, and I'll be super honest, like, none of those myths applied to us.. When we kinda found ourselves together we were really just three people.. We didn't know anything about what we wanted to do.. We didn't know anything about some big vision that we had for the world..

   But we did know that we really attracted to a change that was happening in the world, and really for us at that time the change that was happening in the world was inside of every organization we saw this really big shift where you used to kind of work at a job to get paid, and then suddenly people were working jobs to make a difference, and they were working jobs to have impact, they were working jobs to grow.. You know, I basically would have, you know, conversations with all my friends, and more often than not we would talk about whether we were fulfilled in our work.. And you know, that's a huge change from our parents' generation, the generation before that, and really I think, you know, if I zoom out and talk about it from a macro, cultural macro-economic standpoint, what we had stumbled upon was like, you know, there was a literal generational shift happening in the workforce.. Millennials were entering the workforce with a completely different set of cultural values.. You also saw the nature of work really changing as technology transformed every single industry out there, you know, the types of work that was happening out there.. Airlines were now software and logistics companies.. You know, like, hotel chains were now actually experience companies.. Work was really changing, and the people doing the work was changing, and you know, that's essentially the kernel of what would become Lever...