

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/starting-at-a-large-company>

Frederic Kerrest, executive vice chairman and co-founder of Okta, observes that aspiring entrepreneurs who start their careers at large companies can learn important lessons and build valuable relationships. Through examples from his early career at Salesforce, he encourages students to identify a growing company, find an awesome manager, and work on strategic projects.



Transcript

- I know many of you are probably gonna go off 00:00:02,940 and start your own companies.. But for those of you who are gonna say, "Hey, first I'm gonna go out into industry, I'm gonna work at some larger companies, I'm gonna learn some things before I go and start my own because maybe I'm not ready to do it today or tomorrow, but I might be next week or next year," there's a lot of good lessons here.. The first one is, if you can pick the right company in the right industry that you wanna work in for a long time and kind of go there, and if that ends up being something that grows like this, there's a lot of benefits from it.. First of all, I built some amazing relationships with a lot of folks who ended up going off and building other companies and taking those public, so that network of people that you can call and interact with and ask questions of, especially when you're building your own company, which is very, very hard to do, you'll have a peer group to do that, which is amazing.. The second thing I recommend is you go find a good company that's growing well, you go find an awesome manager.. The best manager I ever had was my first manager at Salesforce, and he's still a mentor of mine today.. And just what I learned about how to hire people, how to motivate people, how to direct people, how to help them grow their career in a selfless way, I mean, that is immeasurable in your career.. Find an amazing manager early on.. And the third thing is work on things that matter at these kinds of companies.. So whatever company you go to, make sure that you are working on the thing that drives the main revenue for that company..

Not a sideshow, not a side project, because there's gonna be a lot of momentum and a lot of motion, a lot of energy around that.. And as an example, I was very fortunate.. I got to.... Obviously, I had just come from Latin America, so I got to start the Latin America group, which was great.. The company went through an IPO, so I got to experience an IPO from a front row seat.. I mean, the company already grown to a thousand or 1,500 people, I can't remember exactly.. But it was still a pretty small group, so that was great.. Then I got to work on two more projects, basically one a year and start groups that are now billions of dollars of revenue, but also be at the core of what was happening and see how things were going.. You know, I did the first M&A for Salesforce of a small wireless company, and this is back in the day.. Blackberries where like, "We were trying to do SFA, sales force automation" so how salespeople read their sales leads on a mobile device..

It was all on Blackberry, to give you an idea.. But you could see that this was gonna start to be something.. This is two years before the iPhone.. The iPhone came out.... The first iPhone came out 2007, my first year in grad school.. So this was kind of my second stop in my career.. Go to a big company, find an awesome manager, build those relationships that are

gonna be extremely valuable.. I talk to a lot of those people still all the time, and it's just a great peer group that you can work with...