URL: https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/talk-to-potential-customers

Dave Vasen, founder and CEO of brightwheel, tells the story of how discovering pain points in the early childhood education system led him to found his company. By trying out ideas and listening to potential customers early on, he was able to address the market's most pressing challenges.

Transcript

- The first thing that was really compelling 00:00:03,810 was just to understand how important it was.. And again, I literally had just had, you know, blinders on or whatever it was to this part of the market and realizing that when you look at the child, the first five years of development are arguably the most important five years of development in the development of a human being.. It's just so critical in every way, for certainly cognitive, but physical, emotional, every type of development.. And then you look at the family, as you mentioned, families need, and I felt this very viscerally, they need childcare to go to work every day, it's the number one determinant in women's workforce participation, it's usually the biggest check the families are writing, it's either rent or childcare and depending on your zip code or the number of kids, it's usually often childcare.. So it felt profound in terms of how important it was.. And for me, it was just that pull of like, okay, I've been looking for impact, it's here and what can I do? And the natural orientation for me was, I'm a parent, I'm gonna go out and solve a parent problem.. And so that was my first orientation.. And back then, this is in 2014, I got really great advice, just go and try something.. Like I think a lot of people toil, design, iterate, think for a long time on their own, and I was on my own at that point.. I got really great advice, just go out there..

And so actually, early on in this journey, I was actually on parental leave, you know, for Serena, I started going out and it started just trying to get her in to actually a childcare space and feeling the pain of that, I started drilling, developing some parent-related products.. I quickly realized that I was off course.. And I think being able to really quickly early talk to users and in particular who were going to be the determinants, like the buyers, in this case it was the small business owners and the administrators and the teachers.. They were interested in the parent problems but that wasn't the biggest thing on their minds.. Like making parents happy actually wasn't the biggest thing that they needed to solve day to day.. And so it was a quick pivot into, okay, what are your biggest challenges? And doing a lot of observing and listening and just asking, like not going in there with any predispositions of I know technology, I can solve your problems, just asking, hey, like what is most challenging for you? What's the most time consuming? If you could take one thing outta your day, what would it be? And having those conversations as well as just observing the workflows that they had, which honestly were pretty tough to observe, like they were really painful.. These folks are, even in the hub of Silicon Valley, even in like the tech capital of the world, running on paper, more or less, paper or checks, maybe like really old spreadsheets, horrible software and kind of bandaiding together these different systems.. We benchmarked like 15 different tools that they were using to run their small business.. And it's no different than a restaurant or a yoga studio or pick your small business, but this was one market that

really had never had adequate tools and really no one took a modern SAS approach to saying like, how do we solve those problems? And it was at a time when there was a trend towards just building more dedicated software for dedicated verticals and it just happened to be that this was a very big one without frankly any, you know, real software...