

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/the-clarity-mortality-provides>

Julayne Virgil, CEO of Girls Inc. of Alameda County, recalls how the deadliest terrorist attack in U.S. history made her reassess the work she was doing early in her career. Curiosity and an eagerness to explore drew her to a fun job in New York. But after Sept. 11, 2001, she asked herself whether she was applying her skills and strengths to what mattered most to her and resolved to have more of an impact on society.



Transcript

- They had a website, and the website consisted of one static page, that's it.. You couldn't click, you clicked, but didn't go anywhere.. There was just a picture and their address, that's it.. And they realized they wanted a web presence.. And they said, "Okay, well, we don't really know "what we're doing here.. "We need somebody to research it." Well, I raised my hand.. Why? Why not? Why not? Even if I don't wanna do it forever, it could be interesting and fun, and I could learn something.. And that's exactly what happened.. I did some research.. I did more research..

And pretty soon, I was the expert on the team on Internet marketing.. I mean, imagine that? I was, you know, 23, 24.. How could I be the expert, but I was.. I was the only one in the company who knew what I knew.. And so they decided to create a department, and they asked me, "Well, you're the internal expert.. "Do you wanna move into this new department?" Of course, course I do.. Right.. So I move into this department.. And now all of a sudden, they are looking at how their, they're looking at their brands; Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer, The Powerpuff Girls.. There were a couple of other brands, Peter Cottontail..

And they wanted to create these experiences with the brand online because it was another way to engage the customer.. So I got to build these fun experiences.. I got to work with the developers and build these fun experiences for kids and their families to come visit and have fun, and engage with the brands.. And then decide whether they wanted to buy some products or not.. So I'm literally at work, testing games.. That's what I'm doing.. I'm testing games, and I caught myself laughing at a couple points and going, I'm getting paid for this.. This is, (laughs) I mean, I would do this for free.. I had a great time.. It was a blast..

And then 9/11 happened.. And I started to ask a lot of questions about what I was doing, what I wanted to do.. I lived in New York at the time.. So there was a smell of computers and ash, and burning cement, and things in the air that should not be burned, for months.. On the television every night, there were funerals where bagpipes were being played.. And so I started a lot to think about my own mortality.. It's not something that's natural to really think about when you're that young, 24, 25.. It's not something that's natural to think about it that young.. But I started thinking a lot about my mortality, and I started thinking about what is going to be said about me when I go, because we eventually all go.. What are they gonna say about me? And I thought, well, (hums) I guess they could say that, you know, I'm making a company more money, or I'm moving this profit, or (hums) are these things that matter to me? Am I giving my skills and my strengths to something that actually matters? And when I asked that question, I knew immediately that I needed to shift my focus away from the entertainment side and more towards something that mattered to me personally...