URL: https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/the-plusses-and-minuses-of-scrappiness

In the early days, admits GoldieBlox founder and CEO Debbie Sterling, the company had a focus problem. Small, under-resourced teams were hacking together numerous projects and exploring all opportunities at once. A more orderly and strategic rollout might have been more efficient, she concludes. On the other hand, she adds, some of those early projects — like the award-winning GoldieBlox mobile app — benefitted from that scrappy, nimble structure. She finds that a sudden influx of people and resources can sometimes bog down a project, and that small, scrappy teams have a place in mature companies as well.

Transcript

- Staying scrappy was never the problem.. 00:00:05,890 We did get a lot more resources.. Our problem was we were trying to do too many things with too few resources.. So we always, in the early days, we really just had a focus problem because the vision for GoldieBlox was so big.. You know, it was not just, I want to have toys.. It was like, I want to have toys and a TV show and a feature film and mobile apps, and I want, you know, eventually I want to have stores and, you know, it was just, I wanted it to be a global franchise, as big as, you know, Barbie and Disney princess and American Girl.. And in the early days we were just trying to do so much.. So what ended up happening was we had like what, what we should have done, which is, you know, hindsight 20/20, but like, what we really should have done was sequence it out a little bit better so that, you know, we really nail one thing first.. And then once that's sort of, that part of the business is stable and up and running and profitable, then we layer on the next thing.. And then we layer on the next thing..

But instead we had like five projects at a time all of which were under resourced.. So we always, we always stay in really scrappy.. And what's kind of amazing about it.. And what I've learned though through this is, you know, for, for example, we decided we wanted to launch a mobile app, which could have been its own company in and of itself.. Right, and for us, this was just sort of like an add on to, 'cause we wanted to have, We wanted to get into the apps business.. And so we had this tiny scrappy team.. I mean, we literally had like a friend of ours from Seattle who we knew could make apps.. And he like moved into my husband and my apartment and like lived and slept on our living room couch for two months, all pulling all nighters, working with a team in Poland to make the app.. I mean, it was like insane.. And, but it ended up winning iOS App of the Year..

And I was on stage doing a keynote at WWDC.. So like, it's like, I think what, I've what I've learned here.. One like yes, like properly resource the projects that you do and kind of sequence things out so you're not doing too much.. 'Cause that's like what every startup messes up on and ours was very much so, but on the other hand, I have learned that keeping it scrappy can be a really good thing because I've had other examples of projects where you would think like, okay, well we have a bunch of resources.. Now we have more money.. So you start growing the team and putting more people on it.. And then all of a sudden, all of these people bog it down and, and I've found that, and we do this now when we're working on a project, like even my, my toy team is very small.. Like my internal toy team is very, very like amazingly small.. You wouldn't believe, but we bring in contractors and new ideas and thinking, but the in house team is very small and that enables us to move really quickly...