

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/trading-places-the-c-suite-edition>

When Christine Yen and her co-founder Charity Majors created Honeycomb, Yen assumed the CTO role and Majors became CEO. In the spring of 2019, they switched roles. Yen explains why it might make sense to shuffle roles as a company moves from initial product and customer development into searching for a repeatable sales model. When co-founders build trust and deeply respect each other's strengths, she observes, these kinds of shifts are much easier to accomplish.



## Transcript

- When we started out, we were not the sort of people to be like, well five years down the road we're gonna be a 200 person company and you should be CEO and I'll be CTO and then we'll have these giant organizations underneath us.. We were very pragmatic.. We were very just like, okay these are these roles that need filling right now.. One of us has to be CEO and none of it will really matter because for this first year we just need to build stuff.. And so Charity kind of reluctantly took on this burden of being CEO, and I say burden because that's how she felt.. You know, we were engineers going and developing relationships with CEOs, sorry developing relationships with investors and figuring out how to sell are not things that really were exciting to use at the time.. We wanted to build a product that would change how people like us would do their jobs.. And I think it was actually perfect in the beginning because Charity had spent so much time as an operator kind of developing this public voice.. She did a lot of speaking before with her work through Mongo and was very well practiced at going out there in the industry and saying, hey guys, gender neutral guys, there's something different, there's something, you could be doing your jobs differently, there is this new future, I've seen it, guys it's so great over here.. Guys, gender neutral..

And especially in that first year we spent building up the market, building up the understanding of why observability mattered and why Honeycomb's approach was important.. I think great to have her kind of more publicly out there, myself more focused on the product.. In the last, this spring we actually sort of changed roles.. So I'm now CEO she is CTO.. - Oh wow.. - And I think that it feels, on one hand it feels like a big change, right? Changing roles, what does that mean? What does it mean for our focuses to change? On the other hand, as a startup goes from baby start up to three year old startup the needs of each role also changes.. The type of person that you need to be to get something off the ground, that sort of CEO that you need to be to get the industry and get folks excited about this new vision can be a very different person than that CEO who needs to get to that repeatable sales model.. And so I think because we started off with this very strong base of trust between the two of us and understanding of each other's strengths and skills we have been able to both do what is best for the company.. - Yeah...