URL: https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/what-is-authenticity

Di-Ann Eisnor, director of growth for Waze, explains how the term "authenticity" can be code for "outsider" in homogenous industries like tech. She talks about harnessing uniqueness and turning it into a strength, as well as going beyond respect for diversity and actually relishing different perspectives. Rallying the team behind a common mission and quashing territorial behavior are also key, Eisnor notes.

Transcript

- So authentic, of undisputed origin, genuine, true, you get it.. But when people say that about me, I think they mean something more like this: Naive, outsider who is intensely optimistic.. I could throw in a lot of other adjectives but you get the idea.. It's when I hear authentic, I hear okay maybe that's a little off, and just to kind of go into that a little bit, naive.. My ninth birthday, I was in love with Michael Jackson.. Thriller was out, days were good, I invited him to perform at my ninth birthday.. And he didn't reply but I was sure he was coming.. So I told everybody at the birthday that Michael Jackson would be performing and of course I had a lot of kids over, I was very popular that week.. And then he didn't show up.. Okay, that's a lesson you learn, but that kind of naive feeling that you can make anything happen has served me, personally, very well..

I think it's an important thing for entrepreneurs to be able to harness, because you need it a lot, because Michael Jackson usually won't show up but sometimes he does.. Not these days.. Outsider.. Everyone in the valley, when you first get here, you feel like they've all been to Stanford or they've all been to MIT, and everyone has advanced degrees.. And I come from a family of truckers, in a kind of post-industrial town in Massachusetts without an advanced degree.. You heard that I studied painting and business.. So it was kind of this new notion to come in here.. So when I give a talk at a place like this and they say oh, that's so authentic, I hear "outsider." And intensely optimistic.. ("O-o-h Child" by Stan Vincent) Just listen for a second.. (laughs) ♫ Ooh child things are gonna get easier ♫ Ooh child things will get brighter It's kind of a life long theme song..

(audience laughter) So that's what it's like to be inside of my head on this journey.. Now let's look at what that means within the context of ways.. Because if I walked around with rainbows and unicorns, singing that song all day long, that would be called a non-profit.. (audience laughter) That would not be a company.. Within the context of my team, I've got you know Israeli special forces guys, I've got cynics, I've got academics, I've got the best engineers on the planet.. So the fact that I can stand up here, even in the company, and be talking about this rainbow and unicorny stuff, which I actually don't talk about but I have that vibe, it allows me to not have all of the cons that come with the pros and cons of who you are, right? How do you harness who you are to make it as much of a pro as possible? I think that's what we're really trying actively to build within the culture of our company.. When we sold the company were were just over a hundred, now we're at about 350 which is still relatively small for what we do.. Some of the things that have worked for us.. So what is it about building this team that we've tried to keep in mind? So obviously you want a diverse team.. From some of the news that's been coming out in Silicon Valley the last couple of weeks it can seem disheartening, but it's not always like that..

We have an incredibly diverse team and we're committed to getting these new perspectives that are coming in, because we think that healthy debate is really important.. But it's not just diversity for diversity's sake, right? You need a common set of values, a common purpose that you're pushing toward.. Without that it's just a lot of noise.. It's very difficult as an entrepreneur to stay focused and to prioritize, these are two of our biggest challenges.. It's all the things that you say no to, not the things that you say yes to, that matter most.. So that common purpose is what you check yourself against.. In terms of the debate, I'm often asked how do you work with Israelis? You know, as the first non-Israeli there and all of that.. It's amazing, we would go into a room, we would have a very difficult decision to make, and we would fight and we would scream, and the door is closed.. We would come out at the end of the day with a decision, everybody pointed in the same direction, and never look back because we were encouraged to be able to have a space to get anything out that was relevant, and that's so important in the early days when you have no idea what the heck you're building or who it's for.. Oh, one thing (laughs) oh

let's just go here cuz you already saw it..

    Two other things that were important.. Squashing territorialism, you know it's difficult when someone is running say, I don't know, community programs and then all of a sudden you have 500,000 members of your map editing community.. It's not that the same person can necessarily do that all by themselves, but they might feel territorial about it, and how do you squash it? It's a very normal human thing, how can you not let it fester? Address it and move on.. And then of course the no asshole policy is something that we take very very seriously.. The other thing I would like to mention is not just respecting the differences within the team but kind of reveling in it.. Everybody will come to me with their problem because they know that they won't judge it.. Everyone will go to X person for something else.. It's really reveling in those differences and what make people tick, and what brings out the best in them.. When are they at their best within the company? And for every single person at the company to know that's not always a single person.. There's never one person who can solve all of those problems...