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When Your Passion Isn't Your Superpower

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Steve Garrity, founder of Hearsay Systems and Juliet Rothenberg, product manager at DeepMind, discuss how to develop passions that aren't your superpower. It comes down to learning the hard skills to develop the soft skills. Be diligent in working on your hard skills to let your soft skills shine through your passions.

Transcript

- There are often times where you're passionate about something, but you might not have the skills yet to actually contribute to that field.. What are the soft skills or the other opportunities in that discipline that allow you to get your foot in the door? As you're building those other skills.. - That's a fantastic question.. Definitely soft skills become more and more important as you move further in your career, right? And there's a point at which it flips, and they are far more important than the hard skills are.. I think it is, the hard skills don't necessarily need to be your superpower, but getting those will make your soft skills so much more credible.. So for example, I remember being told, when I was in college that I should get the hardest engineering degree that I possibly could, and I didn't, I designed my own.. And I regret that.. I regret not digging deeper into hard engineering skills.. It's not that it would've been my superpower and I always knew that it wouldn't, but I think if you have those soft skills to layer on top of it, you will always have opportunities to exercise those soft skills, because life tests your soft skills each and every day.. And if you have at least a certain level of credibility, and harder skills, you'll be able to get past that period, and then your soft skills will start to shine really quickly..

So if I were you I would encourage you to go at getting those hard skills, be really diligent, work hard, it's going to be a slog, and then allow your soft skills to shine from there.. That would be my advice.. Some of which I took and some of which I didn't.. - You know it's interesting, that's sort of the model that often gets floated around of the T-shape person.. The person who has a depth of knowledge in at least one discipline, but the breadth of knowledge and the skills that allow you to work across disciplines.. So it's about thinking of yourself as a T-shape person, that allows you to really be successful.. What do you think? - I agree, I think there's a lot to be said for acquiring some of the hard skills, even if they're not your superpower, just to have credibility and knowledge.. I also think there's a lot to be said for, I can't think of off the top of my head any problem areas or fields where the soft skills aren't also quite important.. And so, they might not be as glamorous, or as exciting in the early days of something, right, but you could almost always find a way to help, and that gets you involved and that gets you both building the hard skills, and also more and more expertise in that area so that as you get deeper into your career you have more and more.. Right and so you can get into classic, you know you're starting a technology company, and Stanford we're in the Technology Ventures Program..

And it's like, well does somebody who's not writing code do in the first year at a software company? There's a lot.. Now that doesn't mean you need five people who don't have engineering degrees and one engineer, because that doesn't work out that well, but there's a lot of stuff to do, and I don't mean like, kind of dump stuff.. Like, yes you need to get an office, and get benefits set up, and administrative stuff, but there's actually, there's user research, there's partnership conversations, there's fundraisers, there's a bunch of stuff that needs soft skills.. You can find a way to help, and then over time as the company grows, there's even more and more need for soft skills.. - And the more that you have hard skills, I would say even in that role, hard skills are really important because you'll be so much more credible with engineering teams and you'll actually understand the pain and problems that they're going through, and you'll be able to better take back, say user research or fundraising feedback, and in a way that's useful to the team.. So hard skills are always helpful...