



EPISODE 22

Ask why it won't work — Rick Song's lessons from Square and building from 0 to 1

Today's episode is with Rick Song, the co-founder and CEO of Persona, a platform that enables companies to create the ideal identity verification experience for their customers. Before founding Persona in 2018, Rick was an engineer at Square for 5 years, and an early team member at Square Capital.

Play Episode



Subscribe

 Apple

 Spotify

 Amazon

 Overcast

 YouTube

 RSS



The best advice in tech, right in your inbox.

Join the 200K+ other builders who subscribe to our free newsletter.

Sign Up For Free

Already a First Round member? [Sign in](#)



In Depth

Ask why it won't work — Rick Song's less...

Today's episode is with Rick Song, CEO of Persona.
Before starting the identity verification company, Rick...



 [SAVE TO SPOTIFY](#) [SHARE](#) [SUBSCRIBE](#) [DESCRIPTION](#)



Today's episode is with Rick Song, the co-founder and CEO of Persona, a platform that enables companies to create the ideal identity verification experience for their customers. Before founding Persona in 2018, Rick was an engineer at Square for 5 years, and an early team member at Square Capital.

Rick is at an exciting inflection point in his journey of building from zero to one — just last week, Persona shared that they've raised a \$50 million Series B round. The company plans to double the team this year to keep up with revenue that's surged more than 10x and a customer base that's grown to include big logos like Square, Postmates, and Gusto.

In today's conversation, one theme stands out: Rick is somewhat obsessed with the idea of pre-mortems, or figuring out why things might not work out. From all the ways a candidate might fail, to why a customer *won't* want a product, to how a commonly-used framework might not be a good fit, Rick brings this mindset to every aspect of running Persona.

From hiring lessons to go-to-market strategies, Rick offers up some counterintuitive thinking, including why his engineers sell and cold-email prospects, and why he *doesn't* try to convince candidates that Persona is a company that will change the world.

Today's episode holds tons of insights for anyone who's a founder or thinking about starting a company one day, but there's also plenty in here for engineering leaders and hiring managers.

You can follow Rick on Twitter at @rickcsong and learn more about Persona at <https://withpersona.com/>

You can email us questions directly at review@firstround.com or follow us on Twitter @ twitter.com/firstround and twitter.com/brettberson

Transcript

EP.22 - Rick at Persona

Rick Song: [00:00:00] I think the one thing that you've consistently found true for building a business. Is that almost anything can work. It's actually a lot more about how all the pieces are put together than trying to find the best piece for everything. I made this analogy to some folks, which is like building a team is not about finding the greatest talent for every single role.

The best advice in tech, right in your inbox.

Join the 200K+ other builders who subscribe to our free newsletter.

Email address...

Sign Up For Free

Already a First Round member? [Sign in](#)

It's actually a lot more about how does every single person work with each other. You're building an NBA team. It's not about finding five. All-stars. It's really about finding five synergistic players who can really play off each other. And I think the same. Really applies to building a business as well, which is it's nationally.

I figured out, oh, what is the perfect thing? Like what did this best company do? It's a lot more about thinking about much more holistically and how all these parts interact.

Brett Berson: [00:00:48] Welcome to in depth, a new show that surfaces tactical advice, founders and startup leaders need to grow their teams. Their companies and themselves. I'm Brett Berson, a

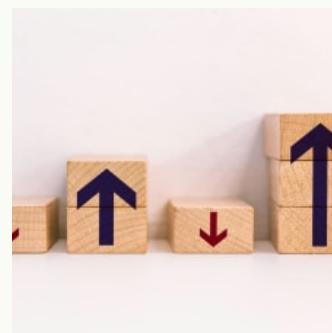
Continue reading

Find More On The Review

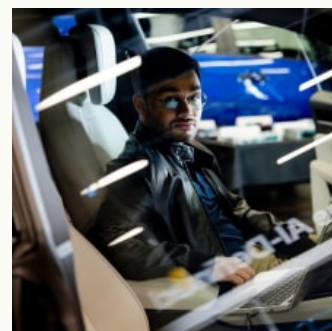
Ask Why It Won't Work, And Other Lessons This Founder Relies on While Building From 0 to 1



Counterintuitive Lessons on How to Get Better as You Scale, From Twilio's Jeff Lawson



Firsthand: Seven Years Inside Applied Intuition, the Quietly Dominant Physical AI Company



"AI-Powered" Isn't a Position



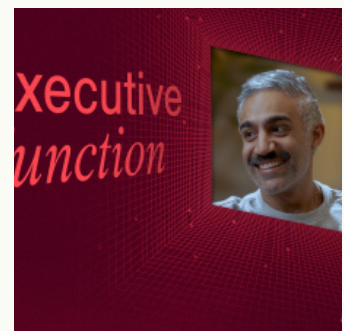
The Founder Dating Playbook – Here's the Process I Used to Find My Co-Founder



How Superhuman Built an Engine to Find Product Market Fit



Why founders should bet on first-time executives | Praveer Melwani (CFO, Figma)



Guideline's Path to Product-Market Fit — The Early Decisions That Powered Its Acquisition by Gusto



About

Articles

Curated Reads

Paths to PMF

Newsletter

Podcast

Sign in

Glossary

For the founder's notepad:

"If you personally want to grow as fast as your company, you have to give away your job every couple months." – [Molly Graham](#)

Shuffle →

Published by **First
Round**

[Go to First Round Capital](#)



[Privacy Policy](#) [Terms of Service](#)