



Siri founder shares secrets to success

Students encouraged to persist with good ideas

By **James Whittaker** - June 22, 2017

Want to know how to become a multi-million dollar Silicon Valley success story? Better ask Siri. Or better still, ask one of the company's founders, Adam Cheyer.

Schoolchildren in the Cayman Islands had that opportunity last week when Mr. Cheyer explained the secrets of an overnight tech success story that was nearly 20 years in the making.

He spoke to students from multiple schools at an event at the Westin resort, organized by accountancy firm EisnerAmper, which brought Mr. Cheyer in as a guest speaker for its anniversary event.

He encouraged them to be creative and follow their passions.

“Don’t just watch a movie, try to make a movie; don’t just play a game, create a game,” he said.

Explaining the history of Siri, the “intelligent personal assistant” that his company developed using speech recognition technology to help smartphone users navigate the web, he said the app launched in 2010.

“Two weeks later, the phone rang and it said ‘Apple’ on the caller ID. We pick up and on the other end a voice says, ‘Hey, this is Steve. How you doing? Wanna come over to my house tomorrow?’”

Within two weeks, Apple CEO Steve Jobs had made an offer to buy the company, and two months later, despite some initial misgivings from the Siri group, the deal was done.

What seemed like instant success had actually taken years of work, he said.

“For a computer person, this is the success story of a lifetime. You launch an app and, boom, two weeks later Steve Jobs calls you and buys your company. Actually, it took a little longer than that,” he explained.

Mr. Cheyer developed the first prototypes for Siri in the 1990s. He spent five years working at Stanford Research International developing the machine learning technology that underpins the system and a further two and a half years with his team creating the specific technology for the app.

He told students good ideas were worth persisting with.

“Sometimes in life, you have a great idea but it takes work and time, longer than you think, to get there. It took 18 years from my first idea till Apple launched it on hundreds of millions of iPhones in 2011.”

Mr. Cheyer also developed Change.org, a platform for people to start petitions to support various causes.

Citing the example of British teenager Nick D’Aloisio, who created an app at age 15 that

condensed long articles into bullet points and sold it to Yahoo for \$35 million, he said age was no barrier to success.

“If you can get your hands on a computer, no matter who you are or where you are in the world, you can do anything,” he said.

Ben Leung, managing partner at EisnerAmper, said Mr. Cheyer had come to the island for the company’s anniversary celebrations, and he had organized the schools event to allow youngsters to take advantage of the visit.

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