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JIM: Anybody who’s interested in technology and how its changing the world will want to listen to today’s guest, Darren Pleasance. He is a Google executive and he’s leader of Google’s Global Customer Acquisitions Team. He spoke at the EAA Soaring for Success Program in November of this last year and I’ve got to tell you, I was amazed. I thought I knew what Google was all about and some of the things that they’re doing and I think some of the success that they’ve had and some of their processes and the way of doing things is really transferrable to anybody, whether they’re trying to advance their career, grow their business, or they’re just interested in seeing what’s going on. You’ll certainly want to listen to today’s guest, Darren, so it’s with great pleasure I welcome Darren Pleasance. Welcome Darren.

0:47

DARREN PLEASANCE: Thank you.

0:48

JIM: Hey, I’m really looking forward to our discussion today. I think most of our listeners are probably like me, a baby boomer, and when it comes to technology, we’re technologically challenged, we’re afraid to use it. Some of us have jumped into it but I know Google is something that when we were growing up wasn’t invented yet and, now, it’s a dominating business that reaches many aspects. I was at the EAA Museum here a couple months ago and heard you speak and I was very inspired about some of the technology that was coming up. For those of you that don’t know, EAA is the Experimental Aircraft Association, and they hosted this talk. Darren, we share something in common, we’re both pilots and we both fly Pipers.

1:26

DARREN PLEASANCE: That’s outstanding. Yeah, I know we talked before this conversation. It’s been something I’ve been doing since I was 13 years old so it’s been a core part of my life, one time professionally. I used to fly for corporations and some high net worth individuals before I managed to work my way into management consulting and then ultimately over here to Google so it’s been a constant thread through my life and I, now, am a very active pilot, just not doing it professionally.

1:47

JIM: And it is amazing because I remember the early days of Google, it was a search engine. It was a service that we use. There were many others that were out there that no longer seem to be in existence but you shared at that session some of the interesting things that Google is doing and I know you have a core philosophy on living and I think that kind of goes in with some of Google’s doing. Can you share some of those philosophies?

2:09

DARREN PLEASANCE: I can, yeah. Google has been an interesting place. I’ve only been here about three years now but I was doing something called management consulting for a placed called McKenzie & Company, a large global consulting firm. I ended up doing that for about 15 years and enjoyed it and learned a lot and enjoyed the people there and the variety and, frankly, wasn’t looking to leave. When Google came along, it sparked an interest in me that I hadn’t anticipated, which was a chance to work for a company with a global footprint, the ability to have impact on a massive scale, but also a company that had a philosophy about trying to do good things in the world and also a way of working that I just found really intriguing, which was around hiring bright people, around creating an environment that fostered innovation and creativity, around putting in place a set of aspirations that start with the CEO Larry Page on down, around really trying to change the way the world works in a positive way, and basically not being daunted by the fact that, in many cases, we don’t yet know how to do that and you come to work every day thinking about how do I make a fundamental difference in the world and set really high aspirations. There’s a whole set of principles within Google that allow that to happen and we can go into more of that as part of this conversation but it was that kind of environment that, to me, was so intriguing and, at least with my life, I’ve had a lot of different chapters. As I mentioned before, I flew for a living. Coming out of college, I was a pilot by the time I graduated. I flew for a living and met a lot of very interesting people, movie stars, wealthy business people, and had a very interesting set of experiences. That led into private equity, which became my next chapter. My last flying job was with a private equity company, when then led me to business school, which then exposed me to management consulting, and I managed to get into McKenzie, which then led to this Google opportunity so I’ve had this series of chapters and kind of this willingness to take on new experiences that, today, has led me to a very interesting career path and, with Google’s philosophies around how to change the world, it was just really created an exciting set of opportunities in front of me.

3:55

JIM: When I heard you speak, I went to this event because I just wanted to find out more how Google works and how to take advantage of what they did with marketing with business, I was just inspired by your whole talk because you spent a little bit of time, and we’ll talk about that maybe a little bit later, what Google can do to help businesses grow their business but some of the stuff that you shared, whether it’s a student exploring a career or someone that’s in a career that wants to expand their career or move up in what they’re doing or it’s a business trying to grow their business or survive in today’s world, some of the philosophies that Google has embraced, it’s no surprise they’ve gone from a company that was one of many that was a search engine to, now, a dominant force, really, and it’s not just the internet what they’re doing. I know you talked about some of the core philosophies, one being focus on the user. Share with the audience a little bit about what that is.

4:44

DARREN PLEASANCE: Yeah, that’s been from the start and persists today, which is just a maniacal focus on thinking about helping whoever the end user is of the product. In our case, there’s a lot of products. People know Google Search probably the best but there’s so many different products Google provides. The constant theme is how do we make sure that every decision we make is being made in a way that is in the best interest of the user, whether that’s the way the product works, the ease of use of the product, the relevance of the product. You think back to, for instance, just the Google Search home page that all of us know so well, there were many opportunities, especially in the early days, for Google to try to start monetizing that, putting banner ads, doing all of the things that were being done by other companies at that time and, despite the pressures of the company to find ways to make money, the maniacal focus was on how do we make sure that this is the single best user experience in the world and, if you look at the Google Search page, it’s largely unchanged from the very early days, which is a simple search bar and virtually nothing else on that page. The whole intent was to keep that product simple and easy to use and as focused on its prime purpose as we could. We eventually did find ways to monetize that, by the way, through Google’s advertising product called AdWords and, so, when people get search results, obviously, there’s ads out there but, even in that, there is a huge focus on how do we make sure that those ads that show up are displayed in a way that’s not intrusive, that’s contextually relevant, that’s actually anticipating and even guessing what that user might be looking for in a way that often surprises them. You can misspell words, you can type in things that aren’t quite right and, through our search engine, we do a pretty decent job of picking out what it was you were trying to actually find and that comes through this persistent focus on how do we make sure that what we’re doing is in the best interest of the customer and is, in fact, putting the user first. The reality is every one of us is also a user of our product so it’s not hard to put ourselves in the shoes of the end customer and figure out are we doing good by them and, like all companies, I would say we don’t always get it right and what I love about Google, though, is that we’re always self-correcting and I think it’s just cool focus that we’re willing to try things and, once in a while, we get it wrong and, if we do, we’re willing to admit that and get on with it quickly and fix it and make sure it’s right so I just think that’s a great.

6:43

JIM: I know with the focus on the user, I think that’s a mistake a lot of times people make. It’s putting yourself in the other person’s shoes and, sometimes, we get blinded by our own circumstances that we don’t look outside the box and I think that’s really been a key to success with Google. Something you just talked about, fail fast, I know you spent some time talking about it. I know a lot of times people are like, you know what, we know this is going to work, we’re going to make it work, and they get bogged down instead of getting on to the next thing that’s going to work instead of trying to fix something that’s maybe doomed to fail. Expand on that a little bit, fail fast.

7:13

DARREN PLEASANCE: Yeah, it’s one of the other principles here. Philosophy is around experimentation and the reality that the chance of getting things right, especially out of the gate, is very low and, so, we have a lyric, the fail fast, which is launch and iterate, and so we’re very much around piloting things, get things out there even if they’re not perfect, try them, iterate them, basically use the learnings of having something in market to determine what works and what doesn’t, and then be willing to use those learnings to iterate. Related to that, at some point in time, you may discover that what you thought was a brilliant idea may, in fact, not be such a brilliant idea and there are no clear paths to fixing it, in which case the conclusion has got to be to shut it down and move on to something else, and that’s the underlying principal of fail fast, which is learn very quickly whether what you’ve got is good or not and, if it can’t be good, don’t be afraid to shut it down and move on. In fact, we talk here about what would you define as failure and, generally, the clearest description of a failure is the time it takes from the time you know something’s not going to work to the time you make that hard decision to shut something down and, ideally, when you finally come to that conclusion, you shut it down immediately. Of course, there’s a lot of friction in that process because, in many cases, people have committed months, if not years, to a project, there’s a lot momentum and inertia behind those projects, and, so, shutting something down is the non-trivial thing to do but it’s what I’ve found Google does extremely well is be willing something doesn’t work, shut it down, and then redeploy people and dollars into other things that do work, and it’s almost never the case that even if you do shut something down and deem it a failure that you haven’t learned something that can then be used down the road for something else. Especially in my McKenzie career, my consulting career, I would see companies that would not do this. They would keep these little projects going forever and ever and ever, and you’d have this group of walking dead basically working on stuff that most people knew wasn’t going to materialize into anything, yet, the companies didn’t have the fortitude to declare the reality of a failed project and then redeploy into some else, so I think Google has been incredibly good at that. It has served us well because we’re continually coming out with new things and, what the press doesn’t usually see and what the public doesn’t usually see is how many things we started that didn’t actually turn into something directly and did, in fact, get shut down, of which there are many in any given year.

9:10

JIM: I’ve studied Thomas Edison and I remember him being interviewed talking about his failures and he just talked about it as one step closer to success. We’ve got to get through the failures to find out what works and we’ve got to get through them quick. I know, in his instance, there were thousands of things that didn’t work before he got that light bulb to work.

9:27

DARREN PLEASANCE: What’s fun here is the culture of Google, that whole concept is supported from the CEO on down. The conversations people have, if we come up with an idea on any given day of a better way of doing things, we don’t spend a lot of time debating whether it’s a good idea or not. There might be a little bit but, very quickly, it’s how do we pilot, how do we test and determine whether it’s a good idea or not, and how do we structure those tests in a way where we can measure to determine at the end of the test whether it did, in fact, work or not and, if it did, we’re ready to put more money behind it and accelerate and, if it didn’t, we’re perfectly happy to shut it down and move on to the next thing. That’s just part of how it works.

9:56

JIM: So, talk about the ten times philosophy. I found this very interesting.

10:00

DARREN PLEASANCE: Yeah, we call it 10x here, and it’s, again, led from Larry Page on down so it’s the CEO down and it’s basically a mindset about doing things big. If you’re going to come to work every day, why focus on the world of incrementalism. If you want to make something 10% better, you can pretty much do that by doing things the same way you do them today, just slightly marginally better. If you want to do something 10x better, you pretty much have to step back and rethink how you do things and question the foundation of how you get things done. There’s a lot of what we do here at Google that encompasses that. We talk a lot, how do we 10x it, how do we 10x it. What it does is it forces you to go to the whiteboard and say how could we? How could we take a $100 million business and make it a $1 billion business? How could we take a car that gets 10 miles to the gallon and get it to go to 100 miles to the gallon and to do that requires a fundamental rethinking of how things get done but just forces a different conversation than most companies have and the problem is to do that takes risk, to do that requires you have people who are both willing and capable of stepping out from the status quo and thinking about doing things in a fundamentally different way. It requires you to ask questions differently, to question what many might consider to be a given, to question whether those assumptions are, in fact, true, and it requires basically a leadership team that’s willing to allow the space for people to experiment and try to do things radically different, knowing, back to our prior topic, knowing that, in many cases, those ideas may, in fact, fail but, if they’re towards a grand aspiration of doing something 10x better, you have a reasonably high probability of doing something transformational. I guess the last point I’d say is it’s easier to attract and retain people when you’ve got that kind of aspiration, right. People like to come to work with big, we call them moon shots here, too, with big aspirations to do things that really make a difference and if you think back to the Kennedy era and the Apollo moon shots, that’s kind of the principles people think about around here is what’s our version of a moon shot and you can take that down to individual groups. It doesn’t have to be a big project like the self-driving car but even within individual groups here, every one of them has the opportunity to think about what’s our version of a moon shot within our group that would really transform how we do what we do every day.

12:00

JIM: With the world changing faster and faster, to survive today, it isn’t about survival. You really have to innovate or you’re going to be left behind. We’re going to take a short break. When we come back, let’s talk about some of the key trends that are shaping the world as we know it so please stay tuned.

12:14

BREAK

13:45

JIM: Welcome back as we continue to visit with Darren Pleasance. Darren is in charge of business development at Google. I recently heard him speak at an EAA special event. Boy, it really opened my eyes because I had fairly narrow vision of Google and, to hear some of the things that they’re all working on, it is just mindboggling and the scope of things that they’re thinking about, and I think we talked about that a little bit in the beginning, the innovation and the 10x philosophy and everybody willing to fail fast and move on to something else that’s going to succeed. You’ve come a long way in such a short time but, obviously, you’re always looking ahead. What are some of the key trends that you and Google see and how is Google capitalizing on that?

14:27

DARREN PLEASANCE: Yeah, there’s a few things we see happening out there. I guess the one I’d start with is this concept that everything is connected. If you think about just all of us, right, in our day-to-day lives, how often is it that we’re in some form or another, connected into the internet and, therefore, connected to either other people or other things? All of us have, for the most part, smartphones these days. We’ve got tablets, we’ve got laptops, increasingly in this world of wearables, whether it’s the Google glass or whether it’s a watch or any other type of device. Our ability to be connected to different devices and to different people has now become pervasive. That’s basically true around the world. In places where it’s not, it’s catching up very quickly so we live in a world that’s connected. What are the implications of that? Well, potentially, it means you’ve got access to information, firstly, at all times. It means that people can engage with each other in a way they never could before. It means the amount of data that’s being created and captures is at an all-time high and it’s going up at an exponential rate so the amount of data that will be created and captured will be higher a year from now than it is today by a pretty sizeable amount. What that’s opening up, then, is a whole new world where we can take advantage of the computing power that exists to, basically, drive insights from that data that allows us to deliver better services and better experiences for people in a way that could never have been done before, right, so this would be, there’s a lot of good examples of this. One might be Google Search is the first and most obvious example, right. You can type in almost anything and if it’s remotely close to what you’re looking for, Google Search does a great job of using its algorithms and the massive amounts of data and, over a decade, 15 years now worth of machine learning to give you back a result that’s relevant and useful for you as a user of that search engine. Similarly, I’ll use Google Maps, right. Google Maps is now taking all of the data that’s out there, including traffic data, movement of these devices throughout the environment, to help you figure out how to get from Point A to Point B in a way that’s most efficient and it’s dynamic, right, so it’s constantly using real time data to figure out what’s the best way for you to get from Point A to Point B. You can imagine, then, taking that to the next level around healthcare. The amount of data that could be collected out there is increasingly being collected through things like FitBit and other wearable devices that are basically capturing your movements throughout the world, that and also biometric data, whether it’s heart rates, whether it’s blood pressure, increasing the glucose. I mean a lot of these things are being measured or measurable are allowing for a set of services to be delivered to you as an individual that could never have been done before and, ultimately, find ways to improve your life, right. Spend less time doing things that you’re less interested in and provide you better information to improve the quality of your life so it’s just foundational. Let me just pause there because there’s a lot of other things I’ll go into but this whole concept of a connected world is transforming how all of us will live over the coming decades.

16:59

JIM: I’ve talked to a lot of people. Obviously, healthcare is a big issue and, with Affordable Care Act, healthcare costs are skyrocketing and what I see with healthcare is there’s a lot of people that want to control it. They want to control it and maybe keep it the way it is but I know some of the things that Google is working on, some of the things that some of these other companies are working on, I just watched a TED Talk, it was an oldie but goodie already, and they talked about the 50 cent microscope so that doctors and stuff would have access to something that’s easily shippable and they could study viruses and things on the spot. Technology is going to drive the prices down and give more access to more people. It seems like there’s a big fight to keep things status quo, keep payment schedules the same, so we have this battle going on but I think technology is just going to make things so much better for people and, as you said, access to all of that information instead of relying on one doctor remembering what prescription or prognosis to give you, and to have access to all of that instantly and get the best minds helping to treat people, it’s obviously going to create efficiencies and drive the cost down eventually. Do you believe that?

18:04

DARREN PLEASANCE: I do believe that and I believe the quality goes up. Cost goes down and quality goes up. One of the challenges, healthcare in particular, that we’ve got is, obviously, around the privacy and Google cares immensely around privacy. Boy, if there’s a topic that doesn’t go a day without that coming up is the concept both of privacy and security. How do you make sure that users have the ability, consumers and individuals have the ability to control their privacy and manage their privacy, and then security is kind of the other side of the coin? How do we, as guardians, if you will, of a lot of this data do what we can to insure the security of that so that whatever privacy constraints people put over their own data, we do a good job of making sure that that is, in fact, secure, and so healthcare is an interesting dilemma because the ability to diagnose and improve the outcomes of a lot of conditions could accelerate dramatically if we, as a civilization, could access the massive amount of data that exits out there at the individual level. Of course, there are legitimate private concerns around doing that and so one of the fundamental questions is are there ways to allow individuals to make that data about their own healthcare status available in a way that’s privacy compliant so that maybe no personal information tied to that, that would be a way to do that, but then allow this machine learning concept to go to work on millions and millions of types of healthcare related data in order to more quickly diagnose somebody who has a certain condition, to identify which types of remedies are more effective in addressing those types of healthcare conditions, and you could imagine a world where, as you said, you could go in and basically upload your data and have that basically be diagnosed almost without human intervention at that point and then allow the human intervention to be focused more on the treatment side of things and on the human touch side where it adds the most value as opposed to a lot of the diagnostic side where, in fact, the data could provide a massive amount of acceleration and improvement in quality of how we get our healthcare.

19:50

JIM: I know, Darren, you’ve got to run. I really appreciate the time you’ve taken. I would love to have you share with our audience, because I had a business that I was involved in with retail and we went online, we used Google AdWords, and it really helped, so all these logarithms that you talk about and helping the consumer find what they’re looking for quickly, boy, you can partner with a business and really make a difference. Maybe share with our audience a little bit about how that works and how they can get help. Are they stuck going online figuring it out for themselves or how does that all work?

20:21

DARREN PLEASANCE: Good question. Well, back to this world of constantly connected that I talked about a few minutes ago, as all of us know, since we’re all users of this, the reality is that when someone is going to buy something, the chance of them having already done an enormous amount of research online is quite high. If you think about the consumer buying and also businesses, it might be business buying behavior these days, people will typically go online first, do research around a product or a topic, and then, by the time they’re ready to buy, they have at least narrowed the list down of acceptable providers down typically to two or, at most, three. If you’re a business and you have not managed to be found through that online research process, your probability of being picked as a provider is dramatically reduced. That’s whether you’re a hair salon, whether you’re a lawyer, whether you’re someone who provides bedroom furniture for children, it doesn’t matter. Most of those types of products or services have been researched by the buyer typically in advance. What Google provides to help with that reality is a product called AdWords and it’s basically an online marketing engine that allows you to show up for people in various forms across the web. The most simple one that people probably are most familiar with is search marketing so, when somebody goes into Google Search and they type in a given term looking for something, when the results come back, you’ll see, typically, a set of ads that are well carved out, so we try to make it very explicit so people what’s advertising and what’s not, but it’s also relevant, and so you’ll see ads show up on those pages and that’s called search marketing. You can use AdWords to make sure that when someone searches for a given topic or theme, your ad shows up for part of the search results. We also have something called display advertising and so these are more like, almost like ads you would see in a magazine but, instead of being in a magazine, they’re populated over millions of websites around the world and so you can take either a picture of your business or a coupon for your business or even a video of your business and have it show up across Google’s display network. There’s, again, millions of sites and you can use AdWords basically to help you make those show up. That’s more useful for getting in front of people who may not yet know what they’re interested in but they’re on a site that’s related to something you sell and so you want to get your ad in front of them that way and so AdWords is a very powerful way to do that. Then, lastly, video has become a massive medium. All of us, I’m sure, use YouTube. It’s the second largest search engine in the world behind Google. Google owns YouTube. Obviously, a massive amount of video content in there and, to the extent you’ve got good content that you can engage people with through video, that’s another way to attract and educate customers. Last is we put metrics around all of this so, to me, the beauty of online marketing is much more measurable than called traditional advertising and so the AdWords engine along with Google analytics allows you to really track whether you’re getting any kind of return on the marketing dollars you spend, and we do have teams. To your last question there, you don’t have to do this all on your own. We’ve got partners out there who are solely focused on helping companies do this. We have teams here at Google. It’s a free service where we will work with you to help you learn how to do this and get started and you can just go on to Google and search AdWords and you’ll see a place to click there and you can either go in and sign up yourself or it will give you a phone number to call and those will call into my teams who are more than happy to help just get people started and get off and running.

23:22

JIM: And, again, whether you’re a small business or big business, if you’re not working online, the amount of commerce that’s going online has dramatically increased year after year after year as people get more comfortable with that way of providing products and services so I’d encourage anybody to check it out. It has worked for me personally. When I heard some of the things Google is doing, a lot of the corporate giants rest on their laurels and Google is doing anything but resting on their laurels. They’re continuing to innovate and making the world a better place so I really appreciate you sharing with us today, Darren.

23:54

DARREN PLEASANCE: Absolutely, I appreciate being invited to speak and I’m passionate about what Google does. I believe in our mission. I used to be a small business owner myself and I’ve got a lot of friends who own their own businesses and I love the fact that we’re able to help them every day so I feel good about what we’re doing.

24:05

JIM: Well, thanks again. I’ll let you run and we look forward to maybe having you on again in the future.

24:09

DARREN PLEASANCE: I’m more than happy to do it and I appreciate the invitation and the opportunity.

24:12

JIM: Thanks for joining us this week and tune in again next week as we explore another phase of the Real Wealth process and, remember, if anything you heard in today’s show you’d like to get more information about, contact your Real Wealth advisor. Also, if you feel that any of this information would be helpful to a friend or family member, just click the Forward to a Friend button.