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NEXT STEP

It's all about moonshots

Former Apple and PepsiCo CEO John Sculley talks about the next big thing

Moonshot

Noun: The act or procedure of launching a rocket or spacecraft to the moon.

This is how dictionaries define the term 'moonshot'. But today the term means something quite different. A moonshot is an idea so big, so bold, that it is thought to be impossible until it isn't anymore. We caught up with John Sculley, former CEO of Apple and PepsiCo (who will be played by Jeff Daniels in the new Steve Jobs movie) to talk about moonshots, what's going to be the next big thing and the startup he's been working on.

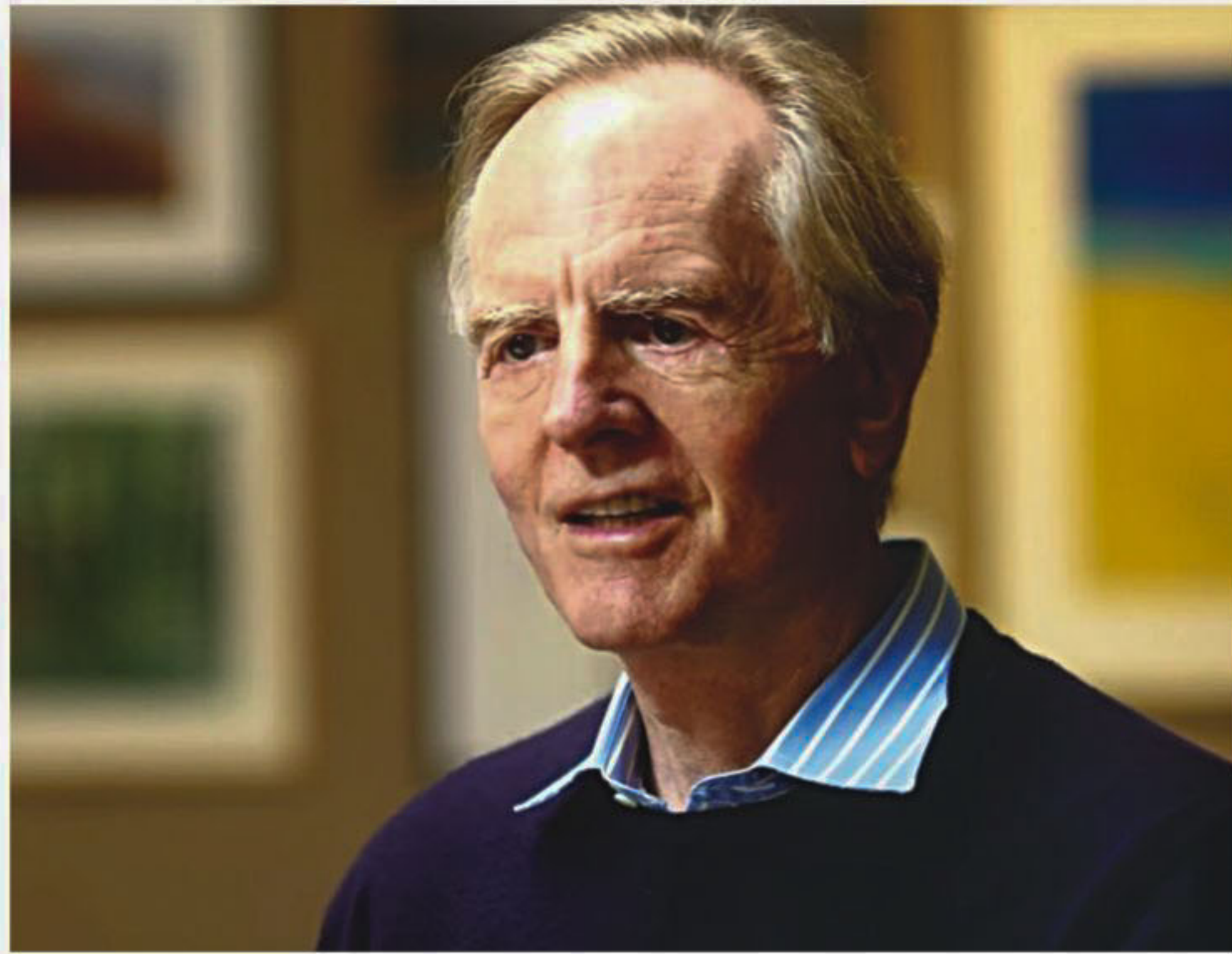
You often say that now's the best time to build a billion dollar business. Why is that?

I believe this is the perfect time to build a billion dollar business because technologies which were considered mindboggling just a decade ago are easily accessible for businesses and entrepreneurs at an extremely affordable price. We will get to see many game-changing initiatives - 'moonshots'.

Most multibillion dollar (tech) businesses are working on cloud computing, wireless sensors, big data, mobile devices and the upcoming 'Internet of things'. In addition to that, the West is recovering from a global recession. Money borrowing costs and inflation are quite low. Compared to my time, it will cost you a fraction to start a business today. Founders have become smarter. They start their businesses as almost-virtual-organisations. They take little to no pay at all during the incubation period and outsource most of the functions to specialised contractors. So building a billion dollar business from scratch is much easier.

How can an entrepreneur build a billion dollar business from scratch?

To be an entrepreneur, firstly you have to have a vision. You have to be passionate and optimistic. You have to have the mindset of doing whatever it takes to meet your goal. Then again, being overzealous might make



you blind to the fact that there may be obstacles in your way. To overcome that, you need to ask the right questions, as well as see your work from the eyes of the customers. The idea you have might require some fine-tuning so keep an eye out for improvements and feedback.

You also need to simplify. Steve Jobs was brilliant at that. He could zoom out, see the bigger picture and make things simpler from a consumer's perspective. If you focus on your customers and stick to your gut, you are bound to succeed.

What is the latest 'preneur' you are working on?

We are currently working on launching a smartphone that will create a buzz globally. It is called the 'Obi Worldphone'. Many might wonder why. After conducting

intensive research we came to realise that there is no product in the world that is as iconic as a cultural instrument as the smartphone. But there must be some gap in the market where you can bring great design and be able to differentiate. We plan to tap in that segment

How is your product going to be different?

Firstly, we are a design-driven company. Every decision we make about something the customer experiences is done through the lens of design. Robert Brunner (a former Apple design director and designer of the Dr. Dre product-line) was tasked with coming up with a handset that would appeal to consumers on both an aesthetic and financial level. The two models currently in the market, SF1 and SJ1, are empirical evidence to that very fact.

The smartphone market is seeing stiff competition, particularly in the mid-range budget segment. Only a few companies are making decent business here. Do you think your product will survive here?

It's true that HTC, Nokia, Sony, and others are hemorrhaging money. We realised this was because of the corporate overhead, legacy R&D expenses, and big field hierarchy. But you don't build companies like that anymore. You need to start from scratch, particularly with the Silicon Valley model. So we implemented just that. The hardest part of designing this product was not coming up with a cool design. Rather we were sweating over the details in our Chinese factories because they were not accustomed to delivering such demanding finished products. We had teams all over in China, working for months on the floor every day to bring the best possible product at the best possible price.

What would be the target market? How do you plan to promote it? Are we going to see them in Bangladesh?

The next two billion of the world's middle class will be from emerging markets like Asia, Africa and the Middle East. They will be our target market. These consumers will want low-cost mobile phones that combine functionality and design. Our phone embodies both. Also, our marketing approach is going to be different. Unlike others we believe our product will speak for itself. We will rely on old-fashioned word-of-mouth. We make beautiful phones that people will certainly tell their friends about. That's all the marketing we need.

Hopefully, by the end of the fourth quarter of 2015 we are going to bring Obi smartphones to the Bangladeshi market.

INTERVIEWED BY: SHAHRIAR RAHMAN

Engineer-turned-writer, Shahriar Rahman is Sub-Editor of the tech publication of The Daily Star. He is also Head of Operations at HiFi Public

IEEE PRO TALKS 2015: AN INITIATIVE TO CREATE

IEEE Bangladesh Section held the IEEE Professional Talks (IEEE Pro Talks) on October 10, 2015 at Bangladesh University of Engineering & Technology. It was a new initiative to create an open online courseware for Bangladeshi engineering professionals that incorporated lessons from successful tech entrepreneurs, leaders and managers. Pro Talks covered three major areas: technical entrepreneurship, technical leadership and technical management.

Shah Ali Newaz Topu, CTO of Secure Link Services, talked about building teams, managing funds, and dealing with investors in the keynote speech. This was followed by a panel discussion consisting of Jennifer Farrel, Founder & CEO of Critikalink; Md. Miftah Uddin, Co-Founder and CEO of Ubiritrix Inc.; Weidong Xue), MD of Solarland; and MD. Hasibur Rashid, Director & CMO, Novotel Ltd.

At the end of the first round of talks, participants and speakers got to meet one another in a networking session. The second session started with Tanzim Sakib, DX Lead of Microsoft, talking about technical leadership. In a panel discussion between Syeda Kamrun Ahmed, Director (Strategy & Planning), Akhoni.Com Ltd.; Tanveer Ehsanur, Director, Spectrum Engineering Consortium Ltd.; Dr. Reduan Hasan Khan, DGM & Head (CSS), Grameenphone; and S M Altaf Hossain, Founding MD & CEO, Drik ICT Ltd. dissected technical leadership in a more generalised manner.

At the last session, Intekhab Sadekin, Tech Manager, IT of IMS Health, presented the qualities required of a technical manager. Maruf Ahmed, Deputy Director & Head (Operation & Maintenance), Banglalink; Selima Ahmad, President, BWCCI & Vice President, Nitel Group; and Anamika Bhakta, Vice President, Technical Regulation, Regulatory Affairs, Robi Axiata Ltd. drew from their own experiences and presented their views on technical management.

EMPLOYER BRANDING

The way to bring in talent for local firms



According to a 2014 report by the Economist Intelligence Unit, nearly 5 out of every 10 Bangladeshi graduates are unemployed. That's half of the five hundred thousand graduating every year in our country. While solutions like industry-university coalitions have been proposed, a major problem still persists under our very noses. Why are the local conglomerates claiming the lack of a talented workforce when the multinationals seem to have a never ending list of candidates?

Looking over the several disciplines that both the public and private universities offer, two disciplines stand out like brick kilns in the distance; BBA and engineering. In both the disciplines, if you ask any student where they aspire to work, the first 5 options if not all would be MNCs. This leads to the fact that local firms (even though booming) are the last place any freshmen in these disciplines want to work in. Ultimately feeding to the bigger problem in two ways; the talented ones go to MNCs, and the ones who do join local firms are unhappy and look for avenues to get into MNCs.

The MNCs have done an amazing job of branding not only their products but also their workplace. Companies like Unilever, BAT, and Grameenphone have invested both time and money to create a workplace that attracts the talented graduate pool in the country.

The locals however have a long way to go to even come anywhere near the employer brands these companies hold. However they must start. The local firms are expanding. Firms like Pran-RFL and ACI are just examples of conglomerates that are growing and have the potential to grow even further. However what the locals must understand is that to sustain this growth, they need talented managers. Individuals who are willing to become business leaders for their organisations and will both capture and sustain market share. To get hold of these individuals, local firms must let go of their "why fix what isn't broken" philosophy. It's time for them to step up and join the game.

Employer branding is a serious lacking amongst the local firms. It's essential that they establish a unique employer brand in the market to differentiate them and attract talented graduates to work for them. However they must also understand that employer

branding isn't a one day gimmick but rather a commitment that must be pursued all the way through. Recruiting the talents is one thing, keeping them is another. A proper employer brand aims to fulfil both objectives.

While some firms having the environment and achievements to boast an impressive employer brand lack communication, others miss out on the entire concept of employer branding. Local firms before starting the flashy front end of employer branding (recruitment) must align their back end (work environment and career prospects) to what the graduates are expecting and what they can provide. Talented graduates at the end of the day seek two things over money; work environment and career progression. Both of the aspects can be provided by local firms with a little HR shaping.

With a proper core value settled, local firms can then seek to reach out and brand themselves as a certain type of employers. The recent start-up phenomena is a great example as how to these small ventures brand themselves to prospective employees. Fun, adventure, and thrill are three characteristics that the startups have used to attract their employee market. Likewise the local conglomerates can use their own set of characteristics to bring about a unique employer brand.

The only way we can observe a rise in local employer brands is if the local firms start now. Start with the current employees you have. Create an environment and career progression plan for them. Remember your current employees are the first point of contact with the talented graduate pool. Hiring every year isn't also a fix prerequisite for employer branding. But by providing a nurturing environment and a proper career progression plan your hires will ensure your employer brand persists in the market even when you're not hiring. And when you do need a new hire, your employer brand will line the best talented graduates outside your door.

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Making a DIFFERENCE

Bangladesh is rapidly moving towards middle income status by 2021. Our businesses definitely offer immense opportunities for the growing economy and this diversity needs a stage for the stories untold. See Bangladesh make its mark on the global map as Making a Difference brings you our proudest success stories from across the country.

4 people you should add to your network now

You've gotten over your initial fear of going up to a complete stranger and striking a conversation. You've even accumulated quite an impressive stack of business cards. Proud of yourself? Getting someone's card is the easy part. Knowing which of these people can and will help you in your career is the real challenge. Here are four people you should add to your network to advance your career.

The mentor

This one's a bit obvious, but we often undermine exactly how important it is to have someone to objectively criticise your ideas, offer advice, organise your thoughts, and help you create a plan. A mentor doesn't have to be someone you've been close to since your school/university days or someone who's high up in the world. It could be someone who's moving up the ladder, getting promotions and bigger responsibilities. Someone who's aware of what needs to be done and is approachable enough to offer their two cents.

The inside guy

We're well aware of the dangers of gossiping in your professional life - it'll come back to stab you in the back sooner or later. So instead of getting comfortable with the office gossip girl, find someone who knows the industry dirt and is willing to share it - an insider. Although the whole affair may sound seedy at first, the insider isn't just any company guy with a big mouth. They're well-connected and known for their observation and listening skills.

While you may come across people like this all the time, you will have to build a solid professional relationship with them to gain their trust. You need to put some serious time and effort into it because most people won't give you the inside-scoop just because you're asking.

The man with the plan

It's fairly easy to spot the man with the plan, aka, the visionary. This is one person you can be sure to inspire you with fresh ideas and energy when you're

in a rut. But obviously, their usefulness extends to beyond that.

The visionary is always coming up with new ideas, networking, and executing exciting projects. They're full of great career advice and know the right people in the right places. While it may seem daunting at first to approach someone like this, they're usually hanging out at networking events, meeting new people. So take a deep breath and make that first move. Make a compliment, smile, and continue from where you left off on social media.

The kid

In our race to the top, it gets harder to start looking down. We're too busy thinking about the next big contact, the next big job. That's why it's always handy to have a young perspective.

Having someone young in your circle will help you stay updated with how the industry's changing from the ground up. It's also undeniably refreshing to see someone who's enthusiastic and passionate. Who knows, he or she could just be the next big thing.

Selfish motives aside, this is also a great opportunity for you to bag some points in the mentor department. You've been there, done that - your experience could be of great use to someone who's just starting out.

So slow down for a second and reach out to the wide-eyed junior at your alma mater or the fresh grad in the office.

While it's good to know a wide array of people across industries, don't start your network without a purpose. Play it smart and keep an eye out for these people.

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