

-- [00:00:00] **Ash Ashutosh:** Waves of changes happen, and we can either try to figure them out, take some time, understand and figure out how what you want to pursue is aligned with or in some ways improved by this new wave, or we just stay and become a dinosaur. And I hate being a dinosaur, so.

[00:00:24] **Ryan Newman:** This is Dare to Disrupt, a podcast about Penn State alumni who are innovators, entrepreneurs and leaders and the stories behind their success. I'm your host, Ryan Newman, and on the show today is Ash Ashutosh. Ash is a serial entrepreneur and the global director of solution sales at Google. With over three decades of operational and strategy experience, Ash has had the privilege of working with who he considers to be some of the most passionate, smart and skilled people to build companies at all stages. He has founded three companies with successful exits and was on the leadership team of one startup that executed an IPO. He considers himself fortunate to have experience on all sides of the business table, from engineer to senior executive, small startup to global enterprise, vendor to customer, raising capital to investing capital, getting acquired to leading acquisitions. And from being the learner to being the advisor, Ash graduated from Penn State with a master's in computer science.

[00:01:31] **Ryan Newman:** Ash, I'd like to welcome you to the Dare to disrupt podcast. This is a first for us. You are the first entrepreneur that we've had the chance to interview who was acquired by a large technology company like Google. Also, you're one of our few very rare unicorn founders as well, which we'll get into in a moment. But at the start, I just want to thank you so much for making time for us.

[00:01:53] **Ash Ashutosh:** My pleasure, Ryan. It was a long time since we first talked about this one and I'm glad we could make this one happen.

[00:01:59] **Ryan Newman:** Well, we always like to start at the beginning, Ash, and so for us it would really be to take us back to your childhood where you grew up and how it all started for you, if you can start with just those early formative years.

[00:02:11] **Ash Ashutosh:** Yeah, I was born in a town called Hyderabad in India.

I was a mediocre student. I think I was one of those who was interested in everything and not really good at any one thing. But I also went to a school called Hyderabad Public School, which is an amazing platform that provided all kinds of activities and an opportunity to engage in pretty much anything, whether it's academics, of course, material or music or sports. So when you have so many choices, it becomes very hard for someone like me to say, oh, I'm just going to focus on one thing, so here I am. And my parents were phenomenally good at supporting me in all kinds of crazy pursuits I was doing. So I had a great family, great school, great set of friends, and just a very happy childhood to pursue what I wanted to do.

[00:03:03] **Ryan Newman:** So, the decision to come to the United States and then ultimately Penn State, was that something that you started talking about with your parents when you were very young? Did that kind of come on the scene later and what was sort of the discussions in your household, take us into your home and the discussions you were having about how that decision was made?

[00:03:18] **Ash Ashutosh:** Yeah, so I actually finished my engineering, graduated from a school called Kakatiya Institute of Technology, and I went to pursue a career in electrical engineering. And I love, I love electrical engineering, electronics. And I went to do my first job, and this was in a power generation company. This was a large organization called National Thermal Power Corporation, as they call it, NTPC. And what I found out pretty quickly was a lot of what I was doing was actually software wasn't the electrical engineering that I thought. I wasn't carrying around my soldering iron and winding copper wire anymore. And so, I also found myself pretty lacking in those skills. So, by that time, I had also gotten married to my wonderful wife ---- and we sat and chatted. I said, okay there's two ways to pursue this. I could just do what I was supposed to do, or really go back and do what I think is required to be really successful in what I wanted to do.

And she was an amazing person, she still is, just an amazing person to support. So we had a chat, I said okay --- let's go to grad school and I'm going to be a poor grad student again. And that was probably the toughest part, just going from a nice place where you get paid well to land as a grad student at Penn State with no money and trudge your way through from where you stayed to the school every day. But I think that was important. It was one of those things you invest in in order to pursue what you wanted to do.

[00:04:56] Ryan Newman: So, this idea of taking one step back, to take two steps forward, that sort of concept.

[00:05:01] Ash Ashutosh: Yeah, because oftentimes and I've seen this every time, waves of changes happen. And we can either try to figure them out, take some time, understand, and figure out how what you want to pursue is aligned with or in some ways improved by this new wave, or we just stay and become a dinosaur. And I hate being a dinosaur. So, this was super important.

[00:05:25] Ryan Newman: Amazing. So, Ash, we'd love to hear how you eventually came to the US. And more importantly, to Penn State. And I understand that your full name Ashutosh. Ashutosh actually had its origin at Penn State. If you wouldn't mind telling that story as well.

[00:05:40] Ash Ashutosh: Yeah. First thing, I applied to multiple schools. I didn't know much about many of these schools, but the decision was pretty much based on two factors. One, Penn State was generous enough to give me an assistantship that defrauded a lot of the tuition cost. And second, several people that I knew who had been to Penn State before in those days, familiarity of someone who was already at a place and the fact they didn't have to worry about at least most of the tuition really helped. The first thing you find out now, this is we're talking about late 80s now. Very different India that I was coming from than the India it is now, you have some cultural surprises. Like, you wonder why the light switches are upside down and milk is actually in plastic satchets instead of nice glass bottles.

But those are minor things. But bigger thing was when I landed at registration, he said, what's your name? I said Ashutosh, A-S-H-U-T-O-S-H. What's your last name? Said no. None. Because in India it's not uncommon to have just one name. So she enters the name and hits an enter on the system and says, Nope, you need a last name. I said I don't have one. So, she said, OK, I'll just make your last name the same as your first name. So hey, not only did I get a great degree from Penn State, I also got a name from Penn State.

[00:07:02] Ryan Newman: Amazing.

And it stuck ever since. Although obviously you go by the first name Ash, but your formal name as it relates to the US is Ashutosh Ashutosh.

[00:07:11] Ash Ashutosh: That's right. That is right.

[00:07:13] Ryan Newman: So, you come to Penn State and what was your course of study and what actual degree did you end up getting from Penn State?

[00:07:19] Ash Ashutosh: So I graduated with a master's in computer Science. At that time, computer science was in school of math, which is kind of where computer science originated to begin with. It then became more of an engineering program.

[00:07:31] Ryan Newman: And less twining of copper wire at this point, I presume.

[00:07:35] Ash Ashutosh: Oh, it was great. I could sit in my room and design copper wire rather than actually have to get my hands dirty anymore. Yeah, I think in general I think that I was very fortunate enough to be at the cusp of this entire field starting out. Every step of the way of my career was shaped by the timing of the opportunity. I was really fortunate to be in that time.

[00:08:00] Ryan Newman: Well, let's get into that. The first question to lead into the discussion, you've talked about a passion for engineering. You've talked about a passion for coding and software in relation to the engineering desire and background. What I haven't yet heard you say is a passion for actual entrepreneurship. Can you talk about if that was a seed that was planted early or something that developed more later on in response to these waves of change you're describing?

[00:08:23] Ash Ashutosh: Every day before I go to sleep, I need to add some value, whatever it is something I have to do that day that makes you feel like, okay, I've been given this life. I need to add something into this world. And it could be it's 11:00 at night and I didn't do anything. It was one of those lazy days. And then in this case, I'll go find a broken appliance and fix it and then go to sleep. Right, but I love that. I love the idea that you're trying to make some difference and in the process you learn, in the process you also give.

And I think it's that pursuit that gets me into this whole world of entrepreneurship. What happens in many organizations is you tend not to have that opportunity. You tend to spend a lot more time organizing things for scale. And you find that a startup entrepreneur gives you a platform to pursue two things, right? One, being able to add value, and two, being able to work with some amazing people. Amazing people who are driven just like you are.

[00:09:27] Ryan Newman: And so, you graduate with this computer science master's degree. And what were some of those early experiences that you went into after? And were the waves of change at that point already starting or did it come later?

[00:09:39] Ash Ashutosh: We were in the early days of what you would call open systems. Things were mainframe mini computers and we were starting out the entire world of Windows and intel, which dominated how **compute went**, changed, and really became part of the masses. Phenomenal opportunity. Everything was new. I had the opportunity to be on the cusp of an entire new wave of innovation that I was perfectly positioned for. More specifically, I ended up in the data storage and data management arena. Very early days, we were still trying to figure out how systems work with each other, how computers connected to storage systems, how data is organized. And that's an incredible experience. In the first seven years of my career, I'd worked at two different places. I think almost every one of those products that we built during that time is still in use because they were still foundational. That was just a coincidentally fortunate timing and experience and really helped me go build the rest of the entrepreneur journey I've had.

[00:10:43] Ryan Newman: So you start off working for these existing businesses that were there. You're working as an engineer or software designing software product. It's amazing to think that a lot of those things you designed still are in process today, given just a half-life of technology in general. And then at what point did you take that entrepreneur leap of going off on your own? What was the first effort in that direction and what was the problem you were trying to solve?

[00:11:07] Ash Ashutosh: Yeah, after about seven years, I had reached a point where I was managing a group of people. I was working for a large company, and pretty soon projects that were supposed to take about a year started taking two. Things were slowing down. I would get up in the morning I remember still telling my wife one day, like, this is Monday, and I really don't feel like going to work because there's really nothing I could add value. And she is an amazing person. She says, well, if you don't like it, just quit. At that point in time in that large company in Wichita, Kansas, you did not quit your job. You joined, and then you retired. You didn't walk out. Thanks to my very supportive wife, I have the courage to quit. So that was the start of the journey. You know, somebody asked me about the journey of entrepreneur. I would say it was because I was bored in my job, not because I had an idea, not because I knew what I was going to do. It was just that I just didn't want to do what I was doing. That's it.

You think it's amazing? It's actually if some entrepreneur came to me and asked for advice in the same scenario, I would call him nuts. Like, really, just go figure it out first. Don't just quit.

[00:12:22] Ryan Newman: Well, what's amazing is what ultimately resulted.

So the naivete of how you were leaving. You've just explained what was that first business? Did things eventually catch fire? Obviously, you're a serial entrepreneur. Or was it really not till the next business that you really started to figure out this whole entrepreneur process and how to really start a company and solve for a solution?

[00:12:43] Ash Ashutosh: Yeah, I always knew. Like I said, I love building, fixing things, so I knew I would do something.

I didn't know what I was going to do. I happened to have a site manager who also was restless like me. The two of us, we all stepped out, and two more people joined us afterwards. So, there were four of us, and we all sat, met for the first time after we quit and said, okay, now what do we do? By that time, I had been working with intel on an IO standard that was being developed for the industry. So I reached out to them and said, Look, I quit. Do you want me to consult with you? So intel was very gracious enough to give me a consulting gig to build some software for one of the chips they were building. That got us going. So we spent some time looking around, and then one of my colleagues reached out to various people we had known before. One of the gentlemen who was a CTO at sun said, hey, look, I'm trying to build a chip. Nobody's really interested because they think the volume of that business is pretty small. We said, look, we got nothing else to do. We will build anything. And we started out on that one. We got some more investment from Sun Microsystems to help us build the chip.

And it was fascinating to watch something that was born out of nothing into a business that became a silicon that pretty much went into most storage companies in a very, very short term. We started in 97. By 99, we were embedded into most storage companies systems. We got acquired by another company that happened to have a silicon that used to sit next to us and saw an opportunity for synergies.

[00:14:27] Ryan Newman: So that business was Serrano Systems?

[00:14:30] Ash Ashutosh: Yes.

[00:14:30] Ryan Newman: That you had founded and it was acquired by Vitesse?

[00:14:36] Ash Ashutosh: Vitesse Semiconductor.

Vitesse was a company that built really high-speed silicon and they noticed that every time they sold a silicon, there was this another little chip sitting next to it that became part of the overall solution.

[00:14:48] Ryan Newman: So it's pretty incredible is that basically within ten years of when you came to Penn State, you had your first exit of your first business.

[00:14:55] Ash Ashutosh: Yeah. And in hindsight, it sounds like most things, right when you're in the middle of the battle, you don't really see what's going on in hindsight. Yeah, you're right.

[00:15:05] Ryan Newman: Incredible. And so you have this business exit. And how quickly after you sold Serrano Systems, were you already thinking about the next idea or the next business you wanted to found?

[00:15:18] Ash Ashutosh: I went to join a company called Storage Networks, was based in Boston, and two gentlemen, Peter Bell and Bill Miller, who were founders. Peter was a CEO, just a phenomenal CEO. And Bill was an amazing businessman and technologist. He took the company public in 2000, which is what brought me to Boston. My first stage was really building silicon. Next stage was slowly starting to move. And you'll see this throughout my career. I keep moving up the stack, talking about those waves. I sit down, I learn, and then I say, okay, that's where I can add more value.

[00:15:53] Ryan Newman: So in your path of continuing to traverse up the storage stack, what came next after such a quick turnaround with Storage Networks?

[00:16:02] Ash Ashutosh: So, Storage Networks went public in 2001 and really pioneered what you would today call cloud storage. Way back. It was called Storage Service Provider. It was one of those brilliant ideas about how do you make storage available like electricity is available to you as a service. But 2001 took its toll in the entire IT market and it did on Storage Networks too. So became very clear. One of the experiences out of watching that storage industry during the .com boom was the amazing amount of money spent by companies acquiring IT assets, especially storage assets. And when the crash happened, it was clear that there was an opportunity to figure out how to rationalize all that spend. That was a big market opportunity. And same thing. I've been a small company person, I've been a large company executive. I've been a person who's asked for money, given money, got my companies required, acquired companies. But the one experience that really changed how you think about building a business is being a customer.

So 2001, we took that experience and started a company called App IQ. And it was all about how do you optimize the storage assets you have? How do you manage all the storage assets? You have what is called the storage management industry. And pretty quickly, by 2004, 2005, we were the market leaders.

We ended up owning pretty much majority of the market by that time, and we had several competitors. But I think that experience of being a customer made a much bigger difference on how you focus on building a product, building a business.

[00:17:46] Ryan Newman: It's amazing. You talk about this idea being the customer versus the vendor and what you learn as a customer, then taking that knowledge of going back and potentially being a future vendor. It's very interesting, very insightful. So, App IQ, you quickly corner and become the market leader, and what was the eventual outcome for that business?

[00:18:05] Ash Ashutosh: So 2005, we had pretty quickly realized we were playing with the big dogs here. We were going after some of the largest accounts. We were about 200 people. We didn't have the wherewithal to go support some of the largest organizations. Those people required all 200 people plus another 2000 to support them. So we took a path of partnering with various large organizations to be their OEM supplier. So they would distribute our product, we would customize it for them. And so we had again, once again, Sun Microsystems comes into the play. They were a big partner, Hitachi Data Systems, Bo, a company called Symbios Logic, who was my former employer when I first left, if you remember, in Wichita, Kansas, I still had some of those folks who were in the storage business. Pretty much everybody except the one big competitor we had called EMC in Boston. So EMC was our major competitor, and pretty much everybody else in the storage industry was distributing our product. So that's how we got a very efficient go to market and sales approach and became a leader in that space. And then two different companies later, we ended up being acquired by HP. And that was my first big exit to a large tech company, a company with some global footprint by that time.

[00:19:23] Ryan Newman: Can you talk for a minute about how you were able to scale the business so quickly to be such a market leader? How much of that ability to have a market leading position within literally less than five years of being created? How much of that was just due to the waves of change in the industry and being first mover in a dynamically changing industry versus something organic or unique to the business you were creating? Or maybe a bit of both.

[00:19:50] Ash Ashutosh: Yeah. And personally, we were not the first mover. There were other companies in this space. But I would keep coming back to my experience as a customer, my experience of being able to come to the Ryan, my customer, and talk in a language that you understand, as opposed to maybe Ash three years before who would come and tell Ryan about

how wonderful my idea was and how you should really give me a chance? As opposed to Ryan, I understand you spent \$400 million in buying storage in the last four years, and you don't know what to do with it. Let me help you figure out forget about what I do. Let me talk about what you do and what your problem is. Right? And this is new. This is still an evolving process because we as engineers love what we do. We love building things, we love sharing about it.

And having that empathy really helped us really help figure out how best to approach it and more importantly, where to focus our investments.

Then we got smarter about how do you do the distribution and sales.

We obviously invested on our own for some time, but it was finding leverage. It was constantly looking for what you would call cost of acquiring customers today in the pack. But it was about finding better routes to market that are more efficient and scale a lot better than constantly raising money. That really got the attention. And I just love the idea of adding value to a customer, to a partner, creating a win win situation all the time. Because I absolutely believe, like I said before, it's about relationships. It's about making sure there's a better place out there that really helped. There are three favorite books I love and the first one **is entire journey** is called The Innovator's Dilemma. Clayton Christensen wrote this book called Innovator's Dilemma, which is probably the ultimate bible for anybody who is thinking about why a startup.

[00:21:42] Ryan Newman: And the other two, you mentioned three.

[00:21:44] Ash Ashutosh: The other one is probably my favorite book. Ben Horowitz wrote this book called The Hard Thing about Hard Things.

Probably the most brutally frank book that every entrepreneur in running mid stage companies goes through. And you would first time you read it, it's like, yeah, I'm never going to be in this position. I will never make the mistakes Ben did.

Second time you get into trouble, you go back like, let me go back to page 68 and see what the heck did he do? And you run into the third time and the fourth time and then you say, gosh, this guy has done it all and he's been brutally frank and it turns into a Bible. So think of Innovators Dilemma as your Bible in the first phase of your startup. The Hard Thing about Hard Things is where you go through the most difficult part of building a company. You actually have something to lose. The first one, you don't have much to lose.

[00:22:38] Ryan Newman: And then a third book.

[00:22:39] Ash Ashutosh: And of course third one is about this is about good to great. This is classic book about, okay, how do you then scale things? How do you get to a point where it's less about the high touch and more about the high impact, leveraging as many resources as you can find.

[00:22:57] Ryan Newman: So you sell to HP, you sell to a big tech enterprise company. Most people at that point would be done. You've now had two successful exits, but you're not most people, Ash and so what came next?

[00:23:11] Ash Ashutosh: So HP was just an amazing experience. For the first time, I was in a large company as an executive. Just if you just look back, we're talking about 2005. If you rewind it's just 15 years ago, I'd come from India. That's an amazing opportunity to learn. HP is a legendary company. You still have people there who are there from the very beginning. You learn a lot about what it takes to build a company.

And for about two and a half years, I stayed there as part of the storage organization, as a CTO for that organization. But two and a half years into it, our son was first going to go to high school. And once again, my wife, the wise one in the family, steps up and says, well, once a kid goes to

or kid goes to high school, you'll be a different person. Maybe we should take some time. So, must have been July. And that very first day was when I had transitioned out of HP. And then we took off for about two and a half months, went to India. First time in my life, I had no job, no health insurance. My phone was silent. Like, no emails, no calls. It was a scary time. I still remember telling my wife as I was leaving, hey, I got this \$6 billion business that we were running at that time.

I wonder what's going to happen if I leave? And she said, Trust me, nothing will happen. Nobody cares, and just give yourself way more credit than you really should. And she was much more grounded. She said don't worry. And there is that withdrawal symptoms you have in the first couple of weeks.

What, I don't matter anymore? Nobody calls me. Nobody sends me an email. Then you realize it was my focus. And that was my opportunity to really spend some time. Because one of the things that happens in startups is it takes a toll on your family.

It absolutely takes us. Now, I was fortunate enough to have a saint in my wife and a phenomenal two boys who really could deal with the fact that I was nonstop 24 by seven doing something. And oftentimes they took a backseat to that.

So it was a good opportunity for us to just focus on them, spend the time and take a break.

[00:25:31] Ryan Newman: But you're not one to sit around for long and let grass grow. Ash and so what got you motivated to come off the bench and start yet another company?

[00:25:39] Ash Ashutosh: Well, before I started a company, so in between, a gentleman named Bill Hellman, who was a partner at Greylock, reached out and said, look, we are trying to put some enterprise business in Boston. Would you consider coming in as a partner.

Met with the partnership and decided I was going to pursue one more thing I had never done in my life, which was being a venture capital investor.

[00:26:05] Ryan Newman: So, just as before, you talked about the first time you became a customer, you learned all the things the vendors were doing wrong. The first time you became a professional investor, what did that, how did that inform your thinking as somebody sitting on the other side of the table as an entrepreneur or founder looking to raise money?

[00:26:24] Ash Ashutosh: Well, I think the first thing I used to remember is a common phrase you still hear, and probably I said it a couple of times, he just didn't get it.

Most common phrase, like, I would go do a pitch and some investor would say, well, thank you, but XYZ reason we can't pursue it. And you would walk out of there saying, man, that guy just never got it.

And I used to tell people when they said that, it's like, hey, it's not whether they got it or not. It's a question that you didn't do your job selling it. It's not their job to understand your business. It's your job to really explain. Because for the first time, I sat on the other side and said, I don't understand what this person is talking about.

[00:27:05] Ryan Newman: The difference between a compelling offer versus a persuasive argument. What are you doing to be compelling?

[00:27:11] Ash Ashutosh: Yeah, it's the entrepreneur's job to convince an investor.

[00:27:16] Ryan Newman: So you're a venture capitalist, you're at Greylock as capital, as a partner, but you still had one more in you. What took you to that?

[00:27:26] Ash Ashutosh: Yeah, so I think one of the things that there was a very interesting

model. In fact, it's a similar model that Mike Spicer follows, which is you invest and then you take on an operational role for a few months until you get this company off the ground, and then you bring in professional management to take over. And I love that. I love the ability to go back and forth between continuing to keep your operational chops going while you went back into investment or new ideas. And FTP was supposed to be one of those it's one of those investment thesis. I was supposed to go invest, find some great talent, and then come back. But I loved being an operations person. I loved working with people on a mission. Came down to, okay, where would the next step be? I just stayed on as a founder CEO journey for about eleven years after that.

[00:28:15] Ryan Newman: And so that was

Actifio.

[00:28:17] Ash Ashutosh: Yeah.

[00:28:18] Ryan Newman: And Actifio ultimately, what was the problem that Actifio was trying to address or solve in the marketplace?

[00:28:25] Ash Ashutosh: Yeah. So if you recall now, I started in 90s in silicon. I moved up in 2000s into storage software. And this was now about data management. Now you're going up the stack. Okay, so we solved the basic building problem, we solved the box problem. Now we need to solve the problem of what's inside the box, which is a whole bunch of data. So FTP was all about figuring out how do you more efficiently manage, protect, and use data that organizations once again, I love the idea of looking at disruptions, of inevitably this happens, right? Something succeeds and you end up having a lot of it. Now I need to figure out how to rationalize it, secure it better, use it. We were dealing with a different kind of a customer, somebody who really valued what the data was all about. And this included some of the largest organizations in the world.

And we became specialists in becoming probably the pioneers in managing huge amounts of data that nobody else could. Energy companies, retail, all the organizations that have a lot of data became customers for us. And by that time, I'd also figured out that you needed to have a lot more capital. You needed to control your own destiny a lot more. You needed to build for the long term. So you learn, innovate and hopefully you become better.

[00:29:49] Ryan Newman: Well, what's interesting is that this was among your longest tenures at any one of these businesses. I mean, some of these businesses, you literally were founding them and then having a transaction or an exit within four and five years of their founding. How long did you from the time of Actifio's founding till its ultimate sale to Google, how long were you involved?

[00:30:08] Ash Ashutosh: It was eleven years.

Yeah, it was three startups.

[00:30:12] Ryan Newman: Three startups. Expand on that. When you say it was three startups.

[00:30:16] Ash Ashutosh: Generally people think of startups as a four year, five year journey, and subsequently in the last ten years, it's become more like a seven to ten year journey as the winner takes all approach started happening.

But generally it was kind of remember, my first company exited in two years. Second one was four years. Okay, so if you keep going on the trajectory, maybe eight years, but it was eleven years by the time we exited.

[00:30:44] Ryan Newman: And what do you attribute that duration of tenure to in terms of running that business compared to the previous businesses before ultimately exiting?

[00:30:51] Ash Ashutosh: Yeah, I think the scope of the problem we were addressing was huge. It was bigger than anything we had done before.

The market opportunity was gigantic. This was about data. This was about being able to use the data that companies had, and we were solving the problem of being able to use that at scale that nobody else could. That is exciting.

In between, there were various stages at which we probably would have been prepared for a public offering.

But you ran into the cycles of financial industry where you hit it, when you hit a bump, you hit an air pocket, then you have to stay there for the next two to three years before you come back to the next one. So you got into some of those cycles.

But it was exciting. It was exciting to watch build, solve problems that seemed like you had endless amount of runway to go address because there was just so much of an opportunity.

[00:31:48] Ryan Newman: And ultimately, even though you didn't have a public offering exit, you did achieve another notable distinction, which was you achieved a market capitalization or evaluation in excess of a billion dollars, which is defined as a unicorn company. What was, for you what was, was that something that you sort of took note of as an achievement, or it was more of just a signpost along the way in the broader journey?

[00:32:10] Ash Ashutosh: It was a signpost. I still remember, I still say this, right? I would rather be a mule to my customer than a unicorn to my investor, because ultimately, that's what matters. That's exactly what matters, because you are from the market, you know, cycles that define valuation of a company. But as a customer, you know, the value that the company creates sustainably over time. And that is the only resilient thing. That's everything. I mean, oftentimes the public company CEOs have the toughest time. Okay, why is my stock down?

I don't know. Were we doing anything different yesterday? Are we going to do anything different tomorrow? Stuff happens. And so I think the valuation status is an interesting article for the media for someone to talk about, but it really doesn't change how a customer sees and how we used to see ourselves.

[00:33:04] Ryan Newman: Well, thank you, Ash, for taking the time to really take us through your journey along the storage stack. I'd now like to hand things over to our current Penn State student, Bianca Wisekall. Bianca is a third year student at Penn State studying agribusiness management. She holds a leadership role within Nittany Entrepreneur Society, Penn State's student entrepreneurship club. She's also an administrative operations intern within Invent Penn State, and she is a technician and lab monitor at Origin Labs Invent Penn State's all new fabrication space. Bianca, I'll now hand the interview over to you.

[00:33:40] Bianca Wisekal: Hi. Thank you so much. So one of the questions I have for you, Ash, is what is your motivation factor to keep going? How do you balance your work life and personal life once you've reached the C suite?

[00:33:51] Ash Ashutosh: Yeah. Thank you, Bianca. And I think one of the things, Bianca, I wanted to ask you is when I was going to school, we used to have 24 hours in a day. I'm thinking you have 80 hours in a day, because the number of things you do seems to be a lot more than we could do. So kudos. Congratulations.

[00:34:09] Bianca Wisekal: Yeah. Sometimes I ask myself, how many hours are there really, in a day? Because I get that, oh, it's already 08:00, and I've done two shifts, two classes, but it's all in a good days of work. I love what I do, and I'm very grateful for the opportunities that have been given to me.

[00:34:26] Ash Ashutosh: That is the most important part right? Just having the opportunity do what you want to do, being grateful for it, getting excited that by 08:00, a.m. Already got a lot of things accomplished, and that's exactly what keeps me going. Your question about what keeps you going is exactly that of the ability for being able to get up in the morning and say, gosh, I love what I do and the opportunity that's given, whether it's by amazing folks that I'm surrounded by, family that I'm surrounded by. We all live by some core beliefs, and I think I always lived by the core belief of my life is about two things at one, being able to add value and being able to support my incredible family.

[00:35:09] Bianca Wisekal: Yeah, absolutely.

[00:35:09] Ash Ashutosh: And if I can do that, getting up in the morning with something that I love to do around engineering, hey, what more can I ask for?

[00:35:17] Bianca Wisekal: That's the best way to live life. Doing what you love doing. That's what I'm trying to do.

[00:35:21] Ash Ashutosh: It's a boring job that I have to do, but most of the time I end up doing what I want to do.

[00:35:27] Bianca Wisekal: Yeah, that's the goal, working towards that. Yeah.

[00:35:29] Ash Ashutosh: And it's amazing when somebody actually pay you for it.

[00:35:32] Bianca Wisekal: So, what are some of your technology predictions for 2030? Do you think that there will be flying cars or just maybe microchips manufactured in the United States?

[00:35:42] Ash Ashutosh: Technology and world is a pretty broad facet, and my visibility is a very small window. Being at the place that I work in, the technology background I have the opinion I give will be within that window. But I see in the last ten years, maybe twelve years, there's a new inflection point. And every time an inflection point happens, fundamentally, businesses that used to exist before get transformed. Nothing much new happens. Amazon isn't a new way of doing something. It was an old retail store in a different way. Netflix isn't something brand new, it's a new way of doing something that was old before.

And AI is one of those areas that's become a new platform.

So rather than come up with something brand new like a flying car, I think for the next you're

talking about seven next seven years or six years. Frankly, I think the powering of new businesses with AI, the opportunity really lies in being able to recast, reshape, or even completely redo how existing businesses are done using AI. So microchips. Made in the United States. Yeah, I think that's more political than business. But I think the opportunity for entrepreneurship and where the future lies in next six, seven years is about reimagining every business that we look around and say, what would that look like when it's powered by AI? And more importantly, what's our role going to be in the process? Yeah, absolutely.

[00:37:10] Bianca Wisekal: Yeah, absolutely. That's a great point to think about. What's something that drives you to continue advancing technology? You just mentioned AI. Did that cause any impact to what your motives for technology are.

[00:37:24] Ash Ashutosh: I love technology.

It's a facet I grew up right from the very beginning, even as a kid. And I love the effect technology has in making human lives better. There are lots of other things that people are good at. And I have several friends who change human lives in other skills that they're very good at. It's just that I love this one I think I'm better at than most other things. If the intent is to go change the world one little day at a time, in one small way, this is the only tool I have in my tool belt, which is technology. So I just love it. I just love learning things. And as you may have heard before in my chat with Ryan, I constantly look out for new things that are being done in the world and how it can apply to things that I know.

And it's that curiosity, it's that desire to leverage something new and add one more little change to the day would be what's driving the whole thing. Yeah. You had asked about how do you balance this is an important thing in the C suite. And I don't think you do. I think you just put a few priorities and then it gets a little fluid after that.

Most importantly, you need to have someone, a group, that is very supportive of what you're doing and believes in it. So the idea of you can have it all is a myth. You are going to sacrifice. The question is, what are you going to sacrifice and what are you willing to do to face the consequences of sacrificing those? That's it.

[00:38:54] Bianca Wisekal: And then my last question for you is what is one thing you wish you could have told your college self?

[00:39:01] Ash Ashutosh: One thing I would say is, hey, be more like Bianca, but just figure out seriously, though, I think when I was at Penn State for, as a grad student, I think I spent way too much time focusing on academics and things I had to get done. And not enough experiencing all the other stuff that Penn State has an opportunity to give you experience about. Because end of the day, things that you do in college, experiences you have are the ones that sit at the back of the mind. They don't come up during the next 30 years of your life. But as you start to wind down, those are the persistent memories. Those are the ones that remain. Very little of the wonderful work you've done probably becomes as relevant as the experiences you had in the early days of your life. So what you're doing is awesome. Or the ability for you to explore. I mean, I never even went to a game when I was at Penn State, and I can't imagine that I didn't have time, quote unquote, right. And so, I think those are the one things I would say maybe I should have stayed on for six more months and made sure that I really experienced Penn State in its really core form.

[00:40:14] Bianca Wisekal: Yeah, absolutely. Thank you so much. It's been a pleasure talking to you.

[00:40:18] Ash Ashutosh: Thank you, Bianca, and good luck. And help us understand what you learned because I think some of the experiences you have will be awesome for some of us to learn from.

[00:40:29] Bianca Wisekal: Thank you. Absolutely. I'd love to share.

[00:40:31] Ash Ashutosh: Appreciate that.

[00:40:34] Ryan Newman: That was Ash Ashutosh, serial entrepreneur and global director of solutions sales at Google. This episode was produced and edited by Katie D. Fiore. If you haven't already, be sure to subscribe to Dare to Disrupt wherever you listen to podcasts and look out for next month's episode. Thanks for listening.