

BLOGGING FROM SILICON VALLEY

DAY 5

Networks and Networking

Friday May 9, 2014

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It is my personal belief that the Telfer Executive MBA Program saved the best of the briefings for the last day of the trip. Today we visited two companies who are best known for their networks. While the networks were certainly part of the discussion, networking and the value of people, of customers and of relationships and reputation became the dominant theme of the conversation. These conversations were rich, insightful and inspiring.

Aruba was the first scheduled visit for today. We felt privileged to speak with Dominic Orr, President and CEO and with Greg Murphy, their Chief of staff. As leader in wireless networks, Aruba believes that mobility will fundamentally change the way networks will be designed. Aruba focuses on the areas where wireless is 'mission critical' so that can they maintain their differentiation from the competition. Dominic's vision for Aruba is to be the 'biggest' small company within Silicon Valley: big enough to conduct world-class R&D and small enough to be personal. He believes that people want to work where they can have an impact on the organization while having fun and being recognized for their work. Aruba believes that trust is the basis for a partnership – that people buy from people. While Aruba is passionate about technology, it is clear that their focus is all about their customers.

Following our stay Aruba we ventured to Cisco Systems. It was here that the often mentioned, but little understood 'Internet of things' was explained to us by Tony Shakib. When we fully realized the concept of the "Internet of things" we quickly

concluded that a world where everything is connected to everything else will open up incredible global opportunities. Next on the speaking agenda was Inder Sidhu, Cisco's Senior Vice President of Strategy, Worldwide Operations, who spoke to the group about Cisco's philosophy. This gentleman is truly a world-class speaker and if he has yet to give a Ted Talk, he should do so at the next available opportunity. He spoke about the choice many companies face – to innovate or to sustain – and argues that you can find a way to do both within a company. Although Cisco is a large company it places a premium on leading edge innovation. Cisco will acquire companies with disruptive technology or invest within these technologies using a concept they call spin-in. To cap off the day, Rob Lloyd, President of Development and Sales at Cisco continued the cultural theme which has been present in all of presentations this week. He said that culture is often what 'makes' the company. Cisco actively evaluates the impact on culture when considering potential acquisitions. He stressed that Cisco often resists the temptation to 'Ciscoise' a company after it an acquisition and therefore intentionally leaves the original culture intact in order to retain their secret sauce.

As we end our last day within Silicon Valley I think back on something that one of our classmates said today. Claude said 'MBAs give a good grounding in the thoughts and theories of business'. Trips like these let us see first-hand and feel the realities of business. I was awestruck by the level and caliber of our speakers today and humbled that they devoted so much of their time to us. That I think is part of the magic that makes up the Telfer Executive MBA program. Through our work with our Silicon Valley client on our Innovation and Entrepreneurship Business Consulting Project in addition to our interaction with businesses from one end of the spectrum to the other, the Telfer Executive MBA's brand of "Global, Practical, Relevant" has truly become real.



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