

Naveen Jain on how to start a moonshot company

These are the highlights of Naveen Jain's talk at the SingularityU South Africa 2020 Summit.



Naveen Jain, Singularity University board member and entrepreneur

Jain, Singularity University board member and entrepreneur, spoke at the SingularityU South Africa 2020 Summit last week.

Below are the highlights of his talk:

Naveen Jain opened his talk by commenting that we are living in one of the greatest times in history. The next decade will see innovations in education, healthcare and agriculture, and exponential technologies that will change the trajectory of how humanity will live in future. We all have a chance to change the way people will live. This is no longer the domain of a select few. We can all play a role.

Some of the problems we are facing may seem audacious. If you try solve them, you may be labelled crazy. But remember, the “crazies” are the ones who end up changing the world. Think of Elon Musk... When he started Tesla five years ago, people had their doubts. This company is now one of the top automotive companies on the planet. It only takes one person to make a change that can change millions of lives.

These ideas are called “moonshots”. If they are successful, they can change the lives of billions of people.

We are exhausting our resources on Earth.

“ We need to work towards a multi-planetary society... or we will suffer the same fate as dinosaurs. ”

Jain started a company called Moon Express so that we can work towards living on the moon, and beyond. Jain believes the moon will be the first stepping stone in becoming a multi-planetary society.

One of the biggest challenges facing humanity is chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes, Alzheimer's, dementia, obesity and others. These diseases are preventable and reversible. So, Jain looked at this situation and looked at a solution to prevent these diseases.

In order to start a moonshot company, ask yourself these three questions:

- Why this? (Will it help a billion people?)
- Why now? (What technologies are here today, were not here ten years ago? Has someone thought of this before?)
- Why me? (Am I passionate about this? Am I asking the right questions?)

Remember, the best and the brightest in the world want to work on the toughest problems. They want to leave a legacy.

At Viome, we knew we could help prevent diseases, and help a billion people live a better life. We knew that in order to do this, we had to use new technology to digitise the human body. We had to be able to use samples to create signals and use artificial intelligence to make sense of this. The AI had to be able to make sense of this data. Additionally, the cost of sequencing had to come down to a certain point for this to be viable.

Why me? This is the most critical question. Ask yourself what you believe in? It is not your job to have all the answers. You need to ask the right questions. Do your research. Collect as many viewpoints on the topic as you can before you create your own.

When they did our research, the gut microbiome seemed to be involved in all chronic diseases... this led him to realise that he had struck a valid point. The question everyone at the time was asking was, “What organisms are in people's gut?” When in fact the real question to be asked was, “What are these organisms producing?”

Jain explains that it's all about the environment. Think about a businessman... At his office, he works. At home, he may wash dishes. Our environments determine our behaviour and outputs. He then asked, if you change the gut environment, can you change the way that the organisms operate and the person's gene expression. This framework can apply to many business or personal situations.

Healthcare is our biggest challenge worth solving.

“ The biggest chronic disease killing people is ageing. ”

At some point, our immune system can no longer cope with our ageing. We just published a paper that started identifying certain predictive markers for certain critical diseases, e.g. cancer. The key is not only to learn about the human body, but also how to improve it. Precision nutrition is the key.

Jain concluded by saying, “There is nothing that will satisfy you more than to help a billion people live a better life. If you can help a billion people, you can create a billion-dollar company. Never be afraid to fail. Every idea that fails is simply a stepping stone to a better idea. Never give up!”

Naveen Jain is the founder of several companies, including Moon Express, BlueDot, Viome, Intelius, Talent Wise and InfoSpace. He is a trustee of the board at the X PRIZE Foundation, which aims to find entrepreneurial solutions to global challenges in health, education, women empowerment, agriculture, and energy. Naveen recently launched a million-dollar Women Safety XPRIZE to empower women around the world.

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