



SIUE Alum Shares His Keys to Success

It is not a surprise that countless Southern Illinois University Edwardsville alumni have gone on to accomplish great feats after leaving campus and joining the workforce.

On this week's episode of Segue, SIUE's premier radio show that discusses the ideas and issues on campus and beyond, SIUE Chancellor Randy Pembrook sits down for a conversation with Aaron Broyles, BS '96, an SIUE alumnus who is an established national speaker and author.

This "serial entrepreneur" has been successful in launching start-up companies and building them into multi-million dollar organizations.

This episode of Segue will air at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 26, on WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound.

Broyles has started businesses in software development, railroading, technology consulting, fitness gyms, an automotive dealership and sales training. Other than his start-up endeavors, he has worked for a long list of customers, including the Department of Defense, U.S. Air Force, Union Pacific Railroad, Microsoft, Anheuser-Busch, Norfolk Southern, and J.P. Morgan, just to name a few.

In addition to starting and building businesses, Broyles has also authored two books; "Do Great Things" and his upcoming title, "Manifesto." He has appeared on several international radio and TV programs and speaks on a broad range of topics including leadership, development and entrepreneurial strategies.

"Let's talk about the term some of our listeners might not be familiar with," Chancellor Pembrook says. "Where did 'serial entrepreneur' come from?"

"My wife began calling me that," Broyles replies. "I'm always thinking of new ideas for businesses, and I have to throttle that back. I realize I can't do everything I come up with and pick the ideas that are most important."

His first entrepreneurial endeavor, Foster Townsend, was a strategic consulting and technology services organization. Partnered with Microsoft, the organization built business intelligence software that allowed companies, who had collected massive amounts of data, to compile the information by distinct keywords onto a dashboard. The company, which had started initially for the commercial market, landed government contracts with Scott Air Force Base and the Department of Defense.

"Our software was able to help businesses compile the information they were already collecting and bring it together in a simple way for viewing," Broyles said. "The leaders could then make important decisions on that data daily."

"How do you decide what type of data is important?" Pembrook inquires.

"Determining what is important to one individual may not be as important to another, depending upon what part of the business you're in," Broyles replies. "It all involves bringing an organization to the point where everyone is singing off the same sheet of music, per se. They may be looking at the same numbers, but they are interpreting it differently. However, the bigger picture matches the strategy of the entire organization."

Since starting Foster Townsend, the company has gone through several changes and as of 2010, it is now known as Secure Data Inc. However, there have been other businesses that Broyles has helped build from the bottom up, including: The Prairie Line, and Foster Townsend Rail Logistics (FTRL).

“What was so intriguing about the railway industry that made you create FTRL?”

“The rail industry is in my blood,” Broyles replies. “My family had been in railroading going all the way back to my great-grandfather. My father, who was the president of the Terminal Railroad, a local railway, and he had an idea to start a new business. He asked for advice and asked me to help him put a game plan together, how he might tackle it and bring investors to the table.

“I realized there was a huge industry here, and I asked to partner with him. We funded the business with technology money, and we were able to build the railroad company debt-free out of the gate.”

When starting a business from the bottom up, Broyles says that it is important to understand the risks you are taking, your limits on what you’re willing to invest or seek external funding, and to find the right people to partner with along the way.

To hear the rest of Chancellor Pembroke and Boyles’ conversation, including what led Broyles to begin consulting and write “Do Great Things” and his next book, “Manifesto,” which is set to hit shelves in 2018, tune in at 9 a.m. on Sunday, Nov. 26, to WSIE 88.7 FM The Sound.

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