



Inspiring Girls To Become Tomorrow's Leaders



SHEHEROES EPISODE 19: SUSIE WEE

Susie Wee



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Susie Wee PhD is the Vice President and Chief Technology Officer of Cisco's DevNet. Cisco's developer program, DevNet helps developers and IT professionals who want to write applications and develop integrations with Cisco products, platforms, and APIs. One of the early technology companies, Cisco was founded in 1984 by two computer scientists who were trying to find a way to connect computer systems. Cisco is one of the 'founders' of the internet we use today, and 85% of internet use is run by Cisco's networks.

Discussion Guide & Questions:

Part 1.

Dr. Wee grew up in a small New York town where she was one of few Asian-American families. A shy and quiet girl, her life changed when her father brought home the family's first computer, an Apple II. Back then, computers were very limited in what they could do, but Susie was good at math and quickly figured out the basics of coding. Before long, she was inventing games, particularly a little onscreen figure she created that could break-dance. These early games gave

her a passion for coding, computers, and technology.

Questions:

Do you need to be 'smart' at math to be 'good' at computers? If so, where do you think that idea comes from? Does being shy and quiet mean you can't succeed? How can these qualities create opportunities? Is there something you do on the internet or computer that might make you want to explore how coding/programming works? There are many "How-To" videos and materials on the internet that can help you figure out how things work. Have you ever tried one? Did it make you want to learn even more? Or invent something?

Part 2.

Susie was accepted into MIT, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. College broadened Susie's world and, while she met many other Asian-American young women like herself, there were few young women in MIT's engineering classes. Joining the women's hockey team enabled her to make new friends and grow her overall confidence while improving her hockey game. Susie eventually became an assistant coach and credits the skills she learned being a teammate for making her a better leader today.

Questions

How do you approach a new situation or environment that you know might frighten or intimidate you? Do you seek out others who might feel the same to create a support system or ask for help? If you are comfortable in a situation or environment where others might not be, do you reach out to help them? What does being a team player mean to you? Do you agree with Susie's statement that "if you help others, they will help you, and that's where real innovation can happen?" Playing hockey made Susie more confident. What in your life has helped you become more confident? Are there some other ways young people can build their confidence?

Part 3.

Susie's early love of coding led her to become an executive of one of the biggest internet companies in the world, but it didn't happen overnight and she didn't know, as a girl, where she'd be today. She had to learn to overcome her shyness, how to speak in public, and how to manage teams of people, things that originally seemed very difficult, if not impossible, for a shy, quiet girl.

Questions

Do you have a passion for something you do now that you can imagine might lead to a future career? Have you ever imagined your future self at 30? What would you be doing? Do you have a personality trait that you can't imagine changing, like shyness, or something else? Is it holding you back from doing something you'd love to do? Many of the future job opportunities will be in technology, yet only a small minority of women (25%) pursue STEM careers. What do you think about that? Only 23% of middle and high school girls consider tech careers. How do we get more girls in middle school and high school to consider tech careers?

Part 4.

Susie credits Cisco for making it easier to be a successful leader and mother because the company supports families. By the time you grow up, the world will be very different and companies should be even more supportive in helping women balance motherhood and work. Perhaps more importantly, the internet has opened up a new world of possibilities for girls. As Susie says, "it's so easy to learn a program, to make a webpage, or to build anything you want to build." Anything you can imagine, you *can* do.

Questions

Do you feel that when you grow up you will have to choose between being a parent or having a career, or that you can do both? Does that thought excite you? Do you think *you* can do anything? If not, what's holding you back, or what would you need to change? Are you tapping into the internet to use your imagination and creativity? What kinds of possibilities could you imagine for yourself?