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How to (Accidentally) Become a Tech Mogul

“I did not intend to be any of the things that I am now. I wanted to be either an astronaut, a fighter pilot, or a journalist,” Wendy Pfeiffer said. Pfeiffer, an accomplished technology professional, businesswoman, and public speaker, never imagined the trajectory her life would take.

She started off working towards being an astronaut. As a junior in high school, she entered a contest to work on a research project with NASA, and to her surprise won an internship for cockpit technology.

“While I was working on that, first of all, I discovered that I did not want to be a pilot. I did not want to be any of those things (space related careers),” Pfeiffer said, “But the computers were really cool.”

Despite this, Pfeiffer headed off to Fort Lewis College in Colorado the next year to pursue a degree in astrophysics and become a fighter pilot (her second career choice), because she wanted to see the world. When she ran out of money, Pfeiffer headed back home to the Bay Area to pursue a bachelor’s degree in Radio-Television-Film at San Jose State University.

While taking 15 units of class credits, Pfeiffer also worked 40 hours a week as an administrative assistant for a company called Trimble Navigation. It was there that she discovered an alternate career path: business.

“I was walking around in the parking lot, and in the first section, the first row of cars were all these exotic sports cars. And I thought, ‘Is this an exotic car show, what is this?’ And

they said, ‘No, these are all the sales people, they all have the cool cars.’ And I thought, ‘How do I get the cool cars? I’m sure I could sell things,’” Pfeiffer said.

This epiphany of sorts invoked yet another college degree change and started a prolific career for Pfeiffer - one where she has been able to travel to 91 countries, empower her peers, and be a part of many important moments in technology history.

Raul Robles first met Pfeiffer when they worked together at GoPro. He credits Pfeiffer as being the individual who realized his leadership potential, and even encouraged him to pursue his wife.

“Everything I ever accomplished, everything I learned, everything I’ve been able to speak to in every interview since the day I met Wendy, anything in terms of achievement is thanks to the opportunity that Wendy gave me, so I’ve learned a lot under her,” said Robles.

Pfeiffer’s older sister, Juli Kline, says she’s always been like that. Kline attributes her sister’s communication skills and subsequent leadership skills to the influence of their parents.

Kline said, “Both of our parents were fabulous communicators and storytellers. Having storytime just off the cuff from either one of them when we were just going to bed in our daily lives I think really was something that formed who we were.”

Pfeiffer’s life after her time at GoPro makes quite the story itself. She worked at a data integration company, Nutanix, for six years before starting her own consulting firm. She has served on multiple executive boards, including being the board director of the American Gaming Association. She even helped to launch the first version of fantasy football during her time working at Yahoo.

Back in the ‘90s when Pfeiffer’s career got its start, there were few opportunities for women to be leaders in the technology industry. Her roles in many key information technology

breakthroughs throughout the years have opened doors for other women to explore jobs in a traditionally male-dominated industry. And, none of this would have happened if she had just stuck with that astrophysics degree.

“My teachers and my parents and all conventional wisdom told me you’ve gotta pick something and focus on it and stick with it. I wasn’t able to do that, but it turned out OK,” Pfeiffer said.