

The Essential People Project Cedric Masengere

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SPEAKERS

Cedric Masengere, Kamal Oliver

Cedric Masengere 00:04

Hello, hello.

Kamal Oliver 00:05

Hey, how you doing? How you doing?

Cedric Masengere 00:08

I'm doing well, thanks, man. How you doing?

Kamal Oliver 00:09

I'm good, I'm good. Well, first and foremost, we want to, you know, celebrate those who are working to protect and to support the rest of us. And one of those people was you. So, in the spirit of that, I'd like to give you the floor to, you know, introduce yourself, let us know who you are.

Cedric Masengere 00:26

All right. Well, I'm Cedric. I work for Moderna, which is a pharmaceutical company producing one of the many vaccines that so many different companies are. I'm a manufacturing associate. So I'm on the floor and in the office on the team producing the actual vaccine itself. I don't know how much you know about the Moderna platform, but it's pretty much a pharmaceutical...

Kamal Oliver 00:53

Not much.

Cedric Masengere 00:54

Not much? Alright, so it's a pharmaceutical company that uses a genetic-based platform to produce RNA to produce the necessary proteins for a vaccine. And I'm on the team which actually manufactures

that plasmid itself. So we construct we sequence and we clone certain DNA to produce the end product, which is a vaccine.

Kamal Oliver 01:23

Wow.

Cedric Masengere 01:24

Yeah.

Kamal Oliver 01:25

Yeah, that sounds like a lot. How exactly did you get into this field?

Cedric Masengere 01:30

Um, I actually started as a little boy in my room with my own chemistry set. At first my mom was like, why are you taking like, Clorox with these random chemicals away? Like, that's not safe. But like, back in the day, we had encyclopedias, right. So you have the ability to learn things. And as a young kid, we didn't have iPads. So your mind was naturally curious.

Kamal Oliver 01:51

Mm hmm.

Cedric Masengere 01:52

So being my young self, being about I think I was eight years eight because I used to live in Newton. So I was eight years old chilling in my room by myself and being like, I wonder what happens when I put this penny in a thing of Clorox? When I would put it in, I'd notice it fizzle, right. So what I started to do, I got little sets of dishes, put them in my room behind my bed so I could hide it from my parents. And I'd just like I had a little notebook, because I always have those little yellow notepads, nice to take notes. I wasn't academically inclined. I was curious, but not in the classroom. I was more curious on things happening outside.

Kamal Oliver 02:34

Mmm mmm.

Cedric Masengere 02:35

So it didn't actually occur to me until later on in high school, when I had the opportunity to choose the classes I want to take. So during that time, like I had this great teacher, his name was Mr. Kenosie [sp?], and he taught me all the fundamentals of in a sense science, like you have a hypothesis, you experiment and you create. In my senior year, I had the opportunity to either choose to take normal courses like normal students or graduate a year early into a capstone.

Kamal Oliver 03:08

Hmm.

Cedric Masengere 03:09

I took the capstone option like hands down like.

Kamal Oliver 03:11

Right, right, right. Yeah, you found your passion.

Cedric Masengere 03:16

Yeah, I found my passion. And then I remember that year, I was, I was in chemistry class. I'm speaking to my chemistry teacher and I'm like, hey, like, I don't know what to do when I go to college. You know, I'm a young black man, for one, right? And I didn't have a lot of guidance on how to pursue my career. And she was like Cedric, I can see as a mechanical engineer. And I was like, really, but I like chemistry. And she has a chemical engineering. It's crazy hard I don't think you can do it. And like, when someone tells me I can't do something, I'm motivated to kind of, I'm challenged. You know, I'm driven to do it. So I, I was like, you know what? I'm going to do it. I essentially started - I was a quality engineer for a startup company in Lexington called Tifa. It was a great opportunity. It showed me that my true love was in biomedical research and development. I think when I realized that man, like I knew I had to get a career that was hands on. And that would help me reach my ultimate goal, to be able to one day possibly own my own company, but the best way to do that is to get technical experience to understand industry and then go back to academia as well.

Kamal Oliver 04:34

So you do plan on going back to school?

Cedric Masengere 04:37

Yes, I do. I want to get my PhD eventually.

Kamal Oliver 04:40

Okay, nice.

Cedric Masengere 04:41

I'm actually still in the works of creating a bio reactor on my own, and that's why I want to pursue further education so that I can be able to either create my own streams of income to fund my own project, or to be able to get venture capitalists themselves to fund my ideas. So right now I'm pursuing creating the system at home with my girlfriend who's actually helping me as well.

Kamal Oliver 05:08

Okay. Yeah. She an engineer too?

Cedric Masengere 05:12

She's not an engineer. She's a, she's a biologist, actually.

Kamal Oliver 05:16

Oh!

Cedric Masengere 05:18

Yeah.

Kamal Oliver 05:18

That sounds like a great combination.

Cedric Masengere 05:20

Yeah, we actually both work for the same company too, which is it's phenomenal.

05:24

Oh, yeah, I can imagine. So that actually brings me back to today and what we're dealing with now with this whole COVID-19 you know, Coronavirus. So what is what is the vibe at work though? Like, what's the atmosphere like? What's the feeling like?

Cedric Masengere 05:43

People were focused before, but now, it's a whole different type of atmosphere. It's like the way they execute direction to different employees is it's to the "T". You know, whatever you're doing on your computer, whether in a lab or if you're eating you think in terms of time and finishing your job without causing a disruption to the environment, it's created this kind of unity within each, within our coworkers.

Kamal Oliver 06:15

Yeah, sounds like it's strengthened the team a bit.

Cedric Masengere 06:18

Yeah. Cuz you're fighting together. It's a fight, you know? And it feels like we're all fighting each like fighting together against this and it's great.

Kamal Oliver 06:27

Nice. So what would you say is the biggest challenge to work in this type of environment?

Cedric Masengere 06:35

Waking up and realizing you're the only one on the road.

Kamal Oliver 06:40

That's a challenge for you? Oh, I love that!

Cedric Masengere 06:45

Hey, I'm just being honest, man. When you wake up and you realize you're you're really one of the few people going work. It's a great thing, but you're like, man, most people who get work from home are really lucky. But then it's also like I think about, I feel bad that a lot of people don't have an ability to have a job right now because of this whole pandemic. You know, but to be comical and so on, it's like, I go, my normal like, I wake up five o'clock. I'm going to work. I'm like, man, I remember there'll be so much traffic. What's kind of lonely now. You know..

Kamal Oliver 07:03

Right. A little separation anxiety happening here?

Cedric Masengere 07:20

Yeah, I'm like, man..

Kamal Oliver 07:22

Oh man. So if that's the biggest challenge, what would you say is the best part?

Cedric Masengere 07:30

The best part?

Kamal Oliver 07:31

Yeah.

Cedric Masengere 07:32

It's for me, man, it's, it's being, it's knowing that I'm making a difference, you know? Because I think that like naturally, humans are, can, be self centered. But there's nothing that makes you happier than when you know that you contributing something to society because it's almost like - forgive me for quoting Arnold Schwarzenegger or whatever, but he said like a quote, a long time ago, he was like, "the greatest satisfaction you receive is when you help another human being." You know, and knowing that I'm participating in a company that's driven and its main focus to help people, but right now, we're helping people more than we did before. It makes me feel that's - my drive. I wake up in the morning. I'm like today, today's the day.

Kamal Oliver 08:31

So if you don't mind me asking, How does your family feel about you working?

Cedric Masengere 08:37

Oh my mom's happy.

Kamal Oliver 08:38

Yeah? Oh, cool.

Cedric Masengere 08:41

She's definitely proud of the fact that I'm working towards creating a vaccine for this, this virus. I remember I took her and my girlfriend just before everything escalated to like a nail salon. And I guess she told her, her, the beautician or whatever that, "oh, my son's working on this." I had no idea but in a sense she's proud to know that her son's you know, is is working on the product that - the way her beautician said it was "the product that's going to save the world."

Kamal Oliver 09:15

Wow. Yeah, yeah that's awesome. There's nothing like the approval of moms, man.

Cedric Masengere 09:25

No, no there isn't. It's a it's a fuel on it's own man.

Kamal Oliver 09:31

Right? Yeah.

Cedric Masengere 09:32

Man, how about yourself? I wanna know about you man. You asked a lot about me.

Kamal Oliver 09:38

Because I'm interviewing you that's how it works.

Cedric Masengere 09:41

Ah, my bad, my bad.

Kamal Oliver 09:43

Now I want to know is there a person that is your rock during this whole thing? Somebody that is your motivation, somebody that's in your corner, someone's that's encouraging you, supporting you, and just helping you to get through on a daily basis?

Cedric Masengere 10:01

I think that'd be my girlfriend to be honest with you. You know, we both have really high goals, especially with what I want to build and create in the near future. She tells me and reminds me that every single day I'm working at Moderna's that's like, that's a free education on how one day I'll be able to run something on my own. You know, she says, "you're still young, you have your whole future ahead of you. Use each one of these opportunities to learn and immerse yourself and to keep on asking questions. You know, because you'll be able to, you don't have to recreate the wheel." Some days, man, I'll work like 16 hours. But when I wake up, she's just like, remember, everyday you're investing in yourself. That's how, that's how you got to think about it. It's like, it's like building a castle on the sky, right. Knowing what you want to build in your mind, but then laying with the bricks there to kind of get to that castle and start constructing. I haven't reached the castle yet. Right now I'm still on ground level laying down like the blueprint.

Kamal Oliver 11:12

Right.

Cedric Masengere 11:13

You know, so every single day until I feel like I've reached that epitome of oh, there is that castle I've been trying to build. Every single thing I'm doing right now my subconscious mind and in life is kind of building towards that. You know?

Kamal Oliver 11:31

Yeah, righteous. So would you say that's your, that's your motivation in all of this? Like working towards - I don't want to put words in your mouth. Let me ask you. What is your motivation?

Cedric Masengere 11:45

My motivation man is when I create a family one day, right. So every single day I'm working. I'm thinking this is gonna be a story I can share one day so I better play my part in this chapter really well.

Kamal Oliver 12:00

So is that way you say you would find your hope and your strength, or is that something separate in your mind?

Cedric Masengere 12:08

With me, my hope and my strength, my strength is in, it sounds like abstract or whatever, or cliché but it's in like it's having my faith in God. And knowing that I'm going to overcome this regardless of the circumstances. My hope is in my failures, because I know I can overcome those.

Kamal Oliver 12:37

Right, right.

Cedric Masengere 12:38

My failure I don't see them as failures. I see them as success, which is kind of weird. Because when you fail, you're like, oh I failed. But when I fail, I'm like ooh I've learned, you know. And I failed a lot, I got scars to prove it.

Kamal Oliver 12:53

So, I'm wondering, do you have any messages for anyone who might be watching this?

Cedric Masengere 13:05

The best message I can give is all pain is temporary and after every battle, there's growth. Look at it as it's created advancements that we didn't even think about. You know, it creates new doorways. Because if the door ain't there, you're gonna build that door. You know, as frustrating as it will be, that's what we're doing right now. We're building a new door.

Kamal Oliver 13:34

Yeah. Yeah.

Cedric Masengere 13:35

You know, like, humanity, the odds have always been against us, because we are always against each other. You know. But it's those odds that create opportunities. You feel? So, right now we're at odds with nature, but out of that we're gonna get a new opportunity. What this opportunity is going to be, the opportunity's that we find the vaccine or the cure to cancer itself. So at this point for any family that's that's being impacted or hit by this, this pandemic, what I'll say is they're going to overcome. As long as everybody continues to believe in themselves and those people around them they're going to succeed. And they're going to prosper from it, you know.

Kamal Oliver 14:28

Bro, it has been a pleasure. I can't commend you enough on on what you're doing. Definitely want to thank you on behalf of Everyday Boston, for putting yourself out, out here like this and making yourself available to us. And to all of our viewers man, we really, really appreciate you and wish you the best of luck in everything.