

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/the-humanist-engineer>

Lew Cirne, founder and CEO of New Relic, shares his passion for building software. In conversation with Stanford Engineering Professor Tom Byers, Cirne also discusses how an exposure to liberal arts can give engineers a more complete set of skills for building software and working with others.



Transcript

So I've loved building software ever since I discovered my first computer and that was in - my parents gave me a computer in 1982.. It had three kilobytes of RAM.. So what is that, like, one 1,000th of a single mp3 song.. And - but I discovered what I wanted to do for the rest of my life.. I mean the joy of creating software was just something I couldn't resist doing.. So it was easy for me to pick a major at Dartmouth although I also minored in Latin in classical studies and I guess that kind of is - part of the story might be that I had a broad set of interests and I wasn't just - I love the art side of creating software and not just the science side of it.. So I couldn't believe that I could get paid to do this to write code and build software and so it was an easy yes, to come out here and work for Apple.. That's a really significant point because we celebrate that here at Stanford.. I think we use the term humanist engineer.. Yeah, yeah..

I mean that - there is this - that economy is saying well, you're either an engineer or a humanist and you can't be both.. Do you agree with that or do you.... No, I think the very best engineers really do have an instinct for what people want and empathy for the end user even if you're just designing something like an API, there is someone who is using that API.. And so that's why I think liberal arts educations are great for developing the whole set of skills that are involved in building great software.. And of course, you need to learn how to work with people too if you're working on a team no matter what your role is.. So I am a big believer in that, big believer in that...