

Siebel's New System

Billionaire tech titan turns to philanthropy

By [SCOTT BUDMAN](#)

NBC has a new show about a business executive who, after making tons of money, decides to change his life, and help others. The show is called "The Philanthropist." It's not (mercifully) another reality show, but lest you think it's pure fiction, I offer up a real example: [Tom Siebel](#).



Tom Siebel made billions in the business world of high-tech, now he's focusing on helping others.



Best known for the company bearing his name, which he later sold to Oracle for \$6 billion, Tom Siebel now focuses on helping others.

Best known for the company bearing his name, not to mention his long and drawn-out catfight with rival (and eventual buyer) [Larry Ellison](#), Siebel was a tech executive who reportedly demanded a lot (legend has it he didn't allow employees at [Siebel Systems](#) to put personal items on their desks), but rewarded a lot as well. When Siebel Systems went public 13 years ago (almost to the day), 40 of the 150 people he hired were instant millionaires. Had they waited a while, their holdings would have been worth even more.

By the time Siebel and Ellison had mended their fences, Ellison's [Oracle](#) bought Siebel Systems for nearly six billion dollars. Mr. Siebel was more than set for life. He was a member of the "three comma" billionaire club.

Fast forward to last week, when Siebel agreed to sit and talk about the past (a little) and the future (a lot). He says the Oracle deal was the best thing for shareholders and employees alike, and he doesn't regret it a bit. He also says the "fued" between him and Ellison was largely "a media event," and that there was "really less there than you might have read."

We could quibble about that, but there are more important things to get to. Like Methamphetamines. When Mr. Siebel found out that more than half of all kids in foster care in the state of Montana are there because of meth abuse, he had to act. He steered his new venture, "First Virtual," beyond real estate and agriculture, to start helping young people. Now, seven states have anti-meth programs thanks to Siebel's foundation. He speaks of their success like he talks about a big deal: "it's great to work with talented people and watch them meet and exceed expectations." Just like business? "It's a similar feeling."

Siebel has never been shy when it comes to talking about the tech industry. I asked what he thought of the current crop of companies. He says over the last seven years or so, he's been impressed with nothing. Almost. There's [Google](#). "And Google," he says, "is a phenomenon. I think no one would have imagined it .. a remarkable accomplishment that is changing the world."

As for the rest of the industry? "I think there's very little new that's interesting." He says IT has become like chips: built in, and no longer exciting. If you want growth, he says, try healthcare and biotech.

Then, he turns back to his desk, to check some stocks on the Bloomberg monitor, and push a few buttons on his iPhone. His office is still business executive sleek, still says high-powered businessman, but isn't entirely austere. There are, if you look closely, a few small personal snapshots on his desk.