Jeff Bezos Explains Why He's Building a 10,000 Year Clock

Seth Fiegerman / Nov 30, 2012

Jeff Bezos has already revolutionized the way we shop, now he wants to change the way we think about time.

Earlier this year, news broke that the Amazon founder and CEO has invested at least $42 million in a project to build a 10,000 year clock deep in the mountains near one of his homes in West Texas. The clock would play a different sound to celebrate the passing of each year for the next 10 millennia.

During a wide-ranging interview at the Amazon Web Services conference on Thursday, Bezos offered a thought-provoking explanation about why he's interested in this particular project and how it works.

"The clock is a symbol for long-term thinking," he said in the interview. "If we think long-term, we can accomplish things that we couldn't otherwise accomplish." As an example, he noted that asking someone to solve world hunger in five years might sound preposterous, but doing so in 100 years might not. "All we've done there is change the time horizon, we didn't change the challenge. Time horizons matter. They matter a lot."

Bezos continued: "We humans are getting awfully sophisticated in technological ways and have a lot of potential to be very dangerous to ourselves, and it seems to me that we as a species will have to start thinking longer term. This is a symbol, I think symbols can be very powerful."

The clock itself will have five "anniversary chambers," which
Bezos describes it as being like "the cuckoo on a clock." The first of these chambers will go off every year, the second every 10 years and so on until the fifth chamber, which goes off just once after 10,000 years have passed.

"We're only planning to build the animations for the first and second chambers," Bezos said. "We figure our future generations can worry about the third, fourth and fifth chambers."

Bezos, who invests in other futuristic projects including his private space company Blue Origin, noted that the clock is being "carved out inside of a mountain," which takes a kind of "pilgrimage" to get to. However, he said when the project is finally completed, "we'll let people come and tour the clock."

Hopefully, we don't have to wait 10,000 years for that to happen.

The discussion about the 10,000 year clock starts at the 32:00 mark in the video below.
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Stan Schroeder

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