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The Potency of Early-Career Motivation

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Senior Advisor for Innovation in the Office of Secretary of State Hillary Clinton Alec Ross recalls founding One Economy, a non-profit digital divide organization that grew from four 20-something's with an idea to a world leader for the cause. In this clip, Ross talks about his inspiration to support Barack Obama's political career. He also addresses how his youthful naivety was a tremendous benefit to his career path of entrepreneurship and innovation.



Transcript

So after my history, after my time as an inner-city school teacher, I and three friends started a non-profit in a basement called One Economy. And if I knew then what I knew now, I wouldn't have bothered starting it. And if I had, I would have been incredibly unsuccessful. So something about being a 20-something year-old naive hopeful individual that allowed me and my colleagues to become successful, and I'll get to the why of that a little bit later. And we built that non-profit with the mission to maximize the potential of technology to help people of low incomes enter the economic mainstream. And we grew from being four people in a basement to the world's largest digital-divide organization, eventually helping more than 20 million people in more than 10 countries on four continents, use technology to get the skills that they needed to live better lives. And I did that for a period of 8, 9, 10 years and one of the things toward the end of that period that I saw was there was this extraordinary member of the United States Senate who, through his own personal and professional roots in the south side of Chicago. And I saw in this man, Barack Obama, that he got it. He truly got how technology could be a difference-maker in the lives of America's low income and working class communities. And I was so fortunate, as Tom mentioned, to work amidst a great many people to help build a technology and innovation agenda for then-Senator Obama's presidential campaign which then propelled me into government service.

And what I'm doing now, as Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's Senior Adviser for Innovation.