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Don't Despise Small Beginnings

Michael Tubbs, *City of Stockton*

January 13, 2016

Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/3633/Dont-Despise-Small-Beginnings>

Stanford alumnus Michael Tubbs talks about how his path from humble roots to civic leader proves that those less privileged can succeed and still remain grounded. The Stockton city councilman and 2016 mayoral candidate also says admitting to himself that he doesn't know everything freed him to surround himself with those who have answers.



Transcript

I'm not a technical expert but from what I've read and from the people I've talked to, it seems like everyone's obsessed with this idea of scale. Like, I have this small idea, how do I scale it 100X times, and things like that. And in politics, it's almost the same way. People get one office and they think about, OK, how do I go from city council to UN ambassador? Or how to I go from city council to UN Secretary General. It's crazy. I'm like, wait, wait, wait, start with city council. And the first lesson I've learned since being in office is don't despise the small beginnings or the start-up phase because those lessons I shared with you are really the lessons that help govern the decisions I make every single day. It's having the door slammed in my face and being chased by chihuahuas. No, I don't like dogs. So that was very traumatic. So you guys are laughing but that was trauma for me. It was those experiences that keep me humble. It's talking to the grandmother on the porch or talking to the people who don't vote who really inform the decisions I make.

And, I think, often times we're always in so much of a hurry to move on to the next and get bigger and better when it's really the basics and the small beginnings that set the foundation for any scale that comes on top of it. The second lesson from governing or the ramp-up phase is this idea that you don't know everything and that's OK. And that's really hard, especially in politics because for some reason people think that you are a fusion of Jesus, Buddha, Mohamed, everybody, and Tina Seelig, John Hennessy, all the smart people in the world in one body and you have the answers to intractable problems like homelessness and water issues and poverty and crime. And you, and you alone, have the answers and there's a lot of pressure to feel like you're the expert. But I realize that in not knowing everything it's been so freeing because it's opened the door for me to connect with people who do have the answers. So it's been great to work on issues like poverty and realize that I have some Stanford experience and lived experience but there are some subject matter experts who have been doing this work in this community for 25 years who may not have the degrees or the pedigree, but they know what they're talking about. It's been so freeing to say you guys, you know what, I don't know. I don't know. I know that someone knows, so let's find this answer collectively. So don't feel pressure to know all the answers or have all the answers because part of, in my opinion, entrepreneurship iteration is not knowing if what you're doing. Is going to work. It's the iteration and experimentation that leads to knowledge and knowledge is not already baked in.