

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/solving-social-ills-through-innovation-entire-talk/>

Civic leader Michael Tubbs shares his story of growing up in the California Central Valley, attending Stanford and going on to become one of the youngest elected officials in U.S. history. The Stockton City Councilman calls on entrepreneurs behind today's biggest tech innovations to also focus on solving society's biggest problems, like poverty, illiteracy and inequality.

Michael Tubbs was elected mayor of Stockton in November 2016, and he will return to our (now-virtual) ETL stage on August 12. Check out our full Summer 2020 ETL lineup!



## Transcript

So first of all, happy new year.. Thank you so much for having me.. Before I start, I have a quick confession.. I had no idea what a big deal this class was till about last week.. I just got back from the Rose Bowl.. Woo.. Yeah, go Stanford.. I was looking at my calendar, and I still have this talk with Tina Seelig.. That's what I put, talk with Tina Seelig, like me and Tina, one on one.. So then she calls me, and we're going over the talk..

And she sends me to the website, and I see people like Laurene Powell Jobs, and there's some .... next week, and week, after week, after week, after week.. And I said, thank God I'm first.. So thank you so much for having me, and I'm excited.. I really want to structure this talk in three dimensions.. So first, I want to talk about the startup phase or campaigning and some of the lessons learned from there.. That may be helpful in your entrepreneurial thought life.. Secondly, I want to talk about the scale up or ramp up phase, which I would call the governing phase.. After campaigning, what does it mean to be an elected official? How do you govern? How you create policy? And then I went in with some new challenges and new horizons.. So I started running for office..

If someone would have told me my freshman year at Stanford that I would be a city council person in Stockton, I would have looked at them and told them they were crazy.. I had no intention of coming back to Stockton.. I was upset Stanford was so close to home.. I wanted to be as far away from home as possible, and it's not because home was a bad place, or a place I didn't love or didn't have people I liked, but it was because home was difficult and challenging.. But I realized at Stanford that a lot of my passions came from the pains.. Growing up in poverty with a single parent and incarcerated father made me really, really passionate about things like inequality, things like poverty, things like mass incarceration.. And I realized, even before I ran for office, I swear that my pain points were leading me to where I think or thought my passion or purpose might be.. And then my junior year, I was interning in the White House through the Stanford and government program.. And my job was when the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs-- and I was supposed to work with mayors and council members nationwide.. Crazy foreshadowing, and I hated it, which is also foreshadowing..

I'm joking.. But I hated it.. I spent 12 hours a day googling what the mayor of Lorena, Texas was doing, or googling what Cory Booker was doing at Newark, or what Kasim Reed was doing in Atlanta.. And it was so-- so, so boring, but it opened my eyes to how people were making big changes at a small, really local level that no one really knew or cared about.. So I remember talking to my boss and saying, you know what? One day, I'm going to support people and think of Stockton as my hometown.. It's my community.. It's a place in need of good governance.. I thought I would be the donor, the funder, and then someone else could do the messy work of going to the meetings and dealing with people who you may or may not like.. And then around the same time, on Halloween, one of my first cousins was murdered at a house party in Stockton.. And sadly, in Stockton, even today, we've made some strides..

But for far too many young people, especially young men of color, homicides or premature death are almost a fact of life.. But it was the first time it was someone in my family, so it hit me really personally.. And I remember flying back home for the funeral and dealing with the pain, and the anger, and the frustration.. Like how did this happen? I remember having to console my aunt, and my mother, and my cousins, and had to squelch beef and make sure people didn't retaliate.. And I

realize that all the great time I was having at Stanford, whether it was interning at Google, or being in the White House, or having access to great speakers in a lecture series like this had to be for much more than my own personal fulfillment.. It had to be so much bigger than me getting the degrees and making a lot of money, that for some reason, that my part, or the stage which was supposed to play my life meant that I would have to go back to Stockton and run for office one day.. So I told my mom, you know what, mom? One day, when I'm 30, 34, 38, 42, 50, I'll come back to Stockton and help out, because the city really needs help.. But then my senior year, I was applying for fellowships and jobs, and I didn't get what I thought was mine.. I was an entitled Stanford student.. I had good grades..

I had worked hard.. I had the best recs.. I had the best resume.. I thought for sure that it was my job and my purpose in life to be a Rhodes scholar, and that's just what was going to happen for me.. So I put all my eggs in that basket, and then it didn't work out for me.. So then I remember being so upset, so hurt, like I thought I found my purpose.. This is what I'm suppose to be doing.. And now, I can't do it.. And I start with that, because in all of these valley experiences, all these low points, whether growing up in poverty, or losing my cousin, or not getting the fellowship, that really clarified the path that I was going to take.. So I gave a TED talk at Stanford two years ago talking about transforming valley experiences into mountaintop ones..

And that's the first point I want to start with today, is that it's in these valley experiences, these low points that gave me the clarity I needed to figure out what it was I was doing.. It was in the failures, in the rejections, and the pain that I found purpose, and it was in all these low points that I was able to recalibrate, refocus, and figure out that it was my job to run for office in Stockton one day.. So February 20, 2012, after a sign language class, I rushed down to Stockton for my campaign kickoff.. I was going to run for city council in Stockton.. And the second lesson from the campaign is that expert advice really isn't all that expert.. When I was first running for office, first of all, people said I was crazy, which is probably true.. They're like, you're crazy.. Stockton just had back to back years of record homicides.. You're crazy.. You're running against an incumbent..

He was chair of his party.. You're crazy, because there's no way the city of Stockton's going to elect a 22-- 21 year old at the time black kid from South Stockton to helping its resurgence.. There's no way.. You're crazy.. And then when I said I was going to run anyway, all the experts, the consultants, the people who make a lot of money to advise.. The people who've been doing this for a long time, they said, you know what, Tubbs? You're young.. So grow some facial hair.. I'm trying, you see? They said you're young.. Grow some facial hair, so you look a little bit older.. Or they said you're young, so stay away from young people and youth issues..

Don't speak to any of that.. Talk about grown up issues.. And then they said talk about the bankruptcy.. Talk about how the city is bankrupt in finances, and that's what's going to resonate with voters.. And luckily, being 21 and a little bit dumb and foolish we didn't listen to any of that, because what we found in knocking on doors and talking to people, that my youth is what made people most excited.. We had 70-year-old grandmothers from the South side and the North side saying that wow, I like the fact that you're young.. That gives me hope for my grandchild or my child.. We had armies of young people knocking on doors every Saturday, and it's easy to close the door on a Jehovah's Witness.. It's easy to close the door on a salesman.. It's hard to close the door on a 12-year-old adorable kid who's saying Michael Tubbs for city council..

And we found that seriously, it works.. And we found that every single thing the experts were telling us to do, although true for them, were wrong in the special case of this campaign.. Also, and additionally, experts also talked about things like don't only talk to people who vote.. But before we hire the campaign consultant, we had no idea what we were doing.. So I said to win a race, you have to knock on doors and talk to people.. But I didn't know there was any strategy do that.. I thought you just picked a neighborhood.. You knocked on every door.. You talked to everybody, and that's how you win.. So that's what we did..

But we started with what I learned that at the d.school, to be known as extreme users.. We started going to the poorest housing developments in the city, probably not with a lot of voters, and we spent two weeks just knocking on every door there, talking to them about their hopes, their aspirations and what they wanted for the city.. But it was in talking to this extreme user group, the group that wasn't on our nation builder files, that won't show up on voter registration roles that we found our campaign message.. It was really one about moving the city forward, and that many communities had felt bankrupt for a long time, that the city's financial bankruptcy was only a symptom of a deeper bankruptcy and leadership, a moral bankruptcy, and a bankruptcy of vision.. And that's what we ran on.. So everyone was talking about the fiscal constraints and bankruptcy, really important topics.. But for voters, they wanted to talk about what's the vision for Stockton? People were talking about entitlement reform, and things of that sort, very important conversations.. But the voters we talked to are like, Mr.. Tubbs, we've been filling bankrupt for a long time.. Are we going to be here listening to gunshots? It's violent..

It's not safe.. And it's so, so funny, because afterwards, when we got the experts in, we stopped doing a lot of that outreach and all that hard work and talking to people who may not vote, because their resource constrains.. But I humbly submit there's no way we would have picked a message that resonated with so many people if we had not talked to the extreme users, the people who don't vote, the people who aren't going to donate, because they really helped define the message, and one that resonated city wide.. So on November 6, 2012, we actually won the election with more votes than any other candidate running for any city council seat.. We won with 62% of the vote and the first time running.. And it was craziness, because of these lessons really around valley experiences being mountain ones, really around expert opinion being not so

expert.. And then the last lesson from the campaign is this idea that those who are with you then will be with you when? Our campaign was ran by my best friends from college, my girlfriend, my best friends from high school, and my family.. And that was the core.. So oftentimes, when people didn't show up, when people didn't believe, when people didn't invest the time and energy needed to run the campaign, the people that were with me back then, when I was a 16-year-old in South Stockton, just trying to apply to college, or when I was at Stanford, running crazy on the basketball courts at Arrillaga-- or they still have Drake Lounge parties at Ujamaa? Maybe? Maybe not? OK.. But the people I was with, Ujamaa, partying with, those were the same people that helped power my campaign..

In fact, my best friend from Stanford, Cameron Henry, he came up with the idea of reinventing Stockton.. We were in Kimball.. We were sitting down.. I told him Cameron, I'm running for city council.. He said Tubbs, I'm applying for med school.. How can I help? And then he ended up designing our websites, designing our flyers, and coming up with this idea of reinventing Stockton that's really been resonating and still has a following, and a hashtag, and really a movement around it to this day and it was important, because I think oftentimes, as we get older, as we think about scaling, we always want new connections and new people.. We need to connect with this person or that person.. But my experience has taught me that those periphery relationships are important.. But it's really those people that have been with me before the campaign, before the idea, before anything, people who were with me just eating and talking who have really been the base, and really helped me build my campaign.. So those are the four lessons from the start up phase..

And now I want to talk a little bit about after you're elected, after the fanfare, after all that, how do you govern? So in the wrap up and scale phase, I think there's also been three lessons.. The first lesson has been this idea of don't despise small beginnings.. I'm not a technical expert.. But from what I've read and 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 then politics, it's almost the same way.. People get one office, and they think about, OK.. How do I get from city council to UN ambassador, or how I go from city council to UN Secretary General? And it's crazy.. I'm like wait, wait, wait..

Start with city council.. And in the first lesson I've learned since being in office is don't despise the small beginnings or the startup phase, because those lessons I shared with you are really the lessons that I helped govern the decisions I make every single day.. Its having the door slammed in my face and being chased by Chihuahuas.. And I don't like dogs, so that was very traumatic.. So you guys are laughing, but that was trauma for me.. But 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 oftentimes, we're always in so much of a hurry to move onto 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, Mohammed, 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 has 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've 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 and iteration is not knowing if what you're doing is going to work.. And it's the iteration, the experimentation that leads to knowledge, that knowledge is not already baked in.. And then number two, I realize that what I don't know, my users know..

The community knows.. The grandmothers who may not speak English that well know what it would take for their kids to go to school.. The unemployed people know what skills they need.. The employers know what skills that employee need that all these users around me have the answers to the question.. It's been so freeing to learn that I don't have to know everything.. And the only thing I need to know is how to find answers, and how to connect with people, and how to humble myself and open myself so that other people are able to bring their expertise to the table.. The third lesson from this wrap up phase is the idea of having personal angel investors, having people who invested in me early on.. So a lot of my big campaign donors were actually people I met on this campus when I was a freshman, people I met at little development dinners, or different events, and people like that who have been so, so helpful and instrumental to this day that finding early investors, angel investors, people with some experience and seasoning can help put your energy and youth to use and bring some experience to it.. It's been so great, because we realize that what I like and experience, they make up.. And what they lack in energy, I make up..

And it's this idea of trying new things together collectively.. It's so humbling that every Friday, I work with a group of community leaders who have been doing work in my district for 30, 40, 50 years, literally.. And we sit at the table together, and they tell me their experience.. I tell them my ideas.. We push back and forth, and it's a messy process.. But usually, we come up with really good community solutions.. But it's been very key about finding these early on people who believe in angel investors that could push your product, but in my case, that could help me push policy, push ideas, push a system and a

practice to really improve outcomes in my community.. But I had to pivot a year ago in terms of how I was approaching my work as a council member.. I was reading to some first graders about Martin Luther King around this time, and we got to the part where Martin Luther King was assassinated.. And I'm not a psychologist by training, so I was not equipped to prepare or prepared to talk too a six-year-old about death, so I tried skipping through the page really quickly..

And then a kid stopped me and said no, Mr.. Tubbs, my uncle was shot.. And he said it so matter of faculty, I thought his uncle had lived.. And I said oh, I'm so sorry to hear that.. I'm glad he's OK now.. He said oh, no.. He's dead.. And then another kid raised his head and says, my aunt got shot.. And I'm like, OK.. Well, I'm sorry..

And then before I could stop, almost every kid in that classroom had known somebody that had been shot at six years old.. And I looked at the teacher.. The teacher looked at me.. I'm not trying to cry in front of these kids, because they look like everything's still like this.. This is what happens.. This is reality.. The teacher's looking at me.. I'm like this your class.. How are we going to do this? But it was in that moment I realized something, because at Stanford, I was really big on social entrepreneurship.. I was like we could have an idea, a program, a gut, and we can solve it..

So immediately, my mind went to programs.. It's like OK.. These kids have a lot of trauma.. Let's put them in a nice mentorship program, and several which I've started in my first year in office.. I was like maybe their parents may have records.. Let's put them in some back to work programs I started.. And my mind was running, but then I realized that for what they were going through, programs necessarily weren't enough, that the charity I was doing, the social entrepreneurship, the programs, the filling in gaps was important work.. But it wasn't really enough to drive the change or make the impact I wanted to see in my community.. And then I was reminded-- not this.. This all didn't happen on the same day..

It's like a couple months later.. I'm thinking about the issue.. An analogy-- I have a story my mom had taught me growing up about a man that was on a road, on his way somewhere, like thousands of years ago.. So he was on a donkey or a horse down this narrow road, the Jericho Road.. And he was robbed, left on the side of the road to die.. And then a politician came by and saw the man on the side of road and said, you know what? This man chose to be on the side of road.. We don't want his kind in our country, anyway.. They're going to bring guns and weapons of mass destruction.. He deserves to be on the side of road.. That's his lot in life..

And then I think my mom told me a minister came by.. But he was late for church, so he said, you know what? This man's on the side of the road.. I'm going to pray for him, but I'm going to have to keep it moving.. And then maybe a venture capitalist or a Stanford entrepreneurship student saw the kid on the side of the road and said, that's an interesting problem.. I'm going to think of an idea on my way to class, but let me maybe put this on my iPhone and come back to it later.. But then finally, a Good Samaritan saw this man on the side of the road, got off his high horse, bound up his wounds, gave him some money, put him in a hotel, and put him up.. And that mentality was what was driving a lot of my service pursuits, frankly.. I was like I want to be that good Samaritan for Stockton.. I want to stop what I'm doing at 10 to the immediate need, help people get well and on the way.. But I recently just got back from a trip to Israel, and I realized that the Jericho Road is actually structured or conducive for ambushing, that the road is very narrow, and it makes it easy for someone to get jumped and ambushed..

And that caused me to really think about how and all the social entrepreneurship stuff I was doing, the programs, the charity, how it was meeting immediate needs, but not getting that system wide solution.. So I was meeting the need in helping this one person, but there were thousands of kids in my city, 50,000 people I represent, 300,000 people in the city as a whole who really needed systematic solutions.. And that charity, or the Good Samaritan impulse would not be enough to move the needle in Stockton.. So then I read Mountains Beyond Mountains by Paul Farmer, an excellent book, and he had this idea of structural violence.. And he talked about how in some communities, like Stockton and other places in the world, that that divide we see is actually structural, that individuals aren't necessarily the cause for all the issues we see, that poor people aren't poor just because they want to be poor, and kids aren't not doing well in schools, just because they don't want to do well in schools, and prisons are full of black and Latino men and black Latina women just because these people have a gene in them to be criminal, but that it's actually been structured in that way.. So I really, really repositioned myself and spent the last year and a half in Stockton thinking about how do I move from charity to justice? How do I move from solving immediate needs as an entrepreneurial government, to really solving system wide challenges? And the short answer is that it's so much work, and it's so much more difficult than putting the kids in a mentorship program.. It's so much work and so much more difficult that throwing money at scholarships.. It's so much work and so much more difficult, because it requires me not just to get off my horse and help the one kid get off the side of the road, but to stay in that road and figure out the way to restructure it so it doesn't happen again.. And that takes a lot of time and energy.. So I'm going to spend just a couple minutes talking about the difference between charity and injustice, because whether you're in government or not, as a citizen in this country, you have a part to play in making sure that we change the structures so that your innovative solutions are able to scale in a way that actually gets to real life solutions..

So I think the difference between charity and justice for me is that charity, it's like Band-Aids.. It's Band-Aids.. It's painkillers.. And justice is the surgery.. For example, last month, two of my wisdom teeth decided to have a conversation on the freeway.. And one, which was literally on a nerve, and jumping up and down, and the other one was laughing.. I was in so much intense pain.. And my dentist gave me some painkillers and some mouthwash, and they worked perfectly.. So I don't

feel the pain anymore.. But in two weeks, I have to have surgery, because eventually, the pain's going to come back..

And I could keep taking the painkillers, and keep doing the mouthwash, and feel good in the moment.. But next year, 20 years from now, the wisdom teeth still have to be taken out, because I've done nothing to address the root cause, which is that I have too many teeth in my big mouth.. And I think that's the same way in terms of thinking about charity and justice, that charity is what we do, and it feels good, as it's important.. But justice is the hard work of surgery of what it takes to move the country forward.. And then I also think that in terms of old work, that charity is me throwing resources at an issue and making the assumption that the problem is one of resources.. If they had more of this, if they had more in that, if I give to them when I have, then that solves the problem.. But justice is really about putting myself, my brain, my resources, my talent, my time, and my body on the line in a way until we really get at a solution.. And that's not sexy.. That's not easy.. That's incredibly difficult, but that's the only way, we as a society, will progress, in my humble opinion..

And since I made that paradigm shift, I've seen some changes.. We move from programs to really thinking through collective impact strategies for South Stockton.. We've realized that people are sick, because there's no access to health clinics.. So now, we're opening a health clinic.. We realize that people were in poverty, because there's nowhere for them to bank and save their money, that there was nothing but predatory check cashing places that charge 20% to 25% interest on simple transactions.. So we said, let's get a bank there.. And we realized our schools need to improve, so we've been working on organizing around schools.. And we realize that the people we serve don't come in silos.. They don't operate in silos, so we can't operate in silos, that they don't just need one thing, that they need jobs, and housing, and safe streets, and everything mostly you guys had growing up is what people need, and how do we work collectively to do it? And it's also been really humbling, because it's taught myself, but also the city, that we can't do this alone, that it takes the nonprofit leaders, the community organizers, the clergy, the county, the school board, and the individual residents to really, really, really get at these justice based solutions.. So I'm a little bit not sad..

It's a little bit worrying, because the mission we're on at Stockton now went from a four to eight year election cycle to 20, 30 years, so I think I might be in Stockton for a while.. But I would say it's so much more fulfilling to be working towards something that doesn't just get at an immediate itch or immediate need, that really gets at intractable, long term systematic system changes and solutions.. And it's ugly, messy work, but so incredibly fulfilling, because you finally feel like you're doing something so that you won't have to repeat it again in 30 or 40 years.. But all that was introduction.. So what I really, really wanted to talk about, what I really, really wanted to talk about was I've been reading some articles about Silicon Valley lately.. So I read an essay, I think by Paul Graham, that talked about how inequality was just a byproduct of progress, and it's OK that society's unequal, that wealth inequality is at the high point it's been since the Gilded Age, because we're making advancements.. And then I read this article about what's wrong with Silicon Valley.. And I was reading all these things that caused myself to think about wow.. This is such a great opportunity to talk to the future of Silicon Valley, because if I'm honest, my biggest fear is that I'm going to commit myself and my Stanford education to fixing these very difficult problems in community in Stockton, but that our society won't progress with it.. I'm worried that I will continue to spend all my time, and resources, and energy really thinking through how do we make sure every kid could read at grade level in third grade? How do you make sure every kid is in a high quality preschool? How do we help parents learn the importance of reading to their children? How do we make sure that police community relationships are OK? How do you make sure everyone has access to fresh fruits and groceries? And I could do all that great work in Stockton while society continues to get worse and worse..

I'm extremely worried about my kid asking me one day why, dad, in a time with all these technological advancements, and all this good stuff-- people freaking know how to live on Mars and on the moon, and you guys had a black president, but people still had to go to the streets and tell people that black lives matter.. I'm worried.. I'm really frankly, afraid about what happens when we let profit determine policy.. And I think we've seen some of that with the private prison industry, where literally private prison corporations have helped write the country's criminal justice policies for the past 20 years.. I'm worried that I will spend all our time, and all our energy, and all our smart on making cool products, but really forgetting about people.. And I'm not really talking about the people in this room, because the people in this room and most of the people listening on podcast, they're going to be A-OK.. You are going to be fine.. It could be extreme inequality, and you'll be at the top.. So everything will be fine for you-- seriously, and that's OK.. But I'm worried about all the people I represent are frankly 99% of the rest of the world..

So if I could leave you with one challenge, it would be to carve out some space.. Carve out some time to use your entrepreneurial thought, and leadership, and brilliance to really solve some these really intractable problems.. I think it's crazy that we could create apps that scale 100x times, but haven't yet figured out a way to educate people not to be racist.. I think it's ridiculous that we have all these apps, and we have SpaceX, and I'm going to get matched on the moon one day, hopefully.. And all that happens.. But yet, we still have kids.. We haven't figured out a way to get kids to read at grade level.. I find it insulting that we could figure out funding streams, and new funding schemes, and raise capital, and all those things, but we can't figure out a school district funding policy in California that works for everyone, that we have the answers to these other problems.. But the real problems, in terms of what type of society we want to live in, in terms of what does it mean to be a moral nation? What does it mean to be a really great nation, as President Obama says, that we're not working on those issues with the same gusto as we work on others? And that's not to say be a poor councilman like me, because that's not going .... either..

But it is to say with your brains, knowledge, talent, skills, and resources, there has to be a way that we could redefine traditional Silicon Valley terms.. There has to be a way we could redefine what value is so that lives are as valuable as products.. I don't see how anyone could live in a country where 12 year old Tamir Rice is murdered playing in a park.. That's crazy to me.. I'm confused as to how we can allow ourselves to work on these other issues, and not pay enough attention to the issues of the term the quality of life for our kids, and kids' kids, and kids' kids' kids.. We have hundreds of millions of people on Snapchat.. And yet, we still have people who don't believe in climate change and are blocking our progress to change it, that we have all these great products made by immigrants.. But yet, we're saying keep Syrian refugees out of the country.. So I'm asking you, as I prepare the close, that we really need your help, that you guys are so smart, so brilliant, so talented.. And the same people that created Google, Facebook, Instagram, Sun Microsystems could help us think about how we make sure there's no poverty in America, for example..

How do we make sure that the education system is equitable? Or how to make sure we at least provide the equality of opportunity, because I refuse-- I know people in Stockton who are so smart and so talented.. I've met people who could make \$10 last two weeks.. I can't do that.. You could probably go over the bridge with \$5.. So we have all these great people doing great things who don't yet have the same opportunities.. And I don't have the answers, but I do think the answers are in this room, in this community, and on the podcast and concert with the communities I represent now.. So I've prepared a close for question and answer.. My junior year in college, I went under freedom rides with the original Freedom Riders.. And one asked a question that really motivates my work that I want to leave with you all today.. Well, two questions, actually..

The first one he said, I was born on August 4, 1961.. Why was that day important? And I said well, you were arrested.. And then he said well, on that day, Barack Obama was born.. And then he said, I had no idea that the choices I made that day, as a 20-year-old college student, would pave the way so that 50 years later, a kid who couldn't get a cup of water at the counter would one day be president.. And then he said, what are you prepared to do today so that 50 years later, the world's a little better? So that's the first of two questions I'm going to lead with.. The first is what are we preparing today, in addition to making profits, and money, and products so that 50 years later, society is a little more equal? So that 50 years later, this room looks even more like what the rest of the country looks like.. When are we prepared to use that so that 50 years later, there's more opportunity for children up and down the income scale throughout the country, and frankly, the world? And then the second question really came from the article, "What's Wrong with Silicon Valley?" And he said Silicon Valley is losing its soul, that in this mass commercialism, consumption, and making billions of dollars every other day, that we're losing some of the things that make us human, make us humane, and make us a society.. And it reminds me of a scripture that I read this morning that said, what does it profit a man, or a community, or a valley to gain the whole world, have all the resources, all the talent, all the intellect, but they lose its soul? And for that I say, thank you.. Time for Q&A.. I don't have questions..

I have a question.. You are now running for mayor.. How different is it now running your campaign? How different is it than your first campaign? It poses new challenges, because when I was running at first, it was cool to be 21 years old and do things that weren't quote, unquote, professional, or quirky, or not.. No, he's young.. He's cute.. But now, I'm like an old politician.. It's been four years.. I've been in office for four years.. So now, I have this much higher expectation to dot the Is, cross the Ts.. And also, it's easy to run when you have no record, because you could just say what you're going to do..

But now you have to go before the public and say for three years you've entrusted me with your votes, with your support, and this is what I've been able to accomplish.. And for some people, that's enough.. And for some people they're like well, you could have done this, this, this, and this.. So it's a little bit more challenging, because now, you have a record to run on, and you've had to tell some people no, and tell some people we can't do this right now, and tell some people well, this is a great idea, but we don't have the resources yet, because we just exited bankruptcy.. And that makes people not-- like before, everyone used to like me.. And now, only half the people that used to like me like me.. So it's a little more difficult.. Hey.. How's it going? I'm good, man.. How are you? So when I first looked at the whole series, I looked at the speaker, and your name just stood right out..

It's like entrepreneurial leaders-- That was the earring in my ear, I know, in the picture? Yeah.. No, the city council, to the extent that I have knowledge on the whole political system is from watching The Wire, so my question is this.. How do you keep yourself from being into the system and being part of this spiraling political system that Obama alluded to yesterday? What are the expectations for yourself? So I'm working with Google-- Michael, I'm going to ask you a favor.. Can you repeat the question? Yeah.. So the question was I watched The Wire.. How do you keep yourself from being like the politicians on The Wire essentially, right? How do you keep yourself inoculated? No, seriously.. It was how do you keep yourself inoculated from crazy political stuff? Like not being part of the system, but helping to change or reform the system? Yeah, exactly.. Yeah.. Well actually, I'm working with Google X now in a suit.. It's a joke..

You could have laughed.. No, it's a good question.. So the thing about politics is that it is dirty, that sometimes, you have to knuckle up and fight, that sometimes, you have to make alliances, and sometimes, you have to compromise, because that's how the system works.. So I think for me, I try and inoculate myself by being very true to the values I uphold.. So when something comes across the desk for a vote I always think, OK.. Is this fair? Is it equitable? Does it help the city-- like really tests, like is this going to harm people? Is this corrupt? Is this evil? And that keeps me inoculated, because some people don't have that moral compass, frankly.. So that helps.. And also, I think oftentimes, people forget that before they're elected, they're a citizen.. There's nothing special about you.. I don't have special councilman blood..

Like I'm a regular person who is elected.. But oftentimes, when you're elected, you're in meetings all the time with elected officials, and you go to events with elected officials.. And then if you don't go to events with elected officials, if you're in the house they say, the councilman is here.. And you stand up, and everyone claps for you.. And it becomes a norm.. You think that's who you are, that you're the councilman.. So I have to remind myself that no, my name is Michael.. And if I lose tomorrow, if I decide to use something else, that's fine, because I care about these issues.. And right now, politics is a way to address those issues.. But 10 years from now, it might be something else, and be very open to that..

And then I spend a lot of time with kids, because kids don't care.. If your socks have been smashed, they'll tell you.. If you're wrinkled, they'll tell you.. They're great, so I spend a lot of time in classrooms in with younger people to help keep me focused on the issues.. Hi.. How do you think we can encourage social entrepreneurship when that involves taking risk, and all the expert advice is to minimize risk so that they can get reelected? Man, that's an excellent question.. So the question was how can we encourage social entrepreneurship and government when it's about taking risks? But you want to minimize risk so you could be reelected.. It's an interesting incentive system.. And I don't know if there is a real straight answer for that.. But to the best of my knowledge, I think in terms of how I think of it..

It's really around what am I willing to take a risk for? Like some things, I'm not going take a risk on.. Like I would take a risk around helping ex-felons get jobs, because that's important to me.. I might not take as big a risk for some other issue that's not as core essential to me, and that's how I do it.. So if I take a loss for this risk, I'm OK with it, because I know this is an issue I'm passionate about.. I care about.. It's good for the community.. And part of it is also I think it has to be just a more infusion of that into government.. And I used to always ask the city manager at the time, like why is government afraid of risk? And part of it's because governments, the only thing that's really at scale that touches everybody.. But even more importantly, the most vulnerable rely on government the most.. So I could have this cool idea for wired delivery..

But if it doesn't work, the people who are going to feel it the most are the most destitute, the most poor, the people that need the services the most.. That makes it a little bit harder to take risks.. So what I tell my clients on counsel, let's take smart risks in a way that won't unduly harm the most vulnerable, but still allow us to innovate and become better at service delivery.. Did I answer your question? Yes.. OK.. You talked a bit about pursuing justice ... long term solutions to things like salvaging the bank, or you talk about making a health care facility.. Do you mind talking a bit more about how you identified those things as real needs? Yeah-- because the timer was super on me, so I was trying to make sure I was good.. Part of it was that we established a coalition of organizations in the district who had similar interests we wanted to see this district is better.. And then we did this huge need assessment over the summer, knocked on 800 doors..

They came up with a community needs assessment, and the priorities were health care facility, bank, and recreation activity for kids, and education, and safety.. So they got the parties from the community.. Then it was like, OK.. These are the priorities? What can we do to address these concerns? Then it was like OK.. Well, how do we get a bank here? Well, let's talk to the bank president and figure out what his interests are, what would make him put a bank there.. And then for the health clinic, we've found that one of our partners had a health clinic that was dormant-- like literally, a health clinic that was dormant for seven years.. It's crazy.. And people were saying they need health care.. And it was like, OK.. Well, why is the health clinic not open? And then no one really had an answer, which was frustrating, but then it was easy to get a solution..

And they were like well, we don't have anyone to run it.. So let's talk to the local community medical clinics facility.. So things like that.. It's really finding needs, but then also filling in the gaps with the resources that are already in the community.. You talked a little bit to some of the problems that you see in society, such as mass incarceration or climate change.. Do you think that other than the fact that maybe-- you alluded that we, as the next generation of Stanford students, need to help tackle these problems.. Mhm.. Do you think that there are other reasons other than maybe that our best and brightest might not be working on these problems that could be perpetuating their existence? There's a variety.. That's an excellent question.. The question was for a lot of issues, besides the fact that oftentimes, the quote, unquote, best and brightest are working on those issues, where are some of the other causes for these things to happen? A lot of it-- and my opinion is also a profit driven..

So if I'm making a lot of money by polluting, and politicians need money to run for office, I'm going to donate to people who won't make me stop polluting.. And it's more complicated with that.. But I think for a lot of things, what is mass incarceration, climate change, immigration, almost every big issue, there's some underlying profit motive that is driving what I would call opposition that's antithetical to progress.. And some people may dispute the science, although, like the president said, 200 nations, majority of scientists don't, so.. So this series is all about entrepreneurial leadership.. What have you learned about leadership? That's my whole talk.. No, I mean like you know what? Your personal skills.. What skills have you gained over this time? What skills have I gained over this time? And it was a point I have written down, but I forgot it.. But I learned that consensus building is oftentimes better than competition.. And I think oftentimes, especially in politics, you want to be like the man and get the credit by learning to really make progress and get things done, that it's really about bringing the coalition of folks together..

It's really consensus building.. And I didn't realize that was a skill until I looked back at even the things I did at Stanford, from starting nonprofits, to leading student groups.. All of it was finding people who were smarter than me and like, OK.. Can we help do this, and why don't you do this? And I do this, and really working in teams and partnerships.. So that's been a

skill.. I think the other skill has been a really around empathy and listening.. And I didn't realize that was a skill, till I did the d.school fellowship, and they were doing empathy interviews.. And I was like, I'm pretty good.. This is what I do.. I listen to people..

I hear their needs.. I come up with a solution.. I'm good at this empathy stuff.. So that's been a skill.. And then also, I realized that I'm better at saying no than I thought I was, that if the data is very clear, like if we don't have money, we don't have money.. No.. I'm really good at being the bad guy, and I didn't think I had it in me.. But I'm probably too good at it now.. I'm like, no.. There's no resources..

But then I say, no.. Let's figure out a way one day.. But today, no.. What's the most difficult decision you've had to make? Oh, man.. What's the most difficult decision I've had to make? It's a recent one.. So there's a part of the city that's next to mine.. It's the eastern side of Stockton, and there was a library that was open there that was shut down as part of bankruptcy.. And people are calling for the library to be open, that we need to open the library.. But the only thing is libraries cost money, about half of \$1 million a year to operate on an ongoing basis.. And a big part of Stockton's bankruptcy was that oftentimes, we make knee jerk decisions about OK..

This feels good.. Let's put this arena in.. We need an arena.. Let's do this, and we're not really thinking about how do you pay for it after the first five years? Over the next 30 years, how to they pay for this library? So there's been a lot community advocates saying we need this library open.. You care about literacy.. You care about this.. You care about this.. Therefore, you should open the library.. And it's been difficult, because I'm like, yeah.. A library would be good..

But in that part of town, given the resources we have in Stockton, it would also be good to have employment services.. It would also be good to have health care services.. It would also be good to have Wi-Fi internet, so why don't we find a solution that combines the best of all of these? But then there's some people who are like, no.. We want a library.. So it's been really-- and it's also an election year, and no one hates libraries.. Everyone like libraries, right? So it's dumb to be arguing about no, we can't open the library, because the easier political decision would be like, let's just open the library.. But we still haven't found a funding stream for it yet.. And if we do find a funding stream, several city needs at least need consideration for those funds.. Like our homeless problem has increased over the past couple years.. There's infrastructure needs..

There's all these other needs in addition to a library.. So it's been difficult, because I'm like, these people, a lot of the community is English language learners.. A library would be such a benefit.. So that's been a tough decision and a debate we're still having.. So earlier in your talk, you highlighted the importance of the people that you surround yourself with in your both political career and also-- You payed attention.. OK.. Yeah.. Well I was curious, now that the decisions that you make have far greater consequences, how did you make decisions about who to listen to, who to keep close, who to distance yourself from? That's a good question.. So how you make decisions as to who to listen to? So first, I think before you listen to anybody, you have to have, in my head, I call them non-negotiables, or non-starters.. So if it hurts people, if it's not fair, if it's not going to work, I can't support it..

And then on certain issues, I try to find people who aren't connected to the issue personally, who don't have a financial interest or a political interest, who are just concerned, and I listen to them.. And then I listen to people who have political interests, like this is important to them, or they have a financial interest.. I listen to them.. And then I listen to staff, and I put all that together in a secret sauce.. And by the time it's time to vote, I have an answer.. It works, because it's interesting that people see the world really differently based on their position.. So if there's something coming up that I can financially benefit from, that needs to happen now.. And that's one perspective.. But for someone who may have not got the bid or doesn't qualify, they have a difference perspective.. And by putting all the perspectives together with some data and some comment sense, you're able to, in my opinion, find-- I think all decisions I make are good, and I think most people would agree..

But of course, you can't please everybody.. What about for personal decisions? Does that change? Personal decisions.. Like what? Like career choices.. Career choices.. So sometimes, I ask for help after I made a decision, just so people feel involved in the decision, in terms of personal stuff.. It works, because want to-- so that's part of it.. I'll pray.. But most of the time, I know what I want to do.. And I think oftentimes, we're taught not to trust our gut and intuition.. And I agree..

That shouldn't be the whole basis upon which you make decisions.. But there's something viscerally there that's important to listen to, in my experience.. So that's what made me run for mayor.. I was going to run for county supervisor, but then something just did not sit right.. And I was like, hm.. Let me investigate this.. And then I thought about all the great things that a mayor could do, and I thought about, OK.. The stuff we're doing in South Stockton, we could scale to the whole city.. I'm going to run for mayor.. And everybody's like, don't work for mayor..

That's crazy.. And now everyone's like, yeah.. Tubbs for mayor.. So I think it's a mixture of listening to people you trust, but also just really listen to your gut, because it usually has-- if not the right answer, an answer.. So you talked about, on your first campaign, how a lot of people who are instrumental in that process were like one of your best friends, your girlfriend, your family.. Now that you're in another campaign, is it those same people by your side involved as-- like to the same extent-- That's a great question.. I hope they're listening, because every since I've been elected-- not all them.. Honest Jill, she's still helpful.. But everyone-- a lot of people, because other people have lives too, so they're not as invested.. So I was talking to



Cameron about this, like man, Cameron..

Remember I used to call you every day? And now, on this mayor campaign, I hardly even reach out to you, because you're in med school.. And he's still very, very helpful.. But it's been a new cast of characters, in a way.. But also, the past few years has really been around building institutions so it's not so dependent on individuals, that I'm not depending on one person to do all my data needs or one person to do all my mail, that I have built institutions and supporters so that my family doesn't have to walk every single week, and then deal with me every single day, and all that stuff.. They can just deal with me, and then other people can help with the work part.. So the cast of characters have changed, for sure.. It's a good question.. That was probably my favorite today.. Say you have a great idea or a policy that you want to push through, and one of your colleagues says you know it's a great idea.. You're 100% sure, but one of your colleagues disagrees with you, and they're being very stubborn..

What's your approach there? Oh, that's life.. So how do I do my job every day is the question.. I'm joking.. I have great colleagues, for the most part.. So the thing is you don't need seven votes to get anything done.. You'll need four.. So I just try to count to four.. Literally, that's what I do.. As long as I get the majority with me.. But sometimes, if the person who's against it could be helpful, or is persuasive, or has influence on the issue, I try to at least be with them to hear their concerns..

Even though we may disagree, I at least want to see if I can address their concerns, because maybe they see something I don't see.. Somebody's like why are you against this? And sometimes, you get the truth.. Sometimes, you get other stuff that's not quite the truth.. But it's instructive, because it tells you how you shape the message around it so it gets done.. Did that answer your question? Yeah.. OK.. I was just wondering, what were the lessons from your time at Stanford as an undergrad that were most easily translated to your work as a social entrepreneur? What were the lessons from Stanford that were the most transferable? Stanford's a really special place.. I call it Disneyland, in the way.. No, think about it.. You're in this bubble..

You have the smartest professors in the world.. You have the smartest group of 18 to 30-year-olds in the world, and you have unlimited resources.. So it's just a place of great exploration, iteration, and yes, yes, yes.. So Stockton's a little bit different, in some respects.. But I think the lesson I learned in terms of thinking big and not being afraid to try and go has been helpful.. I think the lessons around just relationship building.. One of my best friends now who's been very helpful politically was someone I was on Long Street with in Cape Town for three months, and being overseas, and we just really hit it off.. And things like that, just the importance of the people you meet in The Dish, and in your dorm, and in the dining hall are in some way, going to do something big in whatever they choose to do.. So having a relationship a connection with them is so helpful, whether you're in social entrepreneurship or just in life, because having access to smart people is a commodity.. I'm sure you'll agree that this was totally inspiring..

Please join me in thanking Michael Tubbs.. Thank you.. Good job.. Thank you...