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In January 2019, Aicha Evans was named CEO of autonomous vehicle startup Zoox, which was acquired by Amazon in 2020. Prior to joining Zoox, Evans served as Senior Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer at Intel, where she drove Intel's transformation from a PC-centric company to a data-centric company. In this conversation with Stanford adjunct lecturer and former Zoox board member Heidi Roizen, Evans discusses building cutting-edge technology in a crowded market, dealing with skeptics, and leading an innovative team.



Transcript

Narrator Who you are defines how you build. 00:00:06,190 (upbeat music) - Today, we are very excited to welcome Aicha Evans, 00:00:10,970 the CEO of Zoox, to the Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders Seminar. To introduce Aicha, and to facilitate this session's ETL, I am gonna hand the baton over to Heidi Roizen who I get to introduce to you now. Heidi is no stranger to ETL. She is one of the rare few people who's actually been a keynote at ETL twice. So she's an icon in her own right. She's also part of the Stanford teaching team. She's an adjunct lecturer in the management science and engineering department at Stanford, and she also got her Bachelor's Degree in English from Stanford and her MBA from Stanford, and if that doesn't prove that she bleeds cardinal enough, she also directs the Stanford Threshold Ventures Fellows Program which is named after the fund where she's a partner at Threshold Ventures and on behalf of whom, she served on the board of Zoox. So this is not just an interviewer-interviewee dynamic, it's also a board member-CEO dynamic, which we think will make an especially interesting ETL. Heidi's worn several hats more than I can name, just given our time right now, but among them they include being the former VP of worldwide developer relations at Apple and the CEO of her own venture-backed company T/Maker which she was the CEO of for over a decade and she currently serves on the boards of a bunch of public, private companies and other organizations.

So without further ado, I'm gonna hand over the baton now to Heidi to take it from here. - All right, and I'm also, another title I have 00:01:45,610 that wasn't mentioned yet, is I am the unofficial president of the Aicha Evans fan club. (laughs) So we've got that too. So now it is my distinct pleasure to be able to introduce Aicha Evans. Aicha joined Zoox as the Chief Executive Officer in February of 2019. Prior to Zoox, Aicha served as the Senior Vice President and Chief Strategy Officer at Intel Corporation, driving the company's transformation from a PC-centric to a data-centric company. Previously, she ran the company's wireless efforts and oversaw a global team of over 7,000 engineers. She holds a Bachelor's Degree in Computer Engineering from the George Washington University. Welcome, Aicha. - Thank you, well, I'm also the president 00:02:29,634 of the Heidi fan club so (mumbles).

(laughs) - So we ought to have a fun conversation today. 00:02:35,410 I've been really looking forward to this. So I shall let's start with your origin story. Tell us about your journey from Senegal to Silicon Valley. - All right, well thank you all for having me 00:02:44,540 and thank you for attending. I know that your time is precious, I appreciate it. I was born in Senegal, West Africa and I bounced back. My dad was in telecommunication engineering and at that point we were an ex-French colony so there was a lot of table being laid in Africa to basically have the communication infrastructure wired at that time. And I had the pleasure of bouncing between Senegal and France, and I quickly saw the difference it makes to have technology and not to have technology. This is something that I saw from my personal life, trying to stay in touch with my friends when I was in Senegal, or when I was in France and having to hack my phone at home to be able to make phone calls, to stay in touch with people and my dad saying, why am I getting crazy phone bills? And then I wanted to study computers and really the U.S.

was the place to do that. There was also a certain element of sort of taking charge of my own life. When you are Senegalese kid, when you're in Senegal, people are like, no, no, you're from France. When you're in France, they're like, you're from Senegal. I was a mix of a lot of different cultures and viewpoints and I wanted to be me. And so I came to the U.S. to study, my dad only had one requirement and you know tuition is expensive so you do have to listen to that part. And it was

to be in D.C. because he had a lot of friends at the IMF and World Bank that were gonna quote unquote, supervise me. Then came here, went to school, met my husband who's American and the rest is history.

And first engineer, born, raised as an engineer, enjoy that, but I'm not for happy engineering. I love technology. I love when you do something and it works, but I want to see the impact. How does it make people's lives better? How does it advance society? And that's sort of how I've guided my career. - Terrific. 00:04:39,970 Well, and in terms of impact, I think what you're doing today is going to have huge impact on the world. So Zoox, for those not familiar with the company, can you tell us a little bit about Zoox and what it does? - Yeah, I'll start at the top as if you are a customer. 00:04:55,690 Urban mobility is really important in movement of people in cities and so we sell you a ride. What's behind the ride is an autonomous machine really that takes you from point A to point B. So we like to say that we're reinventing personal transportation, especially in urban centers to make it cleaner so the environment safer, we know that we lose close to 40,000 people a year in car fatalities, and also to make it enjoyable.

Why should you be worried about driving and parking and why should so much real estate be dedicated to parking spaces? Look at a city like San Francisco that has a housing problem, and that wants to retain economic activity but 30% of its real estate footprint is for parking. Look at congestion for 30% of the time, the congestion is really caused because people are looking for parking. And so think about the most efficient and sustainable movement of people by you saying, I want to go from point A to point B. You have a, Zoox app, say that, we show up, pick you up, you step into this beautiful machine, sliding doors, almost like a moving living room, you have your little screen that tells you what's going on. you can control your HVAC, your music. By the way, you can be on your phone, you can meditate, you can relax, you can do whatever you want, and then we drop you off and pick up the next person. - It's pretty exciting. 00:06:20,060 It's very exciting. I get to say that as one of the people who've actually been in one of the prototype vehicles. (mumbles) So, look forward to when it gets commercialized.

So let's go back a few years. When I first met you, you were Chief Strategy Officer of Intel, and you had upwards of 8,000 people reporting to you at a prior role there. And besides my incredibly persuasive skills, what made you decide to take the leap to the startup world and the CEO role? - (sighs) So, look, first I was really happy at Intel. 00:06:54,190 And when you're in Silicon Valley and you look like me, you have to get to be careful to check your ego at the door because you get a lot of calls for different roles. And I had to have a one-on-one with myself after almost leaving Intel a few years ago and say, what do I really want? What's important to me? I've earned, I think sort of the the opportunity to decide what I want to do. And I had decided that I was not going to go to another big company. I was going to stay at Intel, there's plenty of work to do, even today. Good luck to Pat by the way, and that was the decision. And a few friends of mine in the recruiting world, people I'm close to said, well, yeah, but what can we call you for? And I basically said, look, if it's a forward looking technology, big impact on on society, it has to be private, I have two teenagers and I can't afford the public life right now, and it has to be a team of founders or a founder that sort of, I fall in work with love with, and they need somebody like me, not because the board told them, but because intrinsically, they know that they need that. And it has to be in the Valley because I didn't want to move.

And really Zoox, I mean, it was scary a little bit. It's a big mission but it ticked all the boxes. I mean, economy activity and advancement in societies happened through the movement of information and people. Even the internet, it's actually a transportation system it just happens to be virtual and it's for knowledge. So Zoox ticks that box. I'll see these need a lot of help. We're not going to destroy them and rebuild them. There isn't space to redesign them. They are the center of economic activity. The climate and the environment, especially now that we have a New World Order a little bit in the U.S., hopefully we're not arguing about that anymore, that's important.

And then just what you make possible and what you unleash for people in terms of economy access. So Zoox really, the mission is bold, it's ambitious, it's absolutely worthy and I want to spend my time on worthy things. And then I have a wonderful co-founder that yeah, we do quite well together. So that's in the end, why I said no. By the way, I never told you this, a lot of my friends in the Valley said, are you nuts? (laughs) - Oh, I'm not surprised by that. 00:09:09,120 (laughs) I'm glad you didn't listen to them. Or I'm glad you didn't take their concerns. Well, you bring up the co-founder and and I wanna talk about that a little bit, because I know from being on the other side of the recruitment effort that the most important relationship, and really while there were four of us on the Search Committee and you were the number one choice of each of us individually, but one person's vote mattered the most. And that's Jesse Levinson because of course, Jesse being the co-founder and the person you were going to have to work incredibly, incredibly close with, that relationship is really important. And I think that's an archetype of a lot of relationships in technology in Silicon Valley writ large, that it is a relationship between someone who comes in with a lot of experience and someone who was the person who started at the very beginning, who may not have had all the kinds of experiences that melding of the two skillsets that really makes magic happen.

So can you tell us a little bit about, like, what you and he actually did to figure out if that was going to work and then what you've had to do to actually make it work. - It's funny. 00:10:23,006 So I went into, I remember we all talked, you are members of the Search Committee, and then it was like, okay, well, now you need to, now you have to meet Jesse. And I remember everybody like preparing me, like telling me, well, you know, this and that. And I was like, okay. So I kinda knew going in, I drove to Foster City to meet him for the first time ever, I had never heard of him. And I was like, all right, this is going to be the very short conversation or the beginning of something beautiful. So I came in and we walked around instead of sitting down and I don't know how to put it. It's like very quickly, he's very logical, which I appreciate. He has a good value

system, which I appreciate.

He's super excited about about the mission. I mean, it's almost like, it's unbelievable how rooted, it is him basically, and most important point, the most important point, he's a learner. And this is key. To me that makes a big difference, because frankly, if you're the co-founder and you know it all, you don't need me, let's not waste time. And so the fact that he was a learner and we had a value system and we kind of teased him, it's been two and a half years now, we're very similar. We have moments, we are driving people nuts at Zoon because sometimes they'll be like, did you guys talk? I'm like, no, we independently came to the same conclusion. Or sometimes we'll send exactly the same text at the same time. Now we have to watch for that because what's important is diversity of thought, your similarities are good, and your value system to sort of make you a good team. But you do need that diversity of thought. No, but we, I don't know, we like each other.

Now, turned out, he knew more about me than I knew about him, so he had a leg up a little bit. But it just clicked, and then there was a moment, I would prefer not to say what the question was, because it's an intimate moment between the two of us, but I walked in there going, I don't care what happens, if it's going well, I'm going to ask him this question because I'm going to know what he's made of. And I asked him a very difficult, intimate question that had to do with Zoon and he, you have to know Jesse first, he did his little like, (mumbles) O, I can't (mumbles) (laughs) then he took a deep breath, and then he gave me the answer. And he defended his position and he said, you know, at the end, I don't know if I was fully right but I think I was, and I stand by what I did. And yeah, so that also brought respect into the relationship. And then from there we talked and talked and talked and talked and talked many, many times, and then we got down to negotiations, you know how it is, and money is important, but at the end of the day, I'm one of those and I promise, I'm not saying this from a position of privilege, it's like, I truly believe you do the right things and the right things will happen. In the grand scheme of things, as a young girl from Senegal, West Africa, we're all very blessed. If you're on this call, if you're participating in this virtual conversation, we're very blessed. So we have the lawyers, I'm sure you remember that, exchanging red lines and it came down to what to do if it didn't work out. And it was driving me nuts and it was giving me a bad feeling and I was like, you know, it's like, I didn't go into my marriage thinking what's going to happen if we get a divorce? And so I was in Palo Alto, sorry for the long answer, with some girlfriends seeking advice.

And and I texted him and I said, "Hey, where are you right now?" and he said, "Foster City". I said, "I'm in Palo Alto, do you mind coming by? I have an important question for you." He's like, "Yeah, I'll be there in 20." And my girlfriends are like, "No, let the lawyers handle it.", I'm like, "Okay". So he came over and I'm like, "Look, I want to do this. I think it's going to be fun. I think we're going to do wonderful things together, but this is really driving me nuts, so this is what's going to happen. I'm going to call off my lawyers. I don't wonder what happens if we get a divorce, but first we need to have a little conversation here. We're doing well, we're going to do well, but we're going to have tough moments and I want to know that when we have tough moments, you remember this moment that we chose this life together. This work life together, and that we're going to figure it out, the two of us. We're not going to have interventions or anything like that, and I want to know that you're committed to that because I'm committed to that.

And if you are, you call off your lawyers, I call off my lawyers, I go on vacation for two weeks and then let's roll." - And I have to say, this is one of those moments 00:14:41,580 that when the recruiters called in there and they said, Well, we're going to have to negotiate the employment contract and all this kind of stuff. And then they called and said, or Jesse called me and said, "No, we're done, we're all done. Aicha doesn't need that." And let me just say to everyone out there to bring on an incredibly Senior Executive like Aicha with that, was first of all, I think it was just a great symbol of what the future was going to be like, which was incredible. And so incredibly refreshing and also it really, I think, left everyone with the deep understanding that you were putting your whole self in this. And that it's a little bit like, leaping without the net, right? And so I think it had such a huge impact on your relationship with the board and with Jesse and obviously it has been an amazing relationship. So now, but it wasn't just Jesse, you were jumping into a company of close to 1000 people, or maybe we were seven, 800 at the time. Now, you'd managed lots larger groups than that before, but it's a little different being a CEO, right? I mean, how was that different for you? - Well, I mean, first of all, it's very lonely. 00:16:06,410 Second of all, there's a sense of responsibility. You're not just responsible for Zoon and the execution, the roadmap, the fundraising, you're responsible for a lot of families. When you work in a big corporation, you can always look up, it's the CEO's fault, it's the board's fault, it's the market's fault.

Somebody just doesn't get it. Well here, the buck stops with you. You don't get to whine and complain, and you can have a support system. And so the first thing I think you were there, the first all hands. They were like, what's your goal for the first, I can't remember, like 90 days or first year or whatever? And usually people have their normal better talking points, one, two, three, and I'm going to do, and I was like, look, I don't know, in terms of outcomes and deliverables, my first objective is to be one of you. And so a year from now, I want you to kind of forget that I wasn't here for the beginning of the journey, so I'm gonna spend a lot of time with all of you, I'm gonna learn, I'm going to listen. I will form opinions, I won't talk a lot at the beginning, not because I don't have opinions, but because I want to understand what makes this company tick and what is important. And then after that, and in the process of doing that, I had a very good board, thank you for that, I was lucky to. Started sort of forming some opinions, you're in a startup, so capital is top of mind. This is a capital intensive endeavor.

So the whole fundraising strategy who we are. The second fight was a little bit more funny, a little funnier. At Intel, I was known as the change agent and renegade, why do we have this process? Why is this bureaucracy, why can't we do this, why

can't we do that? Why all this infrastructure? Well, at Zoox, you're not just a driving execution, you're building a company, hopefully an American icon. So I was like, well, nobody's coming, it's me. I have to build the infrastructure. HR, finance, all of the systems and sort of have an integrated roadmap, drive towards milestones, but do it from a place of generosity, from a place of teaching and learning, and really manage the rhythm and cadence so that you meet people where they are, and then you go along the journey with them. Human beings do not like change. And so you have to try to make the change positive, an extra credit, make it even feel good. And that doesn't mean you don't make tough decisions. I think within the first, what, three months, a few executives were no longer with us, that was hard.

Make the calls, don't sweat the small stuff and remember what Andy Grove told me once. I was criticizing him and saying, I heard that during your days, this and this happened, I can't believe you didn't deal with that because you know, I know it all right? I'm opinionated, like all of them. And he's like, "Aicha, I knew about that, but that was number 25 on my list and number one and three were so much more important." So sort of known where to put your attention, where do you teach to fish? But it's been a great journey and I've learnt the time too. This is a technology that I didn't know in detail. This is probably the smartest collection of people that I've worked with. And this is definitely the greatest variety of skillsets that I've had the pleasure to work with and building one thing together. - So it does sound like, 00:19:28,110 and I know if you have to articulate your leadership style, you definitely, it seems that you do a lot of teaching- - Yes. 00:19:42,720 Is that how you would describe your leadership style? - Yes, I mean, I would say of course, I'm an engineer first, 00:19:48,510 so that's just the way it is. So logic, math are very important. I also like philosophy, so heart, balance, are important, and yeah, you have to be a learner, you have to be a teacher and you have to make sure that you switch from being you, the personal best or the smartest, or what have you, to enabling the collective best and the collective smarter.

So you have to motivate, you have to have clarity, you have to communicate, communicate. You have to be transparent, you have to be authentic. And those are the things that I strive to practice every day. - Great, great. 00:20:27,870 Now, of course you faced something just about a year ago that a lot of people in the world faced. All of a sudden, COVID enters and you actually run a factory or a prototyping factory in a lab. And I mean, you can't just send everybody home (phone chimes) to work from home, so question for you. How did the pandemic change what you did at Zoox and how did you keep Zoox moving forward during that time? - Well, at first I had to have a little bit 00:20:55,390 of a one-on-one with myself. I was like, no, this is not happening. So I have to accept that it is happening.

We were actually probably a week too late, telling people to go home because I was literally in shock. Then as you know, I had my little crying moment. Yes, I do cry at home by myself. And I was like, dang, we're done. I don't know how we're going to do this. I need people. Literally, we have to reveal the vehicle at the end of the year that was a big deal. And that was one of those decisions that will always live with me, whether it was too late, too early, or what have you. And I am not joking, we use this expression that right at the beginning of the pandemic, when we told everybody to go home, all the vehicles' parts for four vehicles, we needed to build, test, and then reveal. They were in crates.

We joke and say the bodies, because there's the big vehicle body, the bodies, everything was in crates at Kato, our manufacturing facility. So after crying, calling you probably, and calling others, many different times, I was like all right, we gotta figure something out here. And Andy Grove really helped me again from the grave, good companies in crisis, bad companies die, good companies survive and great companies actually thrive and emerge stronger. So it was like, okay, let's break down the problem. How do we figure out, how do we work with the counties to have the minimum number of people onsite to be able to build this vehicle? How do we organize the shifts and phases so we can have social distance, and all of these different things? How do we work with our head over environmental health and safety to put protocols in place? Also got a medical doctor as a consultant to help us with all that, and sort of reassured everybody also that this was totally voluntary. And if they were not comfortable doing it, then we will not going to do it. And basically started building the vehicle step by step and started the testing and rotating people around. Kudos and shout out to our software team because they were doing... I mean, the vehicle doesn't do anything by itself, right? By itself, it's basically a paperweight. And so they were developing and testing remotely.

So imagine the tools and infrastructure to do that. And then there was the other side of the thing, which is, I am supposed to be closing a fundraising around right now. What the hell are we gonna do? (laughs) But it also brought a lot of clarity in terms of, this is a long-term game. This is capital-intensive. We happen to have one company, Amazon, that we felt it was logical for them to be in this game, but they weren't. And to make a long story short, we ended up with them. Did right by our investors, at least as the best we could do. Heidi called, taught me, "No value destruction." I said, "Yes, ma'am" (laughs) - Value creation. 00:23:49,690 No, you did great and I think Amazon is, it is a great place. They still operate you independently.

They recognize that this is a multi-billion dollar effort and it is going to take awhile to do this. It's gotta be right, it's gotta be safe. It is an incredibly complex thing to do. And it's wonderful that Amazon has stepped up to keep the whole team intact and to keep you moving on your mission, which is amazing and keep you in the leadership position as well. So having said that, it is a little different from being a startup and how do you keep the entrepreneurial spirit alive, being owned by one of the largest market companies in the world? - So, first of all, we are still a startup. 00:24:37,920 We're on outlines. The way I explain it to people is, we just happened to be owned by one big investor. And it happens to be an investor that also has a lot of experience at building a multi-billion dollar adjacent and orthogonal businesses. And so, it's a great single investor or owner, but that also has a lot of advice. And down the road, as we earn the opportunity to do so, there are also a lot of

opportunities to do stuff together.

So what I tell folks is nothing's changed. We're startup. Agile, Nimble, fast, we have to take risks. It's funny, we were in a review and an Amazon executive said, "Well, if you need more of that, you have to ask and we'll figure out the funding." And I was like, "Yes, if we need that, we will." But then I turned to my Zoox team that was, we were together and said, "Hey, hey, hey, we're poor. We don't have any money. You know, we stay hungry. We stay determined." So really a lot of people ask me this question. We're still a startup. Zoox, when you come in, it feels exactly the same. It's just, we have security now.

We don't worry about tomorrow morning, but we operate still like a startup and we have competition out there, we have a big mission, and so we haven't our mindset a bit. - So let's change topics a little bit. 00:26:01,890 Couple quick questions that are kind of more personal level. The first one is, Silicon Valley is notoriously bad when it comes to diversity, both women and people of color. What are your thoughts on the state of diversity and inclusion in the Valley and how can we change it for the better? - Well, I mean, the state is, it's not good. 00:26:22,160 I know personally, I mean, I'm decent at what I do, and I'm very proud of my career, but I know I'm not that good that I should be getting the amount of phone calls that I get, let me put it that way. So it's not good. Look, how we can change it, so this is probably going to be controversial. And now there are going to be a lot of questions popping up. Yes, you have to do something purposeful to change it, but I'm not sure that I agree with, I'm not one of those, like you have to have...

You have to impose it on people basically, through, well, now we're going to have at least two women or these numbers or what have you. I think that's a step, but I don't think that should be the first step. I don't think we're applying enough generosity in sort of sitting the majority down and talking about what it means not to have diversity and inclusion for companies from a bottom line and from just an innovation standpoint and frankly, for this nation. This nation is not going to compete in the longterm by all of us having more babies, right? This nation was founded on innovation, on risk-taking and on bringing so many different people from so many different countries, choosing this nation and choosing its value system and bringing all of that together to create what it is today. And so I think that there needs to be almost a resetting of the conversation. This is not about scarcity because I mean, look at it. If you tell the majority it's about scarcity, well then human beings don't react well when you talk about scarcity. Then they are in defense, then there's negative energy and so on. So I think we need to reset the conversation. Then we also need to be honest with the folks who are not in the majority and say, we didn't get here overnight.

A lot of things are very systematic. I mean, taking my son to Lego Robotics opened my eyes because he said, "I'm the only Brown person here. And by the way, the other people who just have a brownish color and straight hair don't count." And that was quite eye opening. That taught me a lot because of course, what did I do? Well, I'm going to donate a lot of money to Lego Robotics. They're like, yeah, we'll take your money. But let me tell you what we need. The kids you want to bring into the conversation, the kids, you want them to participate, some of their parents work on weekends, they don't have time to drive them to this. They don't have mentors in their schools on the Lego Robotics Project. And when there's a project, they don't have access to Silicon Valley. Parents who go, oh, it's going to be about a muscle atrophy on the way to state.

Don't worry, I'm going to call Heidi because she knows somebody at NASA. And the next day you're talking to like the number three person at NASA. So there's a lot of stuff that's very systematic that we'll not going to solve overnight. And so to me, we need to be set the conversation, create a mentality of abundance, so it's all of our problem, and then talk about all this bad systematic stuff that's been installed overnight. How do we go after it? And what unnatural acts and chances do we give to make that happen? - That makes a ton of sense, makes a ton of sense. 00:29:30,980 So we all know about Intel inside, but now we're going to get to Aicha inside, figure out what makes you tick. You've had a tremendous career and you kind of don't have to work. You're the CEO of Zoox you're on the board of SAP. Can I say your new board that you just joined? - Yeah. 00:29:46,240 - You just joined the board of Joby Aviation, 00:29:47,513 incredible company.

Goodness gracious, what drives you? Do you have a personal mission here? I mean, what makes Aicha tick? - I want to drive change 00:30:00,850 and I want to live the world better than I found it. And I want to make sure that the very, the blessings that I've received, I find a way to scale them for others. - Powerful. 00:30:13,250 You are the mom also have two teenagers in your spare time, around all this other stuff. What do you hope to teach them by example? And is there any advice you'd give them that's different from your own path? - Yeah, first and foremost, I want them to be good people. 00:30:29,333 I want them to have a good value system. I want them to work hard. I want them to, earning the discretionary energy of folks around you, whether it's at work or in your family is important. I want them to inherit that. And then other than that, be happy.

And happiness is a choice, by the way. You have to decide to be happy. In terms of the advice I give them, it's not advice, it's more of an invitation. And I tell them that to me, to not obsess too much about money and sort of competing because first of all, that'll be fine. Second of all, I said, look, especially in the Valley, yes, we have homeless people, we know that in San Francisco but we also have a lot of people that are very lucky from a financial standpoint. But frankly, they ought to be ashamed, relative to the homeless people because they're not contributed anything to society, but at least the homeless people don't have the means to. You're here to contribute and to make society better. You are not here to be just a consumer and a just like occupy space for nothing. And so live by that value system and make something happen in the field that you're passionate about. It doesn't have to be in engineering or in high-tech, but make sure that you contribute to society and you

don't chase money, and you don't become a prisoner of your ambition.

- Well, of all the people who are lucky to have you 00:32:02,170 in their lives, I think your kids should know what a great mom they have, and if they need to be reminded, tell them to call me and I'll tell them. - Will do (laughs). 00:32:10,370 - Well, that was great, let's turn our attention 00:32:14,090 to the Q and A that we've amassed here and Aicha, can you see it as well? - Yes, I can. 00:32:18,490 - All right, do you want to go through and pick a... 00:32:20,062 - I'll just go by the voting. 00:32:22,500 So Zoox is no longer a startup having become a subsidiary of Amazon. What does Amazon gain directly from Zoox asset and talent? Why is this a good fit for Amazon? Might it possibly reduce Amazon's operating costs by automating delivery vehicles? I ask because Amazon likes to acquire companies that it can directly integrate into its service or supply chain. IE Distribution, Amazon Prime Air, Whole Foods, Twitch, AWS, et cetera, and then there's a source. So as I said earlier to, first of all, thank you for your question, it's a good one. As I said earlier, to Heidi and to all of you, we're a little different in the sense that no, we're still a startup.

We just happened to be owned by Amazon and we also get a lot of advice and a sort of an acceleration in doing our mission. And our mission is exactly the same. You can actually go on the Amazon Day One Blog and search for Zoox there, and these are very smart people. There's a reason that they they've had so many successful businesses. Look, if you can move people, first of all, that's where the economic demand is, right? And that's already starting. You see it with non-autonomous mobility on demand today with ride sharing and so on. So their view is work hard to establish the technology, get to market, make it safe, that's where the demand is. That's a growth business and earn the opportunity. And I agree with that. So then have intersection points with, whether it's Delivery, whether it's Whole Foods, whether it's Alexa and other things.

And what it gains is at the end of the day, it gains wonderful technology that is a great business. And at the same time that also allows some synergies and some opportunities with the rest of what they are doing. All right, I'm going to move to the next question. I believe Zoox has many competitors, Cruise way more, et cetera. How do you balance between working to achieve Zoox's mission while also ensuring Zoox does not fall behind competitors? What advice would you give for a founder working in a market with many competitors? So, yes, by the way we consider them competitors and fellow travelers. This is a brand new sort of inflection point in transportation and so we have a collective responsibility according to Morgan Stanley, it's a multi-trillion dollar opportunity. The hands of Adam Smith says that, and we've researched this, there aren't multi-trillion dollar industries that are basically dominated by one player so several of us will succeed. And in terms of your focus, look, you have to be very, I mean, one of the things about Zoox is, since 2014, we said, this business model of selling rides versus selling a vehicle is the way to deploy autonomy. We also have been extremely consistent that if we agree that AI is going to replace the human for this particular model, it's important to re-architect and redesign the vehicle to make it easiest and safest for AI to drive. So yes, competition is important, but be very grounded in your mission and your approach.

Apply a lot of consistency and yes, look around to see what they are doing and what makes sense and what doesn't, but that should just be a reference check as opposed to sort of turning your mission into, oh, what do I do in reaction to competition? And in our case, it's particularly makes sense to do that because it's a big market and several of us will make it and that's okay, that's good. - That's it, I'm going to step in, 'cause I'm just in 00:36:10,320 as a proxy for Heidi until we have Heidi back. That was a terrific answer, Aicha. Before I jump into the next one, one of our themes for Stanford is principle-driven entrepreneurship. Do you ever have a conflict, not with competitors, but let's say with Amazon's objective versus your heartfelt mission for why you started Zoox, does that ever come into conflict? And if it does, do you use principles to navigate that or can you give us examples of how you navigate those tensions? - We haven't had one with Amazon yet. 00:36:37,720 It's been six months and maybe we'll have one. I mean, there's enough intimacy that there should be, even in family, there are tensions. What we have is what's called tenets. And they are established from the beginning, before even the close of the transaction and we always go back to those tenets anytime there's a question or any time there's a discussion. Now, with competitors it's more like a...

if it's happened once and then you get on the phone and you say, look, we need to talk. And you get on (mumbles) - And you called up 00:37:06,580 your competitor, you actually called them up directly? - And you sit down and you have a conversation 00:37:13,184 and then get to a conclusion and move on. - Oh, that's great, that's great. 00:37:16,280 Heidi is back. - Sorry about that, thank you for picking up Ravi. 00:37:20,580 So Aicha, well, you're on a roll, what's the next question you want to tackle? - All right, what do you wish natural born U.S. citizens 00:37:28,488 knew about immigrants and immigration having that perspective? Do you think international talent is an underrated asset in U.S. entrepreneurial ecosystem? Huh, that's an excellent question. I think actually U.S. born citizen know this, they just need to sometimes remind themselves.

How this country was founded is not a secret, right? It was founded with a lot of people coming here seeking a better life, sharing a value system, coming from all walks of life and different countries and so on. So I think what I wish they would do is pause and remind themselves and just look at how it happened to begin with. The second thing is, I wish people would educate themselves a little more because even in the high tech of today, right, it's quite clear that entrepreneurs and very successful founders have come from all walks of life. I mean, in my space one of the company people, I'm not going to say his name, but, you know, there's very deep South African roots. A lot of people don't talk about that, but they should. So, now what advice, I think, yes, the talent is underrated not because we're being mean and giving them a bad score, because we're forgetting our roots and how you drive innovation. It's logical to me as an engineer that wanting the best talent worldwide to come innovate in the United States is good for the United States. So it's more of a reminder, pausing, don't get caught up in

all of the division and all the craziness out there in social media. You're all super smart, just pause and ask yourself a few questions and that will be a good enough reminder. Oh, I was afraid of this question.

Okay, are you involved with the African diaspora in tech or French speaking community in the Bay Area? I am ashamed to say, no, I am not. At least the African diaspora, this is something that weighs heavily on me because I feel that it's violating my principle of giving back, a little bit. It's not that I'm against it, it's just, my time is extremely limited right now. And between work and my kids and my husband, my life, I have soccer games, I have all these things going on and I don't really believe in being involved by just calling into a couple of Zooms and sending a cheque from time to time. So this is something that I hope to do a better in the future, and then yes, the French speaking community in the Bay Area to some extent, because my friend, my kids go to a French school or at least you know, what do they call it? Like multi-language school and French being one of the languages and therefore you become friends with the parents, but nothing in a very formal way. (laughs) What advice would you give to minority and international students currently in college? Aha, that's a good one. So first of all, don't think of yourself as a minority. That's a diminishing word, I don't care what your label, but you're the boss of you, you're the CEO of you to begin with, and so I want you to please consider thinking about yourself in a different way. You actually bring to the table something that is rare and something that is going to be different. It is very likely that because of your experiences and viewpoints, you're going to be having ideas, asking questions that maybe others won't necessarily ask, so I want you to actually switch it in your mind and treat it as an advantage, as opposed to anything else.

For international students, I think it's important to ask yourself, are you here just to get an education and go home, which is totally okay by the way, or are you here to get an education and you kind of like it here and you want to be part of the diaspora and go back to my initial question. Immigrants and sort of that international infusion has always been good for the United States in terms of innovation, embrace it, go find your journey and please, please, please don't pick the easy jobs. Don't pick the easy projects, sort of take some risks. I like to say, and I hope this is not too controversial. If you fail, there's no failure, really? Because if you succeed, you get noticed and you get given more and you get a support system and if it doesn't work out, you learn, back up, look at the triggers, reload, and try again. So either way, you win. - Great. 00:42:10,230 - All right, with any new market disruptive technology 00:42:13,320 or product, there are people who aren't onboard. This is the hardest part, marketing to those and convincing those who are not onboard. What do you say to the people not on board with self-driving vehicles? They probably already know the facts (chuckles), self-driving companies market with less deaths safer.

How would you speak to these individuals? So that's an excellent question too. So yeah, you don't throw the figures and the facts at them. Let me tell you a secret, I believe in momentum. I think sometimes we engage in conversations with either what I call the non-believers or the detractors a little too soon. So when you have a disruptive technology, by the time it's mainstream, everybody forgets that it started tiny, small, medium, large, and scale. Personally, I don't believe, unless you absolutely need something from somebody who was a detractor or who's not on board, meaning they are absolutely necessary for you to move the mission forward. I think that sometimes we make the mistake, especially in high tech to try and convince those detractors or folks who are not onboard way too early. So, first question I ask myself is, is it absolutely necessary to have those people on board right this minute? Because without that, the mission cannot carry forward. And if the answer is, no, it is not necessary, then leave that for down the road. Because at the end of the day, if you have a great product, I mean, we talk about the iPhone now, right? And Apple and all that, people forget the first iPhone launched on the AT&T network and only in the United States of America.

It wasn't even on the other networks and now look at what's happened over 15 years or so, it is worldwide. So my view is, is it necessary? If it's not necessary, I'll catch you a little later. And by the way, maybe I won't even want to have to catch you because momentum. If I'm delivering value, momentum will take over. Now, if it's really necessary, then I have to understand why is it you don't believe? And then we have to basically get in conversations and we have to get into a little bit of an SLA or a little bit of a contract as to what has to be true, or what do you need to see to start believing and then keep earning that and put points on the boards? - Great. 00:44:33,300 (mumbles) It looks like we have two more here than we can probably get to before we run out of time. - You pick, you pick. 00:44:38,030 - Well, let's start with this. 00:44:39,520 Do you feel, here's one. Do you feel like (mumbles) school is necessary to be a great executive, seeing as you chose not to get an MBA? - Oh boy.

00:44:48,960 - I know you have a lot of MBAs working for you. 00:44:51,860 - I do, look, first of all, 00:44:53,780 I mean, the fact that I didn't get an MBA was just an exercise in circumstances. I actually thought that I needed one. Look, I think an MBA is a very good tool. It's also sometimes it's, how should I say, an entrance fee? Meaning there are cases and companies that won't consider you unless you have one. So I'm not going to talk about the MBA. I'm going to talk about you yourselves, each person. Be clear about who you are, be clear about what your passions are, especially early in your career, you have the opportunity to really have mistakes. So pick the bold things, learn a lot, always put the truth on the table, be respectful, have conviction and I promise you that whether you have an MBA or not, you'll be fine. - Great and I think this is going to end up 00:45:41,163 being our last question, it's the last voted one.

It is from someone from Uganda who says I'm from Uganda and a veteran in corporate transportation arena here in the Bay Area. What is your experience being accepted by African-Americans and white Americans? (laughs) - Wow. 00:45:59,873 - Yeah, exactly. 00:46:03,010 This is not going to sound good, but I have to be candid and honest. I do not worry about being accepted or not. My philosophy is you don't get to decide that, I get to decide that. And so I worry about understanding what our relationship is based upon, irrespective of what color you are, what social economy, what education, what have you. What

is the basis of our relationship? How do I make it a win-win? How do I seek to understand who you are? What's important to you? How do I, and by the way, and if I don't, that's at the beginning, not your problem, that's my problem, because I always say, what do I own in the relationship? So I do not give people the pleasure and privilege to decide for me whether I'm going to be accepted or not, because I'm going to happen to them and hopefully they'll happen to me and collectively we'll be better together. That's sort of how I live my life and one of the things that's really very important to me in this field, whether it's as an international student, an immigrant, or somebody of a different race or social strata, look, Buddha says, that holding onto anger is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. (laughs) So the combination of, I know the first statement was a little arrogant in some ways, the combination of those two, I think that is what people individually need to focus on.

And then the rest will be history. (upbeat music)..