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<https://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/jessica-jackley-kiva-and-untapped-capital-what-if-changes-the-world/>

Jessica Jackley is an entrepreneur and investor best known as the founder of Kiva, the first microfinance crowdfunding platform, with \$2 billion in loans since 2005. She is currently a founder and general partner at Untapped Capital, an early-stage venture capital firm championing unexpected founders. In this presentation, Jackley shares her journey to becoming a mission-focused entrepreneur and offers insights to inspire others to ask, "What if things were different?"



Transcript

(upbeat music) - Welcome, everyone. 00:00:17,550 This is the Entrepreneurial Thought Leaders series at Stanford, a Stanford seminar for aspiring entrepreneurs. ETL is presented by STVP, the Stanford Engineering Entrepreneurship Center, and BASES, the Business Association of Stanford Entrepreneurial Students. I am Ravi Belani, a lecturer in the management science and engineering department at Stanford, and the director of Alchemist, an accelerator for enterprise startups. Today we are ending the quarter with a bang, with a warrior of social justice, entrepreneurship, and financial inclusion, who is as impactful as she is upbeat. And that is none other than Jessica Jackley. Jessica is an entrepreneur and investor best known as the founder of Kiva, which is the first microfinancing crowdfunding platform with \$2 billion in loans since 2005. Jessica is currently a founder and general partner at Untapped Capital, which is an early-stage venture capital firm championing unexpected founders. And previously, Jessica was the founder and CEO of Alltruists, which was creating unique volunteer experiences that can be done from anywhere. Jessica's has a dizzying list of achievements even beyond these.

She's served as Walt Disney's Imagineering's inaugural entrepreneur in residence, the chief impact officer at Aspiration, a venture partner at the Collaborative Fund and Mustard Seed Maze, and is also an author. The author of "Clay Water Brick: Finding Inspiration from Entrepreneurs Who Do the Most with the Least," which was published by Penguin Random House. She's also the founder and CEO of ProFounder, which was acquired by GOOD in 2010. Jessica's also a teacher at heart. She's a teacher in social entrepreneurship at the Marshall School of Business at USC, and was previously a visiting practitioner here at the Farm, at Stanford's Center for Philanthropy and Civil Society. And she has tons of board experience, including Habitat for Humanity. She's on the board of Habitat for Humanity, Opportunity International, and more. She lives right now in Los Angeles. She wishes she could be here with all of you. But we wanted to get Jessica in whatever form we could.

And she lives in LA with her husband, Reza Aslan, who's a religious scholar, and also their four children, not one, not two, not three, but four kids, in LA. She is also a Cardinal at heart. She has an MBA from the Stanford Graduate School of Business, and a Certificate of Global Leadership and Public Policy from Harvard's Kennedy School, and a bachelor's in philosophy and political science from Bucknell University, and a bunch of honorary PhDs, including from Centenary and

Quinnipiac University. If that's not enough, Jessica's also a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and is a World Economic Forum young global leader. So without further ado, please join me in welcoming Jessica. - Thank you so much. 00:03:09,113 Thank you very much for the kind introduction. I'm gonna share my screen with you. But I'll just start by saying it's really an honor to get to spend a little bit of time with you. I know who I am talking to today, future and, of course, current builders, creators, visionaries, with so much of your inspiring life stories yet to be written.

And I feel really lucky to get spent a little blink of time with you at this moment in your story, with so much left to go. I have two main intentions today. One, I hope that I convince you, more through a show versus a tell, a show of my story in all its, you know, goods, bads, and accidentals. I hope that, by the end of this time together, you're utterly convinced that you can do the things you dream of doing, and that you can even do more. I had a student a few years back come to me after a lecture and say in the sweetest, most kind of oblivious way, "Thank you so much for your talk. I mean, if someone like you can do all that, I know that I can too." And it was a backhanded compliment that I took fully and really appreciated. But I hope you get that same vibe, that same message. And then the second thing is I hope that you take something with you. I have ideas about what those pieces might be, but I hope that there's something in the next 30 minutes or so that you will use beyond today. Ideally when you're at a fork in the road, when you have a choice as to which path, which of many paths, perhaps, to go down.

And my hope is that something that I can share with you that has been true and real and helpful for me will nudge you to your own most authentic path forward. Those are my two hopes, my two goals. I'm gonna share my screen now. Okay. So one of the reasons I couldn't be there with you all today in person was indeed all those kids running around upstairs. Reza, my husband, and I have been so, so lucky, so blessed to have four little people. We have Cyrus and Jasper. They're mirror twins. They're really funny. And we have Asa, who has enough energy in him to have been two full humans, but he is one, all in one compact, eight-year-old body.

And then our little lady, Sariah, is that little love. And I'm gonna start with a story to set this up. And this story is about Sariah. So she's in a mode right now, and all of my kids went through this, where, out of the blue, she'll be become obsessed with the repetition of the thing. Like, sometimes for days, sometimes weeks. It could be a song or a dance or a series of actions, like running some path in the house, you know, in a loop, or a kind of scene she wants to play in again and again. But she gets obsessed with repetition. And she lately has been obsessed with the repetition of certain bedtime stories. Hang with me. So the story lately that she's super into is this one.

I don't know if it's familiar to anybody. It's pretty much a classic. It's about this family that goes on a bear hunt. You know, typical Saturday. And they make their way through a bunch of minor obstacles with lovely sound effects, like through some wavy grass. Swish, swash, right? Mucking through the mud. Squelch, squirt, whatever. Wading through a river. Splash, splash. You got it.

And then they all run. They finally make it to see the bear, and like, shockingly, they're terrified. So they run back, and it all goes in reverse. And then they climb into bed and head under the covers and like, vow to never go on the bear hunt again. She loves this. It's her thing. She wants me to read it all the time. She wants me to talk about it. And even when we turn off the lights, she's like, "Tell me the bear hunt story." And of course, I'm gonna go back to a baby pic because why wouldn't I do that? (laughs) So I'm a pretty patient person, if I may say so, but there's only so many times I can tell the same story on repeat without descending into total madness. So for fun/survival, I started to change some details at some point.

And at first I would just adjust one detail, like the sound effects. Instead of splash, splash, I would mix it up, right? Drips of rain, whatever. The weather elements, the obstacle, the way they got through it, order of events. Now, when I first started doing this, because we'd already gone through it the normal way a million and a half times, when I first started to change the details, Sariah, my little lady here, would freeze, and she would pay extra attention. And at first I was like, "Oh my gosh, she's gonna have a tantrum. She's gonna not like this." But she actually really loved this and listened even more intently. And so I got bolder. I would change bigger things. I would let all these weird natural consequences follow. Like, we'd find a boat to get across the river.

We wouldn't even push through a snowstorm. We'd stop and build a snowman. We wouldn't just discover the bear. We'd discover like, a mirror family of bears that's the same as our family. And then we'd just hang out there and all stay and have a party and eat pizza or something. I would change one thing and let the rest follow. And all this is fine, but this is where it gets kind of next level for me and I hope for you too. So picture me. I've said these stories a million times. I'm changing details.

One night, recently, we're lying there in the dark, and Sariah is on my chest, and I'm starting to tell this story, figuring out like, what am I gonna do this time? And all of a sudden she pushes herself up and looks right at me. It's dark, but I can still see her. And she interrupts me. And for the first time ever, she says, "Mom, what if the bear had a baby kitty?" So the details are important, but she figured out that she could change the story. Big unlock. She started to ask, "What if we did this different thing? What if the bear had a kitty? What if?" And it went from there. And she interrupts like, as soon as I launch into it these days and with other stories as well. So what is the big deal with that? I believe that our ability to pick our heads up and to look at each other and to voice confidently, "Hey, what if this thing was different? What if this detail, big or small, what if it was different? What if we turned left instead of right? What if we flipped the script and gave this character voice? What if we try another way to solve the same old problem? What if somebody unexpected becomes the hero?" I think doing

this can change everything. And doing this in my own journey, asking this question at the right moments in time, it's changed my life again and again. Being motivated to imagine a different possible future, a different possible way the story could go, it's the foundation, essential and unmissable like, prerequisite to creating exponential change.

Because whether we're aware of it or not, we walk around every day with stories on repeat. These stories about how things are or how things are done, who we are, who we can become, who someone else is, and what the potential for their life and their path is. And if we can become more aware of these stories that we have on repeat and the assumptions that build them, and if we can change and update the right pieces along the way, then amazing new stories can branch off and start to unfold. So we're gonna rewind a little bit. Growing up, I had a lot of stories on repeat about business. I thought business only always had to be like, this evil thing. I was not at all interested in entrepreneurship. I studied poetry and philosophy undergrad. And my college had a lovely entrepreneurship program, and I was not interested at all. I thought business is bad.

It's evil. It's about greed and selfishness. And like, entrepreneurs, are you kidding me? They're the gang leaders. They're starting these new businesses. Like, bad. Stay away. And I also thought, you know, again, like, spoiler, my thoughts changed over time and I love entrepreneurship, but at the time, for a long time, I thought business was bad. And I thought the only goodness and the only movers, you know, of change in the right directions, solving social problems, were nonprofits, the opposite, and again, incorrectly, the opposite of businesses. So I thought, "Well, that's what I gotta go do. I gotta pay attention to the nonprofits.

I gotta be involved. And that's the only place where good things can happen." So, you know, this one story of poverty and potential, really only listened to it from one voice or one set of voices. And I really thought there was only one story about a lot of the individuals being served by those well-intentioned nonprofits. And I heard this story from these well-intentioned organizations, like I said, that had a very specific task when they spoke to me. They wanted me to pay attention enough to stop what I was doing and feel enough feelings that I would like, reach into my wallet, proverbial wallet, and give. And the story that they told was always and only a very, very sad one of suffering and desperation and hopelessness. And I thought that the people that were being talked about, the people that were living with total socioeconomic disadvantages, I thought they, I only heard of them as a certain kind of character in these versions of the story. Characters who needed to be rescued, quite frankly. And of course, these narratives, right, dictated, then, my role in the story. Not in a healthy way.

The only way I heard, I took in, the only way things would be okay is if I felt guilty or even shameful enough about my own like, middle-class American wealth and my own relative but very real privilege. If I felt bad enough, then I would care enough to call the 800 number or do whatever they were asking me to do. And I did. I called those numbers, oftentimes without my parents' permission. I gave my allowance away. I would do the thing where you, you know, it was the UNICEF thing, apparently. I put my change in the basket at church. I gave what I could when I could, and it wasn't much. I certainly was never treated as so many larger donors, I think, have been over the years. I've not had that experience.

But my invitation to enter the story was a very particular invitation. And I accepted that invitation when I could. In fact, I remember clearly the, not just Sally Struthers, God bless her. But not just those infomercials growing up, but the ones that would say, you know, for the cost of a cup of coffee, you could change someone's life. And if you even believe that might possibly be true, then you'd do something right? So that's what I did. But I didn't like that role. It never quite felt right to me. It felt kind of icky. And over time it felt like this barrier came up. So I felt disconnected to other people in the world that I actually was very curious about, that had been so otherized, and that I really wanted to connect to and understand.

And instead of this, you know, I began to erect this invisible barrier as a natural defense mechanism to kind of distance myself from this same old story that was so uncomfortable and so sad, and that I thought I knew from, I could see it coming from 100 miles away. Now, what did that do? It turned this interaction that I so desired, or a desire for an interaction, into this transaction. And I would put my change in the jar and move on and feel okay momentarily until the next sad story came along. Now, I can't see right now, but oftentimes, like at this moment in the talk, and just don't worry, it turns out okay. Like, this is the low point emotionally. It starts to get better starting now. So fast-forward a bit more, I graduated high school, I go to college, I study not business. And I totally still assume the only thing I should do is go into nonprofit. Some nonprofit, any nonprofit. 'Cause that was the only place that goodness and good things were happening.

And again, not totally correct, but not a bad assumption at the time. Unfortunately, like, no nonprofits came to my tiny college's job fairs, and I didn't really know what to do. And so this part is not prescriptive. It's just descriptive. So I ended up just kind of moving to California on a whim because I was dating a boy who was doing a co-term. And I moved into one of the very few houses on Sand Hill Road. Y'all will appreciate this. They kind of have redone the road, but we thought, "Oh my gosh, we're one of six houses on Sand Hill." We should just like, start a venture firm just 'cause we have the address. We didn't. But it was this crowded house with like 12 people.

We had a guy living in the backyard in a tent. It was amazing. And of course, we eventually got evicted. But anyway, it got me close enough to the most amazing place in the world, that campus, and that area of, you know, Silicon Valley, where even though I wasn't in it, in it at first, I started to see. I remember feeling like, the best way to describe what happened with that move, flinging myself without a job out onto the West Coast, into that particular spot, I remember feeling like I had been like, fast-forwarded into the future. So I started to see that this was the special place, and special things were happening. And I

begged my way into a first job that was a temp position at the Stanford Graduate School of Business. I did filing and administrative stuff, and it was fine. The best part about my job was being in that environment. And I slowly realized.

At first I was afraid. I thought, "Oh no, I'm in the business school. It was the lions' den. Like, I gotta really watch myself here." But it turns out, of course, I had landed in this beautiful, wonderful place where people every day were walking through those doors trying to think about how to solve social issues, social problems through entrepreneurial thinking and scalable ventures. And it was magic. It's hard to describe it any other way. I fell in love. And I thought, "Okay, I wanna go be like them. I wanna go be like that student or that student or that professor." I wanted to understand how to harness the power that I saw, I could almost feel it there, to move people and resources into action, and into places where good things could happen. But I had no idea how to start.

So imagine I'm there. I'm trying to like, (laughs) I'm trying to sit in on lectures where I'm not a burden. I literally would go to professor's office hours and say, "I'm not a student, but I'm really curious. Can you teach me pricing?" (laughs) And I stayed long enough, three years, to happen to be around late after work one day when this gentleman came to campus: Dr. Muhammad Yunus. It was the fall of '03, so we are talking 20 years ago, which is amazing to be able to say that. Whew. It's a blink. But I remember staying late after work to be able to hear him speak. He was coming through campus.

And it was in one of these small rooms back in the old business school at GSB South, the south building. We could maybe seat 50 people. And I remember it wasn't even at capacity when I went in and kind of crashed the lecture. And I sat near the door 'cause I thought it was gonna be sketchy. It was this guy talking about being a banker to the poor. And I thought, "What is that about? I don't know what that means. And I don't really like the sound of it, but I'm so curious. I'm gonna go sit in and like, hate watch." And so I go in, I listen, and of course it was this amazing lightning bolt, you know, trajectory-changing moment of my life where I learned about microfinance, one. I learned about his particular path, which, while imperfect, all of us are, all of our paths are, I heard about how he began when things really started clicking for him. He had been a professor at the University of Chittagong in Bangladesh, but then he sort of sat with and listened very carefully to the people that he wanted to serve.

And he heard about their experiences borrowing money from money lenders. And I know I'm really just like, blitzing through a very wonderful and nuanced and detailed story of this person's life, but basically he sort of says, "Well, why don't I try to lend you money at not crazy interest rates?" Money lenders were charging 300 to 3,000%. And so he does this, and of course the rest is amazing microfinance history. With all of its goods and bads and flaws, what he did in that moment was go from wanting to help, listening to people very carefully, and then taking action, and designing around the people that he wanted to serve. And that really made sense to me. I thought, "Okay, even this philosophy major knows how to do that. I can sit and be a good listener. As much as I'm talking right now, I can be a good listener." So one, I learned about microfinance that night. Two, I learned about a way to start that sounded like something I could do. And then three, and really importantly, I heard a new story about people who were living in poverty.

Suddenly, these were not individuals that needed to be rescued, obviously, but these were individuals, a lot of people, who were doing everything right and simply didn't have access to the same opportunities or education that a lot of other people and certainly I had had. So it gave me a hopefulness, and it really flipped things for me. It changed things for me. It was a big like, what if that asked me to go see for myself. So what I did, again, not prescribing, but like, maybe it'll work out, this is what I did. I quit my job. I quit that job at Stanford as a temp. And I ended up doing some event planning and stuff, and it was lovely. But I left and I moved. I actually begged my way into an unpaid internship with a tiny nonprofit that was working in East Africa.

And I heard stories from entrepreneurs that had received a \$100 grant. Not even a loan, a grant. But it was enough to start to learn and to listen. And I wanted to see for myself what it was all about and hear the stories up close. And indeed, the stories were beautiful and multifaceted. They were not just about sadness and suffering. There were stories of hope and triumph and overcoming challenges right and left. One of the stories I'll say very quickly is actually somebody who's representative of so many other stories. And he's the person after whom I sort of named, I titled my book, "Clay Water Brick." But I met a gentleman named Patrick who basically built his business from as close to nothing as it gets. He lived in an area of Uganda where he had fled.

Kind of a border town of Uganda and Kenya near Tororo. And he had fled the northern area of the country after a rebel group had attacked his village. He left with nothing, the clothes on his back. He lost family members. He lost everything that he and his family had owned. But he and his brother survived and fled, no shoes on their feet, to this small village where they had distant cousins. And Patrick described to me his story. He described how he would every day wake up and try to figure out how to survive, how to feed himself. He didn't wanna be a burden on his family. And so he did this day after day.

And of course, one day sun's coming up, and he sort of has this inspiration. He starts to dig into the land, into the earth where he is sitting, and he finds deposits of clay. And I'll go through this story also equally, you know, horrifically quickly. But he basically decides that he can make bricks out of the clay if he kind of mixes it and molds it the right way. So with his bare hands, he makes bricks that are rough and misshapen, good enough to sell. Starts to sell those for a fraction of a penny each. Does it again and again day after day. Eventually saves up and is able to buy a brick mold, which looks something like this.

And he was able to, his production sped up, right? This took weeks of saving, okay? But he was able to finally buy or create this brick mold. Production gets better, the quality gets better.

You can sell the bricks more quickly and for more money. Keeps going. Learns in a neighboring village how not just to bake the bricks in the sun, but how to stack them in a self-contained kiln, bakes the bricks, sells those for more. You see where this goes? He builds a business, and by the time I met him a few years in, he had built several houses in the village, like this one, where he had built these things and built his business with a few employees, including his brother, from the earth that he dug up with his own hands. I mean, if that's not the most inspiring sort of version of entrepreneurship, I don't know what is. And even having come from Silicon Valley, this made sense to me much more than a lot of the tech startups that I had been surrounded by. I got this. I understood this, I admired it, and I was inspired by it. So people like Patrick sort of snapped me out of my numbness, an entrepreneur by entrepreneur. That invisible barrier fell away.

I was making real human connections as much as I could, and I became curious and hopeful in a really deep way. And for me, this important question came into focus in my mind. Patrick and others asked this question: What if they could change their lives? What if they could start to do things differently? What if they could think about their own potential differently? What if they could change that story on repeat? And for me, I started to ask what if questions. What if this story, the same story of poverty and potential, could be broken open and shifted? And better yet, what if it wasn't about me or any organization telling the story? What if it was the individuals themselves that I so wanted to be helpful to? What if they could be the protagonist and tell their own stories? So that's what, in the very beginning, I wanted to focus on. Stories of hope and hard work and joy versus just the sadness and suffering and desperation, which is certainly present in a different way in the lives of individuals living abject poverty. But we all have hard things, and we all have good things. Obviously, that's a broad-brush stroke, but there's a lot of goodness to focus on as well. And I found that individuals often wanted to tell that part of their story. They wanted to tell their story of creativity and how they were thriving and how far they had come. They wanted to tell their story of having, you know, already made a lot of progress.

This gentleman had started out with needle and thread under the shade of the tree, and now he had capital equipment in an office and was very excited to like, start there in the story. I met people who even in their, oops, sorry about that. People in scenes of abundance, people who were operating with generosity, not scarcity, and who offered me things, not only wanting me to offer them something. This was very different than what I had been told. And it just was the most inspiring season of my life to that point. And I started to ask, "Well, okay. Cool. What if we put these stories online?" So we did. We took people like Sophia, asked her what she needed to take the next step, put that story online, spammed our friends and family, and at first, we had about \$3,100 in loans across seven entrepreneurs that we tried to raise. We, my co-founder Matt and I.

And we had so little that actually was functional on the site, but I collected cash sometimes even from like, my grandma. And we ended up wiring money over to another friend there. Like, nothing about this was official. Nothing about it was by the book, like, and proving the concept. We just started. And those first seven entrepreneurs were just in Uganda. They paid back their loans over the next six months. And we thought, "All right, well, that was good. That works. Let's do it again." And we took the word beta off of the site, launched for real, whatever that meant, and we're off to the races.

And remarkably, things actually really did take off. We kept going with this. We kept doing more and more rounds of loans. And the pilot round was 3,000 bucks. The first year we ended up facilitating 500,000 in loans. The next year was 15 million, the next 40, the next 100, and Kiva crossed 2 billion, I think, two months ago. All in these \$25 at a time from individuals that have a credit card or a PayPal account lending money, not expecting or asking, not getting any interest for themselves, to people all over the world. I think, you know, it's funny. Today, I just read this. I read this on the website, which is always smarter than me.

I have the historical story, but things are continuing to grow, of course, without me. I'm now sort of the grandparent. But apparently Kiva fund's a new entrepreneur every 90 seconds, and repayment rates have been over 96% historically. So that happened, and it was amazing. And I'm so grateful because what it did for me, super selfishly, it kicked off two decades of building based on asking the right what if questions. My second startup co-founder started with a question, what if I could invest, not just, you know, loan, but what if I could for real invest for a possible financial upside, not just a Kickstarter campaign? But what if I could invest in a small business that I love? And so we started in 2010 one of the earliest crowdfunding platforms before equity-based crowdfunding was actually legal. You can ask me that one later in Q&A or over a drink someday. (laughs) But that's what we did for ProFounder. Alltruists was another recent venture that I just did, just to jump to the future. To the present, actually.

I wondered, you know, what if I could volunteer offline at my home with my kids in like an hour through a box experience? Like, instead of a STEM kit, like a Kiwi Crate or a craft experience, what if I could receive everything I needed to do a service project with my family? So for three years I worked on that idea. At Untapped Capital, the venture fund that I started with my friend Yohei, who's amazing and a whole other TED talk in and of himself, we asked, "Well, what if we found entrepreneurs right at the very beginning? What if we didn't rely on inbound but relied on outbound? Could we deploy an entire fund based on people that we would reach out to and find, and say, "We see what you're building. We saw your question in this discord. We can build alongside of you and understand what you're building. And when you're ready, please let us be the first people you call"? And we did that. Anyway, all those what ifs are great, (laughs) but they're not the most important what if. The most

important and biggest what if I've asked again and again is really about this internal process where I am honest with myself. Like, what if I really could do the things that I dream of doing? Whatever that thing is at the time. What if I'm actually good enough, qualified enough, ready enough to do that? And truthfully, what if we all are, right? That's the big piece. It's very easy to listen to these stories on repeat in our heads that tell us the same thing, that we're not ready to change or to take a step that's big and scary for us.

And I get that. But guess what? There's always gonna be a reason at every moment in our lives. There's always gonna be an external voice or an internal voice that tells us that you're not ready to do the thing that you dream of doing. I mean, I could do a whole talk. I'll do that someday, and I'll record it, and I'll send it to y'all. (laughs) But I could do a whole talk on all the ways that I have never been qualified to do anything (laughs) in my career that I've done. I could do a whole talk on all the reasons that Kiva shouldn't have worked. I mean, like, data-based reasons. Like, things that actually we could make a great case at every point in time about why that wouldn't have worked or shouldn't have worked. I have a lot of data that would count right towards this.

But there's always going to be reasons not to start, and there will always be voices pointing out the things that we lack. Where's my, there you go. You know, whether the things that you, at any given moment, lack are possessions or position, right? You're not in a position of power. Whether you are unfairly disadvantaged, whether you didn't get into the grad program, right? The pedigree, or YC, or whatever other stamp of approval you think you absolutely need to take that step. Whether you've made some mistake in the past, or had a failure, and you don't think that you are good enough to do the next thing. We all have that stuff. And you know what? Great entrepreneurs move forward anyway, and they find a way over, around, through. They don't pay attention to those voices, or at least not as much as they pay attention to the goal that they have in mind. And one of my favorite, very, very favorite definitions of entrepreneurship, maybe you've already come across this in your class, but it's Howard Stevenson, a professor from the Stanford of the East, right? He has this definition: Entrepreneurship is the pursuit of opportunity without regard to resources currently controlled. Now, pay attention to this second half.

Without regard to resources currently controlled. So I think this is completely beautiful. So entrepreneurs are people who believe that some different version of the future is possible. They ask these great what if questions. And then they run like wild, madly, towards that vision, and they disregard the stuff that gets in the way. They disregard the barriers or the things that they might not have at that moment, financial resources, but all those other things in the last slide that we come to believe are necessary. You know, great entrepreneurs literally disregard those things, and they run after this future for the world as they believe it could be and should be. And I love that. And let's spend just a second before we wrap up, a minute on this, the world as it could be. I can't stress this enough.

This can be anything. I was thinking back, during my first month at GSB, I remember, again, put yourself in my position. I'd studied philosophy, I'd studied political science, never a business class in my life. I don't even think I could really use like, Excel or whatever. That's what I was using, I guess, at the time. Not Google Sheets or anything else. But I couldn't even do spreadsheets. I had no idea what I was doing. (laughs) And I remember, I felt like GSB, people were speaking a different language. And I remember professors using the word "value" a lot, and I thought it confused me, because they seemed to be using that to mean money, (laughs) but they weren't saying money.

They were just saying value all the time. And I was so confused that I actually raised my hand in a class for that first few weeks and I asked. And, you know, the bad news is that, yeah, usually that's what was meant by the word. That's often what happens in the business language that gets utilized a lot. And it's not a necessarily negative thing. That's just what it meant in a lot of those contexts. The great news is that of all places in the universe that I could have been, of course, at Stanford, I was in a place where there were so many other layers and conversations that did get unpacked when I would ask those kinds of questions. And there's nowhere else I would've gone to feel like I could receive a whole, holistic, integrated, and I'm sorry to keep using this word, but not really, beautiful education about how to activate people and resources and move those in a direction to create social impact. It's the only place I would've ever gone. So anyway, when you do create value out there, now, but in the future, near or far future, when you're building, when you're deciding the kind of value on large that you want to create, you're deciding who you wanna serve, and what you wanna make, and how you want to go about making and building, you all, of all people on this earth, I beg you to set the bar really high and to think about risk and opportunity in the broadest possible terms.

And to create value that doesn't just show up in your own bank account. To work for and to create value in other currencies. Beauty and joy and empowerment and collaboration. My favorite work, my best jobs, have paid me fine financially, but have made me downright rich in terms of meaning and creative expression and purpose. So please, please, please, build something that will matter to more than just a small segment of already privileged human beings. I see so many people do this. And I say it in a very selfish way. There's so much more value that you can capture. That's the other funny word that's used, right? That you can capture, but that you can create, and that you can spread to so many people. So build things that consider the wellness of and the benefit of the whole of life on this planet.

I have just two more slides. So as we ask, you know, what if things were different, and we dream up how we can create change and change things for the best for as many people as we can, as we do that brick by brick and day by day, the other

urge that I have to tell you is to, of course, don't do that alone. Find your people and ask those what if questions together. Because when we build off of each other's ideas and perspectives and experiences and wisdom, when we walk together, we really do create better ways forward for everybody. And of course, we're never the only characters in our stories anyway, right? So knowing that, going into that proactively and understanding deeply that we're part of a collective story, we're part of a story that will continue on, we get to star in a chapter or two, I urge us to listen and to learn from each other, even tiny voices, and to pause, especially in the middle of these stories on repeat. Pick our heads up and look at each other, and ask, "What if things were different?" Because when we do, new and surprising and more beautiful chapters than we can even imagine will unfold before us. Thank you. - That was fantastic. 00:35:26,220 We're gonna move on to questions now. And you can see the class clapping.

Unfortunately, you can't hear it, but just know that there's great joy. - I feel it. I feel it. 00:35:36,870 - I hope you can feel it. 00:35:38,880 I'm gonna ask one question, which is, so first of all, Jessica, I just love what you embody, which is this unfettered pursuit of what is possible and not being constrained by saboteurs, you know, questioning, going into different directions. But I wanted to just tap into that because I think all the Stanford students are, you know, by virtue of them sitting in the seats they're in, they have very strong neocortexes, where they're very well trained on all the things that would allow you to justify ruling something out. You know, using data or all the reasons why something can go wrong. When we pursue these what ifs, what I wanna ask about is, is there a rigorous or systemic way to source a well of strength, to actually have conviction that this actually is something that you should pursue in an analogous way that you could have data to, you know, justify a rational decision, especially if entrepreneurship is this pursuit where it's not based on expertise, it's not based on, you know, necessarily anything that, at Stanford, you would sort of put faith in? How can you source your validation that you should push forward with a what if? - Sure. You know, it all does work together. 00:36:52,650 The data-based decisions and the heart-led direction.

And I can speak for myself. For me, the best source of strength and also information and insights comes from deep understanding of the people that I wanna serve or the person that I wanna serve. And it always comes down to like, actual, real, flesh-and-blood humans. And, you know, I did d.school stuff as well. I had an amazing experience working with teams there during my time at Stanford. And the sort of like, user-centered design process for me is not just smart and I think well-informed and works well for a lot of those beginnings, as you start to ask the what if questions. But it sort of like, bakes in that humility that you can have all sorts of ideas, but you have to test and learn. And that testing and learning and listening is always going to be about the person that you're designing for. So I don't think you can spend too much time listening really, really carefully. And in fact, I would say, (laughs) you should get really excited when you hear things that kind of make you feel bad, meaning they're surprising and they threaten something else, some assumption that you had in your paradigm and might throw the whole thing off.

Like, yes, those could be anomalies and outliers, but when you start to hear surprising answers, answers that you didn't expect, that's a wonderful thing. 'Cause those are the moments when you can recalibrate or even fully reset and design around those new insights that maybe have arisen just because other things in the world are changing. Maybe, you know, when you first started to do that listening, the questions weren't quite the right questions. And so when you find things that are surprising, that's the really good stuff. Even if it makes you question what you've done up to that point and what you need to do next. - Terrific. Thank you. 00:38:56,580 We'll turn it over to the students. Student Hi, Jessica. 00:38:59,850 Your story's truly inspiring, and especially as a woman, I wanted to ask, how can you manage both being a founder and a mom of four kids? What did you learn along the way? What's the secret to do both? - Oh, I love this.

I wanna give you a big hug. 00:39:16,590 I love this question. I'm so glad you asked. Twist my arm. It's my favorite thing to talk about. So first of all, you learn as you go. Yes, two kids came at one time, but then after that, you know, one at a time, you get your sea legs, and you slowly expand everything to the new normals, the waves of the new normal. I will say, to me, it's harder, I think, in a lot of ways, to pursue an entrepreneurial path, but the benefits, the currencies of having autonomy and flexibility, being able to design your own schedule for many parts of it, absolutely are the things that I prefer. I'd rather get paid less just so I can like, pay the mortgage, pay for groceries. But like, I'd rather, I'm not looking to make millions and millions of dollars or something.

I'm looking to be financially responsible. And then the other pieces, the other currencies that I get when I design my work. I get to pick up my kids from school every day. That's the best. That's amazing. I get to like, kind of stop between three and seven or eight with bedtime. I get up every day really early. I sometimes hop back on at night. But I get to be present with my kids at all these different seasons and phases. And so I would say, strangely, like, even though it's harder in many ways, the benefits of getting to design your own schedule, getting to design your own work, different pacing, I think that's worked really well for me.

I will say, you know, it's funny because we're coming off of this data-based question, like how do you make different decisions, when my twins were, I wanna say, four months, five months, and I was starting to like, be human again, I made a spreadsheet of all their naps. And they were napping three times a day, which, wait, no, twice a day, which left, they were like... Wait, how did this work? No, they must have been napping more than that. There were 21 waking segments, okay? Forget nighttime feedings 'cause they were just like, on me and nursing all the time. But like, during the day I had three waking segments, and I decided I wanted to be there for the majority. So I needed to be there for 11 out of the 21 physically

present. And I also decided I didn't mind if I also had, you know, when we could afford to have a babysitter or a nanny as well for the twins especially. I was cool with other people being there, but I knew that was my like, time budget. I was okay if I was there for the majority. And so I just have to say, like, in every phase, if you kind of really are honest with yourself about what matters to you, quality time, quantity time, I think they're kind of the same with kids, especially.

If you sort of budget out in advance, then at least for me, I didn't like, lose it every time I had to go out of the house for like a meeting. 'Cause I always wanted to be with them and like, have them on my person. But I gave myself that allowance, and I knew that I was like, doing the thing that I valued. And playing it out in a way that the data, like, made sense to me. I would be able to look back at my weeks and say, "I did it. I achieved the thing that I wanted. I was here the majority of their daytime waking segments." (laughs) So whatever works for you. But, you know, I think it's so nice to be in as much control as you can be. And you're still gonna work really hard, but to have more control has always been preferential to me. So you kind of gotta know what matters to you as a parent.

- That's terrific. Thank you for sharing. 00:42:58,050 You're the only one who could share that perspective that we've had to speak. And so I know that is hugely valuable. Next question. Student Hi. 00:43:07,350 What I really appreciated about your talk is I found that you have a very strong conviction to be like a very social entrepreneur and to make a lasting impact. And some might say that like, within the Silicon Valley entrepreneurship scene, a lot of startup founders start off that way. Like, really wanting to make an impact. But sometimes they still end up doing questionable business practice.

So to summarize, my question would be, how do you go about growing up in this very profit-oriented space and still kind of staying with what you really want to do in the world? - I don't think there has to be a trade-off, in most cases, 00:43:57,060 between having an incredible impact and also having, I'll say sustainable, that's the non-profit word for it, but a profitable, right? Being in the black. I don't think that there's a trade-off between those two things. I think those pressures come from either a shift in priorities. Because at the end of the day, you do have to prioritize what, when push comes to shove, would be more important in each scenario. Getting that extra dollar or maybe, right, impacting that extra person. If it comes to that in certain moments in time, you need to really know where you stand, or else it'll be a slippery slope. And I think the structure of the organization, in some ways, you know, it's just a vehicle to move forward. It's a tax structure, not a religion. Like, you can do great things as a business, obviously, and you can have a nonprofit that's not that efficient, and could be doing a lot more, and sometimes even damages the world. Those are extremes.

But I think your investors and your supporters, whether they're investors outright or donors or whatever it is, when you bring them on your team, just don't make compromises. Because they will be the voices that eventually might pressure you to get off track in terms of like, your commitment and your values. So do we have time for one more? Did I do fast enough? What do you think? No, yes? - It was good. 00:45:20,139 We have only 20 seconds, so I don't think we're gonna have time for one more. So I'm gonna exercise my prerogative just to be cognizant of time. But I would say, let's invite you to come back in person, Jessica. Because I know that we should- - Yes. That would be awesome. 00:45:30,830 - I know that everybody would've wanted 00:45:32,370 to have more time with you. And even just your physical existence is an inspiration.

I mean, just the fact that you are, the way that you are actually going through doing what you care about. So I think just seeing role models like you is hugely impactful. So thank you, Jessica. On behalf of the Stanford community, I don't know if you can hear everybody or see everybody, but thank you, thank you, thank you. And you are always welcome to come back to the Farm. And thank you everybody else also for coming in and viewing Stanford's ETL course MS&E 472, all of our ETL viewers and listeners around the world. This is our last session for the fall, everybody. So there is no class next week. This is it. This is the end of the quarter.

But we'll see you here back after the holiday season on January 17th as we kick off our new winter ETL series. That winter ETL lineup will be listed at ecorner.stanford.edu, where you can also find more videos, podcasts, and articles about entrepreneurship and innovation. So thank you all and thank you, Jessica. - Thank you so much. 00:46:41,259 (upbeat music)..