

Speaker: **Nicholas Davis – Senior Director, Head of Society and Innovation, WEC**

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0:06

Tell me. Have you ever considered working for your country? When I came to Oxford in 2005 - I was secretly and being an Australian, irrationally hoping that someone would ask me that exact question. For those are the words that apparently college tutors use when they gently approach promising undergraduates for you know, kind of secret jobs in government roles that are highly consequential that they can't talk about. You know in fact at some there was so much demand for clandestine talent at these universities, that the most famous recruits we have, some of them are at least - ended up working for two governments.

0:55

Now I'm not a college tutor, nor am I asking you or offering you a job in intelligence. But I am here to say that I believe today, more than ever, there is an urgent need for you to go undercover in consequential roles. Which is why I'm here to pitch you a new idea. The undercover entrepreneur. Now, before I start, let me get a sense of whether you're suitable for this job. OK.

1:25

So, raise your hand if you are currently an entrepreneur or have ever been an entrepreneur. Put it high so we can all see. Great - fantastic. Excellent, OK. Please raise your hand if you're not an entrepreneur now, but you would like you would like to be or you think you might like to be at some point in the future. Excellent - OK, finally. Those of you who have no interest in being an entrepreneur whatsoever are very happy working for someone else. You know what, I think you are all completely suitable for this role. Let me give you the pitch. If you accept what I'm saying, what I'm going to say here today. You can have a dynamic, highly interesting career.

2:07

You can be mobile, never bored and more importantly, you can lead a consequential life where you can help existing organisations transform themselves and the whole of society for the better - OK. That's my pitch. It's a little bit abstract so let me talk to you through a few people who are already doing this. This is Kiran Jain, she's a lawyer. She worked for 7 years as the deputy city attorney in Oakland, California. But as an undercover entrepreneur, she experimented with civic design and participatory governance. She pioneered the key keyvor.org what's called Kiva Zip, she brought zero % loans to community members in Oakland. A business model that was developed in east Africa originally. This is Christian Umbach, he's been executive assistant to the board of a major European airline.

3:07

But now as an undercover entrepreneur, he's co-created and innovation lab in Berlin. Working with a whole variety of start-ups and creating an API for the airlines data to reimagine and reinvent the future of mobility. This is Aaron Maniam he's an Oxford Alum with a double first in PPE, and a degree from the Blatvatnik School. He's a civil servant in Singapore - but created a super interesting really innovative training program called The Cast, he applied simulation training so the civic in Singapore can experience and respond to complex challenges in advance.

3:44

And, finally, my fellow Australian Ryan Heath. A journalist and speech writer - he's the guy if you've been to Brussels recently, that helped turn nearly Chris and the digital agenda into one of the most talked about issues in Europe over the last few years. And he's currently disrupting the Brussels media market by writing the must read column every morning in European policy. These people have four things in common. They're purposeful - thank you Cheryl, they're passionate, they're persistent and they're employed - they work for other people. Now, I can't sense that some of you are thinking, hold on a second Nick I think I've heard of this before.

4:27

You're just describing intrepeneurs. These are intrepeneuers, don't try and create some new term undercover entrepreneur. OK - hold on a second, it's a fair point but there's two big differences. The first is that and undercover entrepreneur is not someone who simply looks to create a new product or service within and existing organisation. Instead, as Jennie said earlier, they are people that that try and imagine new possibilities, they try and create new patterns, they mobilise people, they are entrepreneurs on a mission. The second difference is that undercover entrepreneur is so much a cooler term than intrepeneur. Now, this TEDx is all about going from ideas to impact so why do entrepreneurs, why do undercover entrepreneurs have the potential to create impact. Let me just give you two quick examples.

5:21

The first one relates to the economic situation in which we find ourselves today. We have a challenge of sustainable growth and job creating. Now, I'm all in favour of start-ups - I've worked on fostering start-ups in Europe for the last two years, but let me tell you one surprising thing we've found recently. It's not the creation of innovative interesting businesses that matters right now. It's the scaling of existing innovative businesses that's going to leads to the results we need in our economy to deliver the jobs and sustainable growth that is so important. Here's a quick figure from Sherry Coutu scale up report from the end of last year. If here in the UK, the percentage of businesses, that are fast growing - shifts by 1 percentage point, OK, so if the number of fast growing businesses goes from 4.6% to 5.6% that has the possibility to create 280,000 jobs, and £39 billion in additional turnover in the UK alone in the next three years. So the prize is absolutely huge. If you have the guts to join a promising small and medium size enterprise, or join an already interesting start up or join a large multinational and be innovation and undercover entrepreneur there. You can add a huge amount to solving that challenge.

6:49

Second, huge impact that you can have is in government. Government needs undercover entrepreneurs way more than it needs secret agents - I'm pretty sure, OK. Government here in the UK and in the US, is responsible for 40% of GDP in terms of spending - OK. In Finland, France and Sweden - it's over 50%. Meanwhile, Governments around the world are facing complex geopolitical challenges, social challenges, they have to deliver more and higher quality services to more demanding connected citizens. And they need to do so with less money, and records low levels of trust. The Edomom Trust barometer this year pointed out that government are the least trusted of the four major institutions. Businesses, civil society, governments and media. And that trust is going down. So, when you think about where you can put your energy, time, and resources - you should also consider looking to be innovative in government, in civic and municipal government like Kiran. In national government, or, like Ryan - and the European commission or even the United Nations. These are incredibly important and impactful opportunities for you to use your skills. Unfortunately, undercover entrepreneurs today are in hugely short supply.

8:07

This is data from the global entrepreneurship monitor where they looked at entrepreneurial employee activity. You can see in all regions around the world, it drastically lags, what does it lag? - It lags the number of entrepreneurs. And haven't we been all talking in business school recently about how we need more entrepreneurs. Or how much more do we need undercover entrepreneurs if that's the state of affairs - OK. So, just keep this in your mind. You have the opportunity to be purposeful, passionate and persistent and drive - it's something in an area where you, in huge demand. Now let's assume that you accept my pitch today and you decide - Thanks Nick, I'm convinced. I'm going to go and find a target, I'm going to infiltrate an organisation. I'm going to move in there and get that job. Now what. What do I need, what do I do. OK.

9:06

Four key lessons that I have learnt from my own experience but also from talking to many others about this. The first one, it's not that obvious, but it's around the importance of not losing sight of the mission. It's often very easy to blend in too well, into a new organisation. To adapt to its culture and norms very quickly, and to forget why you're there. You are there in order to dance with fear as Seth Godden puts it. You're there to create uncertainty, to shake it up. If you're not doing that, you might as well leave and become a regular entrepreneur - OK. So just remember, remember the mission. Now, one of the speakers earlier made an excellent point, which is the best case is if you can actually create an entirely safe space for yourself to be entrepreneurial and highly innovative within that company. So this is exactly what Christian Umbach and his colleague Sebastian Herrzoff have done in moving their innovation lab to Berlin. Away from the headquarters in Frankfurt. This is a great way of doing it. The second approach, is you've got to be inspired by frugality.

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Don't make the mistake when you join a government department or a civil society organisation or a large multinational that the resources are plentiful. They are not. Right now you need to make the most of scarce resources and do it in the most innovative ways possible. And the upside of this - is it will make the innovations you create, far more transferrable to other sectors and other organisations. So, Kiran when she created the Kiva Zip partnership, really found inspiration in the fact that the city government could not put resources into the crowdfunding programme. In fact they had to look for other reasons and other ways in which partners could come together and support that work. And as a result its hugely successful no in the United States.

11:09

The third lesson, is about trust and social capital. Under entrepreneurs don't work alone. You need to find co-conspirators. And there are besides the immediate surrounding and the colleagues you can recruit to your network within the organisation - there are two important sets of people to work with. The first one is, you do need a supportive boss. You need to find a sponsor inside the organisation that can live with the fact that you're going to piss off a lot of people - OK. That's incredibly important. But the second and really important thing is you need to be open to the outside. You need to be able to create the hooks for your organisation to work with other partners. This is the kind of thing that Ryan did with his colleagues on [Inaudible] cabinet - when they launched at Davos last year, the start-up Europe partnership.

12:04

This is a purpose built vehicle for bringing together large multinationals and young start-up and building trust and relationships so that they can work together. And the fourth lesson is like any entrepreneur, the undercover entrepreneur needs to be highly persistent and hugely adapted/adaptive - OK. It doesn't matter if you're not the superstar, it doesn't matter if you're not the extravert or the genius. None of that matters, you can be from any background, any gender, any skillset. You can't create the opportunities unless you keep going. And this is Nancy Bird - a famous Australian aviation pioneer. And I just put that up there in terms of really focussing on the fact that anything is possible, anything is pioneering, but you have to keep that persistent and that commitment. So I want to leave you then with two final thoughts.

12:59

The first is, as Guy Kawasaki says, being an entrepreneur, it's a state of mind not a job title. So my dream for you is that you have many different job titles over your career. But throughout all of them, you have the opportunity to be part of a global community of under entrepreneurs. Working together, supporting one another, to transforms business, government, civil society, and yes - our universities as well in order to tackle some of those complex challenges that we all worry about every day. I want you to have the opportunity to build on the power and leverage of great institutions like Cambridge, like Oxford - to make a huge difference in the world. And you can do that if you take your entrepreneurial spirit and you apply it as an undercover entrepreneur in these organisations. And you know what, the great thing about this is that if it doesn't work work, if you don't have a boss that supports you, if your fired for being too edgy, creating too much uncertainty, you can always bug out and create the next bid disruptive start up and make a billion dollars and you know, its fine, everyone's happy.

14:20

So let me ask you that question again - have you ever considered working for your country?

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Thank you.

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