

TECHONOMY NYC

The Future of Work is Distributed

Speaker:

Christina Sass, President, Andela

Introduction:

David Kirkpatrick, Techonomy

(Transcription by [RA Fisher Ink](#))

Kirkpatrick: Let's hear something that you guys are doing that might cheer us up a little bit.

Sass: Good morning! Yes, that was indeed sobering and honestly, it's things that in the last four years in building Andela, we have tried to just put our head down and just build, build, build. But it is true, I am going to try and I am going to retitle my talk, which was the end of the last one, which is how tech can actually help.

So, I do think that there was a belief that ~~sort of~~ once the internet was widespread that we would just lay the fiber cable and people would rise up out of poverty, that's false. There is a lot of, all sorts of support that needs to help but I will respectfully disagree with part of what Professor Sachs said, which is how markets are a force in whether or not tech can help. We firmly believe and have seen over the past four years that the need for technologists all over the world is going to force people to look internationally, ~~and~~ ~~And~~ so this is about distributed work, it's about how distributed work is absolutely responsible, ~~it's~~ ~~It's~~ about how distributed work is responsible for democratizing wealth, not just distributed work so we can retitle this one how tech is helping and also how the future of work is both distributed and how the future of wealth is distributed.

So, let me just set the scene a little bit. Raise your hand if you are building a company or part of a company that is currently hiring software developers. Yeah, all of us. So, just to put some numbers around that, there are about five open jobs for every one software developer in the United States right now that is looking for one. So, for every company that is out there trying to grow, we experience a real pain point with about 1.4 million open jobs that just went unfilled, completely unfilled in 2016. And so, if we looked at in the United States how to solve this alone, if we took all of the computer science degree grads, the engineering degree grads, and even dev boot camp or career changers, that would total up by 2020 about 400,000 people total, so you are going to still leave one million unfilled jobs.

So, this is a crisis and you may have noticed software developers are pretty integral to the tools that all of us need to run our lives these days and certainly the tools we need to distribute wealth globally. Meanwhile, those coveted software developers that we need so much are working in a distributed fashion. ~~Sixty-four percent~~ 64% of developers in the last few years are working at least part of their full-time jobs in a distributed way and this is a huge ramp-up. We've seen this over the course of the last few years, but since 1995, a 300 ~~percent~~% rise in the amount of the distributed work force.

And so, if you look at this in combination, you've got everyone needing developers, they're all working in a distributed way. ~~we think about, there~~ There is about 3.5 million software developers in the United States and once again, there is almost under 1 ~~percent~~% unemployment rate for them. They have their choice of the jobs that they want and meanwhile, everyone is looking for tech talent, so we are going to have to look elsewhere. When we tackled this problem in 2014, I had been working on the continent of Africa for about five years and I knew the extraordinary amount of talent and particularly the depth of the tech talent pool and in fact we believe Africa to be the largest and the youngest pool of untapped talent in the world and it is also one of the most exciting places for tech startups, and the tech scene.

So, raise your hand if you started transferring money on your mobile phone post-2014, maybe a few of us did it before then. ~~okay~~ I think I probably transferred money on my phone for the first time in 2013. The Maasai tribe is one of the oldest tribes on the planet. They have been transferring money on their mobile phones in Nairobi and surrounding areas since 2007. So, our reviews of the tech scene across the continent of Africa are woefully out-dated and we looked at this and said everyone we know, every entrepreneur we know, every growing company we know needs software developers and meanwhile we experience this huge, huge pool of untapped talent. And so, we started the company to be able to harness the talent across the continent of Africa and combine them with companies that desperately need that talent.

And so, we started Andela. ~~our~~ Our mission is to advance human potential by powering today's teens and investing in tomorrow's leaders. And, I say this in the context of, there are, there is tech talent all over the globe we think that again 3.5 million software developers in the States, there is 20 million worldwide. So, I would encourage you to look at all sorts of incredible things that are happening in the wider world, this is our solution to this problem. So, what we do is basically three main things, we recruit, we shape our software developers into globally competitive developers, and then we integrate them into growing companies. And when I say recruit, we laugh because the founders of Andela, it's highly unlikely that I would not be able to get into my own company today. We've had over 70,000 applications for our currently 700 software developers; it is a 0.7 ~~percent~~% acceptance rate. ~~we~~ We once had a press piece in CNN that said the startup that is harder to get into than Harvard. So, we find just extraordinary amounts of talent and we are screening them for problem-solving and logical reasoning and then we're looking at how they perform when they are on client engagements and seeing who performs the best and then tweaking and re-tweaking exactly how we recruit. Then we spend six months with them in actual product teams, building products, building the products that our

company needs to scale and making sure in simulated environments that they know both their text tacks and extraordinary soft skills. And then thirdly we integrate them, we fully integrate them in growing companies all over the world. And so, let me just bring this to life by telling you about Tolu Komolafe. ~~when~~ When we met Tolu she was 25. she grew up on the outskirts of Lagos, Nigeria. ~~[ph 0:06:06.9]~~ She had a four-year degree in computer science for engineering and she was unemployed when we met her. And just to set the stage, in July of 2014, Ebola was spreading across West Africa, there was a highly contested political race between Buhari and Goodluck Jonathan. And, at that time, ~~we~~ for her cohort we had 2,500 applications who all took the same problem-solving logical reasoning test, and the testing service called us and said, "You're crashing our systems. ~~we~~ We have never had this many people apply to a job. ~~what~~ What the heck is this job and secondly you have about 48 candidates in this pool that we believe to be in the top 2% percent of IQ in the world." And so, it is a fact: brilliance is evenly distributed and in the modern age, the fact that Tolu could be unemployed living on the outskirts of ~~Nairobi~~ Lagos while there's five open jobs for every one software developer in the United States is absolutely inexcusable. ~~so~~ So we were delighted to find Tolu.

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And we placed her with a company called Everplans. ~~they~~ They are a high growth startup right here in New York. ~~they~~ They do end-of-life planning through a very creative online platform and Tolu since then has risen to be a leader on the Everplans team. In fact, she has been over to visit them about twice, two to three times a year because every time they do a major product launch, they say she is so integral to our team. we need her here. So, she is now managing several of her other Andela colleagues and also is a leader managing ~~there~~ their Everplans team. So, our software developers are ~~fully~~ fully integrated in companies and she is a leader both on our team helping to bring tons of other young women to apply for software developer jobs and now has been recognized in the *New York Times* and CNN you will see a clip later of her on Fareed Zakaria.

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So, this is the power and possibility of distributed work. this is the tech talent that all companies need and it is not just us. Tolu can be an extremely effective member of that team and she is fully collocated. It is great that she can come over two to three times a year, but God forbid what Professor Sachs has said about the leadership of today happens and they shut down the borders, that will not stop Tolu from helping Everplans to grow. So, this is a solution in technology that can absolutely help. And so, we're learning all kinds of things about distributed work that companies that need to be good at it are going to have to learn themselves to push decisions downward to teams to really redistribute it and to constantly iterate.

And it is not just us, here are some of the leaders in distributors, I don't know about your companies but my company is obsessed with Slack. ~~we~~ We probably have 200 unique emojis that one could argue or just for fun, but it literally helps us communicate faster, better and it helps us develop a company culture, a company's shared values across our current locations.

~~we're~~ We're in multiple different countries and so we're doing the push-ups to be a great distributed team too.

And luckily, some of the world is taking notice, we are today 1,000 people strong, ~~we have a huge, t.~~ The mother ship is in Lagos, Nigeria with about half of the company and then we have a modern tech campus that we are building up in Nairobi, also in Kampala. On the client side, for our partner companies we have about 155 different partner companies and they're in 55 cities distributed globally and this is not like a nice little international involvement project. ~~we've~~ We've raised \$81 million dollars for this company and our investors believe that this will grow, and grow, and grow and so we are looking to be at thousands more developers.

But we do, we do need companies to buy into this and the fact of the matter is, if you want to grow and scale, you are going to need engineers. And you're just simply going to have to look in other places and so, this is the future of work. So, it is much more powerful that you hear it from our developers themselves, so here is Tolu on the Fareed Zakaria show speaking—

Zakaria: Are there enough of you?; ~~do~~ Do you think it will change the country?

Komolafe: Yes, I think it will change the country. Every day, I believe we are changing the world one line of code at a time.

Sass: So, that's Tolu. Thank you very much for having us; ~~it~~ we are here all day long. Andela will be and would love to talk to you if you are interested about distributed work. ~~both~~ Both the challenges, it is not easy to do, it is an entire skill set all its own, but it is imminently possible and it will allow those 20 million technologists across the world to add it to the future of work, the future of wealth and so, thank you for having me.