Adrian Lovett
President & CEO, World Wide Web Foundation
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Welcome to Media Masters, a series of one-to-one interviews with people at the top of the media game. Today I'm joined by Adrian Lovett, president and chief executive of the World Wide Web Foundation. His 20-year career in international development and advocacy is focused on delivering policy change on complex global issues. Prior to joining the Web Foundation, Adrian played key leadership roles in successful campaigns, such as Make Poverty History and the Jubilee 2000 campaign to cancel the debts of developing countries. He has also held senior roles at Oxfam and Save The Children.

Adrian, thank you for joining me.

Thanks Paul, good to be here.

Adrian, is the internet a lawless free-for-all, and what can be done about it?

Well, is it? No. It once was, and some people felt that was a beautiful time, and there were certainly very special aspects of the internet back in the early days when it really was a permission-less space. Indeed, Tim Berners-Lee, who invented the world wide web, and who was the founder of the Web Foundation that I lead, he intended it to be that. But over the years it has changed, in some ways for the better, some ways for the worse. There's obviously an incredible wealth of information, so much stuff that we can all access, and that my teenage kids take for granted now, the fact that they don't have to go to the library when they need to do their homework.

They don't have to set a video.

Exactly.

When I used to have to set the video for *Dallas*, if the football ran late, we'd miss the last 10 minutes of *Dallas*.

Yes, I know.

And they don't understand any of that.

Just don't understand! So, yes, things have changed for the better. Things like Wikipedia, all these incredible things we find on the web that make our lives better, enable us to make a living, enable us to claim our human rights, all kinds of things. But also a lot of challenges. And we all know many of those, the ways in which we are becoming too close, perhaps, to our devices, and to the constant scrolling of our lives, and the ways in which our data might be at risk, the ways in which we're vulnerable to misinformation online and fake news, and the way that affects our democracy or our personal lives. All sorts of challenges. So what we're trying to do with Tim and with the Web Foundation is to say there is a brilliant thing at the heart of this, a brilliant idea. His great idea. He gave the web to the world for free 30 years ago, and that's an incredible gift, and we ought to cherish it. We ought to nourish it and we ought to value it and fight for it, and we may need to fight for it. That's what the Web Foundation's about.

When you say "fight for it", who are you fighting and what are you fighting for?

That's a good question. I think in some ways we are fighting against some governments who want to control the web to an excessive degree, who want...

So a kind of reactionary totalitarian, authoritarian regimes.

Absolutely, yes. There's more and more of that. We're seeing more shutdowns of the internet, double last year compared to the previous year, where governments just... when there's an election going on or a bit of unrest or whatever, they'll shut down the internet, which is usually a massive overreaction to a problem. There's those challenges from governments. There's challenges from companies, large and small companies, some of which are caught up in that whole process of disseminating news that may not be true, information that may not be real. And also, companies that are responsible for looking after our data and don't always do so. I'm sure we can come back to some of that. But actually, I think we're also probably fighting against apathy. I think we're all, as citizens, we're all users of the web, and it's very easy for us just to sort of take it for granted, like the air that we breathe. But it isn't like that. It's not always going to be there in the form that is most useful to us, in the form that makes it a public good worth defending, like clean water and being able to go to school and so on. So we have to work for that, and I think part of that is recognising that we all have a role to play in that. I always say it's a bit like you go out in the street, and there's a job for governments to do, to put up the speed limit signs and set the rules of the road and so on. There's a job for companies to do, to build vehicles that are safe and get us from A to B and so on. And then there's the rest, which is not only all of us obeying the rules and driving the cars the right way. But more than that, actually figuring out how we navigate around each other, those kind of courtesies and social norms and so on, which we've managed to build over decades or even centuries in the real world. No surprise, perhaps, that we're struggling a bit with that in the virtual world, that we've only had 10, 15, 20 years to work on. I think there's a big job for all of us to do as human beings, while there's also very important stuff for companies and for governments to do to make sure we have a web that we want.

I mean, we live in an incredibly globalised environment now, and the internet has clearly enabled that to such a point now where almost nation-state governments, countries don't necessarily mean anything. I mean, 10 years ago I bought something from Argentina or something on the internet and paid via PayPal, and it didn't arrive. Then I got into a dispute with the vendor, and it struck me then that my government could do nothing to help me, that the only recourse was an American company, and they were applying kind of West coast Silicon Valley-type ethics, to it. Like if you and I have a dispute and I lend you £20 and you don't pay it back, I can take you to the local court. But that just doesn't matter any more. It truly is a globalised environment.

Yes, and I think we've got to recognise the limits of national governments and national legislation and laws and so on, given the very global nature of the internet, as you say. But that doesn't mean that we can't have some norms, some expectations, and some standards. And actually, something that, with Tim, we've been doing in the last few months is this idea of a Contract for the Web, which we managed to get hundreds of companies and civil society groups and governments involved in, that says, first of all, there's a set of principles that should be used to guide how we organise activity on the worldwide web. And then secondly, that there's a set of concrete commitments that those governments, those companies and all of us as citizens can make to defend and to protect those founding principles for the web. That isn't about creating legislation that should apply in every country in the world, but it is about establishing some norms and some expectations that might cut across national borders.

And what are those norms? Because isn't trying to corral those governments a bit like herding cats? For example, denial of the Holocaust, in my view, well, it's a criminal offence in Germany, in France, and so on, but it's not in America. In fact, they would uphold your right to say it, loathsome though it is, given the First Amendment.

Yes. we do have to recognise there are different cultural norms, different historical experiences and different countries. I think that there's been for a long time a kind of ability to span those different experiences to a point. But I think where that stops, I think people increasingly agree, is where there is content that directly threatens an individual or a group of people, where there's content that is deliberately designed to mislead, to deceive, in order to make money or in order to influence an election or whatever. So there are various ways in which I think standards can be applied that can basically raise everyone's game and ensure that we have an online experience that is much truer to the founding spirit of the world wide web.

And how does that work in the age of self-censorship? Because I remember when the Guardian launched their website 20 years ago, they offered you the option to click the X on sport, because I don't like sport, I consider it to be a waste of time. I don't want my Guardian homepage to have the screen acreage wasted by sport. But of course, you can then take that self-censorship to the ultimate extent. Say you're not interested in so many different types of policy areas, you're just left with a very narrow feed. Look at Facebook's newsfeed now where you can get a Republican newsfeed and a Democrat newsfeed, and

they're completely different. Has it contributed towards the polarisation of society?

Yes, I think particularly in the last five to 10 years in the 30-year lifetime of the web, with the advance of social media platforms, that has happened. There's a responsibility for companies to figure that out. But there's also, coming back to the earlier point, I think it's for all of us to worry about that. We all know that if we only ever eat potatoes or chips, or even if we only ever eat fruit, that's not going to be good for us. You've got to have a balanced diet, right? And the same is true with information. I think, just as we all want to... the vast majority of people see themselves as decent people who want to do right by themselves and other people, and be healthy and so on. Well, that should come to the information and news that we consume, as well. I always try to follow stuff that I know I'm going to disagree with.

It's good when you read a good columnist in a nice broadsheet where you know you're going to disagree with them but they're going to put it really well.

Yes.

And it'll irk you as to why you can't quite articulate why they're wrong.

Absolutely.

Is access to the internet a basic human right, and is that one of the things that the Foundation campaigns for?

Yes, we think it is. You know, I've spent the last 20 years or so working, fighting for things like clean water for everybody, and electricity, and the chance for every child to go to school, and so on. One of the reasons why I'm excited about what we're doing with Tim and with the Web Foundation is that I think there's every reason to argue that access to the internet, and a good internet, an internet that serves people, is a basic right – and is potentially as profound as meeting those basic needs. In some cases, it's the way that people will meet those basic needs. If you think about how, even in some of the less developed countries, increasingly if you want to apply for a job, you may well have to send an email. You may even have to submit a photo or a video, a statement by video, whatever. And if you can't get online, then you're immediately disadvantaged. There was a kid that our team worked with in Pretoria, in South Africa, a couple of years ago that the team were telling me about when I joined the Web Foundation. He was about 10 years old, and he was disappearing every night from his home for several hours, and nobody was quite sure where he was going. Eventually, his parents established that he was going several miles across town to a free Wi-Fi hotspot, and he was going online. His parents said to him, "You know what, you could play football around the corner with your friends. What are you doing?" And he said, this apparently were his words, he said, "I live in a shack. When I go online, I don't live in a shack." The idea that that kind of conjures up for me, of the potential of the imagination, the creativity that can be unlocked by the world wide web, by the internet, and the way that people can be everything that they can be and be truly themselves, uniquely themselves, perhaps in a way that they wouldn't be able to just in their local community, because of cultural norms and prejudice, and all

the rest of it. But also, ways that they can actually just get out there and have a good idea and maybe make a living out of it. We've seen countless examples of that through our work at the Web Foundation, too. So I think it should be seen as a basic right, and that's something we need to fight for. And by the way, only half the world has got that right now. We're at this moment, just in the last year, we've passed this what we called a 50:50 moment. For the first time, more than half the world are online, which is a great moment. It's a moment to say, "Goodness me." And Tim would say, as the founder of the internet, the founder of the world wide web, he would say he never expected that we would get this far. But now we've come to this halfway point, we have to push on and make sure we get the whole world connected, because the deep inequality that we already see in the world is only going to get much worse if we allow that digital divide to widen as well. That will drive other kinds of inequality too. So we need a real hard effort to ensure that we reach those hardest to reach people, whether they're in rural areas, whether it's women rather than men who are less likely... women are less likely to go online, girls rather than boys. Whether it's people of particular groups who are less likely to get online, all kinds of fronts that we've got to take that fight to. Because I think if we leave people behind, then we're saying they're not going to get all those other things that they really ought to be able to access, from basic education to healthcare to the means of earning a living, too.

I mean the internet and the web has changed humanity in such profound ways. You know, we have a president who was popular on Twitter and uses Twitter to completely cut out all of these communications professionals and speak directly with his base. There's almost no turning back, isn't there? Where do you think it is going to go for the next 10, 20 years? Because we're starting to see people disconnect from social media. We're starting to see that for all the benefits of the web, that a lot of young people are suffering from self-harm issues and mental health issues because of social media, the always-on culture. Some people in France have this automatic email responder on a weekend that says, "Your email has been deleted. Please send on Monday," which I quite admire. But is it just that we're getting used to the internet still as a society and as a people?

Yes, I think we are. I mean, I think there are some seeds of those kind of trends that we can see were already sown before the internet. You know, if you'd look at those studies of 20 or so years ago, what was the great book called *Bowling Alone*, that looked at how Americans used to go bowling together to the ten-pin bowling, and then increasingly they were just going on their own.

You always win if you're playing alone.

That's true. I've noticed that, actually. I'm very good. I always go. But some of the things we now say, "Oh, well, look, that's social media, that's Facebook, Google," or whatever that has caused that, I think we have to distinguish between the ways in which those problems have been exacerbated and potentially made worse. We've got to distinguish that from the actual root causes of those problems. But yes, I think it's hard to predict where we'll be in 20 years' time, or even five years' time. But I think it's fair to say that we will see more communities online, whether it's on social media platforms or around websites or whatever. We'll see more connections

between people who define themselves by a particular factor as being in common with someone else or a group of people. I think that's potentially a really good thing. The fact that, for example, people who are... if you're gay and you're in a particular country where it's very difficult to be out, then the only way that you're probably able to really express yourself is by being part of a community online. That's profoundly important, as that's allowing people to be themselves perhaps for the first time. And over time, of course, that can then ripple out and start to break down those that wider prejudice. So I think those communities are really important, but I also hope that the notion of the web and the internet as a true public space will be maintained. I think we need to work for that. So when I talked earlier about Wikipedia, something like Wikipedia, which is for everyone, that everyone can access, that almost everyone agrees is solid, reliable information, trusted, and that is there not for someone's profit, not for someone's particular political interest or whatever. It's just there for the good of the world, for knowledge. That those kind of places and spaces on the web are still as strong as they are now, if not stronger.

Could you go into a bit more detail on this Contract for the Web that the Foundation is producing? I mean, is it just for governments and civil society, or is it for individuals to sign up to, and internet service providers and of course the behemoths like Facebook, Amazon, Google and so on?

Yes, it is. It's for all of those. And actually, we're just at a really interesting stage where we're working our way through... there's been lots of working groups and conversations involving lots of the organisations that have already signed on to the core principles of the Contract for the Web, and that does include those big companies like Twitter and Facebook and Google and Microsoft and so on. It also includes some governments like the French government, the Germans, the British, and others coming on board, and some great civil society organisations. But it also includes thousands of individual citizens, people who use the web who want to protect it, and they've signed on. You can sign on at contractfortheweb.org. It's really easy to do. We want to get people involved. The relatively easy part is to say what are the top line principles?

You preempted my next question. What are they, genuinely?

We've got one principle that's agreed on, which is that we need to make sure we can get everyone online, that everyone can get online, that it's something that is for everyone, that there's a universal dimension to the web. There's a principle around privacy and respecting privacy and defending that, which is really important, as we know, at the moment. There's a principle in there about companies building tech solutions that work for humanity rather than against it, which is, of all of the principles that we've laid out, that's the one where some people sort of roll their eyes and go, "Oh yes, okay, what's that then?" So you know, the devil is in the detail on something like that. But those are the kinds of principles we're talking about. What we're now thrashing out is... so under each of those principles, what are the concrete commitments that companies can make, that governments can make, and that we all as citizens can make too? And that's the idea of it being a contract. The notion of saying that if you do your bit and they do their bit and I do my bit, then maybe we can come to something that is good for everyone, that is good for all of us, and better than what we have now.

And this isn't criticising any one particular government or any one particular party in any country, but do governments even have the know-how to make these kinds of decisions? Because, to me, when I think of any generic government minister, they don't really know what they're talking about in terms of do they have the digital know-how to make those right decisions? It's the people in Silicon Valley that have the knowledge, is it not?

Well, I think it varies a lot for sure. We've all seen examples of American senators asking Mark Zuckerberg how Facebook works, and he says, "We sell ads, Senator." We've all seen that. And yes, there are people who are not very savvy in governments all around the world about tech stuff. There are some who do know what they're talking about, and there are some governments who are quite advanced on this stuff. I think that the potential is in the tech community, bringing their expertise, and policymakers bringing theirs, which should be around understanding how to build policy solutions that are going to work for a large number of people and improve their lives, and try to marry those two together. And then also bring into that, to make it a triangle, people who actually use the web, whether they're represented by organisations like Access Now and Mozilla and others who are great organisations that are part of this process too, or whether they're just involved individually as individual citizens. I think if we can put that triangle together, that could be quite powerful.

Who would you consider a bigger 'get' to sign up? Would it be the government of Finland, for example, or would it be Alphabet, who are obviously behind Google?

Well, Google have signed up to the principles, and they're in the process, they're in the conversations, the working groups that we're having now to work out the detailed commitments. I hope that they, and the others, will stay the course and be part of the final full Contract for the Web. I don't think there's any one big get. I think it's intended to be a little bit of a coalition of the willing. We don't want to just try to browbeat a particular government to come in if they're just going to make a nuisance of themselves. There does have to be something of a genuine signal of commitment to those core principles, that this is about respecting people's rights. This is about understanding the web as a public good that should serve humanity, not one government or one company or whatever. All of that is important. We're not just going to take everyone. We do have a bit of a bar.

Is the problem with the principles that you, and this is not to criticise you, it's anyone that would drop a kind of a sovereign document. If you look at the constitution in the United States, the more specificity there is, the more people are going to be divided. On the other hand, the broader the principles are, they're going to be subject, potentially retrospectively or even mischievously, to re-interpretation. How do you strike that balance between the right level of specificity? I'm surprised I was able to pronounce that word!

It's a good word.

Thanks very much.

I think in everything I've done in my work, you realise more and more that it's all about balance. Balance is a craft, you know, and it's ...

An art, not a science.

Yes. I think that's right. And it's a worthy, a noble enterprise trying to find balance. And I think that's what we've got to apply here. We've got to be serious about those principles, but we've also got to bring them into real contexts that actually affect the behaviour of governments and companies and of all of us. And that's not going to be easy, and we've got to work at that. But I think, if we'd stopped at the principles, then yes, we'd have a declaration of independence or some lofty thing, which there's a place for that but it's important and we need to set direction. But I think if we'd stopped there with the Contract for the Web, that wouldn't be enough. That said, if we just dive straight into the concrete commitments without spending some time articulating those commitments, then there's no compass. So I think you have to try and do both and we'll see how well it comes out. But I'm optimistic that it's going to help us build a better web than the one we have.

Do you think that we've learned as a species now that we can't trust the digital giants to protect our data privacy? There seems to be an arms race between the hackers and the people that hold our data. My car insurance company was hacked recently, and I gather my card details are on some file that someone can buy on Bitcoin, and it seems to be once that information has gone as its non-negotiable, it's out there.

Yes, I mean there are definitely, number one, there are bad people out there who intend to do harm. My view is that they're not huge in number, but they're definitely there and they can have a grossly disproportionate impact beyond their numbers. Then there are people who are just seeing an opportunity, such as the people that... some of the teenagers, in many cases, who were disseminating some of the early fake news stories out of Macedonia or wherever, that affected the 2016 election in the US. They just saw an opportunity, realising that putting a story on the web that was headlined 'Hillary Clinton is unwell', was going to get more clicks than something that said something that was true, and the clicks meant revenue, and that's what they did. So I don't think those are necessarily evil people. They're people who aren't helping, clearly, to make sure that the web is good for everyone. But the solutions to that I think are around fixing those system faults that incentivise the wrong things. And that's for the companies and for governments to focus on.

And are there are limits to your influence? I mean, I imagine the government of Denmark, I don't know who they are, but they'll be quite agreeable. I'm making a Scandinavian generalisation there, but ...

I'm not sure of anyone these days, Paul.

That's actually a fair point well made. But go to the obvious culprits, like if you go up against the likes of China and Russia with the spread of fake news, how

can you reason them out of the position that they don't want to be reasoned out of?

Well, I think that's where, as I said earlier, that there is a bit of a sense of we're trying to start with the critical mass. And we think there is a critical mass of both governments and companies and all of us as citizens who do have a sense of those values being important on the web, in our internet lives of respect for human rights and for human dignity and freedom of expression and so on. So I think that's where our attention is focused, and we'll build it there. And I think if we can get a head of steam there, then we'll see where we go from there.

So you're spending your time in the problematic areas in the sense, that you don't concern yourself with Denmark because they are a mature society, and everyone gets along great, and there's freedom of speech and so on. It's more about what I would consider to be the problematic countries?

It's a mix. I think we need the champions. We need those who are taking the right path. Estonia for example, is a relatively small country but really good on these issues and really tech minded, has really led the way in a lot of innovative delivery of government services and so on. They're an important country to have involved in something like this, because you want the champions.

Yes, they can be a beacon.

Yes.

An ambassador.

Yes, absolutely. But we also want to make sure that we're really hitting on countries where a real difference can be made either because they're big or because they have real influence in the world beyond their size, arguably such as something like the UK. I think it's a case of getting that balance.

And you mentioned the 50:50 targets. That's incredibly interesting, because isn't the remaining 50% going to be the most difficult? Isn't that where growth is going to be slowed?

Yes, that's right. I mean one of the really interesting things I've found in the last couple of years doing this job with the web foundation is that I ask all sorts of people who know far more about this than I do, who understand the adoption of the internet, the increased take-up of the internet around the world. And there's been a kind of the beginnings of an S curve – I'm doing it with my hand as you can see here. It's great on a podcast! – which there's been an increased adoption. We've reached that 50:50 point. Now, nobody has managed to tell me with confidence what's going to happen next. Is it going to top off? It almost inevitably will at some point. It's not going to just march up to 100% and crash through that barrier. But where does it top off? Does it? There are some people who fear it's already slowing down, and that we may get to sort of 60%, 65% and that'll be sort of it, unless something beyond the normal mechanisms of the market is put into place. Some are more optimistic and say, "It will get to 90%," and so on. Pretty much nobody thinks it's going to just get to 100%

without some hammering. And that's where I guess governments need to come in most of all, but companies too. We talk a lot, for example, to Facebook about how their work in developing countries could be much improved by the offer that they make to people, which a few years ago it was something called Free Basics, which was quite widely criticised for being a mini version of the web, that was sold as a gateway to the whole web but actually it was a small group of sites that were sort of engineered to be compliant with that. We've challenged them and urged them, encouraged them to think differently. I think they are thinking differently about a much more ambitious and more positive approach which would enable people, because of Facebook's work, to actually get onto the whole of the web without any restrictions. And I think that's something they'd been thinking about and hopefully are going to announce something on pretty soon. But those kinds of changes are what I think will help us to get to really everybody being able to access the web, and it being truly for everyone as it was intended to be.

But what are the barriers to growth on that then? Is it partly governmental? Like I can't imagine the government of North Korea wanting their citizens to have access to the internet. Or if I was looking after a huge expanse of the African Outback or the Australian desert, there'll be technological difficulties in connecting. There's going to be lots of different difficulties in getting this out there.

Yes, I mean, we tend to talk about four barriers. The first is that last one you mentioned, the technological one. Can you actually get a signal? Can you get a 3G or 4G signal or whatever that allows you to get broadband access? Now actually, about two thirds of the world can do that, but only half the world's online. what's the reason for the difference? Well, that's the next three barriers. So the next one then is can you afford it?

It's so obvious when you say it, but I actually never considered that in the question.

That's right.

It's fundamental.

So we do research that shows that if you are in Africa, you're paying about five times more for your data, for the same amount of data, as someone in Asia. And in Asia, you're spending more than you would in Europe or in North America.

Sorry to interrupt, but is that profiteering or is that reflection of the genuine increased base costs?

It's mainly the latter. You know, that they're, if you're in a very, very sparsely populated rural area, which can be true, of course, in Scotland or in Texas as well as in rural Kenya, then the costs are higher. Sometimes it's about government policies and whether they actively encourage competition, and companies to come and invest and so on. There's all sorts of things. But affordability is one really important thing. But then you find, and this gets really interesting, you can say you can connect to the

web and you can afford it, but sometimes people still don't connect. Why is that? Well, the next challenge is skills. Do people have the skills? Fairly basic skills, but nevertheless skills that not everybody does have.

Again, another thing I forgot in my question.

Yes.

Fundamental. Amazing.

There you go. And so there's a need for widespread digital literacy programmes and we support some of that work around the world, especially engaged in getting greater literacy for policymakers, for people in parliaments and so on around the world.

And is it a chicken and the egg as well? Because you can't gain digital literacy skills until you've got some access to the internet.

That's right. That's one of the challenges, so we have to sort of break that cycle. And then the final one, which is the least tangible of all, is what about the content that's online? So if you can afford it and if you've got a signal and you've even got the skills, but there's nothing online on the web that's in your language, or that's relevant to your community or your country, then why are you going to go there? And that's why the web has to be as it was originally envisaged, truly bottom up and truly a space where people create as much as they consume. Because if we've got creators of content in the most remote parts of the world for perhaps a fairly small group of people, then that is what's going to make the web even more relevant and meaningful, and get us over that last barrier. In fact, I was in a fairly remote part of Indonesia last year where there had been a major typhoon that had gone through that part of the world a few weeks earlier. And in the part of Indonesia I was in, which was a couple of hours away from Jakarta, there'd been some damage caused by the storm to a bridge just outside, a few miles away from the village. And it was a key route to get to the market, I think and the school and so on. So it was causing quite a problem. Now, in the village that I was in, there was an old computer in a sort of little committee room in the middle of the sort of little kind of parish hall kind of thing, in the middle of the community, which was hooked up to the internet and which had a village website that somebody had set up with a little small grant, I think, from the local municipal authority. And the website had live updates, or at least regularly posted updates, on how the repairs were going at the bridge a few miles away. So people were coming in and taking a look and saying, "Okay, well so maybe Thursday we might be all right." And they were posting photos.

That sounds really useful and actually useful.

Absolutely! And in the meantime, of course, some people were also on Facebook and they were in touch with their friends on the other side of the bridge and saying, "Oh, how's it looking from your side?" And so you saw these really grassroots kind of micro-solutions, sitting alongside these big global offers, and actually both of them being compatible with each other.

And another kind of 50:50 split obviously is gender. I mean, is getting women and girls online in the developing world, that must be part of a vital part of opening up digital culture.

Yes, it really is. It's an absolutely key thing. We have a programme at the Web Foundation called Women's Rights Online for exactly that reason. What we find our research shows that women are less likely to be online in the first place and they're less likely to be doing certain things online, less likely to be applying for a job online. That's what our research shows. They're less likely to be expressing a strong opinion on social media. And seeing some of the ways in which some women bloggers are targeted, you can see why.

I don't blame them. To be honest, I'm fatigued with anyone expressing any opinion on social media these days.

Yes, exactly. But in some places and at some times, it's absolutely critical, isn't it, that people are able to, whatever their agenda, whatever their backgrounds, are able to really express themselves in a way that yes, is kind of respectful of others, but is really clear and direct and true to themselves. So we do see that gender divide online, and it's one of the things we're really determined to try to help overcome. And the first task there, I think, is just making people aware of it, particularly policy makers. And I think we've made great progress with governments around the world in the last few years, a long way to go still, in getting a better understanding of gender in relation to getting kids in school, for example, or representatives in Parliament and so on. Still further to go in most places. But we're well behind that in terms of getting that thinking applied to people being online. I think that's a real area for us to do some good public education over the next few years.

What do you do? What is your job? What's a typical week? How do you divide your time?

Well, as CEO of the Web Foundation, I don't really have a job. Everybody else does. They're all the smart ones and I...

You're the conductor of the orchestra.

I like to think so, yes. Though I think they probably would play the tune pretty well without me! I try to build a really great team, and I have a wonderful team, 30 people around the world in 12 different countries, almost all of whom, because they're so thinly spread, don't actually see each other except on a video screen, on Skype or whatever. So we've got quite a dispersed team, and part of my job is to bring all those together. I try to do my job in representing the organisation. We've got to go raise money. We don't have an endowment. We don't have a founder who's made $1 billion from the internet because of course he actually gave the web to the world for free. So we have to go and bang on doors and go see foundations...

I've seen Tim on the TV. He doesn't wear Savile Row suits, does he?

He doesn't, no.

I wonder if he secretly does on that on a Saturday evening perhaps.

I doubt it. You know, you're right. We've got this incredible icon as our founder who really lives those values that the web at its best represents. So I try to represent that. I've spent, what have I done today… I mean I've been working on this Contract for the Web. We've been looking at some of the policy issues that are coming up there, looking at quite intricate things around the privacy agenda and so on, trying to figure out where there might be some common ground between the different partners there. It's a job of bringing together a group of people and trying to accompany them on a journey where we try to achieve some really good things. And I guess that's about as much as I've done in my career, now I think about it! Over the last 25 years or so. Ever since, well, going back a little further, when I was a local radio DJ, that was my first career.

I'll ask you about that in a second!

I feel very much at home sitting in front of this microphone.

Presumably you're more comfortable asking the questions rather than answering them.

Well, I'm most comfortable just playing the Pet Shop Boys and Erasure, who were in the late 80s and on the south coast of England. If you were a listener to Power FM, that's what you would have enjoyed.

I don't say this to flatter you, you've got an incredible voice. I can tell how you'd be a good broadcaster.

Well, that's very kind. I do feel just being in front of a microphone, you suddenly feel this sense of intimacy.

I do have a podcast voice. It is me, but it's just a little bit of a richer, deeper version of it. I think it's the acoustics of the studio as well, isn't it?

It's quite... I used to... I was only sort of 18, 19 when I was on the radio, but for two years or so, I did the late show. I did the nine o'clock at night 'til one in the morning.

Wow. The graveyard shift.

No, that's the one 'til six in the morning.

Oh, yes. Please forgive me. Yes, it is.

This is pre-graveyard.

We're all pre-graveyard!

Yes! So it was that sort of late-night intimate thing, and I'm sure that I kind of ...

Alan's deep bath. Do you remember Alan Partridge?

Yes, exactly. A hero to us all.

Indeed. My team say I'm half Alan Partridge and half David Brent – and I take that as a compliment.

Yes, I think that's... yes. Hard to say which of those halves is your favourite, or do you have a sense?

I don't! Anyway, let me get back to the questions, because you're very good at answering the questions because you're prompting further questions from me, which is kind of doing my job for me. But you mentioned your funding in the last answer. I mean, who does fund you? Who is writing cheques for you guys?

Well we have some great funders, including some foundations like the Ford Foundation, who have been great supporters of ours over the years. The Omidyar Network, which some people know, do some great work and give us some wonderful support. We have some support from companies. We do have grants from Google, from Facebook, from Microsoft, and a few others.

And when they hand you the cheque, do they give you a wink and say, "Go easy on us"?

No. Well at least I haven't noticed them say it. And if they do say it, we ignore it. No, they don't. They don't ask that, and they wouldn't get it. We are absolutely clear that we take money and we say, "Thank you very much." And the only reward you get is in heaven.

Well, it's in their ultimate interests for you to succeed, is it not?

I think so. Yes. And I think that's what they think. And I think there are plenty of companies, including some of the big companies who many of the people in those companies sincerely believe that they are doing something really good for the world, and that they're encouraging, fostering, creativity and expression and knowledge and so on. And that's 100% in line with what we're trying to do at the Web Foundation, and yes, of course also, you know, frankly, the more people that are online, the bigger the market there is for some of those companies to reach out to. But their support for the Web Foundation is something that we appreciate and we never take for granted, but it also is always applied just to our broad operations. We don't take something from a company saying, "How about you do this little project with it that would be really relevant to our interests?" or whatever. We say, if you want to get behind the mission, you want to get behind the team, then that's fantastic and we really welcome your support. But we'll apply that to those funds in whatever's the best way to take that mission forward.

And what does success look like for you guys? I know you've got the mission, but how would you define say 10 years from now whether it's succeeded or not? I mean we've spoken about the 50:50 ratio earlier. Do you have metrics? Say, 10 years from now if you've succeeded it will be 55:45, or that a certain percentage of more women will be online or developing countries will have better access? How do you actually know whether you're doing a good job and whether you're on track?

Truthfully, we don't look quite that far ahead at the moment, because frankly who knows where we're going to be in 10 years.

I don't know where I'm going to be next week.

Exactly, but we do over the next couple of years, have a sense of wanting to see more people being online, but then also those sorts of quality indicators that are harder to pin down. It's much easier just to count the numbers of people that are online, and we do do that, but also to see where we're making progress on greater privacy protections, greater action to combat disinformation online, to stop governments who are shutting down the internet in different parts of the world. And you know, the reason why, I guess, we feel we can hold ourselves accountable to some of those metrics, which arguably are the job of governments and big companies and so on to actually act on is because the way we do our job is to seek to educate and engage with those actors, those governments, those companies. You know, we don't go out there, as 30 people around the world and dig any trenches to put fibre optic cable in. We don't go out and actually connect people to the web ourselves. We see the value of our small organisation being in engaging with those who have the power to achieve these big goals that we've set. And you know, that's been my experience throughout my work. You know, previously when I've worked, for example, with the ONE Campaign which I led in Europe for a few years, that's Bono's organisation, working on seeking to end extreme poverty. And as part of that, trying to get governments in Europe and elsewhere to commit more aid money. Well, in the European countries that I was responsible for in the five years or so that I was there, we got a 27% increase in that aid, which meant literally tens of billions more going into vital life-saving projects. We could never have done that. Even Oxfam, even Save the Children. Even big organisations like that know that on their own they can't have that kind of impact unless they engage with the really big players and companies and governments who, when you put them together, can reach the billions of people and have a huge impact. That's what we do.

We'll go through your career in a second actually, but I just wanted to finish off on a couple of questions on the Foundation. What's your relationship like with Sir Tim Berners-Lee? If you're Darth Vader, is he like Emperor Palpatine? Is he there like as your key advisor behind the scenes, how does it work?

He's...

That was a terrible analogy, wasn't it?

Yes, you're stretching my *Star Wars* familiarity there. Who's the little, the little wise one?

That's Yoda. You're CEO of the evil empire.

Okay.

But Palpatine was his key advisor, the founder, the power behind the power.

Yes. He's the power in front of the power, I would say. Tim is out there, and is very busy, very active. I mean, he has a lot of other things that he's doing as well as working with us at the Web Foundation. But he's just a, you know, he's on our board. He's a very active member of the board. He's in touch on a weekly basis. We talk about all sorts of ways that we want to try and take this effort forward. I mean the Contract for the Web that we talked about, he's very committed to that, very close to that. And he's got involved in some of those quite detailed discussions. And as you'd expect from somebody who 30 years ago, kind of captured a stroke of genius in himself and created this thing that we now all take for granted, he's a brilliant mind. His brain runs at a thousand miles an hour, everyone, I think, I hope, everyone struggles to keep up, because I certainly do. And he, it's a great privilege to work for him and alongside him.

I'm inspired by his success but it also makes me feel pretty crap and, like as a total loser. Because like I've never created anything. Do you know what I mean?

Yes.

He's changed humanity for the better, and I've done absolutely nothing other than to get on a delayed train back to Milton Keynes.

Yes. No, but he's also incredibly down to earth. Very humble guy. Has a very sort of, you know, the kind of life that we all can relate to, with family and with friends and going home at the weekend and going out for a run and going for a swim, things like that. You know, he's a great guy.

And just for the final few questions of the podcast, could we go through your career, I mean, did you always want to do this? Did you, you know, you started at Power FM. Did you always want to be a DJ? How did you actually end up doing what you're doing? Walk us through the actual journey.

Well, I got involved in the radio thing straight out of school, didn't go to college, and in fact had my first graveyard shift.

Pre-graveyard.

Well, I did start on the graveyard!

Right, okay.

I did start with literally at four in the morning just before I was 18.

Wow. Precocious.

I think you could say that. I probably was a little too precocious! Did that for five years and loved it, and it was a great time to be in radio, late 80s, early 90s, it was a lot of fun. But I then thought, I want to kind of, "I want to go and learn something." I got myself on a university course, I went to college in London, studied politics, just because it was something I was interested in. I probably thought at that point that I would come back into broadcasting in some form, but a little bit more serious than playing records. But then in the course of being at college, got interested more and more in the political side. Ended up working for an MP when I came out of university.

Stephen Timms?

Stephen Timms, yes.

I love Stephen. Very, very nice man. Very dedicated.

He's a very nice man, and still there, amazingly. He's one of the great survivors in politics and yes, very, very good guy. And a great boss to work for. A very generous man. And did that for a few years, was around for the 1997 elections. I was sort of, you know, handing out placards on Mitcham Common, and stuff like that and...

Were you singing *Things Can Only Get Better*?

Do you know, I heard that in my car, would you believe, just this weekend. I thought, "Oh my god, it's coming around again." I don't know what I felt about it. Didn't know what to feel about it.

Brian Cox still plays it when he does his world tours.

Does he?

Yes, I saw him in Hollywood the other day.

Really?

I was at his cosmological lecture, and he still plays it.

That's great. No, that was a special time as well. I think there was a sense of hope and optimism, and justified optimism, in what was then created over several years.

It's all gone downhill since then. Basically. Tony did a great job for 10 years, but since then the whole thing has gone to pot. In my view.

Well, it's certainly complicated. But for me, what happened then was that while I was working with Stephen in Parliament, we were doing a lot of work on international debt as he was on the Treasury Select Committee, and they did an inquiry into it. And I got to hear about this thing called Jubilee 2000 which was, at that stage, a small campaign that had this idea of writing off all of these debts that the poorest countries in the world were paying to rich lenders in the US and Europe, and had been paying over and over and over many years compound interest, you know, and at the expense of basic health care and primary education. There was this crazy situation where countries were, 70-80% of their budget was going on interest payments to lenders. And some people, including the Pope, among others, had the idea that you could link that cause, cancelling the debts, which seemed like not just a moral cause, but also just made economic sense. Because you could get people back on their feet and they could build again. You could link that with the millennium, which was coming up, the year 2000, which was sort of lacking a bit of meaning, for many people at least, in the late 90s. And so I got involved with the campaign Jubilee 2000, I was deputy director of the campaign. We got musicians involved. We went over to see Bono, and he immediately got it and got involved and got excited, and Bob Geldof and so on. We had the British music industry doing a big thing with the campaign. I remember in, I think 1999, and Muhammad Ali was there and so on, and we built this campaign that in the end got the, what was then the G8, it had Russia in there in those days, to write off about $95 billion worth of debt. And there are kids in school who've been in school in the last 20, 30 years.

As a direct result of the work.

As a direct result of that. Exactly.

Awesome.

Yes, I mean, that really opened my eyes. I didn't know anything before that about Africa, about international development, but it really, I got excited and interested in it because it's just seemed this great idea. You know, the idea of using a moment to pull off an incredible result, and arguably one that should have been done many, many years earlier, but it hadn't had its moment in the spotlight. That really got me thinking that we could do more of that. Jubilee 2000 was sort of the, felt like the acclaimed first album of a new kind of activism. And then a few years later when I was working with Oxfam, we got together with lots of other organisations and did the Make Poverty History campaign, which was sort of if Jubilee 2000 was the acclaimed first album, I guess was the sort of a greatest hits compilation, because we just threw at it all the old tricks that we knew. And we had people, you have to be over about 30 now to remember this...

Don't rub it in!

People wearing the white wristband, and...

I remember it well.

All of that, and Live 8, and so on. And that was an amazing experience, which again, got a big increase in aid for the poorest countries. A lot of focus on education and getting girls especially into school. So all of that I guess added up to, for me, an experience of bringing together different and often unlikely alliances, you know, putting together a Conservative backbench MP with a rock star, or the trade unions with the business representatives, and so on.

You could write a book.

Yes. I could.

Did Bono always wear sunglasses, even when you saw him in the office?

Once or twice, he took them off. Just once or twice. But yes, you know, I think it really taught me the power of an idea, first of all, of an unlikely alliance...

Well executed, though.

Well, yes, I guess you got to follow through with the execution, haven't you? You know, there's probably plenty of great ideas that have floundered, for lack of that implementation. And did that over, you know, a few more years, working with Oxfam and then with Save the Children running their campaigns. And then came to One working with Bono, and then in the last couple of years with the Web Foundation.

Has Bono basically been involved in everything you've ever done? Was he at Power FM? Were you just playing U2 records?

I did play their records! I remember, actually, I never told him this, but I used to, not that he would care, but I used to take the mickey out of Bono. We all just did, didn't we? And many people still do. But I remember playing a U2 record in I guess 1988 and, no, that was it – it was the Pet Shop Boys, who did a cover of *Where the Streets Have No Name*.

They did.

We're getting really into our late 80s musical history now.

I bought *West End Girls.*

Now, that was a proper song.

Yes. It's a tune.

But they then did a cover of *Where the Streets Have No Name*, by U2, which was deemed not to be the most glorious moment of Pet Shop Boys' career. And I saw Bono being asked about it and he said, "What have I, what have I..."

What have I done to deserve this?

And I thought, and I remember saying, on my radio show, "That was quite funny, for Bono." I had this presumption that he was sort of, you know, humourless rock star. And in fact, in my experience, that's not true at all.

He seems to get a lot of criticism, just out of, a lot of people sneering at him, just for wanting to make the world a better place, and for doing something about it.

Yes. You know, we're all human and we all make mistakes, but it baffles me how someone like him, the way he's perceived, he could be, like you say, he could be sitting on a beach somewhere just spending money, and he chooses to, to have a go at trying to do his bit in making the world a bit better. And in my experience entirely with absolutely good intentions and a lot of very smart strategy too. And some incredibly impressive connections that he's built over the years. I remember, back when we were doing the Drop the Debt, the Jubilee 2000 stuff, we were going to do the first visit over to Washington together to lobby in Congress. And Bill Clinton was the President, but the Republicans were in control in Congress. And we didn't have many friends on the Republican side in those days. And Bono said, "Well, we need to find some people that we can talk to." So he talked to his friend Bobby Shriver, whose sister was Maria Shriver, whose then husband was Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Arnold Schwarzenegger, yes.

Who was in the Republican world, of course. And Arnie told Bono to talk to guy called John Casick, who at that stage was the house budget committee chair. And of course, you know, has had a long political career.

It's always who you know, isn't it?

Yes. you know, a couple of weeks later we ended up sitting down with John Casick. And as I recall, the first conversation they had was about Radiohead, and whether *Kid A* or *OK Computer* was the better album.

Well, there's an obvious answer to that.

Which, indeed. Which way are you going?

I'm not prepared to discuss this. I'll thank you to mind your own business!

And from that curious start, they forged a kind of an understanding and we got the Republicans on board with a lot of what we wanted to do with that relief in the US, as well.

Incredible. What's next for you? And I can't imagine you wanting to leave, but there must be another chapter to come, at the right point?

I don't know. I'm nearly 50.

You've aged well, if you don't mind me saying so.

Thank you very much. Very kind. Very kind.

You look good. We both do, in fairness.

Well, yes. You know, I'm loving what I'm doing and all I want to do is to continue to be useful. I think it's like all of us, we want to do right by our families and enjoy the time we have with our families, right? We want to try and be healthy and get out in the fresh air and keep a little bit fit and so on. And we want to do work that is, that feels, worthwhile. And meaningful. And that doesn't mean you have to be sort of saving the world all the time.

You kind of are. Well, you kind of have, in many ways.

Well, yes. But what I mean is, you know, you also have to... I think it's also right not just to look for kind of this sort of greater good of what you do, although that is important, but also that you do something that you love and that feels like it's, you're able to express yourself.

Would you bring back Power FM?

In a heartbeat.

We can get some funding together. Some seed funding.

Do you think we could?

Yes, we could launch it as an online operation.

It wouldn't cost you much.

power.fm.

Absolutely.

It could be online only. DAB.

I'm there. I will do the graveyard shift, if you need me to.

Pre-graveyard, Adrian.

All right. Yes. Yes!

I'll do the graveyard shift. Adrian, it's been a huge pleasure to have chatted with you. I've been inspired by what you've said, and keep up the amazing work. Thank you.

Thank you, Paul.