



Technology: A force for 'good?'

Every wondered if technology is a force for good?

On Tuesday, February 12th, AJ Alix, Co-Founder of HUX (www.hux.com), and Caleb McCullough, Co-Founder of Intercept (<https://interceptproject.org/>), shared their thoughts on the topic and guided those present through an engaging discussion on “Technology: A force for ‘good?’”



“I grew up a cradle Catholic on a farm in northeast Georgia and graduated from Georgia Tech in 2013,” Alix told the audience. “Then I started a software company but realized I was compartmentalizing life with work as the top priority. So in 2016, I switched to an advisory role with the technology company and traveled to Rome and other places in the world to sit in churches and discern.”

McCullough, an engineering major at Georgia Tech, has had a different life journey.

“I am from upstate New York originally, but then we moved to North Carolina,” he said. “From there, I came to Atlanta to study at Georgia Tech where I am in my 3rd year of studies. I started Project Intercept as a part of Grand Challenges at Georgia Tech – a program focused on how to approach and solve large-scale problems that no one else tackles, like getting trafficking resources to those who need help.”

The roots of McCullough’s creation of Project Intercept can be traced back to the starting point he chose to focus on with his engineering studies – infrastructure.

“My Project Intercept co-founder, Will Gao, and I had the opportunity to fly to Toronto in our first years of study at Georgia Tech to go to a Smart City conference,” McCullough stated. “We came back here and decided to apply what we had learned and heard to Atlanta. After a week we stumbled on human trafficking. It’s heart-wrenching.”

Hearing McCullough’s remark, Alix commented, “It’s amazing how technology accelerates impact.”

He went on to share that when HUX was created, it was originally built for themselves, but then they found it helped other people.

“HUX is like Uber meets Airbnb meets finding a personal trainer or cleaning service,” said Alix. “You push a button, and get a cleaner. What’s important about HUX is that the cleaners make 3x as much via HUX, and they get a fair wage and recognition.”

How has prayer existed for Alix and McCullough in all that they’ve been involved with?

“This is something that’s evolved,” replied Alix. “Every morning I pray with my dad. I started this about 2 years ago. I need to do it with my mom too. In addition, I do the Examen with my fiancée at the end of the day, and try to read the

daily readings. Last year, I also read the whole Bible, which was interesting. All in all, I try to break up the day to let God in.”

McCullough added, “With the focus on trafficking that I have, it’s easy to get lost in the depravity and want to curl up, so I spend lots of time focused on mindfulness. On the other hand, Will, my co-founder, has set a rigid schedule to be at bible studies to stay grounded.”



How do Alix and McCullough then determine what ‘good’ is when they engage with technology, and how do they see that society determines this?

“Tech is either good, bad, or useless,” McCullough expressed. “I think technology as a whole is a bland thing with no morality so we can use it in many ways. Take social media as an example. You can post useless information, you can use it to bring people together, or you can also use it to create subterfuge.”

Alix shared his thoughts with a slightly different lense.

“The key thing I think about is whether technology is used for a selfish or selfless goal,” he said. “To live a life more fulfilled is to give it away. When I’ve given things away and volunteered, it felt good.

CTK parishioner Tim Doyle, who was in attendance at the session, then spoke up in alignment with the panelists.

“I think it’s the same. If you’re intent is good, it will be that. In accounting, if you automate a process and it’s got issues, all you’re doing is automating and speeding up creating more issues. You’ve got to get to the root issue.”

McCullough weighed back in to share, “What technology does is it places a lot of weight on people, so now there’s so much more pressure to act and you have to make decisions.”

Patrice Mantovani, a first-time BELIEVES attendee who works at Cox Enterprises, then raised her hand to add another level of insight to the discussion.

“At work, we did a Hack-A-Thon,” she said. “The latest one was a challenge to come up with a business decision to solve something. Most were around monetizing something. Ours though came to focus on recycling. What we decided when we presented is to not monetize this.”

What on the technology horizon has Alix and McCullough most excited or optimistic, and most scared or concerned, for “doing good” that people may or may not be fully aware of or understand yet?

“What I am most excited about for doing good is Artificial Intelligence,” stated Alix. “Once it’s doing its job, it is behind the scenes. It can make us superhuman in the sense that people like oncologists can be more effective and augmented, so that then human nature and soft skills can become more a focus.”

On the flip side, Alix also had some thoughts on what gives him the greatest concern that’s on the technology horizon.

“Look at trucking for a moment. With the move towards self-driving vehicles, many drivers can be displaced so how do we retrain people?” he posed.

For McCullough, he is excited about what technology can do for our environment.

“Environmental conservation is important. If we damage our planet, it’s irreversible. One day, renewables will be cheaper, and be the most profitable option for big businesses. Then the world is saved.”

And what scares McCullough most about what’s on the technology horizon?

“Basic service jobs are being diminished by entertainment’s portrayal,” he replied. “The more advanced things get, the harder it is to train people in the basics, so segregation occurs between classes of people.”

Having had a solid 30-40 minutes of engaging discussion, the focus of the BELIEVES session shifted for the last 10-15 minutes to invite discussion at the tables around the following three questions:

1. *What most influences my view and use of technology is _____ (one word answer)*
2. *How has the role of Tech evolved in your immediate world in the last 3-5 years? How do you see the role of Tech evolving in your immediate world in the next 3-5 years? How does that differ or not differ with what you imagine will evolve in our society as a whole? What role will faith play for you in discerning how to navigate this personally and professionally?*
3. *Going forward, how can you help the organizations/efforts that the panelists lead?*



When all the attendees and panelists regrouped in the final minutes of the session, they collectively shared the single words that came to mind when thinking about what most influences their views and use of technology were: Enabler, Efficiency, Worldview, People.

They also collectively felt that technology overall has been disruptive, but that specifically over the last 3-5 years, we’ve focused more on how we use it.

Finally, to close out the session, everyone spoke a bit about how they could engage and help with Alix and McCullough’s on-going efforts going forward, with most of the focus on Project Intercept.

McCullough closed by challenging everyone to get informed.

“Do 15 minutes of research. Trafficking is an invisible issue and that’s why it continues. Did you know, for example, that between GA Tech/Downtown and I285 on Donald Lee Hollowell is the worst human trafficking section in the United States?”

