

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/clips/techs-ethical-challenges>

Atipica founder and CEO Laura Gomez addresses some of the ethical challenges she observed during her career working for tech companies, from offensive video content to social media posts by dictators. Sometimes, she recalls, neither she nor the organizations she worked for were fully prepared to navigate some of these decisions. She emphasizes the need to train technologists in ethics, and encourages everyone in the tech industry to hold themselves accountable and change tech for the better.



Transcript

- As I enter my career into Tech, after I graduated, how did I really think about the ethical or the social, uh, responsibilities of working at these companies, and did I have a support system? Uh, that's an excellent question.. I worked as a contractor, the little red badge at YouTube, when I started off there.. They had just been acquired by Google, and then content moderators were like the most depressed people, and you can see the same (laughs) now in other tools.. Um, they would tell me some of the videos that they would see, and I would purposely not walk in that direction.. And there were only 300 employees.. Um, I look back and I look back about I'm also apart of this other, like I don't have enough time, but I'm also apart of this other organization called Build Tech We Trust, where we saw radicalization online, not being held accountable by the tech companies.. Uh, by the content that they're providing.. Um, and so after the mass shootings, um, on, uh, around like, uh, supremacy and radicalization a bunch of women of color CEO's here in the, uh, Bay Area, we came and we built, uh, what, uh, Build Tech We Trust as a, uh, coalition, and then we even, uh, submitted questions to Congress when Mark Zuckerberg went there a couple of weeks ago, on the questions around the ethics.. Um, going back to your question, if I could go back, I would have taken more Ethics courses in college, and thinking about what I'm building to complement my more technical or my more, uh, social degrees.. Um, then I worked at Twitter, (laughs) and the first time a dictator started tweeting on Twitter, was Hugo Chavez, which is a dictator of Venezuela, and I was in charge of Twitter in Spanish, so I went to the general council there, and I said, "Should we have a policy on how leaders or dictators should tweet on this platform, (laughs) even if it threatens the, the citizens' lives?" or, or like, does um....

But, it was kind of like a passing thought.. Do I wake up and think about it? Yes, especially given nowadays.. So I do believe that I did not have that system, and so maybe this is my way of atonement of working for all the tech companies.. (laughs) Um, to try to reverse a little bit, I think after the 2016 elections, one of my colleagues at Twitter, tweeted out, "What have we done?" And I just remember that tweet, and I was crying and then, um, my partner worked early at Facebook, and so he was, uh, he has been, uh, he, yeah, he worked at, through the API on Facebook, so he knows everything that happened there on data and the Cambridge Analytic stuff.. So, um, I think we're all, everyone in this industry, uh, is like really torn on how we can make a change, and hold ourselves accountable.. Um, I always tell people I have a love, hate relationship with tech, but I love the industry enough to want to change it and stick around for a while...