

How Mark Zuckerberg can save Facebook — and us

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There is so much news these days that it's hard to distinguish one big story from another. But for me the most consequential story of late was that a self-driving car operated by Uber — with an emergency backup driver behind the wheel — struck and tragically killed a woman on a street in Tempe, Ariz. I could only look at that deeply unsettling story and say: Welcome to the second inning — the second inning of one of the world's great technological leaps, the implications of which we're just beginning to understand.

But first, let's acknowledge one thing: The first inning was amazing.

It was an inning full of promise, and marvel. In the early 2000s, a set of technologies came together into platforms, social networks and software that made connectivity and solving complex problems fast, virtually free, easy for you, ubiquitous and invisible. Suddenly, more individuals could compete, connect, collaborate and create with more other people, in more ways, from more places, for less money and with greater ease than ever before. And we sure did! We became our own filmmakers and reporters; we launched political and social revolutions from our living rooms; we connected with long-lost family and friends; we found the answers to old and new questions with one click; we searched for everything from spouses to news to directions to kindred spirits with our phones; we exposed dictators

and branded ourselves. With one touch, we could suddenly call a taxi, direct a taxi, rate a taxi and pay a taxi — or rent an igloo, rate an igloo and pay for an igloo in Alaska.

And then, just as suddenly, we found ourselves in the second inning. The cool self-driving car killed a pedestrian; the cool Facebook platform enabled Russian troll farms to divide us and inject fake news into our public life; the uncool totalitarian government learned how to use the same facial recognition tools that can ease your way through passport control to single you out in a crowd for arrest.

And Mark Zuckerberg, who promised to connect us all — and that it would all be good — found himself on the cover of *Wired* magazine, with his face cut, bruised and bandaged, as if he'd been hit by a fastball. He wasn't alone. In inning two, we started to feel beat up by the same platforms and technologies that had enriched, empowered and connected our lives. Silicon Valley, we have a problem. What to do? For problems like this, I like to consult my teacher and friend Dov Seidman, CEO of LRN, which helps companies and leaders build ethical cultures, and the author of the book, "How: Why How We Do Anything Means Everything."

"The first inning's prevailing ethos was that any technology that makes the world more open by connecting us or makes us more equal by empowering us individually must, in and of itself, be a force for good," Seidman began. "But, in inning two, we are coming to grips with the reality that the power to make the world more open and equal is not in the technologies themselves. It all depends on how the tools are designed and how we choose to use them. The same amazing tech that enables people to forge deeper relationships, foster closer communities and give everyone a voice can also breed isolation, embolden racists, and empower digital bullies and nefarious actors."

Equally important, Seidman added, these "unprecedented and valuable tools of connection" are being used with great accuracy and potency "to assault the foundations of what makes our democracies vibrant, capitalism dynamic and our societies healthy — namely, truth and trust."

And they have begun to be used "to assault our personal foundations — our privacy and sense of identity," Seidman said: "It is one thing to use our data to enable better shopping experiences, but

when my beliefs and attitudes are mined and manipulated for someone's political campaign, a campaign that may be antithetical to my beliefs, that is deeply harmful and unmooring." So what to do? "Precisely because we are in just the beginning of a technological revolution with a long, uncertain, up-and-down road ahead, we need to start by pausing to reflect on how our world, reshaped by these technologies, operates differently — and on the kind of values and leadership we will need to realize their promise."

Values are more vital now than ever, Seidman insisted. "Because sustainable values are what anchor us in a storm, and because values propel and guide us when our lives are profoundly disrupted. They help us make the hard decisions." Hard decisions abound, because everything is now connected. "The world is fused. So there no place anymore to stand to the side and claim neutrality — to say, 'I am just a businessperson' or 'I am just running a platform.'"

No way. "Once you see that your technologies are having unintended consequences, you cannot maintain your neutrality — especially when you've become so central to the lives of billions of people."

The fused world, Seidman said, "the business of business is no longer just business. The business of business is now society. And, therefore, how you take or don't take responsibility for what your technology enables or for what happens on your platforms is inescapable. This is the emerging expectation of users — real people — who've entrusted so much of their inner lives to these powerful companies."

To be sure, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube should all be commended for trying to find engineering solutions to prevent them from being hacked and weaponized.

"But this is not just an engineering problem, or just a business model problem," he said. "Software solutions can increase our confidence that we can stay a step ahead of the bad guys. But, fundamentally, it will take more 'moralware' to regain our trust. Only one kind of leadership can respond to this kind of problem — moral leadership."

What does moral leadership look like here?

"Moral leadership means truly putting people first and making whatever sacrifices that entails," said Seidman. "That means not always competing on shallow things and quantity — on how much time people spend on your platform — but on quality and depth. It means seeing and treating people not just as 'users' or 'clicks,' but as 'citizens,' who are worthy of being accurately informed to make their best choices. It means not just trying to shift people from one click to another, from one video to another, but instead trying to elevate them in ways that deepen our connections and enrich our conversations."

It means, Seidman continued, being "fully transparent about how you operate, and make decisions that affect them — all the ways in which you're monetizing their data. It means having the courage to publish explicit standards of quality and expectations of conduct, and fighting to maintain them however inconvenient. It means having the humility to ask for help even from your critics. It means promoting civility and decency, making the opposite unwelcome. It means being truly bold — proclaiming, for example, that you will not sleep until you're certain that our next democratic election won't be hacked."

At the height of the Cold War, when the world was threatened by spreading Communism and rising walls, President John F. Kennedy vowed to "pay any price and bear any burden" to ensure the success of liberty.

Today, falling walls and spreading webs — which criminals and nations can use to poison democratic societies — are becoming the biggest threat to the success of liberty. You will know that the good guys are winning when you see big tech companies rise to Kennedy's challenge — to pay any price and bear any burden to protect us from the downsides of the technologies they've created.