

# Technology for the Common Good

An Interview with Braxton Woodham, President, Unfinished Labs

**EDITORS' NOTE** Braxton Woodham leads McCourt Global's work to develop technology that supports the common good and played a key role in launching nonprofit Project Liberty. He joined McCourt Global in 2019 and, in addition to leading the company's technology business unit, is the original inventor of the groundbreaking, open-source internet protocol called the Decentralized Social Networking Protocol (DSNP) that was released by Project Liberty in 2021. Woodham has been



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at the forefront of envisioning and leading the development and commercialization of scaled software products and platforms for more than 20 years. Formerly, he served as the Chief Technology and Product Officer at Fandango, where he was responsible for product development and technology operations for Fandango Ticketing, Rotten Tomatoes, Fandango NOW (TVOD service with over 90,000 titles), Movietickets.com, Flixster, MovieClips, Ingresso (ticketing in Brazil), and Fandango.lat. While at Fandango, he led technical strategy, diligence, and integration efforts for eight acquisitions. Prior to

Fandango, Braxton was co-founder, President, and Chief Technology Officer at Sun Basket, a personalized meal platform based in San Francisco. He was also co-founder and Executive Chairman at kuma.capital, a software company providing a platform and applications for systematic digital asset trading. Woodham previously co-founded Tap11, a real-time social media analytics platform which was acquired by AVOS Systems in 2011. Before this he was the CTO of InfoSpace's mobile division where he was

responsible for the infrastructure that serviced approximately three quarters of all mobile web traffic in North America. Woodham joined InfoSpace through the acquisition of Moviso, where he led the development of the V4 Digital Media Platform. Prior to joining Moviso/InfoSpace, Braxton served as Executive Director of Technology at Sony Music Digital Media Ventures. Woodham is a United States military veteran and, as a Captain in the U.S. Air Force, served as Lead Propulsion Engineer for two Atlas missions. He earned a BS in Mechanical Engineering with honors from Vanderbilt University.

**Will you discuss your background in the technology space and how this led you to working with Frank McCourt?**

In early 2019, McCourt Global was looking for a chief technology officer for the overall enterprise and I had the opportunity to meet Frank. It was an interesting opportunity and I ended up becoming a technology advisor to Frank. This was a busy transition phase, as I was also involved with two other companies I had co-founded. In the Fall of 2019, Frank and I were discussing concerns over the use of social media in regard to polarization and disinformation. I mentioned to Frank that I had been thinking about a protocol for decentralizing social networks and making the Web socially aware for over a decade.

I was not aware at the time that Frank had been studying and focusing on this problem and was surprised by how committed he was to find a solution. I was amazed at how quickly he understood the abstract concepts of blockchain and decentralized shared state. Frank asked me how I would specifically attack this problem, and I told him that I would start by creating a single tech organization to prototype the entire technology solution, knowing that part of the "solution stack" would be public interest technology, and part

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would be commercial technology. Once we had a working system in place, we would be able to draw more precise “cut lines” and separate the work into nonprofit and commercial tracks. He told me to put a business plan together and “let’s do it.” This is how the company’s Labs team, the tech business unit that I lead, came into being.

**How do you define your team’s mission, and will you highlight how you built the team that created DSNP?**

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The pandemic was a horrible crisis for the world, but one of the results from the pandemic was that it provided the time to focus on this project. I was fortunate to be working with Frank because this allowed me to bring in the best talent I have ever worked with to build an amazing team of people who are highly skilled and also acutely focused on technology’s societal impact. Together, we wrote a white paper on the protocol (DSNP) and its potential benefits for internet users and started building a comprehensive technology

solution. We were pleasantly surprised as we built it out that we did not hit as many road bumps as expected, and it was actually pretty feasible.

**Did you always know that you had an entrepreneurial spirit and desire to build companies?**

I think that there are different sides to entrepreneurial drive. I was in the mindset of retiring from the entrepreneurial environment when Frank recruited me, but the idea of a decentralized social networking protocol had been with me for many years. While I was not looking for another entrepreneurial opportunity, my view is that I am a citizen first and it is important for me to leverage my experience and expertise to tackle societal challenges through innovation and meet the moment.

**How has your journey with leading a technology business unit and helping to launch Project Liberty progressed?**

As in any entrepreneurial undertaking, it is like a roller coaster, and we are still in the journey. It actually gets more challenging as you progress, and I try to develop tools along the way to manage stress. I remember good advice that was given to me by a board member of one of my companies a number of years ago which was that as long as you have another move to make, just focus on that

move. There have been moments on this journey when the next move was not always clear, but it is easier when you are working with a visionary like Frank and have a great team behind you to see the way forward.

**You spent time in the military. How did this experience shape your leadership style?**

This was a formative time in my life and a great experience. I did not realize until afterwards how lucky I was to have this opportunity to work with scaled systems on high impact missions. You learn accountability and teamwork and the need to make decisions in a timely manner. I think a lot about the operational execution that is critical in the military. This was a very important time in my career and had a major impact on me.

**How valuable has it been for you in this role to have someone with Frank’s experience and vision to work alongside?**

It is like nothing I have ever experienced. He is a great thought partner, and challenges me to think bigger. He has lived a big life and his expectations are high. He is consistently inspiring, and keeps our focus on what we need to achieve and promotes an elevated view of the impact our work can have at this point in history. ●

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