PUBLIC INTEREST TECHNOLOGY

Calling all hackers for good #PublicInterestTech

Éirann Leverett, academic, red teamer, and entrepreneur, talks about privacy and security as a consumer rights issue.

Technology is transforming every area of our lives. But as it opens new avenues and shows us fresh possibilities, tech can also deepen existing inequalities. We believe in harnessing technology to serve justice and the public interest—and we see a wealth of opportunities to do so. That's why the Ford Foundation is working with a community of partners to develop a path for people to use their technology skills to change the world for the better: the professional field of public interest technology.

Transcript begins.

Éirann Leverett: The Internet is one of the greatest public commons we have. It's a shared safe space and should remain so.

> [Éirann Leverett, Ford-Mozilla Open Web Fellow, Privacy International. A white man with gray and white hair, black framed glasses, and a white gingham shirt with the sleeves rolled up.]

I'm Éireann Leverett and I'm a hacker for change, for good. I like tracking down threats against civil society. My career in security started out working on industrial systems, and, in particular, public utilities—so, the electric grid, water facilities, sewage facilities, oil and gas, telephone companies. And that really motivated my early thinking about security as a public good—and, in particular, security of everyday infrastructure and services. And as I realized that most of those services were coming to rely on the internet, I realized that the internet is a public service and a public utility.

Traditionally, when we go into a debate about national surveillance or nation-state hacking as Privacy International, we run into this problem where the intelligence agents or the police or the government officials on the other side say, "If you want security from terrorists, you're going to have to give up some privacy." I personally don't believe this is true. I think they can continue to do their counterterrorism work, but we can also make everyday people safer. And the best way to do that is to reframe privacy and security as a public good, as a consumer rights issue. Regardless of whether they're trying to track terrorists in the rest of the world, you deserve not to have your emails read.

In the Internet of Things, security and privacy are both public goods. What do we mean by public good? We mean, I can't get security for myself unless I can also get it for you. Right? If I secure only my phone, it doesn't actually secure wider society. It's very important that we start

to view security and privacy as a public good, because we will fund it differently. As a technologist, you don't always have to work to defend the powerful, to defend the companies, to defend the traditional bases of power and influence in the world. You could go and work at a regulator. You could work at a safety regulator. You know, we've seen the hacking of cars recently. There's no reason that the kind of crash testing that they do on cars couldn't be a role for a computer technologist, who's literally crash testing the devices in a computer science sense to see if they are still safe when we have automated vehicles in the future. And that's true of any sort of regulator, right? I can imagine people working at the Environmental Protection Agency. I can imagine people working at the UN on human rights and the intersection with technology. Just having people in society do those roles will become a very powerful change in the future.

[Ford Foundation logo: a globe made up of a series of small, varied circles. Mozilla logo.]

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