

Recap: “BCLBE Leadership Lunch Talk – Funding Innovation”

By Hannah Rawdin, J.D. Candidate 2020 | October 30, 2017

On October 23, 2017, the Berkeley Center for Law, Business and the Economy ([BCLBE](#)) welcomed Chris Young ‘05, Head of Legal at [GoFundMe](#), for a Q&A discussion about his career, his position as a company counsel at a venture-backed startup, and the crucial role attorneys play in the startup world.

A graduate of SDSU and Berkeley Law, Young began his career as a litigator at [Morrison Foerster](#). After litigating a high-profile class action suit addressing education inequality, Young was asked to join the 2008 Obama presidential campaign as the Deputy Finance Director of Northern California. Faced with a difficult decision between staying at his firm, clerking, or joining the campaign, Young’s mentors encouraged him to take advantage of the opportunity to work for President Obama. He took their advice and served on the campaign until the election, at which point he returned to his hometown of Sacramento to work as Mayor Johnson’s Senior Advisor. Young moved to Washington D.C. shortly thereafter to work in the White House and the Department of Justice. He then returned to the Bay Area in 2010 to work as a Senior Associate trial attorney at [Keker, Van Nest & Peters](#). In 2014, he left to join [OpenGov](#) as its head of business development and counsel, until finally starting his current position in November 2015.

Young attributes part of his success to the encouragement and understanding of his mentors. When presented with the opportunity to work for President Obama, he was initially hesitant to leave his firm and defer his clerkship. However, a senior partner pushed him to take it, stressing that Young could always return to big law. The judge also told him to risk it and enjoy the journey. At the end of the day, Young would encourage any law student to “take chances and bet on yourself” when making career decisions.

Those chances eventually brought Young to GoFundMe, where he has served as Head of Legal for two years. GoFundMe, which Young refers to as “America’s company,” is a rapidly expanding crowd-funding platform, experiencing 300% annual growth with 50 million users worldwide since its launch eight years ago. Young said the best part of his job is that every day there is something new on his desk. Whether he is dealing with corporate governance, litigation, contract negotiations, or equity issues, Young said, “you have to have a sense of confidence and a little bit of insanity to think that you can handle everything that comes your way.” He shared that as counsel to a startup, it is important to balance the company’s want for growth with keeping it out of harm’s way, which presents new challenges every day.

Young also loves the public service aspect of his job. He emphasized that GoFundMe is an open platform that helps people from all walks of life, regardless of their location or political beliefs. Young recently started a charity through GoFundMe to directly assist those in need, and was able to raise \$6 million to help hurricane, California fire, and Las Vegas shooting victims. Young said that seeing how those funds impacted people’s lives was inspiring, and reinforced the importance

of GoFundMe’s role in the world. “When I wake up in the morning, I know that I’m going to work at a company that’s allowing people to help each other out,” Young shared.