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# Crescent Cove Conversations

featuring

**Adeo Ressi**

CEO,  
VC Lab

Executive Chairman & Founder,  
The Founder Institute



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## What is it and why was it created?

Fundamentally, people do business with people. Our founder series is a place where we can show the person behind the business. It will tell the story of how and why the business was started. Our series will be personal and pointed. Our founders are impressive people. Sometimes, they are following a calling to right a wrong, fill a gap, be of greater service, but in all cases, they have a great story to tell.

We look forward to you listening to their stories and learning more about these entrepreneurs.

# Crescent Cove Conversations:

## Adeo Ressi, CEO, VC Lab

### Executive Chairman & Founder, The Founder Institute

In this series, Crescent Cove invites the insights and life lessons from the founders and leaders we've worked with over the years. Acknowledging there is no 'secret sauce' to success, these vignettes explore the human dimension of high-performing individuals and the companies they lead.

[Adeo Ressi](#) is Executive Chairman of [The Founder Institute](#), a startup launch program that operates in nearly 200 cities worldwide and CEO at [VC Lab](#). Recognized as a mentor for fast-growing technology businesses, he has pioneered innovations in the protection of founder rights, the raising of early-stage capital and the scaling of new businesses. Previous to The Founder Institute, Adeo has helped to create nearly \$2 billion in shareholder value by founding or running nine businesses, including TheFunded, Game Trust, Xceed and Total New York.

**Crescent Cove (CC):** Tell us about your beginning in tech. How did you choose your career?

**Adeo Ressi (AR):** I don't think I've had a career. I've been working in entrepreneur ecosystems, and I don't know if you can call that a career.

I left school a few credits away from finishing undergrad. I was working a summer job at a bank, and it was pretty tedious. I was using their printer and other resources to prepare for a company I wanted to begin. Before I knew it, the company just kind of started. I recruited some friends from college. We ended up building the first commercial website – Total New York. What we essentially did was bring a news and magazine concept to the Internet. There was no advertising at the time. All the models we take for granted today just did not exist.

Total New York was a big hit. We were in all the major media publications at the time – the New York Times, Time Magazine – even though, ironically, we were a media publication. After Total New York, we rolled out Total Los Angeles, Total Chicago, and several other cities.

After that experience, it became pretty clear to me that I wouldn't be going back to work for a traditional business. I didn't want to work for someone else in that capacity. I was going to be an entrepreneur and push forward on that journey. I was going to continue doing this forever.

**CC:** Looking back over your time in entrepreneurial ecosystems, what has been your most valuable mistake?

**AR:** Nobody really knows how to do anything. So, in many ways, everything we do is a mistake even if it doesn't appear so because we don't think things through enough to do otherwise.

The combustion engine is a great example. People initially thought 'This is great, let's roll it out all around the world on everything that moves from boats to planes to cars.' Time will tell, but probably the combustion engine is a mistake. It certainly won't be looked back on as a great thing.

It is always hard to tell if you're doing things right or wrong in the moment. We're not good judges of success or failure in the lens of a few years. A few decades later – or a few millennia later – things can be more clearly understood as successes or failures.

I've done a lot to help the world look how it is today, from spreading the Internet to bringing media companies online to working on space exploration. Has everything worked out the way I want? Definitely not. Were some of my decisions possibly a mistake? Definitely 'yes.'

What I try to do now is work only on those things where I've thought through enough of the long-term consequences so their impact is mostly positive. And if I see that some of the consequences are negative, then I try to change very quickly. I'm sure I am making mistakes all the time, but I'm working every day to do a better job of being more thoughtful.

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**CC:** On being thoughtful in solving problems, Marc Andreessen recently [tweeted](#) about different kinds of thinking, drawing a distinction between “wordcels” and “shape rotators.” Is there a meaningful distinction between one and the other?

**AR:** I haven’t followed that debate, and I don’t try. It’s not meaningful and unless something is meaningful, I try not to pay attention. I really try to stay focused on only the things that matter.

“**There’s a mentality where a lot of founders today will chase things that seem popular, cool, or interesting without truly taking a deep look at what impact they’re having on the world around them.**”

**CC:** You’ve nurtured multiple generations of entrepreneurs through The Founder Institute. What’s required for a successful founder today that wasn’t needed before the pandemic?

**AR:** There’s a mentality where a lot of founders today will chase things that seem popular, cool, or interesting without truly taking a deep look at what impact they’re having on the world around them. That is problematic.

Most of humanity is on autopilot at the moment. I think we have to be much more conscious about the impact of all our actions on ourselves, our environment, and frankly everything.

That said, on the other side of the coin, a number of founders are trying to be as conscious as possible. They’re working on things that can be not only large but also have a positive impact. It’s a very important change that needs to happen.

**CC:** You’ve spoken before about the perils of short-term thinking in tech. In 2018, you said Silicon Valley was facing an [existential crisis](#) over this. Has it emerged from that crisis?

**AR:** No. It’s only gotten worse. People are chasing money for money’s sake, building for the sake of building, getting users for the sake of getting users. People are solving problems that don’t exist. They’re making apps with addictive loops that attract

users that don’t really have a greater purpose. This behavior has created a really negative, morally devoid cycle not only in Silicon Valley but also in most of the tech ecosystems around the world. As a result, the planetary crisis we’re facing is not getting better, it’s getting worse.

The tech sector has been completely impervious to the plight of humanity. There’s a bunch of people doing harm – tobacco companies, Big Oil, car companies, the whole global travel industry, most of ecommerce – and it’s a net negative to the sustenance of our existence on this planet. And this impervious tech sector is fueling that harm with innovations.

This is really a double-edged sword. You have the destructive industries of humanity on the one hand and the enabling industries, including tech, on the other, and they’re working in conjunction.

We are at an extreme level of planetary crisis. The end of all things as we know it is near, but that does not mean that we cannot change.

And a change is coming, but it’s not because people have written about it or because there’s been some global awakening. And it’s definitely not because people on the destructive side are changing. The change is coming because the next generation of startups and VC firms are responding to the existential threat to all of life on the planet posed by this gross negligence that has dominated the tech sector for decades.

These new startups and VC companies are emerging to challenge the status quo. It’s early days, but they will eventually allow a constructive and regenerative cycle to begin.

**CC:** You mentioned our planetary crisis. As people watch in horror Vladimir Putin’s war in Ukraine, the question has been asked whether that geo-political conflict – and others like it – will slow or accelerate the shift to renewable energy. What’s your assessment?

**AR:** That’s a really good question, but I think it’s obviously accelerating the shift. You have a huge reliance on Russia for fossil fuels. A lot of people completely disagree with the policies of the country right now and so I think, if anything, there is an even more rapid realization that fossil fuels are not the way to go. We’ve got to kick the habit as quickly as possible. Hands down.

**CC:** Switching gears, in addition to your work at The Founder Institute, you’re also CEO at [VC Lab](#), which has a mission to launch and grow 1,000 enduring venture capital firms worldwide by 2025. How is that coming? Will you meet your target?

**“ These new startups and VC companies are emerging to challenge the status quo. It’s early days, but they will eventually allow a constructive and regenerative cycle to begin. ”**

**AR:** Oh, we’ll meet it. We’ve done 100 in 18 months. This year, we’ll more than double that – more than 200 just in 2022 alone. So, we’re accelerating the number of funds we’re creating per unit of time, exponentially. Eventually, that will taper out. But humanity right at this moment needs tens of thousands more funds to meet the level of demand that is happening around the world. You have all these markets opening their entrepreneurial talent but there’s no funding.

**CC:** Is there one part of the world that’s surprising you with its growth in funds?

**AR:** Africa. We’re seeing a huge number of funds there. Before 2021 or 2022, there were only a handful of functional funds in all of Africa. It’s a huge continent with lots of people, but right now it probably ranks among the lowest funds per capita anywhere in the world. There are dozens emerging, and I wouldn’t be surprised if we launched as many as 50 in Africa or more. And the continent can use these, by the way. You have innovation hubs in Nigeria, in South Africa, in Egypt – everywhere.

When I say innovation hubs, I mean places where exciting things are happening. Look at [Ubuntu Linux](#) OS which came out of South Africa. There are a lot of great companies out there, leap-frogging like they did with the cell phone in fintech and med tech. It’s a fascinating, unique opportunity.

**CC:** This is a good segue into another topic that’s top of mind for people starting a new venture – hiring. Can you tell us a little about how you hire at a VC fund? What traits should founders look for?

**AR:** You can’t hire people through conventional processes at the partner level in a venture fund. You have to know the person for years or decades. You’re going into a high-stress, 20-year commitment. At the earliest stages, a new VC relationship will last 16 years. You have to know the person you’re bringing on really well. If you can bring them on at a certain level in one fund and it works out, you can bring them on at a higher level later at another. But the cycles are very long and the business has intrinsic stress. Of course, you can hire people to perform certain jobs, but it’s different at the partner level.

**CC:** Last question, and this is one we ask of everyone: What is happiness?

**AR:** Happiness is being in balance. Unfortunately, there’s this vision of happiness portrayed in books and in western media especially as having extreme wealth or power or lots of friends. It’s a very possession-driven vision of happiness.

In reality, most of the people I know who have those things – the biggest houses, tons of friends, extreme wealth – are some of the most unhappy and the most out-of-balance people I know. In my experience, balance and happiness are the same.

It is very hard in the world to find happiness because the world itself is out of balance. Most people in the world are also out of balance. Happiness is therefore elusive and exceedingly difficult to achieve. It’s difficult, but it is possible. ■





## Adeo Ressi

**CEO, VC LAB**

**EXECUTIVE CHAIRMAN & FOUNDER, THE FOUNDER INSTITUTE**

Adeo Ressi is CEO of VC Lab, which runs the leading venture capital accelerator and operates the Fund in a Box platform. The goal of VC Lab is to help launch and grow 1,000 next-generation venture capital firms worldwide by 2025. Adeo is also Executive Chairman at the Founder Institute, a pre-seed accelerator with chapters in over 250 cities worldwide and over 5,000 portfolio companies.

Adeo is working on innovation for good. The Founder Institute has a goal for 80% of the portfolio companies to work on ‘For Progress’ businesses that address one or more of the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.”VC Lab asks every venture firm that it works with to publicly support the Mensarius Oath, an ethical code of conduct for investment professionals.

Adeo has launched 14 venture capital funds and founded 11 startups, having nearly \$2 billion in exits before the age of 30. Adeo previously served on the Board of the X Prize Foundation to pursue his interests in space exploration. He studied architecture and spent time living in a commune to explore his interests in designing better ways to live. Adeo is passionate about inspiring people to achieve their potential.



Crescent Cove is a technology-focused investment firm that is dedicated to supporting entrepreneurs and founders. Established in 2016, Crescent Cove leverages its global network of relationships and unique insight across markets, emerging industries, and technologies to build businesses and accelerate value creation across its portfolios.



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