Workera CEO Kian Katanforoosh on AI's jobs impact and working with Andrew Ng

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By Simon Campbell – Special Projects Editor, San Francisco Business Times

Kian Katanforoosh grew up wanting to be a soccer player.

Unfortunately, his skillset didn’t quite match his ambition. Instead, he built a career helping people expand their skills and maximize their capabilities.

Katanforoosh is CEO and founder of Workera, a maker of AI-powered tools that provide individuals and organizations with skills assessments and workforce development.

With the job market poised at an AI-induced inflection point, Workera’s mission is proving popular. It counts several Fortune 500 companies among a growing customer list and has received more than $55 million from investors including Jump Capital, New Enterprise Associates, Owl Ventures and AI Fund.

Katanforoosh founded an edtech company in his native France before enrolling at [Stanford](), where he came under the tutelage of AI pioneer [Andrew Ng](). At Stanford, Katanforoosh teaches the Deep Learning class that shows students “what’s happening under the hood” of AI, and has won the Walter J. Gores Award, Stanford’s highest teaching honor.

What is Workera and what are the challenges you are looking to solve? Decisionmakers have to handle workforces and talent, and it’s really hard to handle talent, especially at scale. You have a lot of decisions to make: who to train, which roles fit each person, what content should people study, what roles are best suited for them, what projects they might be matched to, who to hire, who to reskill, who to upskill? And it’s really difficult without accurate skills data to make those decisions. You end up making the wrong decisions, hiring the wrong people, setting your roadmap back three months.

AI is beginning to influence the job market. How do you see things changing? The (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) and OpenAI are saying roughly 30% of the jobs that we know today are gone by 2030. The World Economic Forum is saying that we will have a net surplus of 78 million jobs created by AI compared to lost, so we will have more jobs created than lost. And OECD and OpenAI also agree with that statement. So I feel that the TL;DR is there will be lots of movement in the workforce. Lots of people will see their jobs gone, and will have to be reskilled toward a new career.

I think we will need more engineers. I think we need more researchers. And I could see an economy where you have a lot of people in experiential jobs, and another set of people that are almost researchers. They’re working on the cutting edge. They’re using the latest tools in order to continue to expand the circle of innovation. I’m bullish on those types of careers.

We’ve seen layoffs at some large companies recently. How do you see employers reacting to increased labor shifts? I believe that companies are using this AI moment to downsize a little bit, mostly for performance management reasons. They’re trying to manage out low performers, oftentimes without saying it like that. And they’re trying to refresh their culture. They’re trying to bring in AI-native talent.

So we’re seeing multiple trends going together, trying to downsize and use technology to augment work and productivity, trying to hire fresh talent with a different mindset and then also absolutely try to upskill their existing workforce by investing in their careers.

So is this where skills development tools like Workera’s can come in? Human capital is an evergreen problem. It will continue to be very important. I can’t imagine a world where suddenly we don’t care about our people, and we don’t care about skilling them, and we don’t care about helping them find purpose in their career. I think that’s evergreen, and that’s what makes me bullish on what we’re working on.

What was your experience of studying at Stanford like? It was the center of entrepreneurship and the best place to start a company. I was sponsored during my master's, which allowed me to explore teaching research without worrying about finding a job outside the university. I met Andrew Ng, who was the perfect mentor for me. He was both an AI luminary and an education entrepreneur, having started Coursera. I started working with him. I shared my passion for what he was doing. We started a company called DeepLearning.AI in order to deliver high-quality AI education.

What can you tell us about the class you teach at Stanford, Deep Learning? The Deep Learning class at Stanford focuses on teaching the fundamentals of neural networks, one of the most popular families of AI algorithms that is broadly modeled after neurons and synapses. Broadly, because it's not really the same. It's been used to create ChatGPT. It's been used to create all the major large language models that you know today. We teach students what's happening under the hood. On top of that, the class involves practical projects, meaning students get in groups to work on something that they're passionate about.

You've won awards for your teaching at Stanford. But who are some of the best teachers you've had? Andrew Ng is the easiest one. Andrew always impressed me with his quality bar for content. The first class that I created with Andrew, we spent probably 80% of our time deciding what to teach, and only 20% actually writing the curriculum. He knows when he teaches something, people listen, and so he cares a lot about teaching the right thing.

The first paper that I wrote for Andrew, I spent three weeks writing it, and then he would just read the first couple of paragraphs, make some notes, and then put it back for me on the desk to iterate.

That repetitive mentorship forced me to increase my quality bar and say, "I know this is not ready for Andrew to review." Over time, I was able to understand his bar. That was very formative for me. I learned a lot from Andrew.

What do you do to avoid stress? I try to always realize how lucky I am. I have health, I have a loving family, a loving girlfriend and great friends. Things can go wrong. It's not the end of the world. I'm in a great place. So I always go back to what calms me down. I also feel lucky that I'm where I am today, compared to having started on the other side of the world and being on the journey to realize some of my dreams.

How do you spend your free time? I'm a big French rap fan. Orelsan, Booba and PNL are my favorite artists. I follow the news in the French rap ecosystem, I listen to the latest songs. I sing — if I'm alone, because my girlfriend would not like it if she's around. But it's rap, soccer and spending time with family and friends.

Is the Bay Area the best place to be to start a company? It was, it is and it will continue to be. I've no doubt there is no better place than San Francisco to start a company. The density of mentors, density of capital. It's the only place in the world where you can go to a coffee shop and you will see a professor, a researcher, a venture capitalist, a bunch of engineering, hackers, as well as senior business executives and founders all in the same room. I don't think anywhere in the world can compete with that right now. It's not for everyone, but for entrepreneurs, 100%.

About Kian Katanforoosh

- **Age**: 31
- **Born**: France
- **Residence**: San Francisco
- **Education**: Bachelor's and master's, École Centrale Supélec; master's, Stanford
- **Resume**: DeepLearning.ai, Stanford, Sequoia Capital, Daskit
- **Did you know**: Katanforoosh co-created the Deep Learning specialization on Coursera with Andrew Ng that subsequently became one of the most popular graduate classes at Stanford.

About Workera

- **Founded**: 2020
- **HQ**: San Francisco
- **Employees**: 80-100
- **Total funding**: $55 million across four rounds, including Series B in January 2025
- **What it does**: Makes AI-powered tools providing skill assessments, adaptive learning plans and AI-driven mentorship to help organizations upskill and align talent with business goals
- **Notable customers**: Accenture, Siemens Energy, Samsung and the U.S. Air Force
- **Notable investors**: Andrew Ng (AI Fund), New Enterprise Associates, Owl Ventures, Jump Capital, Accenture Ventures, AIX Ventures