

# YOUTH NEED TO SUCCEED: AN INTERVIEW WITH EUGENIE TEASLEY



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Eugenie Teasley is Founder and Chief Executive of **Spark and Mettle**, a charity that uses coaching, tech and collaborative events to build character strengths, soft skills and networks in young people.

**THERE WAS A SUCH A STARK CONTRAST BETWEEN OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE TO AFFLUENT YOUNG PEOPLE AND THOSE FROM LESS PRIVILEGED BACKGROUNDS. THE ECONOMIC CRISIS WAS MAKING IT A LOT WORSE. I VOWED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT...**

#### **What inspired you to start your organization?**

I had been a teacher in south London, I'd done a Masters in Education at UC Berkeley, and I had worked at inspiring non-profit 826 Valencia in San Francisco. When I returned to the UK in 2009, I felt that there was a such a stark contrast between opportunities available to affluent young people and those from less privileged backgrounds. The economic crisis was making it a lot worse. I vowed to do something about it, however small, and decided to focus on building the character strengths, soft skills, and networks that we all need to succeed and flourish in both work and life.

#### **At what point did you realize that your vision and had legs?**

When strangers started to sign-up to volunteer and support the idea within the first few weeks of my posting about it online, I felt I might be onto something. When young people applied to our first leadership development programme, it made me think we might be doing a good thing. And when we had our first chunk of funding through (from the Dulverton Trust) I suddenly felt that I wasn't going completely insane and that maybe this little tiny potato of an idea could be a real goer.

#### **What has surprised you most about being an entrepreneur and building an**

**organization?**

How relentless it is! The responsibility is occasionally overwhelming, but having great support in place (from the likes of my board, advisors, funders and now GLG) makes it a lot more manageable. I am also learning how to put trust in others to lead on projects, while also being present enough to support and guide. But with the responsibility also comes the joy of seeing great successes being had by our young people. Recently one of them, Seyi Akiwowo, has just become the Labour Party's youngest ever councillor in the London Borough of Newham. Others have found jobs thanks to us. Whenever the admin of building an organisation grinds me down, it's these moments that build me back up again.

**What has been the biggest catalyst for your project and in what way?**

It's a boring answer but funding. The UK philanthropy world is different to that of the US. The pots tend to be smaller, but securing funding to cover our core costs and test out a range of different projects and programmes has enabled us to demonstrate where we make significant impact and to learn what we can do better. Aside from money, the biggest catalyst is the range of brains that we have in on designing and shaping the work that we do. Our young people co-create programmes and projects with us, which makes them much richer and more relevant and useful. Those development sessions are some of my favorite elements of the job.

**What is the biggest challenge you've encountered? Can you recommend any strategies that helped you overcome it?**

Focus. I love experimenting with different projects to see what works best, and I can sometimes stretch myself too thin. I've worked closely with the board recently to make sure that we run projects that cement our core work, and we are developing ways to share our learning and methodology with other organisations so that they can experiment on our behalf!

**Is there a basic principle or value that guides what you contribute to the world? What is it and why?**

Yes! That it is fundamentally unfair—wrong, in fact—that opportunities in life are available on the basis of your background and circumstances, and that the less privileged you are, the fewer opportunities there are. We believe that everyone has a unique set of strengths and talents that should be allowed to flourish, and our

work centres around enabling these to emerge amongst less privileged 18–24 year olds so that they can fulfil their potential and thrive.

**IT IS FUNDAMENTALLY UNFAIR—WRONG, IN FACT—THAT OPPORTUNITIES IN LIFE ARE AVAILABLE ON THE BASIS OF YOUR BACKGROUND AND CIRCUMSTANCES, AND THAT THE LESS PRIVILEGED YOU ARE, THE FEWER OPPORTUNITIES THERE ARE. WE BELIEVE THAT EVERYONE HAS A UNIQUE SET OF STRENGTHS AND TALENTS THAT SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO FLOURISH, AND OUR WORK CENTRES AROUND ENABLING THESE TO EMERGE AMONGST LESS PRIVILEGED**

**What is most exciting about the world of social innovation for you? Are there pockets of hidden potential you see?**

I love the blend of social good and generating some form of income—there's a chance to be self-sustaining rather than to just always seek donations that I find really appealing. I also love what a genuinely collaborative and complementary space it is. It feels like a tribe of people trying to work together to find a new way to have positive impact collectively.

**In your area of work or interest, what do you think is most needed? How could other entrepreneurs or initiatives contribute to the answer in collaborative or parallel ways?**

We need companies and organisations to think beyond narrow academic parameters and success criteria when looking for new young employees and to embrace diversity in all forms. We also need them to be willing to pay all interns a fair, living wage. Together with other organisations who are also working with exceptional young people from marginalised backgrounds, we can try to create a tipping point when companies are excited to hire diverse young people and to relish the cognitive dissonance they may bring.

## WE NEED COMPANIES AND ORGANISATIONS TO THINK BEYOND NARROW ACADEMIC PARAMETERS AND SUCCESS CRITERIA WHEN LOOKING FOR NEW YOUNG EMPLOYEES AND TO EMBRACE DIVERSITY IN ALL FORMS.

### **What is your theory of change?**

Eighteen to 24 year olds from less privileged backgrounds often are not able to articulate, demonstrate or develop the key character strengths and soft skills needed to succeed in both work and life. Our programmes, workshops, and events trigger new ways to recognise, nurture and showcase their talents through a mix of coaching, personal reflection and networking across and among different social groups. Through this process, young people become more confident about what they can bring to the world and are able to identify and move along the next stages of their career plan.

### **What is the long-term vision for your organization and how it impacts the world?**

We want to be the global heavy hitters for the soft stuff, but we want to do that by sharing our approach with the world and seeing how others want to take and use it for themselves. We particularly want to support other organisations working with young people to find neat ways of quantifying this nebulous soft stuff, so that they can show the real impact they are having.

## I LOVE BEING THE CONDUCTOR OF THE ORCHESTRA, HELPING EVERYONE PLAY THEIR BEST NOTES ALONGSIDE EVERYONE ELSE.

### **When do you feel you are personally at your best?**

Working with a mixed group of people to develop or review a project or programme—that gives me so much energy. Or being in a room full of a cross-section of people—from professional lawyers to recent school-leavers—and setting it up so that they are working collaboratively together. I love being the conductor of the orchestra,

helping everyone play their best notes alongside everyone else.

**If you could give one piece of advice to a budding social entrepreneur, what would it be?**

Set up a CRM database right from the start and if you aren't a process person, find someone who is who wants to help you! Surround yourself with people who encourage you and who provide useful and constructive challenge. And whenever you get a chance, to take some time off, actually turn off your phone, or at least your email. Your organisation is at its best when you are at your most energetic, and even us idealists need to recharge our batteries every once in a while, too.

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# COMMUNITIES: AN INTERVIEW WITH MANMEET KAUR



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Manmeet Kaur is Founder and Executive Director of **City Health Works**, a non-profit, social enterprise that aims to close the gap between hospitals and communities. Founded to support the increasingly expensive and overburdened health care system, City Health Works hires and trains clinician supervised



community health workers from the neighborhoods we serve to act as health coaches.

### **What inspired you to start your organization?**

I created City Health Works to serve as the bridge between the doctor's office and the real challenges people face in their everyday lives. The organization incorporates things I have worked on over the past 10 years in NY, Africa and India.

When my husband and I met 6 years ago, I never thought I'd work in US healthcare. As I watched my husband enter residency three years ago, I was struck with the way in which patients entered and exited the healthcare system. It seemed like his job would end within a brief 10 minute visit after someone came in with a new diagnosis or a concern about their condition. I would ask him, "what about the rest of the year? Why not make a system that takes care of people for 365 days, and not have them just come in and out of the hospital?" In those short 10-minute visits, I wondered if my husband was being a careless physician or if this was a careless system. Chronic diseases need to be managed not treated. However, the US Healthcare system is currently neither designed nor equipped to help patients improve or better manage their health. A Robert Wood Johnson and United Healthcare Foundation study found that our current system only affects 20% of the overall management of an individual's chronic disease. Thirty percent is behavioral and 40% is socio-economic. Clinicians (while talented in their own right) are not trained to handle issues like weight loss or nutrition that directly impact the management of chronic diseases. Through my prior work in South Africa, I repeatedly saw the powerful effect that peers can have on motivating, educating and supporting people in their own communities to achieve goals related to anything from employment to health to depression. The epiphany moment for me was that peers could close this gap by serving as a critical link between clinicians in overburdened clinics and the patients they serve.

### **At what point did you realize that your vision had legs?**

This past Spring I realized my vision certainly has legs and the potential to have a major influence on the way the definition and role of health coaches in our healthcare system. Although we only launched operations last winter, we have received nearly nine invitations for funding from hospital systems, foundations, insurers and the local government.

One of those invitations came from the New York City Department of Health.

Starting this year, the city will help increase our scale, but more importantly, to help ensure we can continue focusing on activities we do to improve the socio-economic and psycho social factors that influence health. Another invitation came from the second largest insurer in the country with the aim of investing up to \$1 million a year for three years to evaluate return on investment, enhance operational effectiveness and technology in order to develop a payment model and expand to a new state in three years. The latter is pending and the former is confirmed. Additionally, we have been receiving requests from major home care agencies to help cross train home care aides to expand their capabilities to include health coaching.

### **What has surprised you most about being an entrepreneur and building an organization?**

A surprise for me is the degree to which I influence the culture of my organization and the perception of my organization. When we scaled from a start-up team of two full-time individuals and two part-time health coaches to a team of 10 full-time employees on September 16, 2013, I recall feeling like I was on stage because I realized that everything I said, the way I communicated, the things I paid attention to (or didn't) and the ways in which I invested my time would be heavily observed by a group of new employees who are learning about the culture of City Health Works.

### **What has been the biggest catalyst for your project and in what way?**

The biggest catalyst for City Health Works has been our ability to attract incredibly talented, hard-working and creative individuals to help design and grow the organization. Across the organization, each individual has been involved in providing critical input into our approach to health coaching and to how we integrate with various neighborhood and clinical partners. I strongly believe that great organizations are largely the result of collective creativity, wisdom and sweat of many people. I grew up playing the cello, but now I see myself as an orchestra conductor creating and investing in meaningful relationships within our team, with our clients, partners and advisors. That said, I have deep respect for all the strings that are required to play a symphony.

### **What is the biggest challenge you've encountered? Can you recommend any strategies that helped you overcome it?**

As an Executive Director, I have to make decisions often and have gotten more confident and decisive in my general abilities. However, the biggest challenge I

made was arriving at and executing upon the decision to fire an individual. The decision was right for the organization, but having such a large influence over an individual's livelihood is a humbling and difficult responsibility. I worked closely with the management team to develop a strategy to determine if this was the right decision and to act upon it. We relied upon expert advising from our HR outsourced firm and our lawyer and then developed an approach that aligned with our value. Decisions like that always keep me up at night for some time until I can come to terms with them.

**Is there a basic principle or value that guides what you contribute to the world? What is it and why?**

What is unique about City Health Works is that we hire people from the neighborhood to serve as health coaches. People who have a shared experience from that community can build trusting relationships with patients because they have experienced many of the same struggles as the individuals they work with. We hire people who do and have been providing support to loved ones because they have seen so many people in their families and neighborhood struggle with chronic illnesses. For example, when I first met Hilda, who is now a health coach at City Health Works, she told me about how she cared for her grandma until she eventually died of diabetes related complications. When she looked at the health coach job description she, just like all of the coaches we hired, said to herself, "I could get paid to do this? And paid well?!" I knew that if we invested heavily in Hilda's natural skills and passion to help her community, she could have a powerful influence in her neighborhood. This influence would start at the individual level, and then have a ripple effect on households, housing projects and then the neighborhood at large as our numbers grow because our approach leverages neighborhood network effects.

**What is most exciting about the world of social innovation for you? Are there pockets of hidden potential you see?**

Across industries, I am amazed at the burst of interest of people working in the for-profit sector who are eager to apply their talents and skills to social causes. I think the social innovation sector is largely driven by the demand of individuals who want to work on complex social problems in direct ways that take advantage of one's individual expertise and skills. GLG's Social Impact Fellowship is strong testament to this, and I think the growth will continue be driven by individuals who don't just choose to work within social enterprises but who also help fuel them.

**In your area of work or interest, what do you think is most needed? How could other entrepreneurs or initiatives contribute to the answer in collaborative or parallel ways?**

Support in increasing literacy about the healthcare services and health insurance. A core part of our work with our clients is to distill and personalize complex information about the management of chronic illness via lifestyle and medication management. Our coaches are very well trained to help our clients understand their health and get motivated through motivational coaching. Many residents of East Harlem have low or no literacy. We are in the midst of re-designing our core educational materials to help address this with support from DesignNYC and ESI Design. However, there are a multitude of questions our coaches receive related to challenges people face in accessing health services, understanding medications and insurance coverage. Based upon our insights from our interactions with clients and their families, this is an area that could benefit immensely from collaborative initiatives with designers, entrepreneurs and initiatives.

**What is your theory of change?**

Today, our health coaches are part of the overall care team for patients and help them through education, motivational coaching and navigation of complex healthcare and social services. Based on my experience in working in Africa with community health workers, I saw first-hand how this was an effective approach to providing low cost neighborhood based care, but I knew that we could not simply apply this model to the US market, we needed to tailor it. I knew that if I built a workforce development organization that cared deeply about building the skills and confidence of locally hired individuals to serve as health coaches they could close the gaps in care in the US as well. Through our health coaching service, our current base of over 100 clients are already achieving dramatic improvements in changing the culture of health in East Harlem. Already in the last year, we have achieved stronger impacts on health outcomes than medication can achieve alone. For example, patients receiving our support have had an average weight reduction of six to 10 pounds within three months and an average reduction in .5-1.5 of each individual's blood sugar levels.

**What is the long-term vision for your organization and how it impacts the world?**

My long-term vision in my work is that across urban, suburban and rural parts of the country, there will be a new layer to the healthcare system that sits at the

intersection of the institutions that deliver healthcare around the neighborhood. We would hire people from the neighborhood to serve as health coaches, who would be able to greet patients at the doctor's office and then support them at home. These well-trained and well-supervised networks of health coaches would also be able to leverage their deep knowledge of the neighborhood's social fabric to knock on doors and engage people before they reached the hospital's door. Ultimately, I know that if we are successful, even most vulnerable neighborhoods will start demanding healthier food options so that healthier food businesses will be willing to fill that market need with affordable healthy options. I also know that individuals will become better-informed consumers of their health. We are seeing this already and I am excited to watch this grow in the coming years.

### **When do you feel you are personally at your best?**

I feel I am personally at my best when I am facilitating creative brainstorming and problem solving with colleagues and partners from diverse areas of experience. In my approach to building my team, partnerships with clinics and coalitions with neighborhood organizations, I know I am working best when I am facilitating the process of solving complex problems or organizing collective action.

### **If you could give one piece of advice to a budding social entrepreneur, what would it be?**

Take a long-term perspective to your venture. In a world obsessed with quick wins, be thorough and persistent with your exploration to help determine whether your business idea is sound and to build a strong foundation for its growth. To get there, you'll need to surround yourself with good people and invest in them.

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# AROUND GLOBAL ISSUES : AN INTERVIEW WITH OLIVER LIBBY



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**Oliver Libby** is a co-founder and current Board Chairman of **The Resolution Project**. Resolution engages and empowers young leaders at the undergraduate

level to develop *a lifelong commitment to social responsibility*, addressing issues such as basic needs, education, energy and environment, health and wellness, equality and empowerment, and humanitarian relief.

## **“LEADERS OF THE FUTURE” IS IN THE PAST. THE RESOLUTION PROJECT EMPOWERS YOUTH LEADERS TO DEVELOP SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE SOLUTIONS TO GLOBAL ISSUES TODAY.**

### **What inspired you to start your organization?**

The founders of The Resolution Project first worked together on a youth leadership summit in college. Organizing this conference taught my co-founders and me the value of an inspiring gathering of undergraduates committed to making the world better together. The conference experience resounded with educational opportunities, simulation, lifetime friendships, networking, and training for the future. In fact, a ubiquitous feature of this and every conference we attended in college was at least one important VIP speaker, exhorting the assembled students to be “leaders of the future.”

We heard that conference keynote speaker recite the familiar speech time and again: “It is such an exciting opportunity for me to address the next generation of leaders. You will all experience something at this conference that will prepare you for a future of changing the world. Learn well here, and meet people who you will run into for the rest of your lives as you become influential leaders of your time.” The implicit message here – the subtext, perhaps – was “not now...not yet.” Leaders of the future, to be sure, but not of today. And so the conference would end, with all the wistfulness of leaving new friends, going back to school, and just perhaps leaving something on the table that had yet to be done.

Over time – after graduating and learning about social enterprise, entrepreneurship, micro-grants, etc. – we recognized that there was a place for an organization to galvanize young leaders of today in the social sector. Resolution was inspired by the dream to create a catalyst – seed funding, mentorship, and a curated ecosystem of support – that would help students at the undergraduate level with a brand new socially-responsible idea learn through taking action today.

### **At what point did you realize that your vision had legs?**



Three moments come to mind. (1) At our very first **Resolution Social Venture Challenge** in March of 2009, when the finalists were presenting their pitches so earnestly and passionately, we realized that we were onto something and that there was a group of inspiring young leaders waiting for that final push and support to get started. (2) When we held our first broader volunteer recruitment push and brought in the core group of volunteers that believed enough in our model to join up in our nascent work. (3) The first time that we ran a full impact evaluation process that yielded a strong, rigorous data set showing our impact clearly – this ranks as one of my favorite moments of all time.

### **What has surprised you most about being an entrepreneur and building an organization?**

A few things stand out: (1) How much people want to help, if you can get in front of them in a meaningful way. (2) How the fun and hard work of entrepreneurship blend together. (3) How important even brief moments of camaraderie between co-founders and team members are – how memorable and crucial those are to sustaining the energy needed to grow an organization of any kind.

### **What has been the biggest catalyst for your project and in what way?**

This is absolutely the talent of the **Resolution Fellows** and the volunteers that support them. Without either one of those two elements, Resolution would not function. The skills, passion, and energy of our Fellows and their Guides (Resolution's word for mentors) have galvanized our growth consistently. Secondarily to this, I would highlight our partnerships strategy, including our strategic allies, corporate program partners, Pathway Partners, and the host conferences for our Social Venture Challenges – these have provided everything from resources and expertise, to credibility and efficiencies, and so much more.

### **What is the biggest challenge you've encountered? Can you recommend any strategies that helped you overcome it?**

Resolution was founded by a team of young professionals who did not quit their professional jobs. This has led to some excellent strengths – access to broad networks of volunteers and sponsors, for example – but has also proven naturally to be challenge during our rapid growth. From time management, to priorities, to the inevitable uncertainty of where the buck stops, growing our staff and empowered volunteer corps at the same time has been at times difficult and risky. However, we have clearly articulated our culture and built a respectful, positive

partnership between the growing volunteer base and the growing core of staff.

This is daily in our consciousness as an organization, especially as we scale, and so this cross-pollination between volunteers and staff has grown into a powerful model for Resolution.

## ***WE BELIEVE THAT INVESTING IN YOUNG LEADERS TODAY AND BELIEVING IN THEM MAKES A DIFFERENCE.***

**Is there a basic principle or value that guides what you contribute to the world?**

**What is it and why?**

We believe that investing in young leaders today and believing in them makes a difference. We believe that the act of creating and implementing a social venture – within a supportive ecosystem – creates not only good management skills, but also a lifelong commitment to positive impact and social responsibility among young leaders.

**What is most exciting about the world of social innovation for you? Are there pockets of hidden potential you see?**

Absolutely – the social sector is full of potential, positive energy, communication, and enthusiasm, but a huge amount of work remains to be done to streamline and coordinate our efforts as a sector. There are some huge opportunities in how social sector organizations can partner together in an organized, intentional way about bringing young social entrepreneurs through their growth (see the Resolution Pathway Partnership below). Also, I feel that this is a generation of young leaders in whom the lines between public and private and between profit and impact are blurring in very exciting ways. This is unequivocally a thrilling time to be part of the social sector and the innovation economy too.

## ***IN THE AREA OF GROWING NEW, VIABLE SOCIAL VENTURES CREATED BY INSPIRING YOUNG***

# ***LEADERS, COLLABORATION IN AN INTENTIONAL AND ORGANIZED WAY IS CRUCIAL.***

**In your area of work or interest, what do you think is most needed? How could other entrepreneurs or initiatives contribute to the answer in collaborative or parallel ways?**

Actually, in the area of growing new, viable social ventures created by inspiring young leaders, collaboration in an intentional and organized way is crucial. This is a key area of The Resolution Project's innovative approach – something we call the Pathway Partnership. Since late 2013, we have been forming official partnerships with such wonderful social sector organizations as **Echoing Green**, the **Unreasonable Institute**, **Watson**, the **University of Miami Launchpad**, and others. We have also formed tremendous corporate program partnerships with DuPont, GE, and **GLG Social Impact**, among others. This network of organizations is not just a cloud of support for Resolution Fellows, but is clearly organized into steps in the ladder of growth, personally and professionally, for a Resolution Fellow. Resolution is a pipeline partner for larger funders like Echoing Green – and we benefit from Fellow sources too. Our corporate partners and educational partners – like Watson – add richness to this ecosystem. The key is that we are now working to develop an informative, active dialogue – leading to effective collaboration – between these public and private institutions, which are working together to apply resources, skills, and attention to efficiently support young leaders growing impactful organizations.

**What is your theory of change?**

We believe that young leaders – availed of a supportive, robust ecosystem of support – will derive useful skills and a lifelong devotion to social responsibility by launching social ventures while at a relatively young age and helping people.

**What is the long-term vision for your organization and how it impacts the world?**

Resolution will continue to grow by increasing the number of Fellowships we award, engaging our Fellows with increasingly deep support, growing our volunteer team commensurately, and expanding our network of Pathway Partners with public and private sector institutions to support our Fellows. Each Fellowship has a positive impact on the Fellow and on thousands of beneficiaries of that Fellow's social

venture, as well as the volunteers and organizations engaged in supporting that Fellow. We will continue to improve our Fellowship value proposition and to coalesce the social sector around an intentional, collaborative, and efficient model of supporting leaders and their organizations.

We fundamentally believe that each Resolution Fellow will be a future leader in philanthropy, business, and government. The Resolution Fellowship will have a deep impact on the character of that leadership, infusing it with socially-responsible values and a proven, entrepreneurial ability to implement good ideas. In this way, Resolution is making a reality of its vision: a generation of leaders with a lifelong commitment to social responsibility.

### **When do you feel you are personally at your best?**

When surrounded by a strong team that is empowered enough to speak up and debate, but connected and mature enough to be friends through it all.

***YOU WILL NEVER RECEIVE WHAT YOU DON'T ASK FOR; IF YOU CAN PUT THE FORCE OF YOUR ENTIRE PERSONALITY, PASSION, INTELLECT, GRATITUDE, AND GOOD SENSE BEHIND A REQUEST, YOU CAN EVENTUALLY GET THE SUPPORT YOU SEEK.***

### **If you could give one piece of advice to a budding social entrepreneur, what would it be?**

You will never receive what you don't ask for; if you can put the force of your entire personality, passion, intellect, gratitude, and good sense behind a request, you can eventually get the support you seek.

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# VOLUNTEERING: AN INTERVIEW WITH RACHAEL CHONG OF CATCHAFIRE



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**Rachael Chong** is Founder and CEO of **Catchafire**, an organization that pairs talented individuals with nonprofit organizations to catalyze the formation of meaningful volunteer experiences and to unlock the potential of the social good sector. **See Rachael Chong backstage** giving insight on what strategic planning nonprofits and individuals want, and how Catchafire is changing the world one match at a time.

### **What inspired you to start your organization?**

Working in the for-profit and nonprofit sectors exposed me to how difficult finding meaningful volunteer experiences can be and how desperately nonprofits need access to top talent. I founded Catchafire to change the way people approach service by making it more impactful, more efficient and more meaningful to both the volunteer and the nonprofit. I started our organization to connect talented professionals with a bigger purpose and to transform the social good sector where a nonprofit's potential will no longer be limited by budgetary or staffing constraints.

### **At what point did you realize that your vision and had legs?**

My experience helping to build the **US affiliate of BRAC**, the largest poverty alleviation nonprofit in the world, was the catalyst to starting Catchafire. With a limited budget and only me and the President & CEO, I had to get crafty. From the beginning, we knew that we'd need outside help to accomplish BRAC USA's lofty fundraising goals. So, we took a step back, identified the organization's key needs, and strategized on how to leverage our network to get the job done. We structured our needs as specific, scoped tasks so that our friends could actually take the time to help. Our volunteers came from McKinsey, AOL, Nike, Goldman Sachs and other esteemed companies. Their help freed up staff time and addressed some of BRAC USA's biggest needs.

Through the process I realized that these professionals truly enjoyed volunteering their skills and were going back to their day jobs rejuvenated. Their contributions increased my capacity to serve BRAC USA. At the end of the first year, we had raised millions of dollars, set up our board of directors, established our brand and



messaging, and launched the first version of our website.

### **What has surprised you most about being an entrepreneur and building an organization?**

One has the power to control her own destiny. There are lots of things one can't control such as luck and circumstance but, you have the power to control your strategy, who you work with, who you partner with, how you spend your time, and your attitude.

**YOU HAVE THE POWER TO CONTROL YOUR STRATEGY, WHO YOU WORK WITH, WHO YOU PARTNER WITH, HOW YOU SPEND YOUR TIME, AND YOUR ATTITUDE.**

### **Is there a basic principle or value that guides what you contribute to the world? What is it and why?**

Gandhi says be truthful, gentle and fearless. Being truthful and fearless are qualities that most people think about in regards to leadership.

**BEING GENTLE IS AN UNDERRATED AND EXTREMELY POWERFUL QUALITY FOR A LEADER TO ASPIRE FOR.**

In order to be gentle, one must be grounded and secure in her own values and beliefs but also be open to others differing opinions. To be gentle, one must be empathetic and compassionate. To be gentle, one must be able to listen and absorb. I believe in a quiet, strong and grounded leadership. I think some of the best leaders are those whose work is widely known and respected but who,

themselves, are relatively unknown. An example of this is my living hero, Fazle Abed — the founder of BRAC — a deeply humble and gentle leader.

### **What is the long-term vision for your organization and how it impacts the world?**

Catchafire is revitalizing the ethic of service in a society that has the tendency to lose sight of its value and importance.

**WE ARE STRIVING TO CREATE A WORLD WHERE IT IS COMMONPLACE TO SERVE THE GREATER GOOD, A WORLD WHERE EVERYONE HAS THE OPPORTUNITY TO USE THEIR TALENTS FOR GOOD AND BE TRANSFORMED BY THAT EXPERIENCE.**

We are striving to create a world where it is commonplace to serve the greater good, a world where everyone has the opportunity to use their talents for good and be transformed by that experience. At the same time, we are working to create a more efficient and effective social good sector where all social good organizations have access to top talent.

**RACHAEL CHONG ON TWITTER: CATCHAFIRECEO**

**TEDX TALK: "THE KEY TO TRUE GENEROSITY"**

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# EXTREME POVERTY: AN INTERVIEW WITH JAKE HARRIMAN



*The Feast and **GLG** have partnered to bring you the stories of today's brightest social entrepreneurs. Global, technology-driven, and nimble, GLG is the world's largest membership for professional learning and expertise. GLG Social Impact connects social sector organizations with experts across industries and*

*geographies for perspectives and expertise to accelerate the impact of their work, including through the **GLG Social Impact Fellowship**. Come back to **feastongood.com** every Monday for a feature on their Social Innovation Fellows.*

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Jake Harriman is Founder and CEO of **Nuru International**, the first self-sustaining, self-scaling, integrated development model to end extreme poverty in remote, rural areas in our lifetime.

### **What inspired you to start your organization?**

I was a special operations marine in my former life and did a few tours of combat in Iraq, the Horn of Africa, and a couple of other places. There were a few intense personal experiences that opened my eyes to the connection between people in really desperate situations caused by extreme poverty and some of the desperate choices they're forced to make to take care of their family and provide some kind of future for them. Many times, I would look into the eyes of our "enemy," and instead of seeing some misplaced sense of hatred for the West that drove them to fight us with a weapon they didn't even know how to use, I'd see that their actions were out of love for their little kid at home that was starving to death. When I made this connection, I realized that to combat the problem of terrorists and global instability we need a multi-faceted approach that includes a strategy to attack extreme poverty.

### **At what point did you realize that your vision had legs?**

After the Marine Corps, the people I talked to about my idea were really supportive. Some of the other marines saw a lot of the same things I saw, and they also felt I could help make an impact by trying to tackle extreme poverty. So, I studied the problem for about a year-and-a-half to try to understand the players in the field, what was working, what wasn't and why. I began to build an idea or model from my research, and I tried to get a job with some organizations first, but nobody wanted to hire me.

I wanted to build and scale a company that would have a global impact on this problem, so I enrolled in Stanford Graduate School of Business, still not sure that this would work. I was really amazed when I got there because a lot of my classmates rallied around this vision. About 30 of them got involved in building the different pieces of the model out, six faculty members mentored us, and I also

received funding.

After inspiring some powerful and influential folks and my classmates with this idea, I began to think maybe we were on to something and that my idea was something that could really make a significant change. I started to see how by ending extreme poverty, we could create a lot more global stability.

***“ENTREPRENEURS HAVE TO BE A LITTLE BIT CRAZY TO BE ABLE TO BUILD SOMETHING IN THE FACE OF SEEMINGLY INSURMOUNTABLE ODDS, ESPECIALLY IF YOU’RE DESIGNING A PRODUCT OR SERVICE THAT’S NEVER BEEN DONE BEFORE. YOU HAVE TO BE ABLE TO THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX AND BELIEVE THAT THE IMPOSSIBLE MIGHT ACTUALLY BE POSSIBLE.”***

**What has surprised you most about being an entrepreneur and building an organization?**

Probably how unequipped I am to run a company and how many mistakes I make, and yet we can still succeed.

I drastically underestimated the complexities involved in building a company and how difficult it would be to scale it globally. Entrepreneurs have to be a little bit crazy to be able to build something in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds, especially if you’re designing a product or service that’s never been done before. You have to be able to think outside the box and believe that the impossible might actually be possible.

I failed so many times during the early days. I was really surprised by the fact that

my early investors, classmates, friends and colleagues continued to believe. Once your vision and idea is very strong, people's risk tolerance is often times relatively high, especially if what you're trying to accomplish is going to significantly impact the world.

### **What has been the biggest catalyst for your project and in what way?**

The first one is Philip Mohochi, my partner, mentor and dear friend in Kenya. He taught a lot about leading with vision, serving others, the power of an inspiring vision and mobilizing a large group of people around the cause and our products. My very first week in Kenya was pretty rough. I got struck by lightning. I got malaria. We got attacked by thieves. We had an earthquake. When I said, "Philip, I just... I can't do this. This is just... It's simply too hard. I need to bail." He looked me and said, "You know, yeah, you really have had a bad week. There are thousands of farmers whose lives you're going to change in the next couple of years and these folks are depending on us. They have a bad week every week. These mothers are waking up every single day trying to figure out where they're going to get enough food for one meal for their children. They're trying to figure out how to keep their kids alive because they have malaria and they're facing really, really difficult challenges." In the early days, I think I would've quit without his help and inspiration.

The second piece: we discovered early on that to tackle extreme poverty it was less about the right solution or the right program to implement, and it was much more about the people. We focused a lot on leadership, and we have found it to be catalytic in unlocking human potential and success in our projects. We've built our entire philosophy around this. A strong Kenyan woman equipped with the same skills and knowledge as I have is far more qualified to solve the problems in her community and regions within her nation than I will ever be. Really, it's about being a catalyst to tap her potential and giving her the skills and capabilities she needs to realize that vision for her country.

### **What is the biggest challenge you've encountered and can you recommend any strategy that helped you overcome it?**

Philip passed away recently, which was probably the toughest challenge. We lost him in a tragic car accident earlier this year, and if it had happened a year ago, we would've lost the Kenyan project. At this point, the Kenyan project is empowering over 35,000 people out of extreme poverty permanently, and he had a team of about 280 Kenyans in the company.

The key to helping us get through that difficult time was his vision. He had done amazing succession planning. He wanted to retire, transition to the board and pass on the leadership of the project to someone a little younger with a little more vigor. An amazing woman named Pauline Wambeti came to be his understudy and prepare to take his place as the Country Director for Nuru Kenya. He was about a month away from retirement and the official handover when the accident happened. One of the reasons we chose Pauline was because she was not of the local Kurian tribe. Our vision is to scale beyond tribal boundaries throughout Kenya. When Philip passed, there was uncertainty about what would happen. Local chiefs said there was unrest and questions about whether they should trust this woman who was not from their tribe. Because of Philip's intentional succession planning, he had done a lot of talking with the chiefs, farmers and other local stakeholders about Pauline. We put together a communication strategy to work with the chiefs, local politicians and farmers to set her up for success. And now, Pauline is effectively leading in Kenya with community support. We were able to get through and it really was because of Philip's vision.

***“IF YOU WANT TO BRING ABOUT REAL CHANGE IN THE WORLD, YOU HAVE TO BE WILLING TO SERVE OTHERS.”***

**Is there a basic principle or value that guides what you contribute to the world and what is it and why?**

Love other people the way you want to be loved. It sounds funny coming from a marine, but I found that love is a very, very powerful force in this world. If you're willing to sacrifice and give up yourself and everything that you have to serve other people, you can live a life that is so much richer and so much more rewarding than you ever could have imagined. People are drawn towards those who are willing to lead by serving, loving others, and putting other's interests first instead of their own. If you want to bring about real change in the world, you have to be willing to serve others.

**What is most exciting about the world of social innovation for you, and what hidden pockets of potential do you see?**



The field of social innovation has the most potential to transform the world we live in today and to bring about greater global stability and peace in our world. It has much more potential than the aid industry. It's much more capable than government or markets strictly by themselves.

I liken it to the big idea guys in Silicon Valley. Like tech entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley, social entrepreneurs have a big idea—a big idea that can be disruptive. To change the world, you have to be willing to disrupt markets. For too long the aid industry has been a behemoth that isn't very innovative. The focus has been on alleviating the problem instead of ending the problem of extreme poverty. Social entrepreneurs think differently. If you really want to be able to make change, you have to be able to address the problem from a different perspective.

In fighting extreme poverty, very few people believe that we can actually solve the problem. So the first thing we have to do is actually to believe that the problem can be solved. I often tell people that if Nuru International exists in 30 years, then I've completely failed my entire life's mission. Our job should be to work ourselves out of the job.

A key factor that's helping to increase the effectiveness of new models is that leading thinkers are moving away from the old World Bank definition of extreme poverty—which is living on less than \$1.25 a day. That's not an adequate definition for social entrepreneurs. There are people getting behind a larger scale definition about extreme poverty really being a lack of meaningful choices for basic human rights. When we address that problem and that definition of extreme poverty, the solutions we design and innovate upon are very different. It becomes a lot less about number of wells, railroads, schools or medical clinics built and a lot more about the number of leaders who can innovate, design and create ecosystems where communities can thrive and lift themselves out of poverty permanently.

**In your area of work or interest, what do you think is most needed, how could other entrepreneurs or initiatives contribute to the answer in a collaborative or parallel ways?**

One is human capital. As a global community, we need to realize extreme poverty is the greatest crisis of our time. In the next ten years it will affect all of us, no matter where you live. We need to attract the most talented leaders and minds out there to end this problem. We as a social sector can do a better job of recruiting talent into this space: hiring them, making great careers for them, making it attractive for them

to stay in the space and retain them as well so you can build institutional memory.

The second is financial capital. There's a gap in the market right now. A lot of really great ideas die on the cutting floor because they can't make the jump in capital requirements to go from idea or R&D to limited scale up and then rapid scale up. On one end, a lot of investors get excited about new ideas and love to fund start-ups. On the other end, institutional funders are willing to fund really large organizations who are already doing work on a global scale. There's a real gap in the industry with a lack of mezzanine capital for ideas that have gone through proof of concept and are ready to scale, but can't get the injection of 15 to 25 million in capital to really take the ideas to scale.

The last thing is transparency and humility. As an industry, we need to commit to failing fast and learning from those failures; admitting when we're wrong and admitting when we've failed. People and funders in the social sector are terrified of failure. The technology sector is able to foster such amazing innovation because of rapid prototyping. There are nine failures for every one success. That's how you find the next Facebook. You have to be willing to fail. And we, as practitioners, also have to be willing to fail. But we have to be good at documenting our failure, understanding it, publishing our failure and then learning from it. We can learn as an industry as well by sharing our failures with our peers and investors, so that we can grow. But the investor community needs to be more willing to take on more risk.

Only by taking risks can we actually make significant gains and tackle the problem of extreme poverty.



## **What is your theory of change?**

We're trying to disrupt the market. It goes back to our basic philosophy, which is that a strong Ethiopian, Kenyan or Somali woman who has the same skill set and the same knowledge base that I have is far better qualified to solve the problems in her community than I will ever be. We see an opportunity to be a catalyst and help remove the barriers around her preventing her from realizing her potential. This plays out in our process of training leaders to deliver integrated impact in agriculture, economic development, healthcare and education. Through this integrated approach, we design solutions with those leaders so they have a sustainability engine that grows and scales. Over time, we exit and the project is completely locally led.

Our goal is to give those leaders all the skills and resources they need. We equip them with the skills they need to be able to design world-class solutions to fight poverty in four areas of need. We give them the project management skills to be able to scale those ideas over time and throughout the country. And then we give them access to a reliable market-based capital source through a for-profit social enterprise we build in each country. With this model, we're able to equip a team of leaders to have a nationally-owned solution that continues to scale impact throughout the rural areas of their country.

## **What is the long-term vision for your organization and how it impacts the world?**

I see a real gap in the market. What I experienced in combat in failed states were families with no choices being forced into doing a lot of things they wouldn't otherwise do. I saw a real need to provide meaningful choices. The challenge is, in a lot failed states and in conflict areas, it's very, very difficult for NGOs to go in there and do work to help provide those meaningful choices. The military can't do it. As a marine, I was trained to do military operations, not teach farmers how to increase crop yields. So I saw a unique opportunity to create an entity—combining my security operations experience from the military with the international development expertise of an NGO—that is able to work in a failed state region and build out what can essentially become an effective nation-building platform.

The desperation that is created by extreme poverty creates a ripe environment for instability, terrorists movements, insurgency, coup attempts, various armed groups and rebellions. If you have a large population base that is empowered with economic choices, you can change the game. It no longer becomes an unstable

area where terrorists can recruit young children into their groups because their parents have no other choices. My vision for Nuru is to look at countries like Somalia, South Sudan, Yemen, CAR, DRC and to help end the failed state problem. If we can solve extreme poverty, we can stabilize these regions and create a safer world, not to mention unlock a lot of the world's economic potential.

### **When do you feel you are personally at your best?**

I'm at my best when I'm in the field, when my shoes are muddy, when I can wear ripped t-shirts and cargo pants and have messy hair and a beard. That's when I feel I'm at my best.

I'm an operator. I love being in the field. I love seeing the transformation in lives firsthand: visiting farmers, sharing a meal and talking about their dreams and what they want to see for their families. That's when I come most alive. That's where I'm at my best. I'm at my best also when there are a lot of fires to put out; when I'm needed to mobilize the team to step into chaos, make sense of it and come up with a solution.

### **The last question is, if you could give one piece of advice to a budding social entrepreneur, what would it be?**

I'd say, "Your idea is amazing. Go with it. Run with it. Take the risk. Jump into the gap. And stay humble." I've found a lot of power in humility. I made so many mistakes early on thinking that I had the best answer, that I was the smartest kid on the block, that I didn't need to listen. Again and again, I got hit over the head with a 2x4 to teach me the lesson of humility.

The principle of servant leadership that I've learned over time has really helped me stay humble and grow as a leader.

**#ETHIOPIA #EXTREME POVERTY #GLG SOCIAL IMPACT #GLG SOCIAL IMPACT FELLOWSHIP #KENYA  
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# INEFFICIENCIES CREATED OPPORTUNITIES FOR CASHEW FARMERS IN BALI: AN INTERVIEW WITH AARON FISHMAN



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**Aaron Fishman** is Founder and Director of **East Bali Cashews** in Denpasar, Bali, Indonesia. East Bali Cashews produces tasty, affordable, and healthy cashews for an international market by educating and employing local Balinese farmers to use environmentally and socially sustainable methods of cashew farming and processing.

**OUR GOAL IS TO IMPROVE THE LIVES OF CASHEW FARMERS AND OTHER FARMERS WHO PROVIDE A TASTY, HEALTHY PRODUCT THAT'S AFFORDABLY PRICED.**

**What inspired you to start your organization?**

When my wife and I first came to East Bali as medical volunteers in the Village Health program, we were in remote areas where there's very little economy besides subsistence farming and a few cash crops. It was the cashew season, and when I asked what they did with the cashews, they said, "We ship them abroad for processing. We don't process them here." I saw that there was a huge business potential, which would give people work, a good wage and improve their quality of life."

**At what point did you realize that your vision had legs?**

People like to eat cashews, and they'll pay money for them. It's more efficient to process cashews where they're grown rather than a couple thousand miles away. All we did is make the process of buying and selling cashews more efficient. It was not exactly rocket science.



**What has surprised you most about being an entrepreneur and building an organization?**

I just am surprised that that no one had done it before.

**What has been the biggest catalyst for your project and in what way?**

The biggest driver, by far, is our team. Nothing we have accomplished would have been possible without our incredibly strong team. We started with just two people, and now we have around 300 employees, including 30 on the management team. All of those people catalyzed the success. Nothing would have been possible without them.

Every single one of our employees is from the village except for me, and there was a lot of team building required. People had never been given this kind of opportunity before, so a lot of it was really putting them in a place where they could feel free to advance and to master their trade and skill sets. They set the tone for how we work; they set the entire culture. From the beginning, our team was the key in making us such a success now.

**WE STARTED WITH JUST TWO PEOPLE, AND NOW WE HAVE AROUND 300 EMPLOYEES, INCLUDING 30 ON THE MANAGEMENT TEAM. ALL OF THOSE**



# PEOPLE CATALYZED THE SUCCESS. NOTHING WOULD HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THEM.

**What is the biggest challenge you've encountered? Can you recommend any strategies that helped you overcome it?**

The biggest challenges we faced and continue to face are financing, team, and bureaucracy. Financing is huge, especially in Indonesia where you don't have the same sort of financing structures available that you do in other places. But then again, wherever you start your business, financing is an issue. The second is the team building: finding the best people, supporting them, and creating a strong work culture from the start. And of course there is the typical bureaucracy and lack of infrastructure here- getting electricity, water, technology has been quite challenging.

# PURE STUBBORNNESS IS HOW WE GOT THROUGH THE FINANCING AND THE BUREAUCRATIC CHALLENGES.

Pure stubbornness is how we got through the financing and the bureaucratic challenges. There is not yet a good system in place for social entrepreneurs to access to funding; you have to go to friends and family first. You try to get through your first year, and then you look for some bigger investors, and so on. We're on our third round of financing now. Each round has been very difficult and probably will continue to be difficult in the future. Constant attention needs to be paid to fundraising. You have to spend 20 hours a day trying to figure out how to provide for the growth of the company. There is no creative solution that we've found to get through any of that, just brute force.

**Is there a basic principle or value that guides what you contribute to the world? What is it and why?**

We value transparency. We always try to make our reasoning, strategy, and

procedures very clear to all of our stakeholders, whether they be our customers, our employees, the farmers or the people who finance us. We've always been very open and honest.

The other is trying our best to be fair and non-exploitative. We believe in profit and success; if you're successful and you work hard, you should rise to the top and get rewarded- but within a limit. You should always keep in mind that other people are not so lucky at no fault of their own. We've been incredibly lucky and we try to spread around as much of our luck as possible.

**What is most exciting about the world of social innovation for you? Are there pockets of hidden potential you see?**

Often times, when people see an opportunity and say, for example, "Okay. I'm going provide micro-grid power or clean water," they forgot that there are reasons that that industry doesn't already exist. Often times you're going up against multinational corporations or ingrained inefficiencies built into governmental systems. I often think that the best way to start a social enterprise is just by looking at ways to remove inefficiencies: inefficiencies in the market, inefficiencies in peoples' lives, inefficiencies in general. It's a nut and bolt kind of thing that has to get fixed first, and then the glamour and all the other exciting things can happen later.

**THE BEST WAY TO START A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE IS JUST BY LOOKING AT WAYS TO REMOVE INEFFICIENCIES: INEFFICIENCIES IN THE MARKET, INEFFICIENCIES IN PEOPLES' LIVES, INEFFICIENCIES IN GENERAL.**

**In your area of work or interest, what do you think is most needed? How could other entrepreneurs or initiatives contribute to the answer in collaborative or parallel ways?**

There's a lot of noise in the social enterprise area. What happens is that people with really great entrepreneurial ideas, who may have already had some success, are overshadowed by people who are very good at making noise. I would encourage the entire sector – anyone working in the sector or telling stories about the sector – to focus on learning and doing due diligence before giving a microphone to an individual or a company. To bring the attention of global audience to a regional issue, an entrepreneur, an NGO or to whomever – has consequences. It's something that should be done with a lot of thought and consideration.

Established interests have immense power and the current microphones are, in most cases, amplifying what's already out there rather than novel approaches. There's a huge need for people to cut out the middleman and empower the individual to make better decisions. That means cutting government or redundant supply chains and doing whatever we can to subvert a system that is not currently serving the interest of the people. Whether it's a corporate, governmental, or global commercial system, there are billions of people who are subservient to that system who have no power or voice. We need to explain to the everyday person exactly what's going on and to tell that story in a way that informs the person with the power to change.

### **What is your theory of change?**

If there's a way of changing the status quo, it's to educate and incentivize: tell people something they don't know and then give them a power or incentive to change how they're currently doing things for the better. Our education, at this point, has been more on the supply side. We have been working with the farmers to educate and incentivize, providing them with a little bit of knowledge about how the commodity system works, what can they do about it, and how can they make more money by changing the way they're doing things.

## **IF THERE'S A WAY OF CHANGING OF STATUS QUO, IT'S TO EDUCATE AND INCENTIVIZE.**

East Bali Cashews doesn't have that kind of microphone to inform the general consumer about how cashews are traditionally processed: how India still uses corporal punishment and Vietnam uses prison labor in cashew factories, or how

cashew farmers are far poorer than chocolate farmers or coffee farmers because of where cashews are grown. We have to peel away the levels of branding that are given to us to get as close as we can to that cashew farmer and say, "Look, buddy, I realize this cashew pack is 6 bucks but your family lives on about a \$1.50 a day." There's a disconnect there. It behooves us as consumers and humans to try and shorten that supply chain as much as possible and to remove all the inefficiencies.

Multinationals also have a huge amount power to change. Often times, you can find corporations that are desperate to learn about these things and to make their practices more sustainable.

If people don't know something, they have no power to change it. Social enterprise really can play a role by offering business solutions that are better on the social and environmental fronts and better from a business perspective. If people are informed, they'll pick the better product, the more responsible product, the more environmentally friendly product.

### **What is the long-term vision for your organization and how it impacts the world?**

Our goal is to improve the lives of cashew farmers and other farmers by providing a tasty, healthy product that's affordably priced. We strive to run the business in an environmentally and socially sustainable way and to grow as fast as possible.

### **When do you feel you are personally at your best?**

I love solving problems. If there's an inefficiency or problem, whether it's the way a cable is run in the factory or the way we are pricing our cashew nuts, I love working with a team and coming up with a more efficient solution.

### **If you could give one piece of advice to a budding social entrepreneur, what would it be?**

I have three pieces of advice: One is make sure you have enough money to really put your venture on a strong foot at the very beginning. If you think you need \$10, try to find \$30. If you think you need \$1 million, find \$3 million. Triple the amount of money you think you need and then work from there.

The second is to focus on the team and the people you work with and don't compromise on that at all. If you have a good team, they'll solve all your other problems.

The third is to make sure that you always remember why you started doing what you're doing.

**East Bali Cashews in Forbes • Let's Eat! • Fortune • WSJ**

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# DISASTER RECONSTRUCTION: AN INTERVIEW WITH ZACK ROSENBERG OF ST. BERNARD PROJECT



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*connects social sector organizations with experts across industries and geographies for perspectives and expertise to accelerate the impact of their work, including through the **GLG Social Impact Fellowship**. Come back to **feastongood.com** every Monday for a feature on their Social Innovation Fellows.*

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**Zack Rosenburg** is a co-founder and CEO of the **St. Bernard Project**, a national long-term disaster recovery nonprofit working to create housing, “prompt, efficient, and predictable” post-disaster aid, and jobs for community veterans.

### **What inspired you to start your organization?**

My then-girlfriend, now wife, and I came to NOLA from DC in 2006, six months after Katrina. To be honest, we thought we’d miss the worst of it. But what we saw blew us away – the luckiest folks were living in FEMA trailers. Others were living in cars, attics – it was horrible. Our original plan was to raise money for organizations that were rebuilding affordably and efficiently, but we just didn’t see that happening. So we stayed and started to build houses.



### **At what point did you realize that your vision and had legs?**

**“WHEN FOLKS QUIT THEIR JOBS TO VOLUNTEER WITH US FULL-TIME. AND THEN WHEN WITHIN 14 MONTHS OF WORK WE HAD REBUILT MORE HOUSES THAN ANY OTHER ORGANIZATION IN THE AREA.”**

**What has surprised you most about being an entrepreneur and building an organization?**

How much thought and energy goes into building and developing a team, while at the same time the catalytic impact of building and developing a transformative team.

**What has been the biggest catalyst for your project and in what way?**

Without a doubt, our the partnerships and alliances we've developed with companies like Toyota, UPS, Zurich Insurance and Farmers. We work with companies that invest not only their dollars, but their “sense.” Financial support is crucial to our ability to bring more families home, but so is the capacity-building support our partners provide. Toyota helped us bring our construction time down by 48%. Tremendous skills-based support from Zurich is helping us identify communities that are vulnerable to disasters so we can work with homeowners and small to mid-sized businesses in those communities to help them understand and mitigate their risk. These are just a couple of examples.

**What is the biggest challenge you've encountered? Can you recommend any strategies that helped you overcome it?**

The biggest barrier SBP has encountered is, quite simply, the firmly held practices long utilized by well-meaning people and institutions.

**“AMERICA'S MODEL FOR POST-DISASTER**

# RECOVERY HAS NOT CHANGED IN OVER 30 YEARS; IT IS CLEARLY INEFFICIENT.”

In order to cause the most impact, we must find a way to create allies out of institutional actors who have the most surface area and capability to cause impact.

**Is there a basic principle or value that guides what you contribute to the world? What is it and why?**

SBP is built on four core values: problems are solvable; all people have an innate desire to prevent harm, solve problems, and to help others; our clients should be treated in a way that we would want our loved ones treated; and we practice constructive discontent.

**What is most exciting about the world of social innovation for you? Are there pockets of hidden potential you see?**

Disruptive ideas that revolutionize an industry in a way that causes human impact that wasn't seen as possible. There is potential everywhere. SBP's has a core value that states that there is an innate human desire to help – we need to tap into this.

**In your area of work or interest, what do you think is most needed? How could other entrepreneurs or initiatives contribute to the answer in collaborative or parallel ways?**

Our industry needs to become more open with talking about problems and embracing the ethos of constructive discontent.

# “WE NEED PARTNERS THAT SIMULTANEOUSLY INVEST THEIR DOLLARS AS WELL AS THEIR ‘SENSE.’”

**What is your theory of change?**

SBP seeks to change the way America recovers from disasters.

Communities/organizations that implement our scalable, proven-effective model for affordable, post-disaster rebuilding are rebuilding more quickly, efficiently and affordably than those who follow traditional paths to recovery.

### **What is the long-term vision for your organization and how it impacts the world?**

SBP seeks to cause transformative change in the disaster recovery realm because the price of delay can be tragic and devastating. SBP has seen firsthand the toll of delay in post-disaster recovery – clients have died waiting, seniors have had their “golden years” irreparably tarnished, and young people have spent their formative years living in untenable living situations.

### **When do you feel you are personally at your best?**

Honestly, I feel my best when I’m sleeping. You can’t make mistakes when you’re sleeping.

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# ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A DRIVER FOR PROGRESS: AN INTERVIEW WITH BEN POWELL



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*feastongood.com* every Monday for a feature on their Social Innovation Fellows.

Ben Powell is Founder and CEO of Agora Partnerships. Agora Partnerships provides entrepreneurs who are intentionally building businesses that solve social and environmental challenges in Latin America with the resources they need to grow, primarily through its 6-8 month program, the Agora Accelerator.

### **What inspired you to start your organization?**

When I was in my twenties I co-founded a miniature golf course in Puebla, Mexico. About 5 years into it, Maribel, our cashier, announced she had received a loan to buy an apartment. She had never even had a bank account until she started working for us. I felt in a small way that I'd contributed to this incredible moment in her life, and it felt really good. Later, in business school, I did a lot of research and discovered that very little of our development assistance actually went to stimulate entrepreneurship in places like Central America, where we have a big presence. A main reason we have 50,000 children crossing our borders is that there are not nearly enough entrepreneurs creating good jobs from those countries. I bet many Americans would be willing to invest in companies solving social problems in Central America if only they knew how.

### **At what point did you realize that your vision had legs?**

After our second entrepreneur retreat, where we bring entrepreneurs from across Latin America to Nicaragua, we had all of the entrepreneurs announce their commitments – what they were committed to do in order to improve their communities through their business. The South Korean Ambassador was there – his government had helped fund the program. We didn't expect him to speak, but he was moved. He told everyone that what we were doing – coming together, working together to support new businesses – was exactly what they did in Korea after the war. It was very powerful. The Koreans know a thing or two about how to shift out of poverty to a culture of innovation.

### **What has surprised you most about being an entrepreneur and building an organization?**

I guess I am still surprised that our investment mechanisms into social enterprises are not more sophisticated. There is a lot of room for more creativity in how we use both our philanthropy and our investment and in the critical partnership between investor and entrepreneur.

## **What has been the biggest catalyst for your project and in what way?**

The right people doing the right thing. We have an incredible team of mostly young people with a lot of fire in the belly. Making sure everyone knows what their job is and then letting them do it has been our biggest catalyst. It's a lot harder to pull off than I had originally thought, but by getting everyone focused on a few clear goals, we've been able to unlock tremendous productivity from the organization.

## **What is the biggest challenge you've encountered? Can you recommend any strategies that helped you overcome it?**

Communication has been our biggest challenge. We are an American-based organization with team members from Malawi, South Korea, France, England, Nicaragua, and the list goes on. We are also spread out and at one point had people working out of Beijing, Managua, DC, and somewhere in Germany and Uzbekistan. It didn't work. People need time together and there is only so far you can go with Skype. We have retreats and have consolidated our offices so people can have more face time with each other, but it's still a challenge. Our **core values** help, but I don't think the challenge of communication ever goes away. Especially with a team like ours where people are very ambitious and passionate about their work.

## **Is there a basic principle or value that guides what you contribute to the world? What is it and why?**

There are **four core values** at Agora we think are critical to helping drive social and economic innovation – agency, empathy, curiosity and perseverance. Of these, for me, agency is the most important. Agency means believing you can make a difference in the world and acting on that belief. It's also feeling you have some basic control over your destiny. How many people in the world today actually have agency? In the US, half of the country lives on 5% of the country's assets – what kind of agency is that? In Latin America, it's worse. People need agency to live fully human lives and to contribute to society. We need more people with agency and with a desire to use that agency to improve humankind. That means we need to distribute opportunity more evenly – like to young entrepreneurs with big dreams to create positive change in the world.

## **What is most exciting about the world of social innovation for you? Are there pockets of hidden potential you see?**



I'm incredibly excited by the millennial generation. They have incredible skills and energy and for many great expectations of what they want to contribute to the world. The entrepreneurs in our program are true builders – they want to create something not only profitable, but significant and meaningful, and they have the tools to do so. Maybe the most exciting thing I see happening in the future is Millennials working to disrupt and innovate our political process using new kinds of tools to increase civic engagement. We're not going to unleash the true potential of social innovation until we can upgrade our political processes for the 21st century. I am an optimist that it will happen, eventually. There needs to be more social entrepreneurs working on that problem.

**In your area of work or interest, what do you think is most needed? How could other entrepreneurs or initiatives contribute to the answer in collaborative or parallel ways?**

I think there needs to be more respect for the role values-based, entrepreneurial companies play in creating a more sustainable and humane economy. And by respect I mean putting money into these companies. We need more early-stage impact investors. We need more people who have extra resources to invest them into companies that are intentionally working to solve social problems, we need better platforms to do this, we need better ways to educate and build community around investors, and of course we need to be able to identify great entrepreneurial potential. We also need more women angel investors – only about 10% of angel investors in the US are women and throughout the Americas it's much less. Women investors are more likely to invest in women entrepreneurs, which is one of the most important things we can do to improve many of the societies in our hemisphere. To make it easier for investors of all stripes to learn about opportunities to support great companies, we created the **Agora Investor Network**, which is our own community of people interested in market-based solutions to our most pressing social challenges.

**What is your theory of change?**

Our purpose is to accelerate the shift to a more sustainable economy, one that creates long-term value for all stakeholders, including future generations. The way we do this is to identify high potential entrepreneurs and provide them with the right knowledge, networks, and capital so they access the kinds of capital they need to scale their impact. As they grow, they become role models, inspiring more would-be entrepreneurs and more investors. This leads eventually to a functioning

capital market that makes it increasingly easier to invest in companies that measure their social as well as their financial returns. This virtuous cycle, coupled with increased consumer and media awareness, helps to shift culture, which furthers the cycle and eventually creates true system change.

### **What is the long-term vision for your organization and how it impacts the world?**

**Our vision** is to become the best accelerator for the world. We want to build a global community that is truly committed to helping entrepreneurs succeed, especially in the most difficult markets, which is to say, the markets that most need entrepreneurs. We're part of a much broader socially responsible business movement with groups like B Lab that are ultimately working to support entrepreneurial capitalism as a force for progress against the rent seeking, crony variant that fears social innovation.

### **When do you feel you are personally at your best?**

When I am focused and in the moment.

### **If you could give one piece of advice to a budding social entrepreneur, what would it be?**

Read Walter Isaacson's Benjamin Franklin



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