

Nonprofit Thought Leaders: 10 Useful TED Talks

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From time to time, we engage in random policy wonkery, recommending to readers provocative tidbits from policy experts, observers, and other thought leaders.

For example, in [*Nonprofit Sector Featured in New Slate Series*](#), (August 28, 2018), we highlighted a series that Slate magazine launched in May 2018, featuring noted philanthropy commentator, Felix Salmon. Titled [*Introducing the Slate 90: A dive into the multibillion-dollar nonprofit sector*](#), the “Slate 90” refers to the 90 biggest American-based charities (by revenue) in nine categories. The editors hoped to “offer a ...robust and useful portrait of the tax-free economy.” They were mindful of an earlier Slate series in the 1990s that was well-intentioned but had “missed the [*bigger story of the billions of dollars in tax-free revenue*](#) that flow in and out of the coffers of nonprofit institutions in the U.S.”

Similarly, in [*Rethinking the “Scarcity Thinking” That Holds Back Nonprofits*](#) (June 26, 2018), we wrote about a renewed effort by Neil Edgington, President of [*Social Velocity*](#), to urge the nonprofit sector to get off the destructive “starvation cycle” mindset. Edgington’s March 2018 article, [*Nonprofit Scarcity Will Get You Nowhere*](#), is an [*update to his earlier writings*](#) on the topic.

TED Talks Inspiration

Now, we turn to the TED Talks recommendations of Scot Chisholm, the young CEO and co-founder of [*Classy*](#), the popular Southern California social enterprise that sponsors “world-class online fundraising software for nonprofits” and has “enabled millions of donations from over 190 countries.”

This highly successful endeavor developed from a single fundraising idea, a pub crawl in the Pacific Beach section of San Diego, organized by Scot and his friends. They wanted to devote some of their free time to fundraise for cancer research; most of them had close family members who had succumbed to the disease. Over the next few years, this core group sponsored dozens of

fundraisers including concerts and races.

“Each event benefited local nonprofit organizations, and engaged young people in philanthropy in new and cool ways.” They realized that “[a] new wave of young people were hungry to change the world, but nonprofits seemed to be missing the opportunity to engage these modern philanthropists in a meaningful way.” So they set out to “build an online fundraising platform that would help connect our young event attendees with our nonprofit beneficiaries in a more meaningful way.”

In 2011, they launched an improved version of the Classy fundraising platform, offering it to any nonprofit interested in using the software for its own campaign and events. Today, Classy has a staff of over 220 people and serves more than 4,000 nonprofits and social enterprises around the world including Oxfam, The World Food Programme, and National Geographic.

In the [Classy blog](#), Scot and his team have taken their organization’s experience of a “unique window into a community of innovative [nonprofit leaders](#)” and created a “[top 10 TED Talks for nonprofit leaders](#).” He explains: “These are people who are out there innovating, inspiring supporters, and creating impact every day of the year, in places all over the world” with important ideas to share.

The [top 10 Ted Talks selections](#) are:

- Starting a Movement: [Derek Sivers](#), founder of CD Baby, the largest seller of independent music on the web and now head of MuckWork, a company that helps musicians do their “uncreative dirty work.” Even when founders of nonprofit organizations are passionate, it may seem as if no one is listening. Sivers advises: “*Don’t despair. With a ‘lone nut,’ and a few “first followers” a great movement can emerge.*”
- The Unlikely Beginning of Movements: [Adam Garone](#), Movember, “one of the most successful fundraising and awareness campaigns in history” that has “evolved to fundamentally redefine cancer research.” Start with “[4 mates, 4 mustaches](#)” *inspiring “a roomful of people” then “a city... that city can inspire a state, and that state can inspire a nation, and beyond that, you can create a global movement.*”
- Challenging Apathy: [Dave Meslin](#), community organizer. Maybe people are “too lazy, ignorant, or selfish to get out there and affect change.” Or maybe they don’t get “*information in a way that empowers their activism instead of discouraging it.*”
- Inspiring Action: [Simon Sinek](#), leadership expert. A “great movement” or “fundraising campaign” happens when there is “effective communication”; that is, an “inspiring message.” There is a secret to the way people “receive and respond to messaging.” “*People don’t buy what you do, they buy why you do it.*”
- Global Challenges; Local Values: [Melinda Gates](#), philanthropist. There are lessons for nonprofits, especially those working overseas, from “how Coca Cola has leveraged real time data analysis, small-scale entrepreneurship, and aspirational messaging to market their products throughout the developing world.” The message must be tailored to “reflect the specific local values of constituents. “*If we can start to understand what people really want... we can change communities, and we can change whole nations.*”
- Making Complex Issues Accessible: [Brenda Brathwaite](#), game designer. It takes creativity to create empathy around complex issues in the developing world. “*What fun, creative ways can your*

organization bring its message home to supporters and inspire action?”

- Crowdsourcing the World's Goals: **Jamie Drummond**, co-founder of the advocacy group ONE. There are huge global problems sometimes beyond the capabilities of governments to address. The nonprofit sector may be the key to tackle and solve these challenges, and *“crowdsourcing may be the biggest ingredient....[for] success.”*
- Crowdsourcing and the Arab Spring: **Wael Ghonim**, Google executive. The Egyptian Revolution in 2011, a significant – although short-lived – global transformation, was driven in large part by Facebook activism. *“Revolution 2.0: No-one was a hero because everyone was a hero.”*
- Human-Centered Solutions: **Jacqueline Novogratz**, investor, advocate, and founder of Acumen Fund. Being creative helps local entrepreneurs solve their communities' needs in remote Pakistan areas. *“The time for us to begin innovating and looking for new solutions across sectors is now.”*
- The Subtle Power of Everyday Leadership: **Drew Dudley**, leadership educator. Each nonprofit leader needs to be reminded from time to time that his or her work is important and effective. The *“simplest actions can have far-reaching effects on those around us.”*

Conclusion

There are, of course, many more TED Talks that are helpful as educational and inspirational tools for the nonprofit community and leaders. But this special list of TED Talks arises from a perspective often overlooked but well worth the time to explore.