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Wendy Kopp, Teach For America's CEO and founder, is driven to end educational inequity across the nation. In this seminar, Kopp shares her entrepreneurial story of starting Teach For America straight out of college, and articulates the sense of urgency that she and her organization still feel for producing fundamental changes to education in America.



Transcript

It's my pleasure to introduce Wendy Kopp.. As you likely know, she founded Teach For America 20 years ago and she's grown Teach For America to over 8,000 people teaching in 39 urban areas and rural communities.. And there's a network of over 20,000 alumni.. Who is part of Teach For America here today, raise your hand.. Let's give them an ovation for the work that they do.. Wendy is also the co-founder and CEO of Teach For All, a global network of independent organizations working to expand educational opportunity across the world.. And she's the author of two books.. The first is "One Day, All the Children.... The Unlikely Triumph of Teach for America" and "What I Learned Along The Way" published in 2000.. How many who have read it? Great..

Shame on the rest of you.. Buy it.. And then, there's a new one just coming out "A Chance To Make History: What Works and What Doesn't Work in Providing an Excellent Education for All".. Wendy, we're so thrilled to have you here.. Welcome to Stanford.. Thank you.. Well, I am really excited to be able to I'm feeling badly about the people who are standing in the back but hopefully you all can sit down if you'd rather et cetera.. I'd love to just have a real discussion with you all.. I'm going to tell some merger between the entrepreneurial story of Teach For America and the story of I guess why I myself and my colleagues in this work feel just extraordinary urgency and sense of possibility about the future in this effort to ensure educational opportunity for all.. But all this kind of start with a story and just say that I feel very, very lucky that I somehow landed on this idea..

A little over 20 years ago when I was a senior at Princeton University, you know, I look back and think and then it seems like sort of a surreal story to me as I even retell it.. But what brought me to this was the couple of things coming together on the one hand, as a public policy major and really more importantly just a concerned citizen and college student.. I had started, you know, I just gotten more informed and more concerned about educational inequity in our country.. Just the fact that you know this is the country that aspires to be a place of equal opportunity and yet where you're born really determines your educational prospects and in turn life prospects.. That seems like a fundamental massive injustice given our ideals.. And so I was doing things that college students do when their concerned about issues and there concern about issues including organizing conferences around it and that kind of thing.. At the same time, you know, our generation at the time was called the me-generation that was the label.. We supposedly just all wanted to go work on Wall Street and work for management consulting firms.. And I just thought that this wasn't a generational issue.. It wasn't about our generation..

It was about the fact that those were the only recruiters.. I think that's great if that's what you know you really want to do.. It's just that there were so many people I knew and I was one of them who were just searching for something else and weren't finding it.. Who were looking for a way to right out of college assume a significant responsibility that would make a real difference in the world.. And one day, all of that came together into this idea.. Why aren't we recruiting all these talented graduating seniors as aggressively to commit two years to teach in our highest poverty communities as we were being recruited at the time to commit two years to work on Wall Street? I knew the thesis topic decided to propose this in a thesis and just became all the more obsessed as I went to that process about the potential power of the idea in the short run to channel all of this talent and energy in the classrooms in our hardest-to-staff schools in remote rural areas and intercity urban areas.. I thought that would make a significant difference for kids growing up today.. And at the same time, I thought you know how powerful would it be in the overall consciousness and priorities of our country to have our future leaders have their first experience to be teaching in low-income communities instead of working on Wall Street.. So it was just clearly an idea

whose time had come.. The timing was so perfect..

It's hard to even capture as I look back the mood on college campuses was very conducive to this.. There were lots of people who really were searching for something else.. In Corporate America, there's just been this big summit of corporate leaders come together and say, "We had to do something to improve education." They didn't know what that was.. And many of those became those people included in the Fortune Magazine articles about this summit, became the first donors of Teach For America.. So we had timing on our side and this was just an idea that magnetized a lot of people right off the bat.. So in our first year, 2,500 graduating seniors responded to a grassroots recruitment campaign which at the time was flyers under doors.. I mean imagine what it would be today, I don't know.. But we selected and trained them, placed 500 of them, and inspired a bunch of people in Corporate America and then the philanthropic community to donate \$2.5 million to fund the first year's class.. So one year after I graduated I was looking out on an auditorium full of 500 people that signed up to be the first Teach For America corps members.. I could tell that part of the story in much greater detail..

And it's actually the part of our story that's probably told the most and in the most detailed but as I view it I mean really that was the beginning of the real Teach For America story.. That was the beginning of immense learning curves on every front.. Most importantly, is those 500 people started teaching and basically hit the wall in their schools and realized how challenging this was going to be.. And we realized that we had our work cut out for us to be successful in this and went through immense learning curves and probably will never finish the learning curve.. I mean there's always so much more to be done but around understanding how do we recruit and select and train and develop teachers who are not just surviving in classrooms with their kids but actually excelling, truly putting their kids on a different trajectory and learning the lessons that come from that living their experience not more disillusioned about the possibility of change but more committed about the possibility of change.. So we've gone through 20 years and will keep going through more years of intense learning curves around that question.. There were also many organizational learning curves.. You know, around how to actually sustain the scale that we started at let alone grow and just to name a couple of them, I mean, I started out in this thinking that management, all the things that we would put in that bucket of things was not worth my time or energy.. And it turned out that whether or not we would fulfill our mission and potential to be a force for change would have everything to do with whether or not we just embrace all the hard core lessons of how do you build a high performing organization.. And there were huge learning curves financially as well..

You know, I said we started out with \$2.5 million of funds and our second year we raised \$5 million and our third year, we raised \$7.5 million and then all of our first funders started dropping off in 500 thousand and million dollar chunks for various reasons.. And we'd learned it a very, very hard way that we were going to have to figure out a revenue strategy that would enable us to even keep this afloat let alone enable us to seriously grow.. So we went through a decade of going through a lot of these learning curves and really as of our 10th year finally we had gained some measure of stability.. So this is 10 years ago, we had at that point still 1,000 teachers in the midst of their two years.. We were working across 11 communities.. We had a \$10 million operating budget.. But we'd finally gotten our act together on numerous fronts.. Our program was much stronger.. Our organizational management systems and our financial kind of setup was much stronger.. And we felt like we had room to finally step back and ask ourselves, "OK, now given everything we've learned, how are we going to fulfill our potential as a force for change? And we came to believe that we needed to get just much bigger and much better..

And launched a growth plan which turned into another growth plan and another growth plan.. And so now, as we prepare to celebrate our 20th anniversary we're making lots of progress.. We have 8,000 teachers today in the midst of their two years working across as you heard 39 communities.. We're providing 15 to 20 percent of the new hires across these communities on average and our alumni force as you heard is 20,000 strong and our budget is \$200 plus million a year.. And because as we scaled, we've also endeavored to get much better at what we do to continue the continuous improvement effort which is leading us to understand a great deal about what teachers were truly putting their kids on a different trajectory or doing differently and how we can train and develop more teachers to teach that successfully.. So our program has gotten a lot stronger and every year becomes stronger and stronger.. And at the same time, we're doing a lot more to maximize the impact of our alumni force through both fostering the community among them but also undertaking initiatives to accelerate their leadership to get these folks who have the foundational experience of having taught in this context to get into positions of educational leadership, political leadership, policy, and advocacy leadership, to launch social enterprises earlier than they otherwise would so that they can be a force for ultimately fundamental change.. And I think, I think the lessons that we'd learned, the very hardest possible way and my first book really documents this in kind of painful detail.. But those lessons were so fundamental because we learned them in the hardest possible way.. I mean through many near-death experiences and what not and really were the foundational lessons that informed the growth we then undertook..

And growth brings many new challenges but it also brings many advantages.. And we were able to work the advantages to attract a totally different level of resources, a totally different level of talent.. And that helped us undertake the kind of new learning curves that it would take to do what we're doing on a much bigger scale.. I've recently spent a good amount of time over the last year to again with our team but stepping back to reflect on now where are we.. You know where are we in the larger education reform effort? Where are we as an organization and where are we headed? And just want to share a little bit about that, kind of where that thinking and reflection has taken us just this context and then would love to open it up and talk about whatever you all want to talk about.. I think to try to give the short answer here.. When I think about where we are today in this education reform effort, we're at a place I never would have predicted we could be at, five years ago, ten years

ago, and twenty years ago.. When I got into this in the US, the prevailing notion fueled by all the research was that kids raised in socio-economic background on average determined their educational prospects.. We did not have evidence that schools could overcome the effects of socio-economic background.. And if we had gone and looked hard, I think it would have been hard to find even a handful of schools that were showing that actually it is possible..

I'm not sure we could have found one but let's just say we even could have found one or two, people would have chalked this up to charismatic school leaders and would have presumed that if they left the whole thing would fall apart.. Now, past forward to today we have undisputable evidence in hundreds of classrooms but also in hundreds of whole schools that it is completely possible to provide kids facing all the extra challenges of poverty with an education that is transformational, meaning not just have a few kids beat the odds which through our country's history we know it's always possible but to put whole buildings full of kids who, based on their socio-economic background, would be predicted to have a 50 percent chance of graduating from high school and would be predicted to have about an eighth-grade skill level if they did on a trajectory that leads some to graduate from college at much the same phase as kids in more privileged communities.. This is pretty radical progress.. Now, we still have massive challenges ahead like if you look at the aggregate data, despite all the proof points, despite seen now.. Wow, we know it's possible.. We even know how to replicate success.. There's still a massive question about how do we do that at the scale of the magnitude of the problem.. If you look at the aggregate data, we still have not moved the needle against the achievement gap in any really at all but certainly not in a meaningful way.. And so, we've got a very real question on our hands about how do we scale this level of success.. Even to that question there, if you look at what's been happening in the last five years, five years ago we had convened a big summit of the thought leaders in education, in philanthropy, and what not in policy and it said, "Let's put on a piece of paper, the cities in our country where we really have no hope at all for the public school system." Who would have a big debate? I don't know who would abound on the list but certainly New Orleans would have been right up there..

And so, would Washington DC and those are two of probably the two fastest improving urban school systems in the country right now.. So you know not that the verdict is out in terms of we know that they've done what they need to do forevermore.. I mean the problems are still immense in these two places but there's reason for optimism that we can effect dramatic positive change at the system level.. So all of this is that's enough to fuel anyone's sense of urgency and sense of responsibility, right? Because now we know, wow this can be done so sort of a moral imperative to figure out how do we do it at a scale of the problem.. And you know when you get into it, I believe that I guess I spent a lot of time trying to understand what's going on in the places where the transformational change is happening.. In classrooms where that's happening, in the whole school building where that's happening, in the systems where we're starting to see evidence of serious positive change and what I come to believe is that you know the most, maybe the most, certainly the most foundational difference in those places where we see transformational change happening is that the leader of those systems has committed themselves to a different mission.. Then most of our public schools and even private schools commit themselves too.. They have committed themselves to the mission of transformational education like they have said to themselves, "We're going to put our kids on a different trajectory and that is a mission, I mean, I went to a public school in Dallas, Texas.. It was always on those top ten list of top public schools in the country.. You think that was a transformational school? No..

Bunch of people, bunch of economically pretty privileged kids showed up at school on a path to graduating from college and came up the other and four years later on a path to graduating from college, perfectly good school not a transformational school.. And we have the same thing going on in our urban and rural schools, right? We've got lots of kids showing up on a path not to graduate from high school let alone college and their coming out in the same way.. So in order to make a difference in this, the most important thing we need is people to say, "We're going to commit ourselves to a different mission for our public schools in economically disadvantaged communities." And then to a company that commitment with a level of energy and discipline that you would find in any organization or any endeavor where people are taking on big audacious goals.. So what you realized when you spend a lot of time in this context is that all the things that maybe many of you have seen in other sectors leaders who are obsessed first and foremost with building strong teams, with building a strong culture of excellence and achievement, with building systems where every adult in the system holds themselves accountable and then is committed to continuous improvement and ethic that look we're going to do whatever it takes to get to the end goal.. If we walked in to any number I mean we could drive a couple of miles and go to schools in East Palo Alto and start talking to the teachers and the principals here and asking them, "Wait, why are the outcomes what they are?" and they'd say, "What can we do?" I mean, the kids are facing so many extra challenges are coming so far behind.. I mean, there are limitations what we can do? Limitations? These folks in the transformational environments don't think about limitations.. They think about, "Well, this is the goal, got to do whatever it takes." It probably means we got to start the school day earlier and later make it longer, bring in extra supports into the picture but we're going to do whatever it takes to put kids on a different trajectory.. So the people who are in the transformational environments have figured out this is what it's about.. One of the things I think is going on in the broader movement is that there are so many people who so desperately want to solve the problem tomorrow that instead of embracing the long, hard work of undertaking all that, we instead lurched from one kind of big silver bullet idea to the next.. And I think we need to sort of realize there are no silver bullets..

This is not as easy as giving every kid a computer or deciding that we'll just fix teachers or we'll fix this or that.. It's we got to commit ourselves to the whole shebang and ultimately create a policy environment that's conducive to building serious capacity in our education system.. And foundational, I mean, just circling back to the Teach For America story, what is informing our next five-year plan is just the recognition that we won't make this transition to a truly transformational school

system in urban and rural areas without a leadership force of people who are working at every level of the education system, at every level of policy who are the influencers in our country, who know what you know when you thought really successfully in this context which is that they know it's possible to pull this off.. They know there's no silver bullet.. They know it's about just an enormous amount of hard work and organizational building.. And as a result, they're going to make decisions differently and create different policies and what not.. So that's leading us to say, "OK, so we've pulled off a good deal in the last two decades.. We have a strong foundation to work from but we've got to just redouble our efforts and we've launched the big and ambitious and hard plan but to double in scale in the next five years so that we will be providing between 20 and 25 percent of the new hires across 60 communities.. We'll double our alumni force in that time as well so that we'll have 40 plus thousand Teach For America alumni out there working in communities.. And we're going to try to do all that..

We're getting much better ensuring that many more of our teachers, our transformational teachers and that many more of our alums are in positions of leadership running schools, running school systems, in positions of elected office, and what not.. So that's our charges as we move ahead.. And I think I'll just end this by saying, there are couple of things they didn't probably fully get in there but the most salient lesson of this work is that this is possible.. This is in fact a solvable problem.. And you know, it's not the people who joined Teach For America don't think of course it's possible, of course it's possible to help more kids attain a better education.. But I mean we've really come to believe that I think through this work you come to realize we can actually do this, meaning we could get to the point where we have a situation where we're providing all of our kids in our country with an education that sets them up to have the full range of professional options and life options.. And once you realized that, I mean, then you realized, "Wow, I mean, we could be part of that effort and that's what has kept me in this and it's what has drawn many, many other people to it and actually I hope there are people in this room who will think about channeling their full time and your full time energies against this problem because we need a lot of help if we're really going to pull it off.. So should we open it up at that? Sure.. And I get to tick it off.. Thank you very much..

Thanks for coming and sharing your story with us and congratulations.. Oh, and I have to stand up here which means I have to pick up.. I have so many mikes, I thought come on life support here.. OK.. First question, it seems like you operate in a political mine field, that it is a pretty challenging environment and you've got a lot of forces that are deeply entrenched and have ways of doing certain things that control the vast majority of the resources going into the education system and yet you've tried to maintain a place of political, a Switzerland of politics and not getting in to some of the political battles.. On the other hand, you talked about how much you've learned about what works and what doesn't work.. How do you navigate the politics while still trying to bring the learning to improve the overall education system? Well, one thing is that I do deeply believe in this particular theory of change, right? Which means that I think that anyone person or one organization coming out with its policy perspective is not as powerful as generating a force of thousands of our countries' most talented leaders who know from their first hand experience what the real answers are and will then work this at every level of policy and for many different angles and perspectives.. So I think keeping my eye on that ball even when I'm very tempted to get pulled into a policy debate which I do get tempted to do and thankfully I have people around me pulling me back.. I know that in the end actually the education movement is going to be best served if we stay focused on what we are the best in the world at or at least aspire to be the best in the world at which is to be the people pipeline that fuels all these other reforms.. When the other piece of this I would say is that I probably just genuinely do have a view that and I think it's a view shared by many but probably not all of the folks in the Teach For America community that I just think this is a deeply systemic problem and this is not a problem in my mind that we have because we have unions or because teachers in low-income communities are terrible or because the parents of kids in low-income communities don't care..

I mean each of these groups has been the target of an incredible amount of kind of vitriol at one point or another.. And you know, everyone's to blame.. All these groups are to blame and so are we because we are citizens in this country.. We are not informed about the issues.. We are electing people who are not informed et cetera.. I mean I just think this is a huge problem and that it isn't productive or fair to blame anyone group.. And so probably that perspective is a natural way to hold myself back in some of the stuff.. I think we all need to change now that we know it's possible to say, "OK, how can we create a new world?" Thank you.. I want you to repeat the question.. So Wendy OK..

Repeat the question to everyone.. Yeah.. Hi, I'm a third-grade teacher in East Palo Alto and I would love to hear your thoughts on, well first of all, I'm a big fan.. I think it's awesome, all that you bring to it.. But I'm curious to know about I'm talking about this huge level of dedication that's required of teachers and how do you deal with you can talk about kind of the burn out factor that is a huge problem of teachers.. Yeah.. Totally.. So question is from this gentleman who's in his third year of teaching.. In East Palo Alto, you know, you talk about the huge level of dedication that's necessary to teach successfully in this context, how you deal with the burn out factor.. And I think it's a perfect great question..

And it's one that I think a lot about because I actually don't believe that the answer to this problem is to expect the hundreds of thousands of teachers in our urban and rural schools to themselves be transformational teachers in our existing environments which are not transformational environments.. I mean it's essentially asking hundreds of thousands of people to build islands of excellence in what in some cases are sort of seas of dysfunction not necessarily because of even the people in that puzzle but just because schools have not been set up to meet the extra needs of kids in this context.. And I actually personally believe that you know teacher is the latest silver bullet.. It's like everyone just thinks oh that's the answer.. If we could just get to the point where we have 3.7 million high performing teachers in this country that would solve the problem.. I think what's led me to be skeptical of that is just our own experience.. Like this book which I just wrote which will soon come

out called "The Chance To Make History" takes its title from one of our teachers who walked in to her ninth-grade biology class in the Bronx and said to her kids, "You know, this is your chance to make history." and put them on this quest to take the region's exam and pass it.. What she did it's so humbling to get to know a teacher like that.. And honestly, it's overwhelming and humbling and everything else like the teachers who are doing what Megan Brissau, this teacher, pulled off.. They're extraordinary..

We need many more of them given the state of affairs today.. But all you have to do is spend time with them to realize this is not ultimately our answer.. Now, I think it's possible to create whole schools that make it much easier to teach that way and that make it possible to sustain the level of success.. And in fact, many of the very high performing charters were started by teachers who were themselves transformational teachers who thought there's got to be a better way for the teachers, for the kids.. Let's create a whole building that is actually designed to foster and facilitate this.. And now, I think the challenge is how do we scale that but I think it's sustainable if we take this on from a system perspective and try to build the systems that make it possible to teach successfully without being an absolute superhero.. In the meantime, I think, we need as many superheroes as we can get and I think that our best bet for building a leadership force necessary to effect the structural and systemic changes is to fuel as many leaders as we can into teaching so that they then go off and pioneer the bigger changes.. Yeah.. So you were talking about your initial work like you know initial marketing campaign for Teach For America pushing flyers under doors and like a grassroots approach.. And it's very exciting to hear that from an undergraduate perspective..

It's very empowering to think that you can start a major non-profit organization or a major movement with something as small as a flyer campaign on campus.. So I wonder if you could talk more about the entrepreneurial process that you took when you started this organization.. Any advice you have to young social entrepreneurs on making one of those lists.. So the question is can you talk more about sort of the initial entrepreneurial process essentially.. So one of the biggest assets I had was the fact that there was a thesis requirement at Princeton.. In all honesty, because it sort of it was my opportunity to develop the plan and argument for the creation of this organization.. And I think, I'm not sure I would have spent four months and done lots of research and developed at least what I thought at the time was a well thought through plan for the launch of this.. If I hadn't had that and I mean this is sort of obvious but maybe not to everyone.. I think really taking the time to do the research and developed the plan initially is clearly step one.. I'd say all the time to and it sounds maybe flippant but I really, really truly mean it..

I mean I think the other big asset I had was my inexperience.. And I didn't know what was impossible.. And I think there's much to be said for that.. There's also much to be said for experience but I don't think we would have Teach For America today if I had known at some level more than I need then.. So embrace, the point is, embrace your inexperience.. Don't be held back by it.. It can be an asset.. I think, yeah, I mean the other thing I would say I think is in order to get this off the ground, I needed a lot of help.. And in particular and most dauntingly at the time I needed a lot of money.. So I spent my first that seemed like the most daunting piece of this to me like I developed this plan..

I had this idea that it just had to start with five hundred people.. I mean that was based on various convictions around conveying that this was a movement not a little program.. I needed to surround it with a sense of urgency and national importance.. That was going to cost \$2.5 million.. And where was that money going to come from.. So I spent the first, after I got the initial seed grant, I spent from one of those people included in the Fortune article I mentioned earlier.. And I mean I just wrote letters to these people blindly.. Those people and some other randomly selected corporate executives like the CEOs of major companies I heard from.. I mean talk about the power of inexperience.. Some of those people actually met with me..

So just go to embrace the inexperience.. But I spent the first three months after I graduated from college just trying to get into doors.. Of course, it's more challenging than it seems now.. I would send a hundred letters and get a meeting or two but then we worked out from those people to try to meet others.. And I think, I got lots and lots and lots of no's.. And I think one thing I came to see and probably just knew intuitively is this is a search for allies.. You actually don't need everyone.. You need a few true allies.. And I feel like my whole last 20 years has been a search for allies.. And what I ultimately realized too is that the people you meet in that first summer may say no and no and no for the next 12 years and in your 13 could be your biggest enabler..

And I wished I'd known that then because I would have been much nicer to everyone.. Kept in touch with everyone.. But it really is a true I mean gosh it's just a law of life that I've now discovered.. I don't know that's maybe some of it.. Honestly it was an immense amount of hard work.. It was extraordinarily stressful.. Yes, I was constantly thinking the whole thing was going to fall apart.. Yeah, yes.. So I... was like the TFA, just got off the phone..

My friend is teaching through TFA in Boston but how would you respond to criticisms that TFA teacher aren't sufficiently skilled just doing summer training and that you know elite students of our nation's best colleges aren't necessarily the best teachers and that TFA is a band-aid solution, it's not sustainable because people just go in for two years and then move on.. Yes, OK.. Multi-part question hopefully I will remember all the parts.. How do I respond to critics that people from elite colleges are not necessarily the best teachers for kids in this context that the Teach For America corps members are not skilled enough, well prepared enough after summer training and that this is a band-aid program because people commit two years? And how can that solve the whole problem? Is that, OK? So let me just take each of these.. So first of all, Teach For America recruits contrary to most perceptions, far and wider, our corps last year represented 500 colleges and universities

across the country.. But we do recruit most aggressively at the most competitive colleges in the country.. So when you look at the U.S.. News and World Report lists the top 350 colleges in the country, those are pretty much our recruitment priorities.. I do think that that is critical.. We need our most well-educated, most skilled folks to channel their energy into ensuring that the education of the next generation is as strong as it can possibly be..

That is not the reality today.. If you actually take a hard look at who decides to go into teaching on average, you will find that it's generally not the most capable people graduating from the most selective colleges.. And I think we have to change that.. Now, there are exceptions to all those rules.. There are definitely people we would die to have within Teach For America who were at college number 750 on the selectivity list.. And there are definitely awesome people at some of the most competitive colleges going into teaching without Teach For America.. So there are the outliers but in terms of where the lion's share of Teach For America resources should go I think we are doing a great service by making teaching a cool thing to do at these very selective colleges.. We've also spent a lot of time though.. I think our selection process is not what some perceived it to be.. It's not like we think, "Oh great any Harvard or Stanford I should say since I'm at Stanford 3.5 GPA person should get in to Teach For America..

No." We have spent enormous amounts of time and energy trying to understand what are the personal characteristics that are differentiating the teachers who are in fact transformational teachers.. And we've developed a predictive selection model.. No selection model is perfect.. Ours does get better and better each year based on the data.. It gets more and more predictive.. It's probably one of the most predictive selection models out there based on this is what selection experts tell us.. What we found is that people who have track records of achievement across academics, extracurriculars, or work experience, people who demonstrate perseverance in the face of challenges, people who have the ability to influence and motivate others, who have a level of organizational ability, problem solving ability and who approach this with respect and humility in terms of how they work with others are more likely to be successful.. So we've developed all sorts of different screens that try to identify those folks and they can come from anywhere but who demonstrate these characteristics.. In terms of the preparation, there's first of all probably a lot of truth to the fact that I think there's no pre-service program that can eliminate the learning curve that comes along with being a first-year teacher in any environment let alone in the environments that we're operating in.. But we've learned a lot again about what not just what the characteristics of the transformational teachers are as they come in but how they teach..

And we've seen quite extraordinary patterns across these folks and as a result have developed an understanding of what the kind of mindsets and skills and knowledge are that teachers need in order to be truly successful in this particular environment.. So we've developed a very intense, very goal-oriented pre-service program.. I would put it up against any pre-service program in the country by a long shot.. If what we're talking about is producing teachers who will be prepared to effect significant academic gains with their kids in low-income communities.. And then, we know that actually the biggest issue is what kind of management and training on-going professional development do they get once they are as unique people in their unique environments? And we've done a lot to invest in that piece as well to do what any good manager would do.. So we're doing a lot.. The evidence would show that in fact I mean first of all the majority of the principals say that the Teach For America corps members are better trained than their other new teachers.. Just opinion, just what they think.. But more importantly, the data would show that these folks are in fact more successful as new teachers than other new teachers.. And even in some cases, the more experienced teachers in their schools..

So that's what I would say to those critics.. And I would invite them in because I think people are completely shocked when they realized what Teach For America puts into the training and support of its teachers.. And then finally to the band-aid question.. I think it's important and it's very easy to lose this in the halls of academia but to remember that the nature, the magnitude of the crisis we have, right? So 15 million kids growing up in poverty.. By the time they're in fourth grade, they're three-grade levels behind, half of them will not graduate from high school and the half who do will have an eighth-grade skill level.. If you are a kid in a low-income community, you have a 10 percent likelihood of graduating from college.. This is a crisis.. It exists despite the efforts for decades of very well-intentioned policy makers, deans of teacher education, school superintendents.. In the light of that challenge, we need out-of-the-box solutions.. And this one is about saying, "You know what, let's make this the cause of our future leaders." Let's be sure that the most capable people..

The people who Goldman-Sachs most wants and lot of other places most want channel their energy against this problem.. Let's invest in those people to make sure that they're successful as they can be, that they learn as many of the right lessons as they can learn.. And then, let's support them to go out and figure out what is the solution to that crisis.. We think a lot of those people are probably going to have to stay in education.. No one would have predicted, 65 percent of these folks who were not going to go into teaching would stay a long term in education but they do.. Sixty five percent of our 20,000 alums are working full time in education.. Half of them is teachers, 600 of them is school principals, many others is district leaders.. But honestly, some of them have to leave because all you have to do is work in schools to realize we're definitely not going to solve this problem from outside the system alone.. And that's why many people have to stay but we can't solve it from within schools alone.. We need policy makers and the people who most influenced them to understand this problem in a way that almost no one understands it today..

So that's it's a counter intuitive theory of change.. And I'm sorry to be grumbling like this but the others just quickly I tell the story in my book about my little eight-year old who's writing a school paper and he's to interview someone who's solve the

problem.. And he starts interviewing me and he goes to this whole thing I think we're done.. He's like, "Mom, you know one more question." And he says, "If this is such a big problem, the fact that poor kids don't have a good education.. Why would you ask the most inexperienced people to take it on?" And literally, I mean, I was dying when he asked this question because I mean this is my own son.. He believes in his mom as kids typically do.. And I realized at that point, why I've done nothing for 20 years to try to help people understand this theory of change.. It gets so counter intuitive that my son wouldn't get it after all of this.. So anyway, but it's working.. And that was the one piece I realized as I grumbled through my initial talk that I actually didn't spend any time at all talking about what we see happening in communities today..

But we've been placing teachers in some of these communities now for a decade, 15 years.. Some of them 20 years, places like Houston and Newark and DC and New Orleans and Oakland and Chicago and any number of other places remote rural communities as well.. And I've seen the change in these communities.. There is a level of optimism about the possibility of change.. There is hardcore evidence.. There is huge momentum.. There is change that literally 10 years ago, people could not have predicted.. It's happening for many reasons.. It's not like I'm saying let's just teach America.. It's just that if you took all the Teach For America people out of the picture, you would take away most of the energy, the leadership..

You take away the people at the center of that effort.. And all you have to do is go see it for yourself to realize that it's really true.. Like there's something very powerful.. I'm sure I didn't really understand how this is going to work when I first started in but there is a very powerful transformative experience for teachers who teach successfully in this context.. And it changes every decision they make after that.. Every life decision, career decision, and what they say when they're in the big policy rooms as well.. And in the end, there's something very important about that.. OK, yes.. So one of the key transitions you mentioned was developing a well-managed and well-organized organization.. So I was wondering if you could talk about the evolution of your approach to management and how you manage today and what are some of the metrics that you might look at? So the questions about what I mentioned as the kind of importance of the learning curve I went through around good management..

He's just asking what I have I learned and what's my approach.. You know, I think, I mean this is very basic I guess.. I mean first of all, I loved Jim Collins like I read Jim Collins' books and I'm just like yes this is it.. So I mean and he's so much better at articulating all this and I would be but I really just deeply believe everything that has come out of his research around "Built to Last" and "Good to Great".. But I think it came there through a long and winding curve.. I mean I think first of all the notion that people are everything and that I mean it's very hard to act on this lesson actually.. I mean every day, I think to myself, actually I should stop everything I'm doing right now and just spend all of my time looking for the people who have what it takes to lead us forward in any given number of areas beyond where I can personally even fathom how to take us.. It's sort of I think in every turn, I probably not quite acted on that enough.. But I do intellectually know and that is the key to everything.. We put a lot into I sort of came the hard way to realizing that we're going to have to really approach the development of our own culture at Teach For America in a pretty systematic way..

And we built a culture around our core values that I think is one of our greatest assets.. I think the fact that we go through these kind of five-year planning cycles where we step back really center ourselves in our theory of change and ask ourselves, "What are the key priorities? What are the big goals in those areas?" has been a powerful lever.. I think just taking the time to reflect, aligning everyone in our now 1,500 staff person organization all of our boards nationally in those 39 regions.. All of our funders around here's where we're going, here's how we're measuring success has been very fundamental to our growth.. Those are some of the, we built a very outcomes oriented, data driven.. I can't claim to even be, I mean thankfully I do have people around me who know how to do this much better than I do.. And you know we built a very data driven and continuously improving organization.. Yes.. So I have a question.. Earlier you mentioned that one of the biggest things you show within the last 20 years is convincing people that this counterintuitive model of two-year teaching and then taken the best people and putting them into all sorts the different possible jobs et cetera, et cetera is going to change the problem by putting the most inexperienced, the smartest people into the classroom..

And so, I was wondering at this point, I get some quick research on TFA before.. I had applied to the program.. I was really strongly considering, yeah, going for with it.. So I saw that there are a lot of results you know like a lot of papers out there that cite Teach For America being very successful but then that there are also a lot of really strong criticisms.. But I know, you mentioned it briefly earlier.. But I want to know, how much does Teach For America focus on sort of communicating the fact that they are successful in media and marketing programs versus how much effort they put into continuing to develop and train the teacher corps which is you know ultimately the mission of Teach For America.. I guess it's a question of which do you approach first and which one do you put more emphasis on? Any better results or communicating the fact that there are live results and hey.... back off and let us do what to do.. OK.. So the question is I mean if you go do an Internet search out there, you would find these studies that show that the Teach For America corps members are effective and actually, I'm changing your question but I mean the most rigorous studies really do show this but then you'd also find a lot of other stuff..

You'd find a lot of criticisms.. And you'd find even studies by the way that is some methodology or another and show that they're having really negative impact.. You'd find all sorts of stuff.. And so, this question was how much of your time do you spend trying to get better and how much of your time do you spend trying to communicate the results that you already have.. In our case, the fact is we're sort of our own biggest critics.. I think we're not good enough.. It's not to say actually don't think that I think many of the critics are just misinformed.. And I think the fact is we've got a very positive baseline up there.. We've

got teachers who are doing a responsible job.. This is certainly not irresponsible..

But this is very, very hard.. And the fact is that overtime what I've seen in our work is that some of our people have shown us what's possible.. And yet, others are not at all at that level.. And so, we spend most of our time trying to get better for the sake of the kids we're working with and for the sake of our long-term mission.. We're trying to figure out how do we get more of our people to be as successful as the most successful of them.. So I think in order to fulfill our potential, we have to do that.. And I think probably our marketing communications and public relations every time have really been quite as sophisticated as they need to be.. We try to fix that problem overtime but certainly we've got lots of sophistication going on on the effort to get not only bigger but much better.. Yes.. Yeah..

Yeah.. So my question it seems like the condition of over the past 10 or 20 years.. There are many turns 20 years ago was to set up admissions policies and funnel education money at the secondary level to scholarships and things that with almost light at the end of the tunnel that carried on a stick for those people that did want to graduate to make sure they make that transition from high school or college.. There wasn't their socio-economic background that held them back to the tuition cost or whatever.. What would you say is the relative importance of those programs still today where you try to set up a ground base, a bottoms-up approach to transforming those people at an earlier level? How much is it still important to provide that light at the tunnel? So the question is you know 20 years ago, there are lots of programs like providing scholarships for the kids in urban and rural areas who you know did make it in to college to enable them to go and those light at the end of the tunnel programs you know serves some purpose.. And how much are they still important today like versus the effort to ensure that from an early age more and more people are set up to compete to get in to college.. And what I would say is I think we need to do a lot more than we're already doing actually.. I think these schools that are out there putting a whole new generation of kids on a path to getting into college are realizing how tough it is.. I mean actually I don't think people realized how big the achievement gap is in college.. I just saw the stats and sadly I'm going to be able to pull them up but it's shocking to realize the dropout rate among kids who get in to college from low-income communities..

And actually the schools that have done so much to help their kids access a new opportunity are now also putting a lot of energy into trying to figure out how do we address that.. What kind of financial supports and community supports at the school, at the college level are necessary to help people make it? We just did a whole piece on this on our alumni magazine which it's kind of uncover, unpacks all the different dimensions of the problem.. But I think it's absolutely critical.. I think it's a fundamental piece of the question.. Yes.. I have sort of a two-part question.. One, can you say a little more about your revenue model, how Teach For America get its money, what are its expenses, what the operating cost is, how do you.... and how you plan to scale out of the next five years if you're going to grow so much.. And two, just sort of curious, curious on my own part, how do you feel about the programs that allow students to make money for their grades so that agents go to offer financial incentives for their grades, forget academic performance? So one question about what's our sort of revenue and expense model and another question around how do I feel about programs that provide kids financial incentives to do well.. On the latter question, at some level again we have huge crisis..

We should experiment with anything that can truly create not just incremental change like we don't need incremental change.. We need like transformational change.. I will admit I'm pretty skeptical that the transformational answer here is to pay kids for grades.. I don't think so.. The kids we worked with especially in this transformational context.. You get the kids on a mission.. I've never met kids more on a mission than the kids in these classrooms in these schools that we're talking about.. And there's nothing that's more of an incentive than having a straight-up, heart-to-heart series of conversations with kids and their parents about the stakes for them if they either do or don't turn it around on the academic trajectory piece.. And I don't think we need the financial incentives actually but I think without the real conversation people don't actually even know the stakes.. So it's just not where I put my energy but the more experiments around things that are well-intentioned the better..

I thought that Roland Fryer just did a whole study that sort of showed that actually the strategies I don't want to get wrong.. I would look up his studies.. I thought that it was a little more disparaging than his theory was at the beginning.. Revenue model, Teach For America expense about \$40,000 on every recruit from start to finish meaning from the time we start recruiting them to the time they go through a summer full of training to two years of ongoing professional development and support.. And so, in a world where we'll have more than 9,000 teachers next year our budget is about \$250 million or so.. Seventy percent of our funding, the thing that we figured out the long hard way in our first decade that there's a constituency for improving local public schools.. You know there's school districts with budgets.. There are states that are investing and trying to improve public schools.. There are individuals and corporations and foundations that care about their local public schools.. And what we realized is that we could and basically we set up a system where we can only grow and sustain our presence in communities that are investing in it..

And so, it's on our team like Emily Bobel here who leads our Bay Area efforts who's trying to figure out, "How do I build the support to double our impact in the Bay Area over the next five years?" And in order to do that she knows she's got to double the funding base from \$10 million a year to \$20 million a year.. So how is she going to enlist the public support and most significantly since 70 percent of our support is private? The private sector support necessary to do that.. The other 30 percent comes from some national philanthropy and some federal funding.. We have to double our funding base in the next five years.. It's pretty daunting.. But we're going to open up 20 new sites which is whole new local communities willing to invest in education reform.. Grow in existing sites where there's just growing evidence of not only the possibility of change in

education but the role Teach For America is playing.. We desperately need to convince the federal government to invest more and that is a saga that you don't have time to listen to.. And I don't know what the solution is.. And on that cheerful note....

Yes.. We're out of time.. We want to thank you very much.. Thank you...