

URL: <https://stvp.stanford.edu/blog/videos/thirsting-for-a-life-of-service-entire-talk>

Scott Harrison, founder and CEO of charity:water, shares his entrepreneurial path from a life of pure self-interest to one driven by a desire to bring clean water to millions. In this compelling talk, Harrison shares his interest and approach in re-inventing the charity sector, along with the powerful stories of those affected by his organization's work.



Transcript

I'm so excited to be here and for those of you guys in the room I am going to show you a ton of photos.. I am a really visual thinker.. I think in pictures.. I'm a photographer, so I'm excited to kind of share a lot of the photos and videos that I've taken.. If you're on podcast I think they're going to make the video possible, so you can see some of the stuff.. If I'm describing something that is not on the screen well that's why.. I'm going to talk a little bit about my back story and how I got into this.. I would probably be the last guy you would expect to be talking to you about water or charity if you met me 10 years ago and I'll tell you why.. I am going to talk a little bit about the water crisis but hopefully not in the typical kind of NGO way and just hammer you with a bunch of statistics but share some stories and tell you about some real people and then I'll talk about charity:water in the last seven years and the way that we've tried to approach this really as a startup and not coming from any sort of charity background I think some of the advantages that we've had.. So I'll start with me as a kid..

My parents actually used a cereal bowl to cut my hair.. Hence the bowl cut.. Born into - I was born in Philadelphia, middle class family, only child.. When I was four my mom gets really sick and becomes an invalid.. And family planning stopped.. I went into a caregiver role at a really early age, and was like the perfect kid growing up to be quite honest.. I mean I am taking care of my mom, I was active in my church and just did all of the right things, said all the right things until the age of 18.. And like so many bad cliches, I was like an hour and half outside of New York City and I grew my hair long down to my shoulders.. I joined a band and now it was time to look out for number one and go get famous in the Big Apple.. So I moved to New York City..

We immediately break up because our band hates each other, even though we were good.. And I learned that on the other side of the business the people that were actually booking our bands out were the ones making all the money.. And now kind of in New York, no band anymore, I learned that you could actually get paid to drink alcohol for free.. And there was a job called a night club promoter and if you could get the right people inside clubs, you could charge them extraordinary amounts to pay for alcohol and you could make an amazing living doing this.. So I figured, I'm going to rebel, let's rebel in style, and I spend the next 10 years filling up night clubs.. I was kind of that guy on the one - I was on the inside of the one-way glass and there was the velvet rope outside and we were deciding who could come in.. And inside the club, you would spend \$600 on a bottle of champagne.. We were going and buying these things for 30 bucks like, 'I can't believe people are buying this for \$600!' So this is a snapshot of life at 28 and I share this photo because it's indicative of what a scumbag I'd become.. I'm holding ostensibly out the Rolex watch that I own so the photographer notices that I have an expensive watch.. By all means, I had gotten everything I thought I wanted at this point so I wanted to climb to the top of New York night life..

This is my business partner.. We were working two nights a week.. Bacardi was paying us \$2,000 a month just to be seen in public drinking Bacardi, Budweiser paid us another \$2,000 a month just to drink Bud in public and we're like, we're awesome.. We drink for free, our friends drink for free and we get paid to do this.. So looked great on the outside, if you'd continued partying with me until 5:00 or 6:00 or 7:00 in the morning, the shine wore off and it was a really kind of dark, decadent existence.. So by the age of 28 I have assumed every single vice that you would imagine comes with night life.. I smoke 2.5 packs of Marlboro a day.. I drink excessively.. I am a coke user, an MDMA user, an X user.. I have a gambling problem, a pornography problem and a strip club problem..

So thankfully I woke up out of my stupor after 10 years of this and I was in Punta del Este in South America with all of

these beautiful people and we'd rented out a house with some night life people.. We have servants, we have horses.. We spent \$1,000 on firework and my life looks great.. I'm dating a girl that's in magazines, I have a BMW, I have a Labrador retriever and I have a grand piano in my apartment and I am supposed to be really freaking happy.. And it just dawned on me that I am not only the most miserable person I know, I'm the worse person I know.. I mean there is no one more selfish and sycophantic than I was.. And I realized that the legacy I was creating, what I was going to be known for, was that guy who threw parties and just got people wasted.. And there was kind of wreckage everywhere.. I mean there was wreckage in my own life and we just kind of had this trail of wreckage everywhere.. So I came to my senses, hung over during the day, so I start reading theology and exploring a very, very lost faith as a kid and I remember a lot of hypocrisy I had seen growing up and I said what would the exact opposite of my life look like? What would the 180 of this selfish night club promoter partying every night look like? And as I started re-exploring some of these values, I thought, what if I were to serve the poor for a year? I mean that would be as opposite as I could imagine..

So I came back after this vacation, I'm like I got to get out of night life, took me a little while.. One night I rented a Ford Blue Mustang and I drove north with a bottle of Doers and a Bible, and I had no idea where I was going.. I wound up in Moose Head Lake in Maine and from the dial up internet cafe, I start applying to the great humanitarian organizations of the world.. And I'm like, I am ready to serve you now.. So, to my surprise, they all deny me.. They're like, we don't want you here, like we're serious people, you know, you're running around getting people drunk for living.. So thankfully, so literally all these denials come in.. I have left night life.. I am ready to go and serve the poor and I can't.. One organization says, Scott if you pay us \$500 a month, you can volunteer with us..

I am not lying.. So I said here is my credit card details, where are you guys going? They said we are sailing a giant hospital ship on a mission to Liberia.. I had never heard of Liberia before.. I thought Africa was a country not made up of 40 some countries.. I mean, there was no one more politically or world illiterate than this guy.. But I said no problem, I'll join.. Thankfully I had kind of mailed in a degree at NYU as a journalist because I was a decent writer and I was a decent photographer and I was an only child.. My dad had saved up, I had to go up.. So I kind of dust off this degree and I said look, you guys are doing this mission.. I'm going to take pictures and I'm going to tell stories..

And by the way, I know 10,000 people in New York nightlife.. So I may be able to raise awareness.. So they accept me on those terms and this becomes my new home.. This giant 522-foot yacht that has been gutted and turned into a hospital ship.. So it's an amazing organization now with a 26-year legacy and a simple idea, bring the best doctors and surgeons in the world on their vacations to serve the poorest people in the world who have no access to medical care.. And I remember living at - my room was about 200 square feet on this ship.. It was bunk beds, there were cockroaches because this thing was 50 years old.. And I remember just feeling sorry for myself until I grabbed my camera and started seeing how people were living in post war Liberia.. And then I stopped feeling sorry for myself.. So the country had been at war for 14 years, there was no public electricity, no sewage, no mail at the time..

And there was one doctor for every 50,000 people that lived there.. So when you got sick, you were screwed.. Here we I think have a doctor for 180 of us or so.. And people were living in bombed out buildings like this.. They were living in houses without roofs, without windows.. And before our giant hospital ship sailed in an advance team would fly out to the country and they put up these photos saying, if you guys have a huge tumor or flesh eating disease or if you were born with a cleft palate or a cleft lip, if you were burned during the war, turn up on this day and our doctors can help you.. There are these pivotal moments in life.. And this was one of them.. Our third day on the mission.. 5:30 in the morning, I grabbed my Nikon D1X, I am so excited because we're going to help people and I'm going to see who has responded to these fliers, and I know that we have the capacity to help 1,500 people..

We turn up at the soccer stadium and there are 7,000 people that have come and responded.. And we just realized, wow, we're going to turn over 5,000 people away.. First child in line was this boy named Alfred and I learned that I was going to be taking pictures of people with massive facial deformities up close and that was this job.. Alfred was 14, his mom had brought him there.. He was the first in line.. He was fine four years before this.. At 10 years old, she took out this photo and she said this is my son at 10.. His tumor started growing.. There was no surgeon to go to and this was her son at 14.. So I just freaked out..

Man, I ran in the corner of the stadium, I started crying, Chief Medical Officer had to come over me and kind of kick me in the butt and say, dude we've been doing this for 25 years, didn't you get the memo? You could have gone on our website.. Go do your job.. And I did.. I pulled it together and he said, look, we're going to be able to help Alfred, his story is going to end well, that's why we're here.. So I got through the two days of screening.. I met some incredible people in the next - I think two days later I scrubbed up and I got to watch these amazing doctors operate on Alfred's tumor, literally set it on the table.. And then they said ,why don't you take Alfred home.. Why don't you see what it's like when a child is welcomed back into this community that's been written off for dead.. And I got to take him home without his tumor a couple of weeks later and watch him heal.. And it was an extraordinary experience..

So that was what life was like.. Wake up in the morning, go down in the ward, meet Marthaline.. She starts telling me her story.. She has this towel in her hand that you can kind of see her holding because people would throw rocks at her when she left her hut, they thought she was cursed.. She needed a 40 minute surgery to get her face and her life back.. So it was an

extraordinary year, an extraordinary mission, I can probably do a day long presentation telling you about all the amazing people that I met and photographed and was able to get to know.. So I signed up for a second year.. I wasn't sure what was next but I said I'm not done here yet.. And on my second tour, I started learning that one of the things that was making people sick was the dirty water they were drinking in the villages.. And imagine this huge hospital ship, 350 doctors, nurses, surgeons and crew and one guy off to the side was given a little bit of money to go to work in the villages..

And the thing that he was working on was water.. So I had to document his work.. I would jump in his Land Rover and he would take me into villages and show me what people were drinking.. And I remember just - I was incredulous.. I just didn't believe it.. I was like, bro, come on.. Like I wouldn't let my dog drink that water.. No human being would ever drink water that was filled with scum and bugs and then we would watch kids come out of the forest, fill up their buckets, drink, take it back to their families.. The horrible irony was that in Liberia there is tons of groundwater and it was 40 feet underneath the village.. So what he would do is he would work with the locals..

He would train them.. He would provide the cement, the PVC and the pump and then he would take me back a couple of months later and I could watch these same communities drinking clean water for the first time.. So on the one hand I am photographing these expensive surgeries and there is this guy out to the side literally touching thousands of lives at a fraction of the cost.. And that just left a really deep impression on me.. Maybe this was the question behind the question of so much of this disease that we were seeing.. So I come back to New York.. I am 30.. I have less friends now because I've been blasting all of them pictures of tumors for the last couple years.. So my night life list had waned, there were kind of two typical responses, one: frigging take me off this list right now.. I set up for the Prada party, not the tumor party..

The other response, though, was this is amazing what these doctors are doing.. I never knew this existed.. I never been even heard about this country, how do I give money, how do I help, how do I serve.. And people began to volunteer.. So I learned the power of the image.. The power of story telling to move people, both away from you and towards you.. So I had seen all these problems when I was there and it seemed the problems with education and kids dying of AIDS and malaria and some of the justice issues and I'd spend time in leprosy colonies.. But I just kept coming back to this idea that - frigging people didn't have water, they were drinking from swamps, and that no child, no man or woman should be drinking dirty water in this world that we lived in.. And I said that's the problem I'm going to start working on.. So that's where the idea for charity:water was born..

I'll talk to you a little bit about water.. So a typical kind of water charity will just come at you guys with a bunch of stats.. So this is the top level stat.. They'll say a 800 million people right now don't have clean water to drink and I don't know about you but I can't imagine 800 million people of anything doing anything.. 5,000 kids died today of bad water.. It means nothing to me.. 40 billion hours are wasted in Africa fetching water every year.. I was not a statistics guy.. So I grabbed the camera and I just wanted to go and meet the people who were affected and learn about them and their families and meet their children.. So that's what the seven years have been for me..

And if you were to come with me, you would meet kids like John Masco and you'd freak out, when you watched him walk out of his apartment, or his small hut into this swamp and fill up his jerry can and then take it back to this family.. This is the only water he's ever known because of where he was born.. Open well in Northern Ethiopia.. It's a typical source, the community was sharing it with their cattle.. You guys can imagine there are lots of diseases associated with bad water.. Some of you've heard of like cholera, so maybe you haven't heard of like schistosomiasis.. Schistosoma, just a bad word for parasites.. 210 million people right now have worms growing around in their body because of the water that they've been drinking.. And if you want to know what that looks like, it's like this.. So this child was in Athani, Kenya..

She was drinking from a river.. Every time she would drink, she would throw up on herself.. And we just watched this in repeat in her.. Took the water away from her and gave her some mineral water that we had, promised to try to help her village but I really wanted to know what was actually inside the river.. So I took it back through customs, I gave it to a lab at Rockefeller University, I said could you guys put this under a microscope? And they made me this movie.. And they said look we're not experts in all the different kind of amoebas and parasites but that water is alive.. And nobody should be drinking water that is replicating in front of our eyes.. Okay, leeches.. Now I have never in a million years associated leeches with my drinking water.. But community after community would show us that this was their biggest problem..

They would hold out their hands, they'd say the big leeches.. We can always kind of filter them out with our cloth, with our scarves, with our t-shirts, but the little leeches will sometimes get through our filtration, grow up inside us and stick to the back of the throat.. And it's a big problem with their kids and two common ways we would hear rural communities deal with this problem.. One is to use a stick and to pry the leech from the back of their child's throat, hoping to actually kill it or it just crawls back up again.. These second was to drink diesel fuel, little bit, just enough to scald the leech and hopefully not enough to injure their child.. Typical filtration is just done using cloth in these villages.. It removes some of the sticks, some of the brackish content but obviously none of the unseen parasites.. Started coming across schools without water.. If there was a second issue that I was passionate about, it was probably education and I learned that about half of the schools in the world didn't have clean water or toilets.. And you say to yourself, well how can kids get a good education if they have to bring their river water with them in the morning? And when the girls hit puberty they stay home a few days every single month because there are no toilets and there is no water at the school and fall behind in their studies and we learned that water sanitation

and hygiene were incredibly linked together..

And if you drop out, this is your life as a teenage girl, you're just walking every day in the hot sun for hours with 40 pounds of water on your back, sometimes even more.. So I've seen a lot over the last seven years.. There is one story that stuck with me more than anything I've ever seen or heard.. Ethiopia is kind of my baby.. It's my favorite country.. I've been there 19 times over the last few years and we're making a big impact there.. I love the people there.. We work in area called Tigray in the north and I learned of this women's story.. Her name was Letekiros Haelu.. She was 22 years old and she had two kids and a husband..

And she lived 10 years ago so I didn't meet her.. So this is not her photo but it illustrates the region which is really dry and rocky and most importantly the clay pot.. So she didn't have the kind of yellow fuel can which as crazy as it is for us to imagine carrying water in a diesel can.. It's better than a clay pot which weighs 10 pounds or 15 pounds empty and then you fill it with 40 pounds of water.. So she had a clay pot and she was walking eight hours every single day.. Three hours out, five hours back.. One day she comes back into her village and she slips and she falls and the clay pot breaks and all the water that she has just spent the entire day fetching rolls out into the dry sand.. And instead of going back, she took the rope and she hung herself from the tree in the center of her village.. So this is the water crisis.. It's not about statistics..

It is about people who have names and children and families.. So what drove me crazy was that it was a solvable problem.. And if you didn't try to take one solution and jam it down the entire world's throat you know one filter and say well this is going to cure the water crisis.. If you were solution agnostic, you could solve this problem.. So sometimes the hand-dug well is the appropriate technology and there is water 40 feet underneath the village.. Sometimes water is at 1,000 feet deep and you can drill.. Sometimes there is no groundwater and you can protect a mountain spring, you could harvest the rain, you can filter dirty surface water using pond filters, biosand filters.. Every once in a while the hi-tech stuff works, the UF, the UV, carbon filters.. At its simplest for \$65 in Cambodia you can take dirty water like this, build a \$65 filter that the community actually builds themselves, they contribute \$5 per family and the dirty water goes in the top and comes out clean, water that you or I could drink.. And I drank this..

It's completely fine.. Takes out over 99% of the contaminants.. About \$6,000 to hand dig a well and that's just three months of digging.. And I get asked a lot how come the Africans just don't dig their own wells.. So this picture illustrates really that crucial moment.. This is a really good sign.. There is water coming in at the diggers' feet.. But to make this a successful sustainable project, you need to go about 20 feet deeper and to do that, you need a \$2,500 dewatering pump and \$2,500 generator to run it or else you're just standing in soup.. You need cement to make coverts so that the well doesn't collapse over time and it is continually sustainable.. But \$10,000 to drill a well instead of three month it takes three days, you're bringing a \$1 million drilling rig, eight skilled drillers hydrologists, technicians and you're tapping into these massive aquifers underneath these villages and it is incredible to see a community get clean water for the first time..

We got six liters per second out of this well.. It's enough for one jerry can, one person to have clean water every five seconds.. And we saw that when we could bring clean and safe drinking water into a village, it really had a transformative effect.. We say water changes everything.. It obviously improves the health of kids.. If you were not drinking dirty water with leeches, or with replicating parasites you're healthier, less money is spent on medicine, more time is spent at school if you're not walking hours every single day, if you're not sick with diarrhea.. We learned there was a huge, huge impact on the women.. And we would hear kind of two themes, one from women like this that say, I have this extra time in my day and I am now selling things at the market.. Sometimes rice, sometimes peanuts earning an extra \$0.50 a day.. And other women said, we just spend more time with our family..

We're just better moms.. What I loved probably most about the issue was that I really thought it was one of those few inarguable things in the world that every single person could agree.. I think every single person in this room thinks that that child should not be drinking the water on the left, but should be drinking clean water.. And what's beautiful about it is measurable, it's provable.. Either it's clean or it's not.. So lot of data about water making people healthier, it's been coming out lately that water also makes people wealthier and it's measurable.. The UN published an 88 page report saying every dollar you invest in water and sanitation returns an average \$4 to \$12 in economic returns.. Some of the stuff I mentioned, time savings, improved health, improved education, the ability to work and earn an income.. Community involvement is obviously key.. Maybe some of you guys are just saying that's great what happens after the project is built..

So training, setting up local water committees.. Here you can see there is a treasurer, a vice chairman, a secretary, a chairman, sanitation workers, this is the community.. The project is theirs.. And they are responsible for maintaining it and collecting a \$1 a day from every single family who uses the project.. All right, so what was I going to do about any of this.. 10 years partying, two years taking pictures, you could argue I wasn't qualified to do anything about the water crisis.. Anyway seven years ago, I figured I was just going to go for it and try and make the biggest impact I could with the rest of my life.. I really believed nobody should be drinking dirty water and I wanted to create a world where that happened.. Sorry guys.. So this is where I was living at the time..

This was a problem.. I had no money because I had given all my money to mercy ships and night club promoters have no concept on how to save money.. So I was broke.. Living on my friend's couch in SoHo.. And he says you can start your charity

from my couch and I said great.. So if you'd run into me seven years ago, I would have told you two things, I would have run around told you, I was going to end the water crisis in my lifetime.. And people were looking at me like I was crazy.. I would have also told you that I wanted to reinvent giving and reinvent the way people thought about charity.. So the first is obvious, and I'm going to talk a little bit more about this.. When I came back from Africa, my friends were like I don't trust charities..

I am not giving to charities because they are black holes and I don't know where my money actually goes.. And I thought man, you're just selfish.. I mean you just don't want to give.. But I realized there was a theme, there was an incredible distrust in non-profits.. And the black hole kept coming up, people seemed to pull some bad charity out of their back pocket and say see this CEO ran off with the kitty.. He hired his family.. This charity spent 95% of their money on admin and only sent 5% to the poor.. And I thought the biggest problem was around this business model.. The money was fungible and people really didn't know where it went.. So I thought man, if I'm going to solve a problem this big, we're going to need everybody to trust what we're doing..

So I had three big ideas around that.. The first was, solve the money problem and just make a promise to the public that from day one, 100% of their money will always go to projects, okay.. People said I was crazy like how will you pay for your staff, how will you pay yourself, how will you pay for an office.. How will you actually fly around and develop these projects.. I had no idea at the time guys.. I opened up two bank accounts and so with \$100 and said we will never touch the public's money, we will somehow convince other people that it's fun to pay for overhead.. Board members maybe, private donors, sponsors, but that would allow this very powerful model where we could tell the public every penny would always go to the projects and we'll be so crazy about this, we would pay back credit card fees.. So if someone donated \$1,000 in American Express took that 40, we would make the \$1,000 whole, we'd send all \$1,000.. That was idea number one.. Idea number two was let's use technology to prove where the money is going and let's show people their impact..

So two things that happened at the time, Google Earth had just come out and I had walked into an electronic store and saw that handheld GPS devices cost \$99.. And like I had the eureka moment, I mean this was disruptive at the time which is sad like for \$100 we can know where our water projects are anywhere in the world.. And no charity was doing this at the time.. So we said let's buy a lot of GPS units.. Let's get our partners out there to turn these things on, take pictures of the completed project and of the GPS and let's make all that data public on Google Maps and Google Earth.. Must be completely transparent about where the money is going and the projects around the world.. The third thing was a little softer but I said man, I want to build a brand.. Charities are the worst marketers I've ever seen.. I mean I thought they had some of the worst websites.. They are worse than insurance companies..

And there was no Nike, there was no Apple in the charity space.. There were big charities, there were safe charities but no charities inspired me or my friends.. And Nick Kristoff had written New York Times, he said people peddle toothpaste with more sophistication than all of the world's life savings causes.. I just thought man that's so sad, so broken.. And I didn't think you needed a lot of money to build a brand, you needed good taste and a couple of talented designers.. Probably the most important thing was try not to bite off too much and we said, we're going to work through local partners, we believe that for work to be sustainable, it must be led with the locals and I'd knew nothing about hydrology.. You know like if I'd turn up in Kenya and start trying to drill wells, I am going to pay like five times for cement, what I should.. I'm going to drill more dry wells than good wells.. But we found these amazing local organizations many that have been at it for 30 years and we said we'll take on the piece of building the movement raising awareness, raising money as efficiently as we can and then give it to these organizations and help grow through them so that they can lead their local communities forward.. So that was the model..

Fundraising day number one.. This is a little sad.. But the only thing I knew how to do was to throw a party in the club.. I am like let me see if I can redeem this lost decade.. I threw my 31st birthday party in a night club.. I got 700 people to come out.. I gave them open bar for an hour and I charged them 20 bucks at the door.. But the main difference was I did not pocket the \$15,000 this time and we took 100% of that money to refugee camp in Northern Uganda, a place called Bobi where 31,638 people are living and there was one water project.. So we wished we could have done more but we did six, we rehabbed a bunch of wells and then we sent those photos and the GPS back to the 700 people that had attended the party.. And they were like blown away..

Some of them didn't remember attending the party.. They were like wow I guess I was generous.. But in all seriousness they never expected to hear from the charity again.. I mean they gave 20 bucks and here they are getting photos and GPS and proof and a video of what this night, what this gathering of people did for people across the world and we said this is very powerful.. Let's continue to close the loop.. Let's show people their impact and let's keep doing this until we solve the problem.. Okay, I tried to come out with creative ways to get people to think differently about water.. So I wanted to shoot rich people in New York City in the same situations as the people we were serving around the world.. So these kids in the bottom right, they go to a \$35,000 a year private school.. Imagine if they had to carry 40 pounds of water on the Upper East Side..

I mean their parents would never allow this.. Imagine if your mom or your grandma had to drink water like that that had bone and hair in it, like the women on the left told me.. Sent some of my banker friends out to Central Park lunch breaks and said go get water.. We would never allow this.. We started to try to partner creatively with brands.. This was the biggest coup

ever.. We went to Saks Fifth Avenue and we said you guys have figured out how to sell \$5,000 handbags to women, that's amazing.. We have \$5,000 water projects.. We should totally partner.. We're both in New York..

So I was not booted from the CEO's office and they liked this idea and they wound up shooting their catalogues in water for two seasons.. They gave us the windows of the Fifth Avenue Store after Giorgio Armani took his windows down and we put up pictures and we built a well in the window.. And they started their employees their customers, their vendors, the story.. And they raised over \$700,000 to help 140 communities.. Soon after that the MacCallan came to us and they said we make whiskey, lot of water in the making of whiskey and there is a lot of water in Scotland.. That's what we said, we were like 'and?'. So their marketing team said well we have a 64-year-old whiskey.. It's the finest we've ever made.. What if we took it on a world tour and if you wanted to taste our whiskey you have to drop \$5000.. And we were like who would pay \$5000 to taste your whiskey..

They rose \$605,000 check from the single bottle.. It broke the Guinness world record three times over.. We love social media.. We were the first charity to reach a million followers on Twitter.. We were not only the first charity to use Instagram, one of the first three brands to use Instagram.. We were early adopters.. We were hiring young people and this is where we lived.. It was a great way to get our story out.. People need water.. Here are the solutions, we'll prove them to you..

Great way to engage some of our supporters creatively around the world.. We opened up the NASDAQ a couple of times by the way you could do this just by asking if you are a charity, sometimes somebody goes bust like the night before, so we're now the go to.. They call us up and say can you be here at 9:00 in the morning.. Same thing with the New York Stock Exchange.. Exposure for free to \$100 million eye balls.. Try to reinvent the gala: instead of those boring stuffy sit-down rubber chicken dinners.. We invited a couple of thousand people to New York and we create experiences for them like the water walk.. So they walk at a fashion catwalk, littered with death and disease and dying and statistics and if they carry these heavy jerry cans it unlocks donations from companies.. So last year just by carrying the cans you earned \$500, for every person that walked.. We finally outgrew our office, we went from the couch to the first office, which oh my gosh when I saw it I thought it was the most beautiful space I'd ever seen..

It was covered in grease, it was an old printing press, but at least it wasn't the couch and then it took us a little time when we finally got a beautiful office donated in SoHo, where about a 100 people work today.. Though we'd feel much much more like startup than any sort of charity you've ever seen.. Then we stumbled upon this big idea and a lot of our growth has come from this very simple idea.. On our one year anniversary I was going to through another party in the club, but said, man, that doesn't scale.. Maybe I could get I don't know 1,000 people to come, maybe I can charge them 30 bucks, but it wasn't real money.. And I thought what if I gave up my birthday.. I said look, you all just stay home, donate my age in dollars, \$32, and you would have spent that money tipping the bartender, on taxis anyway.. So I wasn't sure if it was going to work but I emailed, just bombed every single person I know saying please give \$32, please give \$32 and I wound up raising 59 grand.. Wow, this a big idea.. I didn't spend any money..

So this seven year old kid in Texas takes the idea.. Austin, Texas - he starts knocking on doors, asking everyone for seven bucks and he raises \$22,000.. And you know the wheel started turning and like everybody has a birthday.. Like in the world, everybody could care about clean water and no one needs more crap.. You didn't need toys or video game.. I didn't need a wallet or socks or a belt or all the crap that we normally get for birthdays, people don't even have clean water, so could we turn our birthdays into giving moments, into these generous expressions about others.. So this started to take off.. Bieber tweeted three times, it raised \$47,000.. So it started through spreading through sports, through fashion, through the tech community, Jack, has now done three birthdays, raised almost \$200,000, Michael Ek of Spotify, Will and Jaden Smith not only gave up their birthdays but asked their fans to start pledging their birthdays.. They wound up coming with us last year to Ethiopia to actually drill and see what that meant..

So that's all cool but most of the money was not raised by famous people or rich people or tech entrepreneurs, it was raised by kids like Lory.. Giving up his sixth birthday.. Maggie Moran giving up her 16th, 89 year old Nona Wein.. She kind of uncovered another layer to this, right, her mission statements is 'I am turning 89 and I'd like to make that possible for more people in Africa.' She had doubled the life expectancy in so many of these countries where we worked, because of where she was born.. Some people said I can't wait until my birthday.. It's like 10 months from now and they started climbing mountains, they started jumping out of planes.. This girl is like I will only go skydiving to her boyfriend if I can do it for charity: water.. People started biking across America.. They started giving up wedding gifts, giving up honeymoons giving up anniversaries.. These guys sailed across the Atlantic Ocean..

Four or five people now have walked across the country in solidarity of those walking millions of hours every single day.. Riley ate rice and beans for a month.. Raised \$15,000.. I'll play you guys this little video we made just to celebrate some of the passion and creativity of our supporters.. So our fundraisers were awesome.. They were bringing the best of themselves their creativity, their passion to this issue and they were doing stuff that we'd never thought of.. Just recently I learned about a guy in Afghanistan writing haikus for charity:water.. I couldn't remember what a haiku was.. It's been a long time.. But really bringing just the best of themselves..

And we realized that what had started out as our story - and this was such a big revelation for the organization - it was not

our story any more.. It didn't belong to us.. It was their story.. And that we actually needed to be intentional about taking a back seat, getting out of the way and focusing on the platform and allowing people to tell their story and then celebrating them.. And that through that maybe this thing could just continue to grow and scale.. We focused on connecting them, showing them their impact, trying to use technology to do that, creating products like dollars to projects.. Where - when Maggie's money was sent to the field, she got an accounting for all \$5,709.. She saw that the first \$4,596 went to the village of Mywelloh.. She could see her name on a sign or on a plaque just to make it real.. She can see where it was on Google Maps..

And then every single donor got a report, even if they gave \$1.. They could see exactly where the dollar went.. Total transparency throughout the process.. So we started crowd sourcing drilling rigs, and we're like well how do we connect the tens of thousands of people that are giving to the rigs.. They are going to be drilling wells for 15 years.. So we mounted GPS units on these things.. We built web trackers and we gave them Twitter accounts so they tweet every time they drill.. Their locations so people can follow our rigs as they are going around giving communities clean water.. Probably what I am most excited about right now is a new project that we're working on with Google.. So we know all our projects have been built, we know where they are and now we want to know that they are working over time..

We know that we've set up the water committees, we've trained people.. But wouldn't it be amazing to have that data and then be able to even pass that along to our supporters.. So we went to Google last year and we said would you guys consider giving us a grant to develop a sensor, a remote sensor we could put in these villages and it could fire through satellite and through GSM and let us know how much water is flowing.. And they love the idea.. They wound up giving us a \$5 million grant which was the largest grant they'd ever given to a non-profit.. And at the moment we have 11 different labs working to develop a sensor.. At the same time we're training local entrepreneurs and setting up businesses who will be able act on that data.. This was a failed pilot in Ethiopia.. Here are some of the design challenges.. We had to figure out how to protect these things, how to power them, how to transmit and how to make it for \$150..

This failed the 'protect' criteria as a kid put his hand on it and the thing broke.. So we're seven years old now and as I kind of wrap it up, a lot of this stuff has worked.. We've raised over \$100 million.. We've gotten over 500,000 people involved around the world.. And for us we don't keep scoring money, it's about what we can do with the money.. And we've been able to help over 3 million people get access to clean water.. 20 countries, 9,000 villages and right now there are over 1,000 local staff employed every single day on charity:water projects leading their own communities forward.. This is what the growth curves look like.. So much more like a startup than a charity and if you think that this is what charitable dollars were doing over those years, think again.. The sector was net negative..

Money was being pulled out of the charitable sector.. Charities were laying off their employees and we think some of these values - transparency, inspiration, creativity, design - lead to this growth, versus some of the traditional ways that people have fundraised and run their businesses.. What I am most excited about is the statistics in the right direction.. Last year, we gave 1,900 people clean water everyday.. One person every 44 seconds.. And I told my staff, you guys slept for eight hours and when you got up, 600 people got clean water that you will never meet just because you've given your time and your talents and your energy to work at charity:water.. Many of them have given up equity.. They've given up great salaries to come and work on this problem for people who will never be able to pay them back.. Who may not be able to thank them, but the equity has been transferred to some of the poorest people in the world.. As we look ahead, we've got a huge goals..

3 million people is great and if we want to make ourselves feel good we can fill up stadiums and say rah rah.. But we're trying to help 800 million people so we need to continue to grow this.. We need to figure out how to continue scaling it.. We have put a marker down and this big number.. We want to help 100 million people over the next 10 years.. And this is a \$3 billion to \$4 billion problem.. It's at least \$30 to \$40 a person.. We know this is going to be hard.. We also have to figure out how to continue funding the staff and keeping this powerful 100% model in tact.. So far we've been able to do that with 100 people..

About 60 of them from Silicon Valley who said I want all my donations to help pay for the people making it possible.. So as you guys wonder how you might be able to contribute, the main ways people get involve with us: they support water projects.. What's so exciting is that when you guys give, even if it's \$10, if it's \$20 you unleash a team of people in the locals that are actually contributing the labor.. One village I was in in India said they donated 59,000 hours working on the projects.. They worked it out at minimum wage and it was three times more than the money we had put in for the actual materials.. We have a new program as you go out and start your companies.. People are starting to donate a minimum 1% of their equity.. They are founding companies saying I want to start working with charity:water, I can't write a big check now but I'll give you 1% or 2% or 5% of my equity.. So that some day if some sell, some day if I go public, the poor benefit.. And then of course every single person here could donate your next birthday..

None of you need anything else.. You have everything you need.. You could turn your birthday into a giving moment and it's amazing.. Your friends will love it, your family will love it.. It just works.. The average person raises \$1,000 from 13 of their friends and family.. And as we think about solving this problem off we could get a million people to give up their birthday.. That's \$1 billion for clean water.. You can learn more about that at charitywater.org/birthdays.. We have a cool way to pledge even if your birthday is like nine months from now and we send you a reminder and easy instructions..

All right, guys.. Thanks for listening.. I'm going to take questions.. Thanks for putting up with the coughing fits.. I got my tea now.. Yes? Thank you so much.. That was really amazing.. I am really curious as to know what impact you've had on the rest of the non-profit sector in terms of fundraising.. I mean coming from a non-profit background what you're doing is very innovative and I'm curious if other non-profits have adopted some of your strategies.. Yes, so the question was basically: have other non-profits followed suit, do you feel like you've been an influence on the sector, right? So I think now websites have gotten way better..

I mean there are non-profits out there that have better looking websites than charity:water which drives my wife and I crazy.. She is the creative director.. I married the brand by the way.. I didn't tell you guys that part of the story.. I married my second employee.. Yes, so I think it's gotten a lot better.. I should have given you that for the intro.. I would hope so.. I mean we try to be really generous with everything that we're doing and we get on conference calls with groups that you might have heard of like Keyven, Donors Choose and Global Giving and we're sharing data, we're sharing insights.. So we have a very open - we're a very open book when it comes to that..

We're raising 60% of our money for water projects online.. So it's a really efficient great way to do that.. A typical charity will raise about 5% of its money online.. So we think direct mail is kind of stupid.. I write one check a month for my rent.. The minute I don't have to do that, I will rip up my checkbook.. I have never once opened one of those huge things in my mail box and ticked the box and sent it back and it's really expensive to do that.. So we're kind of out there saying look, you've got to shift or you'll die.. Your fundraising will fall off a cliff.. So in that we can be voice and just say some of this new stuff is working but I hope that we can continue to influence the sector..

Yes.. So in terms of working with larger organizations and partnering with like Saks Fifth Avenue and things like that, how did you go about the process of contacting like the hire ups to make like opportunities with them possible? So the question is how did we get to kind of these organizations that we work with, how did we get to kind of the brass in them.. So I think I was fortunate to have some connections through night life.. So that worked really in the beginning, probably in the first year, and then I think we outgrew them.. But that connection actually was a friend who would come to my night club parties.. And he said I have friend at Saks, I think he might really care about what you're doing.. They really care about the world.. I went in and I was making probably 20 pitches a day at the beginning.. I would just run around with my laptop.. I had made people look at tumors and dirty water and some of them would tell me to get out of their office and others would say I want to be involved..

I heard a lot of no's in the beginning but I think what we were doing is we were just asking people for interest too; you know, who can you introduce me to now that you know what we're doing that would be interested.. And then I would go and take those three meetings and then those three meeting would turn into the next 12.. So really just I think going around, telling the story to anybody that would listen and try not to get discouraged when a lot of people said no, which they did.. So I'm not sure if you heard Dan Pallotta's TED Talk but so given the model in which 100% of donations go to projects, do you feel you'd have a bigger absolute impact if some of that went into marketing and building awareness? And do you think that model is sustainable for other non-profits in the same sector? That's a great question.. So the question is have I seen Dan Pallotta's TED Talk and could we be more effective without the 100% model? And do I recommend the 100% model? So I know Dan, like Dan.. We disagree on a couple of things but I - god bless him for being the voice out there saying how much you spend on admin and programs is really the wrong metric.. I think Dan is fighting such an uphill battle.. I didn't want to fight that battle.. So I kind of wanted to play within the system.. So we still - we have 100 people in the office..

They are just paid differently.. So I go out and curate that group of entrepreneurs and say when you write that check I need that not to go to the water projects, I need that to go to my next UI designer, my next software engineer.. I need it to pay for the office.. I need it to pay for the insurance.. I need it to pay for the travel as our team is flying around to 20 countries.. So for us it's worked.. It worked uniquely because of the problem we were trying to solve, right? And I am really - I just really believe people didn't trust charities, they don't know where their money is going.. I don't stand up here and tell other charities to start 100% models.. It's incredibly difficult.. You have to literally start two businesses at the same time with no money and then you have to run them in perfect balance..

So if you raise too much money for your water projects and not enough for your staff you can't make payroll.. You raise too much money for your staff and not enough for water projects, you're inefficient and then nobody wants to give you money for your staff because there is no leverage.. So it's really kind of delicate act.. Love some of the stuff that Dan says.. I am a not big - I don't really believe charity should spend money in marketing.. I think traditional marketing is just a bad way to do it.. We spend money trying to inspire a movement and give our supporters tools to go out there.. So no on the 100% model.. I don't think it's for everyone.. I think if you can make it work, it is very powerful and it was right for us..

Yes? Why did you choose for the money to go to wells when I think sometimes people have concerns about like leakage or erosion, stuff like that, rather than filters? So again we have now nine different water technologies in 20 countries.. So often a well is really the best solution and a rain water harvesting system is not.. Sometimes a filter is.. So in Nepal and Cambodia, it's all filters, no wells.. So we really depend on the locals for that expertise.. If there is ground water - in wells, I've seen wells that have been working 22 years.. Imagine a \$5,000 investment serving a community of 250 people for over a decade.. It's some of the most efficient return on investment that we've ever seen.. My friends up state, when they go buy houses, they

drill wells in their backyard.. They literally pay a guy \$12,000 to come in with a rig, drill a well for them and their wife and their two kids..

And their family now has a well in the backyard.. I actually - my parents have a well in the backyard of their house.. So I think wells are often the solution but not the only solution.. And we're just not married to any technology.. As some of these new technologies are proven, we can adopt them using our model.. That's kind of the beauty.. So if there was a filter - you guys have probably heard of Dean Kaymans working on the sling shot, I mean if that was really a viable thing we would the ability to go and pilot it.. And we've piloted a bunch of the new technologies.. We've got a partner in Nepal who is actually using fog nets to give communities on top of the mountains clean water and he is - there is so much moisture in the air.. I mean I'd never heard of fog net before and it's working for those communities up in the clouds..

It wouldn't work down in the desert.. So I think the theme for us is we are truly solution agnostic and we're always looking for the right solution for the community.. Anybody else? Yes? I was wondering how you got Saks Fifth Avenue to agree to give you the most expensive real estate in New York.. How come Saks gave us the windows on Fifth Avenue? Well, they actually gave us the windows in Chicago and in Beverly Hills and New York.. They were really passionate about it.. One of the most exciting things - and the CEO has become a friend over the years and he said this is really taken the organization kind of by storm.. And the Jackson Mississippi call center, he said, you know, these are employees that are amazing and they are working on minimum wage.. They wanted as a call center to provide clean water for a community so badly, they started selling their personal jewelry to raise money.. So I think it really became about passion and inspiration.. They weren't thinking like oh my gosh if we take the windows down we're going to lose X money..

I mean it was really about how can we bring clean water and awareness to as many people as possible.. I am curious about how you choose your water projects and then also you talked about training the local kind of community to administer the projects.. And I am wondering how that capacity building happened and does that come out of the 100% or is that coming out of some other fund? Great question.. So how do we choose our projects and then how do we train communities.. Let me start with the second one.. So the water project dollars do pay for that.. So they pay for both hardware and software.. Sometimes 30% of the cost of a project will be in training.. And it's a lot of time spent with the community before the water project goes in.. There is a negotiation of where should it actually be..

And there needs to be complete buy in.. And some of you guys might have heard of - there are lots of really bad projects out there where a government or potentially an NGO will just come and drill and leave.. And the community's like "we don't want it there, we would never go there." So there is a lot of time and care spent on the front end and then afterwards.. And a lot of stuff that I didn't talk about - just because of time - but around the hand-washing.. You know, hand-washing - using that clean water for proper hygiene is actually the number one way to reduce disease.. Sanitation is incredibly important so building latrines, and so all of that comes out of the 100% of water donations.. So it's not all just bricks and mortars.. If we were funding 90% of the local water program, we would pay for 90% of the local accountant's salary that was working on that as well.. So it allows for some of those local costs as well.. Your first question was how do we pick it? So we just have a big programs team that is flying around really vetting projects and partners and then auditing them afterwards..

So we use - we're basically looking at quality and then we're looking at money flow and we have an internal auditing process in the way of third-party auditors that go and follow the money.. There is a lot of data on water scarcity in the world so we created a couple of rules: no conflicts zones just because we're too new as an organization and no governments that didn't want us.. So no sneaking into the Myanmar's of the world at this point.. That's left us 20 plus countries to work in with some amazing partners.. And if you go on our website you could actually learn about some of them.. Some of them have 30 some years of experience.. Our partner in Ethiopia has 1,200 local staff-375 working in water-and the best hydrologist I've ever seen, the best technicians.. Their drillers drill 29 out of 30 days every month and they see their families one day because the dry season is nine months and they can't drill at all during the rainy season.. And they are just dedicated to getting the most out of those rigs for their people.. So, so many inspiring stories through the local partners..

That's it.. Thanks, guys...