

The TED Phenomenon

**Presented by Ben Eisbart
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TED

Had any bystanders witnessed the attack on Duncan Davidson late one evening four years ago, they could never have guessed its game-changing significance. It was a February night in Long Beach, California, and Davidson was walking to his hotel after a long day of work, writes Ben Wallace in his New York Magazine article, "Those Fabulous Confabs".

West Ocean Boulevard was unusually dark. The streetlights were out. The sidewalks, thickly over-treed, were invisible from the road. As Davidson made his way through the gloom, a man grabbed him from behind and said, "I need your badge right 'blank...ing' now!"

Dangling from Davidson's neck was an all-access staff badge for TED, the four-day ideas conference he had been hired to photograph. Davidson was also carrying a backpack containing cameras and lenses worth tens of thousands of dollars, it went ignored. The man squeezed tighter. "I don't want to hurt you, but I will", he warned.

Davidson thought quickly. At this hour, it would be difficult to notify everyone that a violent, credentialed TED imposter was at large. The attendees included famous people like Bill Gates, Al Gore, and Meg Ryan. Davidson told the mugger he couldn't give him the pass.

"No, you don't understand," the man said. "I've got to get in there and meet those people."

"I made a decision", Davidson recalls. With the guy hanging on his back, Davidson dragged himself toward the street. As they reached the curb, the mugger let go and took off running. From behind, Davidson saw that he was a professional-looking man wearing slacks and a sport jacket.

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The Long Beach Police Department seemed doubtful of Davidson's description. They thought the attacker had to be an itinerant or gang type. The attack perplexed Davidson, too. This was an attempted identity crime the likes of which the world had never seen...the strong-arm theft of **an ideas-conference badge** and he was the first victim. "It's easy to think that money is the currency of the world", Davidson says, but that night there was certainly another!

At least since the early 70's, there have been exclusive gatherings that mix ideas with major league networking. The 80's gave rise to *Renaissance Week-end*, for the political crowd; Allen and Company's *Sun Valley retreat*, for the media types, and an early version of TED.

TED was born in 1984 out of Richard Saul Wurman's observation of the powerful convergence among **Technology, Entertainment and Design**. Described by Fortune magazine as "an intellectual hedonist" with a "Hummingbird mind", Wurman has always sought ways to make the complex clear. He has written, designed, and published 83 books on topics ranging from football to healthcare, to city guides, but he likes to say that they all spring from the same place – **his ignorance**.

An American architect and graphic designer who coined the phrase, "Information Architecture" and considered to be a pioneer in the practice of making information easily understandable, he created, among other things, the ACCESS city guides, using graphics and logical editorial organization to make places such as New York, Tokyo, and Rome understandable to visitors. Other volumes he created focus on topics such as football and the 1984 Olympics. Several of his books are in the permanent collection of the Museum of Modern Art, in New York City.

A graduate of the University of Pennsylvania with undergraduate and graduate degrees in Architecture, with high honors, he has been awarded several honorary doctorates, two Graham Fellowships, a Guggenheim and a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Smithsonian, to cite but a few. Now in his late 70's, he is perhaps

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best known for having created and chaired the TED Conference from 1984 through 2002. He also created the TEDMED conference, 1995 thru 2010.

The first TED included demos of the Sony compact disc and new 3D graphics from Lucasfilm...

But despite the stellar lineup, the event lost money, and it would be six years before Wurman and his partner Harry Marks tried again. This time the world was ready and the numbers worked. TED became an annual event in Monterey, California, attracting a growing and influential audience from different disciplines untied by their curiosity, open-mindedness, a desire to think outside the box...and also by their shared discovery of an exciting event. Back then, TED was an invitation only event without an advertising budget or PR campaign.

According to TED's website, the roster of presenters broadened to include scientists, philosophers, musicians, religious leaders, philanthropists, and many others. Over the years TED speakers included Jane Goodall, Billy Graham, Frank Gehry, Quincy Jones, and Bono. **Yet the real stars were the unexpected like Aimee Mullins, a Paralympics competitor who tried out a pair of artificial legs on stage, or Jennifer Lin, a 14-year-old pianist whose improvisation moved the audience to tears.**

For many attendees, TED became one of the intellectual and emotional highlights of the year...and that was certainly true for media entrepreneur Chris Anderson who met with Wurman in 2000 to discuss the conference's future. Wurman, at age 65, was ready to pass on the reins. A deal was struck, and in 2001, Anderson's Foundation (The Sapling Foundation) acquired TED, and Anderson became TED's curator.

Chris Anderson was born in Pakistan in 1957, one of three children. His parents were medical missionaries, and he spent most of his early life in Pakistan, India

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and Afghanistan. He studied at Woodstock School, a boarding school in the Himalayan Mountains of India, before moving to a boarding school in Bath, UK. At Oxford, he studies Physics, and then changed to Politics, Philosophy and Economics, to eventually graduate in 1978.

Anderson began a career in journalism, working on local papers, then producing a world news service and later working as an editor first on *Personal Computer Games*, and then on *Zzap!64*, both early computer magazines. In 1985, he launched a publishing company devoted initially to the hobbyist computer magazines – Future Publishing. It rapidly grew, expanding into other areas such as cycling, music, video games, technology, and design, and went public in 1999. Future Publishing grew to more than 130 magazines and more than 1,500 employees.

In 2001, Anderson left Future Publishing, and through his non-profit foundation, The Sapling Foundation, acquired TED. A 501(C) 3, headquartered in NYC, according to its most recent IRS 990 filing, the Foundation had revenues in 2011 of more than \$38,000,000, expenses and disbursements of more than \$33,000,000 leaving \$4,800,000 in excess revenues over expenses.

The goal of the foundation is to foster the spread of great ideas. It aims to provide a platform for the world's smartest thinkers, greatest visionaries, and most inspiring teachers, so that millions of people can gain a better understanding of the biggest issues faced by the world and a desire to help create a better future.

As of May 2013, over 1,500 talks are available free on line. In June 2011, the viewing figure stood at more than 500,000 million, and on Tuesday, November 13, 2012, TED Talks had been watched One Billion times worldwide.

Central to the goal is a belief that there is no greater force for changing the world than a powerful idea. Consider the following:

An idea can be created out of nothing except inspired imagination

An idea weighs nothing

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It can be transferred across the world at the speed of light for virtually zero cost

And yet, an idea when received by a prepared mind can have extraordinary impact

It can reshape the mind's view of the world

It can dramatically alter the behavior of the mind's owner

It can cause the mind to pass on the idea to others

Anderson is the non-paid curator of the Sapling Foundation, which supported projects that use mass media, technology and market forces to leverage every dollar spent and create sustainable change in areas such as global public health, poverty alleviation, and biodiversity.

TED's mission statement begins:

“We believe passionately in the power of ideas to change attitudes, lives and ultimately the world. So we're building here a clearing house that offers free knowledge and inspiration from the world's most inspired thinkers, and also a community of curious souls to engage with the ideas and each other.”

There are several major ways in which this now happens:

TED Fellows

TED forums, debates and questions are often hosted by TED Fellows.

Approximately 40 Fellows are selected each year, 20 for each conference and have been described as 21-40 year olds who are persons who have demonstrated remarkable accomplishments. The emphasis is placed on their accomplishments as part of the selection process, not just their academic achievements.

Ten individuals from the previous year's Fellows have the opportunity to be part of a select “Senior Fellows Group” who will participate in an extended two-year

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Fellowship program attending conferences, deliver TED talks, and benefit from TED sponsored mentoring programs...

TED Prize

A TED Prize is awarded annually to an individual who is deemed exceptional and whose talents would be greatly advanced with a monetary gift. The TED prize is awarded at the TED Conference and has grown to \$1 million dollars. The winner also has TED's global resources available for their use. The TED Prize is presented to an individual who is expected to use their talents, the TED Prize money and resources to initiate or bring about global changes.

TED Open Translation Project

Started in May 2009, the Translation Project aims to reach out to the 4.5 billion people on the planet who don't speak English. At the time of its launch, 300 translations had been done by 200 volunteer transcribers in 40 languages. In March of 2013, more than 39,722 translations had been complete by 9,262 volunteer translators in 97 languages.

The project contributed to a significant increase in international visitors to the TED website, with traffic from outside the U.S. growing 350%, 600% growth in Asia, and more than 1000% in South America.

TEDx

In 2009, TED started granting licenses to third parties to organize independent TED-like events internationally. These events are prohibited from making a profit, although sometimes an individual attendance/admission fee (\$100 max) can be charged to cover costs. The licenses are free, but franchisees are vetted by TED and events are subject to conditions. Speakers are not paid and must agree to give TED the right to edit and distribute their presentation under a "Creative Commons" license. At the end of 2012, more than 16,000 talks had been given at more than 5,000 TEDx events in 1,200 cities in 133 countries.

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Fort Wayne has played host to three TEDx events in 2011, 2012, and most recently in April of 2013. Themed: “Ignite Fort Wayne”, the event was organized by Craig Crook and held at Indiana Tech’s Andorfer Commons and Theater.

According to its website, the event spotlighted ideas in “Commerce, Community & Wellness.” Among the confirmed speakers were Questors Connie Haas Zuber and Dr. Bill Argus. Pat Ashton, Director of Peace and Conflict Studies at IPFW also appeared. The next Fort Wayne TEDx event is scheduled for June 2014.

TEDWomen

A series of conferences focused on women-oriented themes including gender issues and reproductive health, TEDWoman has launched some powerful ideas into the world.

In 2010, Sheryl Sandberg gave the talk that led to her groundbreaking book, “Lean In”. In 2011, Jane Fonda gave a mind-shifting talk on the unexpected “third-act” in women’s’ lives and in 2012, Angela Patton told the tale of a father-daughter dance...held in prison.

TEDWoman 2013 celebrated invention **in all its forms**. Not just technology, but also solutions to poverty; approaches to peacemaking; expressions of art, and, at all times, **their own lives**. TEDWomen will be held in San Francisco, CA in December 2014.

TEDMED

Is an annual conference focusing on health and medicine. It is an independent event operating under a license granted by TED.

TED.com

In 2005, Anderson hired June Cohen as Director of TED Media. In June 2006, after Cohen’s idea of a TV show based on TED lectures was rejected by several networks, a selection of talks that had received the highest audience ratings was posted on the websites of TED, YouTube, and iTunes. By January of the next year,

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they were viewed more than three million times. On the basis of that success, the organization pumped hundreds of thousands of dollars into its video production operations and into the development of a Web site to showcase 100 of the talks.

By July 2012, a total of 1300 TED talks had been posted. Every week 5-7 new talks are published and on 13 November 2012, TED reached its billionth video view.

Chris Anderson in an interview in March of that year said,

“It used to be 800 people getting together once a year, now it’s about a million people a day watching TEDTalks online. When we first put up a few of the talks as an experiment, we got such impassioned responses that we decided to flip the organization on its head and think of ourselves not so much as a conference but as “ideas worth spreading” building a big website around it. The conference is still the engine, but the website is the amplifier that ~~takes~~ ^{takes} the ideas around the world.”

This week on TED.com available ¹ free on line recently included:

Maysoon Zayid’s: I got 99 problems...cerebral palsy is just one

“I have cerebral palsy. I shake all the time,” Maysoon Zayid announces at the beginning of this exhilarating, hilarious talk. “I’m like Shakira ~~meets~~ ^{meeting} Muhammad Ali, “With grace and wit, the Arab-American comedian takes us on a whistle-stop tour of her adventures as an actor, stand-up comic and philanthropist

Mayor of Oklahoma City, OK, Mick Cornett’s: How an obese town lost a million pounds

Oklahoma City is a midsized town that had a big problem: It was among the most obese towns in America. Mayor Mick Cornett realized that, to make his city a great place to work and live, it had to become healthier, too. In this charming talk, he walks us through the interlocking changes that helped OKC drop a collective million pounds.

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Diana Nyad's: Never, ever give up

In the pitch-black night, stung by jellyfish, choking on salt water, singing to herself, hallucinating...Diana Nyad just kept on swimming. And that's how she finally achieved her lifetime goal as an athlete: an extreme 100-mile swim from Cuba to Florida...at age 64.

Paul Piff's: Does money make you mean?

It's amazing what a rigged game of Monopoly can reveal. In this entertaining but sobering talk, social psychologist Paul Piff shares his research into how people behave when they feel wealthy. (Hint: badly) But while the problem of inequality is a complex challenge, there's good news, too.

The \$80 prosthetic knee that's changing lives

We've made incredible advances in technology in recent years, but too often it seems only certain fortunate people can benefit. Engineer Krista Donaldson introduces the ReMotion knee, a prosthetic device for above-knee amputees, many of who earn less than \$4 a day. The design contains best-in-class technology and yet is far cheaper than other prosthetics on the market.

Krista Donaldson is the CEO of D-Rev, a non-profit product development company improving the health and incomes of people around the world.

Body parts on a chip

Geraldine Hamilton builds organs and body parts on a chip...to test new, custom cures

It's relatively easy to imagine a new medicine, a better cure for some disease. The hard part, though, is testing it, and that can delay promising new cures for years. In this well-explained talk, Geraldine Hamilton shows how her lab creates organs

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and body parts on a chip, simple structures with all the pieces essential to testing new medications...even custom cures for one specific person.

AND ...

How societies can grow old better

There's an irony behind the latest efforts to extend human life: It's no picnic to become an old-person in a youth-oriented society. Older people can become isolated, lacking meaningful work and low on funds. In this intriguing talk, Jared Diamond looks at how many different societies treat their elders...some better, some worse...and suggests we all take advantage of experience.

Delivered by Jared Diamond, who investigates why cultures prosper or decline...and what we can learn by taking a broad look across many kinds of societies.

The TED Conference

Held annually on the West Coast of North America, the TED conference is the heart of TED. More than a thousand people attend this five-day conference about Technology, Entertainment and Design as well as science, business, the arts, and the global issues facing our world. More than 70 speakers appear on the main stage to give 18- minute talks and shorter presentations, including music, performance and comedy.

Titled, "The Next Chapter", the next TED Conference will be held in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada on March 17-21, 2014.

While it is sold out, a small number of special all-access passes for new donors to TED @ \$15,000 each are still available.

If that's a little salty for you, you could apply for the TED Conference standard membership package for \$7,500/year, and if accepted and you sent in your

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request early enough you could attend. You'd also receive as a benefit online social networking, enrollment in the TED Book Club, which sends an inspired selection of 2 or 3 books every few months, via Amazon Kindle, and a special password to the Conference video archive.

As TED is owned by the Sapling Foundation, a private 501 © 3 nonprofit foundation, \$5,000 of the TED Conference fee may be tax-deductible...please check with your tax professional

TED offers a special membership category of TED Patron for TEDsters who wish to further support TED's goal. **The price is \$125,000 or more and you must apply for membership, here, too.** With this level of giving, there are a number of benefits including early access to get the best seats, a special dinner, and a speaker reception...to name but a few.

If you could only scrape together \$3,750 you could apply for a TEDActive membership...a parallel event held at the same time a TED but in Whistler, Canada...it features a live simulcast of the conference...it, too, sells out very quickly.

Before an application can be accepted, it must meet the following criteria:

1. Availability: There must be availability in the membership category you are applying for.
2. Enthusiasm: You must be likely, in TED's judgment, a strong contributor to the TED community, the ideas discuss at TED, and the projects which come out of the conference
3. Payment: Prompt payment must be made upon acceptance of the application

And , oh, the fine print..."We reserve the right to terminate any membership at any stage without explanation by notifying the individual concerned by email and delivering a refund...and one more thing....should a TEDster change his/her mind

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after being accepted, we cannot refund a membership, since the bulk of the fee is a charitable donation!

Well, now that we filled out our application **with enthusiasm, availability existed and we were accepted, and we promptly paid**, what can we expect from our TED conference...

Listen to what some of the attendees say:

“It was like drinking from a fire hose” said Jay Dedman

Billy Graham, the evangelist notes, “Words are inadequate to express my appreciation for the invitation to participate...it was one of the highlights of my entire life.”

“TED was simply wonderful, an intellectual spa, a 21st century Chataqua”, wrote Kurt Andersen the novelist.

Author Malcolm Gladwell stated, “It was incredible...and I met a thousand fascinating people”.

Activist Al Gore said, “Sign me up for another year.”

And Bill Gates, co-founder of Microsoft wrote, “I wasn’t prepared for this conference to be so profound. The collective IQ of the attendees is incredible.”

All these accolades based on 18 minute TEDTalks....so just what is a TEDTalk?

TED conference organizers share a set of Ten Commandments with their invited speakers. These guidelines offer a number of compelling best practices and can be divided into two categories – CONTENT and DELIVERY

CONTENT

Thou Shall Not Simply Trot Out Thy Usual Shtick

13.

Thou Shall Dream a Great Dream, or Show Forth a Wondrous New Thing, or Share Something Thou Hast Not Shared Before

Thou Shall Tell a Story

Thou Shall Not Sell from Stage: Neither Thy Company, Thy Goods, Thy Writings, nor Thy Desperate Needs for Funding; Lest Thou be Cast Aside into Utter Darkness

Thou Shall Remember All the While: Laughter is Good.

DELIVERY

Thou Shall Reveal Thy Curiosity and Thy Passion

Thou Shall Freely Comment on the Utterances of Other Speakers for the Sake of Blessed Connection and Exquisite Controversy

Thou Shall Not Flaunt Thine Ego. Be Thou Vulnerable. Speak of Thy Faliure as well as Thy Success.

Thou Shall Not Read Thy Speech.

Thou Shall Not Steal the Time of Them that Follow Thee.

The author, Jeremey Donovan has viewed hundreds of TED Talks and in his book, "How to Deliver a TED Talk" he provides the following insights:

Much like Covey, you have to begin with the end in mind. You must have planted one seed that awakens the audience consciousness to a new way of thinking or action – the objective is to sow a single seed of inspiration.

Begin by asking the question of self-discovery – "What is the greatest lesson I've ever learned."?

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Once you have the central idea, work backward to build an audience-centric narrative with layers of stories and facts...constantly play the role of a skeptical listener as “So what?” and “What’s in this for me?”

Of the ten most viewed TEDTalks in 2011, seven (7) focused on inspiring people to change themselves. Concepts “inside the human mind” included: mental illness, creativity, leadership, happiness, motivation, success, and self-worth.

The other three (3) cast a wider net by catalyzing interpersonal and societal change. There was a call to action on public health, education, and diversity

Taking a lesson from Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, after we have met our needs for physiological health and safety, four others emerge – the first: love and belonging was evident in Gerda Grimshaw’s TedTalk, “What makes you happy?”

Gerda is, by the way, ^{is} the founder of Call Mom, a free referral service that connects single mothers with their children with resources and education to help them become self-sufficient and to thrive.

The second of the fundamental deep rooted needs is desire and self-interest. Lest you think such subjects are not the stuff of TedTalks, think again. Mary Roach shared, “**10 Things You Did Not Know About Orgasm**” and Helen Fisher revealed “**Why we love + Cheat ... in her talk.**”

The third fundamental need to connect with the audience is... **Accelerating Personal Development**....We want to learn and to grow.

It is no accident that “Hope and Change” was the centerpiece of Barack Obama’s 2008 presidential campaign. It is the centerpiece of every mass movement and it is the fourth of the fundamental needs that we have a human beings...making the audience an enemy of the status quo and helping them see the positive promise of tomorrow. People want to make a difference and TedTalks can give them the means and the will to make a dent in the universe.

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Nothing has come close to matching TED's popularity and it is all the more impressive when you consider that the engine of TED's success is the eighteen-minute "nerd-bomb" as Chris Anderson told Charlie Rose in their 2008 interview.

When Anderson sharpened the talks' length from a fuzzily defined "short" to eighteen minutes, he chose the arbitrarily precise time limit to keep speakers aware of the clock.

It turns out to be about the right length people can really stay focused, Anderson told Rose. It's long enough not to be trivia – you can really say something serious and important in eighteen minutes, you can develop an idea and argue it, but short enough for people to put aside a bit of time, drink a cup of coffee, and watch the talk...that means it can spread !

EXAMPLES

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So, do you feel that you may have just taken a trip on a Scientology cruise ship?

June Cohen's sister-in-law calls the TED Talk a secular sermon and the atheist, Daniel Dennett suggested TED could replace religion, observing that in some places, it already has!

But is the Platinum brand wearing thin? **Are the ideas worth spreading... spreading too thin?** Wallace's New York Magazine article also explores that issue.

TED's originator, Richard Wurman, thinks he has the answer.

In the years since Wurman sold TED to Anderson, their relationship has been high drama...quick to give credit for Anderson's achievements...but spiced with backhanded compliments calling TED the greatest conference of the **20th CENTURYdespite we're now in the 21st !**

Anderson has been somewhat antagonized. And so, in 2011, Wurman, having gotten his TED ticket and booked a hotel room, suddenly found himself disinvited!

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“He won’t let me back in”, Wurman said. “I love TED. I was very hurt not being able to go...I’m unforgiving about that, Wurman commented.”

Unforgiving, indeed.

The “father” of TED in 2012 reinvented the venue, staging a series of improvised... one-to-one conversations, held in front of a small, invitation-only audience and then disseminated via a high quality app.

Wurman has created a “dinner party” with a hundred of the world’s greatest minds having a conversation, two at a time.

And so, ideas continues to spread.