

Jeff Skoll Giving Pledge

July 20, 2010

I grew up in a middle class family in Canada. My dream was to be a writer who tells stories that make a difference in the world. Along the way, when I got out of business school, I became the first full-time employee and the first President of a fledgling company with an online auction service called AuctionWeb. That company later became better known by its corporate name, eBay. When the company went public in 1998, all of a sudden I went from being in debt and living in a house with five roommates, to having hundreds of millions of dollars in the value of my eBay shares.

Until then, I had not thought much about philanthropy. But with my newfound paper wealth, I resolved to do good things for the world with that money, in smart ways.

The first thing I did, in 1999, was to start the Skoll Foundation. Today, the Skoll Foundation has become the leading organization in the world supporting social entrepreneurs to drive large-scale impact. Each year, we find innovative social entrepreneurs from around the world – people like Paul Farmer of Partners in Health or Ann Cotton of Camfed – and we support them over a multi-year period. We also convene the annual Skoll World Forum on Social Entrepreneurship, at Oxford University. I am proud of the work we are doing together with our partners and grantees. In the words of one of my heroes, John Gardner, we are “betting on good people doing good things.”

In 2004, I resurrected my original vision of telling stories that make a difference in the world by creating Participant Media. Since then, Participant has released over 25 movies, including Good Night and Good Luck, The Kite Runner, Charlie Wilson’s War, An Inconvenient Truth, The Cove and Syriana. Our films have won four Academy Awards and received 18 nominations. But I am most proud of the impact that these films have had on social issues – human rights, Afghanistan, climate change and so on. We even have a social action network called TakePart that is rapidly becoming the online community for social activists and concerned citizens alike. For me, Participant is another form of philanthropy, as I believe that good stories well told can inspire and compel social change.

In 2009, I started a new foundation, called the Skoll Global Threats Fund, to deal with urgent threats that imperil humanity. The first five issues are climate change, Middle East peace, nuclear weapons, pandemics and water scarcity. These are all issues that could bring humanity to its knees if we don’t tackle them together now.

I have already donated about half of my net wealth to these organizations in the last eleven years. I expect to contribute almost all of my wealth to the betterment of humanity either during or after my lifetime.

In the meantime, I will continue to tell stories that awaken enlightened self-interest, activate citizen engagement, and galvanize political will. I will continue to double down on innovative solutions that have enduring social impact. And I will continue to support catalytic mechanisms, like the Skoll World Forum and TakePart, that unite the forces of change from all corners and cultures of humanity.

In doing so, I hope also to inspire others to do the same. The world is a vast and complicated place and it needs each of us doing all we can to ensure a brighter tomorrow for future generations. Conrad Hilton said it is the duty of successful people to give back to the society from which their success was derived. I feel privileged to have grown up in Canada and to now live in the US, two countries that value and reward education, hard work and good choices. I feel lucky to have been able to pursue my dreams and I hope that my contributions will in some small way lead to a sustainable world of peace and prosperity.