



Stanford eCorner

A New Breed of Entrepreneur

Larry Brilliant, *Google.org*

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Young people with mammoth commercial success have bred a new kind of philanthropic entrepreneur, says Google.org's Executive Director Larry Brilliant. And Brilliant also explains his optimism in smallpox, using it as a case study on a managed disease that once killed half a billion people worldwide. Through global unity and a concentrated effort, akin to what Google.org strives to accomplish in other areas, the virus was eradicated; thanks, in equal parts, to scientific discovery and philanthropic will.



Transcript

And I really am very optimistic because what has happened against this background of all of these grave issues that we face, largely out of Stanford and colleges like Stanford, a new breed of entrepreneurs and philanthropists have emerged; the Pierre Omidyars, the Jeff Skolls, the Mark Benioffs, Larry and Sergei. Where did these people come from? When I was growing up, we didn't have people who would make such a terrific commercial success, and then while we were still young turn their attention to the big problems of humanity. You live in a very special time. You are not only privileged because you get to go to a school like Stanford. You are privileged because around you are people who will reshape the world. And one person with a great idea can make a Google and a Google.org, and Bill Gates can make the Gates' Foundation. This is a time of grave danger but even more richer opportunities. I'll tell you a little bit about smallpox because I will never be able to be pessimistic having seen the worst disease in history eradicated. When I worked in India in 1974, most of you were not even a gleam in your parents' eyes in 1974, there were 188,000 children who died that year in India. I was in places in Bihar state where the rivers stopped running because of the bodies that were thrown into the rivers.

I probably have seen 5,000 little babies die of this terrible disease which was the worst disease in history. In the last century, the one that ended nine years ago, wasn't so far away. Half a billion people died of smallpox. That's not a word-o or a typo. Half a billion people died of smallpox. More people died of smallpox than any disease in history and in all the wars of history that have been recorded. It goes back to one of the biblical plagues being boils. This is a picture of Pharaoh Ramsey who died of smallpox. How do we know he died of smallpox? Because this little area of his skin, a friend of mine from CDC was asked by Anwar Sadat's widow to come and open up the sarcophagus and look at the mummy and take a little piece of skin and put it under an electron microscope and we could still see smallpox viruses. So this is a disease which began back in antiquity, and I was able to see the very last case of smallpox in nature.

So I can never be pessimistic in the midst of the worst plague or the worst disaster, and you shouldn't be either. Because if humanity can set aside our historic problems and conquer a disease like smallpox, and soon, polio, and please, God, soon after that, malaria, and in between, we'll get rid of Guinea worm. These are great accomplishments but they take more than just science. They take will. They take the same will that it takes to start a company and to push it through into marketability. It takes something which public health has not historically had a great deal of, but now, we're finding new ways to do that. This is my favorite slide. It is my favorite slide not because I like to see the death of kings and queens and sovereigns. It is not my favorite slide because we can put a list of all the great people with all the wealth in the world and all the power and they died from one disease. But it's my favorite slide because it tells me and it should tell you that, at some level, we're all in this

together.

That it's true that 99.4% of all of our genetic material is the same. That it doesn't matter what race we are, what religion and what national origin. At some level, if you're not vaccinated against a new virus which kills people and you get it, you're going to die. We share that in common. So if we pollute the water and we pollute the air, there's no place to hide. There is no amount of wealth that will allow you to buy your private island because these guys have tried all throughout history, but they died from smallpox. To get rid of smallpox, it took the largest army in United Nation's history. In India alone, we had 150,000 people who went door-to-door trying to find every case of hidden smallpox. We visited every house in India every month regularly for 20 months. We made over a billion house calls.

Something you won't find too many doctors even at Stanford doing, I think. This is a classic case of smallpox. I don't put it up here to make you feel bad or turn away. I put it here because it's actually a very mild case of smallpox. Just to give you an idea of how horrible the disease was: In a bad case of smallpox which we call confluent smallpox, there will not be a single point on this child's skin where you could put your finger. The fact that there are some isolated areas means this child will live and not die, whereas a third of all kids who got smallpox did die. This is really an important graph because it's a histogram and it shows you that in 1974, we reached the peak of the most number of cases of smallpox recorded in human history. We had to do that because if we didn't find every case of smallpox at the same time, every virus in the world, on the planet at the same time, we could not a circle of immunity around it and stop that virus from going on to the next susceptible patient. I put this here just to remind me the number of people who worked from 50 different countries and put down the things that divided them so they could work together on a common cause. That's what we're trying to do right now in fighting against climate change.

That's what we're trying to do right now in fighting against new diseases. We don't have that level of effort yet in trying to bridge the gap between the rich and the poor. We don't have that level of agreement yet on education and how to make new jobs in Africa, but we're just getting started.