



Stanford eCorner

The Desire to Make a Difference

Wendy Kopp, *Teach for America*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2599/The-Desire-to-Make-a-Difference>

In 1989, as a senior at Princeton University, Teach For America CEO and Founder Wendy Kopp was a public policy major concerned about inequity in American education. Her idea for Teach For America was born from a desire to right these injustices, and realizing classmates searching to make a difference in the world were all around her.



Transcript

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

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