

5 stories, no more than three paragraphs long

If you had a million dollars to give away, to whom/what would you give it?

When I saw this topic I thought: “\$1 million? That’s not nearly enough money to create the change I want to create.” That’s when I realized that I’d use it as start-up for a foundation dedicated to spreading awareness about the truth of charity and helping other nonprofits fundraise effectively.

If I had a million dollars to give away, I would turn that million dollars into many more millions by spending it all on growth. The way the world views charity is so backwards, and that backwards view is crushing the nonprofit sector. However, you can watch Dan Pallotta’s TED talk to learn that, so instead I’ll describe a cause that is important to me. I wouldn’t give this cause \$1 million, I would not settle until I raised much more than that because this cause requires much more than \$1 million to initiate actual change.

Extinction of a species is—to me— one of the most horrible crimes that mankind has committed. That’s saying something because mankind has committed many horrible crimes. We’re leaving a hole in the genetic pool of the planet, and I feel helpless to do anything about it. Take elephants for example. It’s 2014, and yet 100,000 have been poached over the past 3 years because the middle-class in some Asian countries believe that ivory is precious and mystical or something superstitious. These amazing creatures are slaughtered all the time and the people trying to protect them have not nearly enough resources to do so. It’s so incredibly upsetting to me that someone could hold an ivory trinket in their hand and be pleased, knowing that an elephant was murdered so they could have their mantelpiece. Elephants are some of the world’s most magnificent creatures and they’ll be extinct in no time if something doesn’t change. Something has got to give and I want to make it give. \$1 million multiplied many times over due to the effectiveness of my fundraising team will help sway governments that allow ivory to be traded at such a high price, that allow the black market to thrive at the sake of elephants. That’s what I’d do with \$1 million.

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What are your goals?

This is a difficult question, because 1 year ago I prided myself on the fact that I knew the answer to it. It was easy “I want to be an Investment Banking Analyst.” It would be a difficult path but I knew what to do and was confident that I could do it. Then things changed. I got involved with philanthropy at Iowa State and began to question if I even wanted to work in Finance. Then I took a statistics class and things we’re complicated even further as I realized how much I enjoyed working with data, especially data visualization.

Today, I’ll tell you that my concrete goals are ever-changing. Depending on what day you spoke to me, I might be an aspiring investment banker, or I might be a future fundraising coordinator. Wishy-washy. That’s what they call that, and I hate that I am that way but I can’t help but see the merits and the drawbacks of both which I find to be relatively equal. But hey, let’s throw a new variable in the mix: maybe I want to be a data scientist. Well doesn’t an investment banker work with lots of data while financial modeling? Well couldn’t a data scientist use powerful statistics and visualizations to bolster a fundraising campaign? And so I continue to spiral downward into my own indecision.

However, I do have abstract goals. If you don’t know what I mean by that, let me throw some of them out: Work with data. Create visuals/presentations in my career. Be the BEST at what I do so I can be a consultant and work for myself. Be financially independent enough to start my own foundation(s). Be a person of importance, someone who matters. Know that every day I’m doing my piece to make the world a better place. Change the way society views something... All of these are quite grand, and I am so confident that if I can just find one goal here on earth to attach them to, I know I can achieve them.

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What is the most important thing you have learned?

Life's too short to not give it your all every single day.

That's it. In one sentence that sums it up. Here we're starting to come full circle as this most important lesson is how I came to be "here" mentally. How I came to be so driven, so eager to contribute and so much more confident in myself and my abilities. I'm never going to give life less than 100%. Most of the time I give it 110% (the extra 10% coming from time that is spent sleeping by a normal person). I can't give anything less than all of me because doing that would compromise this person I've become.

I balance 10 different commitments at the same time. I leap at any chance I get to put data into a spreadsheet and analyze it or organize it. I spend time working on projects for organizations I'm involved with instead of sleeping. Instead of lunch and dinner, I run from class to meetings back to class then home for quick bite before another meeting followed by tasks that I was given at the meetings. Oh and at some point (shortly) before the due date, I work on school assignments and study, and although my priorities are out of whack, I still manage to perform at a high academic level. I take classes and get involved with things because I think I'll develop into someone better as a result of it, not because it looks good on a resume or transcript. I asked myself the other day if I had spread myself too thin, and if I should sleep more than 4 hours a night, but then I read that *"It is far better to be tired than bored"* and remembered why I do what I do. I put twice as much effort into everything, and it therefore takes me twice as long. My life is devoted to improving efficiency. I have trouble delegating because I know that it'll be done the way I want it if I do it myself. I'm learning about how to empower others, I'll get there, someday.

Maybe that paragraph sounds like one hundred different things I've learned, but I believe that they all stem from the idea that "life's too short to not give it your all every single day." I never want the day to end with me laying in bed thinking "I could've done more" or "if only" because life is a battle and those days are the days I lose. At the end of my life, if there are more days won than lost, then I'll know I gave it my all. If I pass away wishing I could go back and start over... well, that's not an option.