

Your Organization Could Be Part of the Solution

Neil Bush

February 2020

2020 International Association for Peace and Economic Development (IAED)
Kintex in the Seoul Metropolitan Area, South Korea



It is such an honor and pleasure to be invited to participate in this prestigious forum today. I've been to Asia over a hundred times since I married my beautiful wife, Maria, who's sitting here. This is her very first trip every to Asia.... Maria and I got on the plane, and we saw everyone with their anti-viral masks on. We were coming in this direction; we were wondering if we were heading the right way. And yes, we were, and we landed exactly where we should be.

I want to thank those of you whom I've met, who expressed condolences for the passing of my amazing parents. Barbara and George Bush... My mom and dad lived lives that reflect the values of the Universal Peace Federation -- looking for the best in others, treating everyone with respect, leaning into everything they did with love. When asked what the most important thing in their lives was, they would say faith, family, friends, and service to others. My parents participated in events such as this, and always appreciated the Moon family's commitment to promoting service to others. They understood the power that comes from embracing universal values and seeking peace. We share a common humanity, and when we find common ground with people of different religious, cultural, economic, and political backgrounds, the problems we worry about the most will go away.

The world's astonishing progress

I often think about how amazing the path of human development has been. How a relatively weak and disorganized species that faces threats to survival by natural elements and fierce predators has evolved into the dominant force on earth. Humans have the unique ability to record findings -- findings that are passed down from generation to generation, always advancing. The sharing of these findings has led to remarkable medical, engineering and scientific breakthroughs. Humans are living longer. Millions of people in the past century have been lifted out of poverty. We fly in big comfortable airplanes from all over the world to Seoul, Korea, to be here today. Communication systems are getting faster and faster with higher and higher capacity for delivering more and more data. Humans are more connected now than ever, and the rate of change is mind-boggling. If you just take a moment to look around while you are out and about, you can't help but marvel at how incredible God's hand is in the work he created for us and how far humans have come as a species.

Old and new threats remain

With all the positive developments, there are growing challenges to sustaining life on earth that we need to address urgently. The United Nations identified a list of seventeen challenges in establishing sustainable development goals that set an aspirational global benchmark to be achieved by 2030. The UN has designated the coming ten years as the decade of action. The human population will grow from eight

billion to over ten billion by 2050. While farms are being more efficient, farmlands are being overproduced and being drained of nutrients. Modern supplies are shrinking. How will we feed ten billion people?

Climate change is real. And the ramifications of this phenomenon are rising sea levels, eroding more habitable lands. More frequent, more violent natural disasters require more and more human resources for recovery.

How will we deal with the increasing complexity of the spread of infectious diseases? Viral agents are mutating in ways that get around our natural immune systems, and they weaken the impact of the scientifically developed remedies. Did you know that (according to the World Health Organization) the seasonal flu this year will cause up to 650 thousand deaths globally? One of my brothers and my assistant had a flu shot, and just as we were getting on the plane, they are now recovering from debilitating flu symptoms. There is growing concern over income inequality. The rich are getting richer, and the middle class and the poor are finding it increasingly difficult to advance. Cities all over the United States, and I suspect in other parts of the developed world, face challenges related to intergenerational poverty. Kids born into poverty have a tough time getting out. Our prisons are full in the United States, and the children raised by parents that have been incarcerated have an 80 percent chance of being incarcerated themselves someday.

Education is invaluable

Education is the key that opens doors to advancement. And literacy is the platform skill that is required for humans to realize their fullest God-given potential. And yet, in the United States, an alarming number of kids graduating from third grade without having the prerequisite skills required to succeed as a student and in life. There are many challenges that need to be addressed -- homelessness, the refugee crisis, immigrant resettling, senior care, gun violence, mental health, high suicide rates, the breeding of terrorist cells, the opioid epidemic, the list is too long to rattle off here.

A vacuum at the top

It is frightening that while humans face these challenges, we are facing a highly disruptive moment in terms of global leadership, with growing anxiety among people all over the world. The 2020 Edelman Trust Barometer came out two weeks ago at the World Economic Forum. They shared that none of the major institutions, businesses, nonprofits, government and media is distrusted. Yet, 66 percent of the people said that they do not have confidence that their current leaders will be able to successfully address the company's challenges, and 73 percent are looking for a change. This trend has both positive and very disconcerting. On the negative side, there seems to be less civility than before. There are deeper divides and less commitment to collaboration. Walls are being built, enemies are being made, good people are being maligned and are often being replaced. On the positive side, many people are calling for change and taking action. This phenomenon is best reflected recently by the young climate activist Greta Thunberg who (like millions of others) is using what they have, where they are, to create change.

A thousand points of light in a broad and peaceful sky

My father, as Tom referenced, started the Points of Life, the largest organization focused on promoting voluntary service and social responsibility in the world. Because he recognized that governments alone could not address human challenges. He recognized that there are millions of nonprofits, faith organizations, and corporations that use human capital to solve problems, to lift individuals to realize their full potential and build communities to respond to crises and the aforementioned challenges to sustaining life on earth for generations of humans to come.

I'm extremely proud to chair this organization, and in recent years it's been very interesting to observe how people giving back has changed. In addition to volunteering in a traditional way -- to mentor a child, to clean up a neighborhood, to feed the homeless and to teach an adult how to read -- more and more people these days are making conscious decisions based on core values to do good.

They choose to work with companies that have established a culture of service. They choose to buy products from companies that are socially responsible. More and more people are creating their own social enterprises to find new innovative ways to address systemic change. Points of Light believes when people look back at this time, they will see an era of sustained, meaningful civic engagement, fueled by a global community of people driven by our common humanity ready and willing to do good. We're defining this era as the civic century.

Businesses could lead the way

There's a role for everyone, individuals, nonprofits and especially corporations. In a recent CEO survey on sustainability conducted by the United Nations, they found that only 21 percent of CEOs feel business

is currently playing a critical role in contributing to the UN sustainable development goals. However, 71 percent of CEOs believe that with an increase in commitment and action, businesses can play a critical role. We need to spread the word. More business leaders need to take responsibility for how their company can contribute to the solutions.

According to the CEO report, there are some top ways for business leaders to get this done. Number one, personal commitment at the very top C-suite commitment drives change. [c-suite: the suite of offices occupied by the company chief executive officer (CEO), chief financial officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), or chief information officer (CIO)] If you're in the C-suite, those of you sitting in this room, you need to drive the change.

Number two, get educated. From the C-suite to the street, visit and learn globally, if you can, and seek local solution leaders to grow your ability to imagine your company being sustainable in every way, not just net-zero [no loss, no growth]. Assign someone to lead this work and mainstream it into your company.

Number three, get focused. Where does it make sense for your organization to focus your energy? What are your organization's priorities? It's completely expected that your business can look to address both development and business goals?

Number four, integrate sustainable development goals into your strategies, and operational purpose. Don't take it on, build it in. Number five, engage and educate your most valuable asset -- your employees. How do their departments and habits contribute to more sustainable practice? How are you incentivizing their behaviors? Number six, look for partners. Whether from groups like Corporate Social Responsibility, the CSF Forum, or global organizations like Points of Light and Impact 2030, how do you engage and communicate with your customers and vendors as you commit to achieving around the sustainable development goals?

Number seven, measure and communicate the impact. One of the biggest evolutions in the (corporate social responsibility) CSR space is connecting business value into measures around social impact. And believe me when I say, doing good is good for business. This year's Edelman Trust Barometer showed that globally, 73 percent of people believe companies can take action to both increase profits and improve conditions in communities where they operate. Research shows that companies that establish a culture of service are tracked and retain more productive employees that benefit the bottom line.

According to the 2019 Edelman Trust Barometer Special Report, 81 percent of consumers set a major consideration for brand purchases now based on "I must be able to trust the brand to do what is right." Last year, the UN reported that if we don't harness the right power from people, we will not hit the sustainable goals by 2030. So now, more than ever, in this decade of action, it is critical that businesses roll up their sleeves and get involved. For every individual, for every faith institution, for every corporation, it is time to commit, to recommit, to double down on being part of the solution, on being someone the world needs us to be, to be the Points of Light in the lives of others. Thank you.