My Top 4 Takeaways From This Year’s Annual TED Conference

In case you missed the annual meeting-of-the-minds mega-conference this spring, don’t worry, I’ve got your back. Here’s the best advice I got there.

May 22, 2019 5 min read

Opinions expressed by *Entrepreneur* contributors are their own.

Whenever the annual TED Conference rolls around, I always make sure to budget time and money to attend. You’re probably familiar with TED Talks from streaming them online, but TED’s *main* conference takes the learning we get from one other to an even higher level.

This past April’s event in Vancouver featured five full days packed with bold and exciting lectures from some of the most brilliant and inspiring people on Earth, touching on everything from relationships to astronomy.

Related: The Top TED Talks of 2019 So Far — and What You Can Learn From Them

Here are a few key points that I found extremely insightful and motivating, and I hope you do, too.

1. “Your company should have an unwavering purpose you never lose sight of, no matter how big you get.”

Speaker: Chobani founder and CEO Hamdi Ulukaya

As the founderof a mission-driven start-up, this statement

wasn’t news to me, but it was still powerful to see Ulukaya speak about the importance he saw in maintaining a sense of purpose as he built his multibillion-dollar company. One-third of Chobani’s employees are immigrants or refugees. And their CEO pays these factory workers an average of twice the federal minimum wage, as well as gives a portion of profits to charitable causes.

Ulukaya also believes that in this politically charged era, real social change will come from the business world, not from government. I found his words inspiring, and a reminder of the responsibility that I have to my customers and to the planet overall.

2. “Speak the hard truth, even when it’s terrifying.”

Speaker: British journalist Carole Cadwalladr

This was the TED talk heard ‘round the world: Cadwalladr — a Pulitzer Prize finalist — revealed how she broke the news that political data firm Cambridge Analytica had gained access to 50 million Facebook users’ information as a way to identify the personalities of American voters and influence their behavior.

She called out the executives at tech companies for being asleep at the wheel (at best) and willfully negligent (at worst).

Many of those same executives were sitting in the audience right in front of her; the energy in the room was palpable. This was not just an investigative journalist explaining her process, but oine standing up for what she believes in, even when the people on the other side of the debate were, and are, some of the most powerful in the world. Now, I know senior executives at major companies, like Facebook and Google, and there are a lot of good people working at those companies. But

Cadwalladr’s talk showed us just how bad things can get when a company loses its sense of purpose.

Related: 10 TED Talks That Will Change How Entrepreneurs Think About the World

3. To truly expand one’s mind and change their way of living, people need to experience the benefits first, then understand the how and why later.

Speaker(s): Various

One of my favorite aspects of TED is that you can roam around the convention floor and encounter everything from robots that follow you to VR experiences that let you see what the view is going to be like when viewed from the top of Mt. Everest. The “Future of Food Lab,” a showcase of innovative independent food and beverage brands, was particularly inspiring. From Beyond Meat’s vegan lab-grown protein to Miyoko’s cashew-based cheese, companies introduced us attendees to new and innovative ideas, and showed us how those ideas can fit into our real lives.

Each product was presented in an appetizing and alluring form that people would actually want to eat, from vegan buffalo “chicken” nuggets to a dairy-free charcuterie plate.

It was eye-opening to watch fellow attendees instantly shift their perspective on food and nutrition just by taking a bite or sip of a new product. I felt as though I was watching someone’s mind open up to new possibilities in real time. Sometimes, experiencing something first-hand is exactly what drives actual, meaningful transformation.

4. Sometimes, it’s all about how you tell your story.

Speaker: Marine microbiologist Karen Lloyd

Every year at TED, there are talks that I fear will go way over my head as well as talks I believe will bear ittle relevance to my life and/or my business. This year, for example, there were talks from astrophysicists, soil scientists and plant geneticists. The entire TED experience can be so overstimulating, in fact, that sometimes it’s tempting to duck out of the crazy science talks and chill over a cup of coffee.

But, often, these are the very speakers that can be the most mind-blowing because, if they are doing their “talk” right, you can tell just how passionate they are about the often incredibly narrow field of research they are involved in.

For example: Lloyd, the marine microbiologist, described her research exploring tiny life forms at the bottom of the ocean and in volcanoes, and how the findings are completely changing scientists’ idea of what constitutes “life.” This is pretty far from my area of interest or expertise, but Lloyd’s fervor for her work as well as her great effort to ensure that audience members with likely no knowledge of, or inherent interest in, her field would be able to both grasp and enjoy what she had to say.

Related: Fried? 9 Hyper-Motivating TED Talks from Women on the Top.

She clearly cared not just about the story, but the audience. And that’s a lesson for all of us who have a story to tell.

https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/333788