

TED2019: “Bigger Than Us” Takeaways

TED speakers solicited global buy-in as they shared big ideas about the future.

Deep thinkers, boundary-breaking scientists and awe-inspiring trailblazers from all corners of the world converged in Vancouver for [TED2019](#). On their own, each speaker had the ability to transform the way you think about an issue facing the world. Collectively, they provided a tidal wave of curiosity about the future of humanity.

This year’s theme, “Bigger Than Us,” alludes to the complex problems facing the world today. We’re in a time of turmoil. Most have given up on the idea of the lone-wolf innovator, instead increasingly turning to [teams](#) to solve the biggest challenges in front of us. TED speakers solicited global buy-in as they shared their new approaches and big ideas about the environment, technology, science and more.

“Bold ideas, tough truths and jaw-dropping creative visions.”

TED2019

As a TED partner for over 20 years, Steelcase has been helping TED to create great experiences for their forward-thinking speakers and attendees by creating the [places](#) where the TED events and learning happen. This year, Steelcase asked two artists to create a mural exploring collaboration and teamwork—exactly what organizations need to tackle the biggest hurdles ahead. The mural came together in real-time over the course of the conference and each figure is modeled after real attendees. A [TED blogger](#) reported the mural was bringing TED attendees and the artists together on and off the canvas.

Steelcase TED attendees included Uli Gwinner, president of Asia Pacific for Steelcase, and Thomas Cook, Steelcase director of corporate strategy and development. They shared the difficult questions, brazen ideas and eye-popping TED Talks that caught their attention.

DISRUPTIVE TECH ETHICS

Carole Caldwelladr speaks at TED2019. (Photo Courtesy: Bret Hartman / TED)

One of the most talked about TED Talks this year, also topped the list of both Gwinner and Cook. [Carole Caldwelladr](#), a British journalist and Pulitzer Prize finalist, shared her investigative reporting into the Brexit vote and how misinformation spread in social media ad campaigns. She pointed the finger at Silicon Valley saying, “You set out to connect people and you are refusing to acknowledge that the same technology is now driving us apart.”

She raised very direct questions about how disruptive technologies can bring about unintended consequences. The ideas carried into an interview with [Jack Dorsey](#), founder of Twitter where moderators and the audience (through live tweets) pressed him on changes to the platform to mitigate some of the divisiveness it can propagate. “New technologies can impact parts of our lives we probably never imagined when we started using them,” said Gwinner.

DEMOCRATIZING SPACE

Peter Beck speaks at TED2019. (Photo Courtesy: Bret Hartman / TED)

Peter Beck, who set up a private rocket company in the very south of New Zealand, is thinking small when it comes to outer space. He wants to dramatically increase access to space by leveraging tiny spacecraft and 3D printed engines. The CEO of Rocket Lab currently launches a rocket every 72 hours and reduced the cost from \$50m (USD) to \$5m.

SUBVOCAL SPEECH DETECTION

Arnav Kapur, a young entrepreneur at MIT, demoed a new technology that can detect subvocal speech through a small patch worn on your jaw (like a band-aid). It’s basically text-to-speech, but you don’t actually have to open your mouth or make any sound for it to detect the “speech.” On stage, they combined this with an Alexa-like AI device that parsed the speech and fed answers back via an earbud. So, imagine being able to look up the weather in the middle of a conversation without ever breaking eye contact or making a sound. “Combine this kind of tech with tablets or VR headsets and you can see how it could replace typing and make the laptop obsolete,” observed Cook.

DIGITAL DOUBLE

Doug Roble speaks at TED2019. (Photo: Ryan Lash / TED)

Are you ready to meet your digital twin? Doug Rouble, computer graphics software researcher, appeared on stage with a helmet and his digital video alias on large screens alongside him. The 3D video alias moved in almost perfect synchrony. It took 15 months and millions of facial data sets to build. It’s a completely new level of computer animation for movies and video games. He mentioned this technology could show up for you in video conferences or movies. The applications are endless.

SAVING THE WORLD

TED has picked eight submissions out of 1500 to be part its [Audacious Project](#). This is a massive project intended to inspire change at scale. They include Project Educate a Girl—a plan to convince parents in rural Indian villages to send young girls to school. Project Thorn—which develops software that helps identify people who upload video material of sexual child abuse. And, the Institute for Protein Design—an institution led by young scientist David Baker who dedicates his life to the computer design of new proteins. He has a vision to design a new type of protein molecule which functions as a much more effective vaccine, and medication than what we have today.

TED2019 included dozens of speakers, some you've heard of, and many you haven't heard of yet. To read and watch more TED Talks from this year, visit ted2019.ted.com.

* Lead photo courtesy: Bret Hartman / TED

Uli Gwinner is the President of Steelcase Asia Pacific. He is responsible for all AP operations in a region that includes China, India, Japan, Australia, Hong Kong, South Korea and Singapore. As veteran in workplace environments, he has worked with numerous Fortune 500 companies to design spaces that inspire, connect and engage employees. A lover of the outdoors, Uli is also a competitive swimmer, rower and cyclist.

Thomas Cook is director of corporate strategy and development for Steelcase. He is responsible for leading the development of Steelcase's growth strategies. Before joining Steelcase in 2017, he was with Bain & Company, a global management consultancy.

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