

NEW GOSPEL OF WEALTH / THE FUTURE OF PHILANTHROPY

Tech funders changing philanthropy featuring Priscilla Chan and Darren Walker

Priscilla Chan, co-founder & co-CEO of the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, on creating innovative solutions with organizers and activists to tackle complex challenges of our time.

This video is part of a collection of conversations with leaders, thinkers, and activists from philanthropy, business, the arts, tech, and beyond outlining bold visions for the future of philanthropy.

Transcript begins.

[The new toolbox for social change: technology, advocacy, and philanthropy. Priscilla Chan, co-founder and co-CEO, Chan Zuckerberg Initiative. A first-generation Asian American woman wearing a violet-colored dress. Darren Walker, president, Ford Foundation. An African American man wearing glasses and a light blue dress shirt with gray pants.]

ANNOUNCER: Please welcome Priscilla Chan and Darren Walker.

[applause]

DARREN WALKER: Priscilla Chan.

PRISCILLA CHAN: Hi, everyone.

DARREN WALKER: CZI, the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative, which you started with your husband, in a way to actually honor the birth of your daughter.

PRISCILLA CHAN: Yeah.

DARREN WALKER: Talk about that.

PRISCILLA CHAN: So, a little more than four years ago now, we were finally pregnant—we had a number of miscarriages. And then we had, I think, a very human experience of, oh my god, it's happening now. We are deeply unprepared. And we went into nesting mode, and then it, like, spiraled. Because it was like, do we have the crib? Is the world going to be okay?

[laughter]

And so we started thinking, like, oh my gosh, she's coming. She's going to be raised in the world around us, and there's so much progress that needs to be made. And we want to be a part of that. And so we always knew we were going to give back. We always knew we had a

tremendous responsibility with the good fortune that we've had in our lives, but we thought it would come later. But that moment of panic—of, like, we need to do something to advance medicine, we need to do something to improve education, we need to build systems that are just in our country—that became very urgent when we realized that the future was now. And so that's when we launched CZI, and we had the exciting opportunity to give back while we were still young, still in the prime of our careers, and wanted to bring more than just capital. And for me it was really being on the frontlines. I've always known that I was going to be in service. I was an after-school teacher, elementary school teacher, and then a pediatrician in our San Francisco safety net hospital. And I love being on the frontlines. It gives me gratitude for all that I have in my life and—the satisfaction of serving, but it's also frustrating. I see all the problems on the frontline, and it's hard. The people who do well are the ones who've gotten lucky, not because our systems are doing well and serving people. And for Mark, he's—he has the skill set of building technology that can actually scale to serve the needs of many, not just the lucky few. And we thought, how can we merge these two things in addition to the incredible opportunity we have to give back our resources to actually do something a little different to make sure that we're serving a niche?

DARREN WALKER: Yes. And—and you really did

[applause]

think very intentionally about how you embed technology into human-centered solutions.

PRISCILLA CHAN: Yeah.

DARREN WALKER: So talk about how you embed technology into CZI's strategy.

PRISCILLA CHAN: So about half of our organization is, uh, technical. And I can tell you, recruiting in Silicon Valley is brutal.

DARREN WALKER: Why is it brutal?

PRISCILLA CHAN: Oh my god, there's companies like Facebook,

[laughter]

Google—they're always trying to recruit our people. But it's this realization that was part of the founding of CZI—is how do we bring the tools that we expect, being able to use technology to make a scientist's life better, to make an educator's life better, to hold accountability in the criminal justice system. Those don't exist. And our role is not to invent that, because there are folks—practitioners on the frontlines that we partner with—that have those great breakthroughs. They have an amazing pilot program in their lab, or in their classroom. We see our role as embedding industry-standard technology teams to help make those systems stronger, better, more shareable. I'll give you one example. We partnered with this fantastic scientist named Joe DeRisi. He built a program where you take a blood sample, you sequence it, you remove all the human DNA, and we take the remaining genetic sequence and map it to known infectious

diseases. And it tells you, without any prior guess, what you might be sick with. It's fantastic, and I promise it actually works. But—couldn't scale. And we partnered with Joe and his lab, and we put a team of 11 product managers, engineers, designers, user researchers, to actually ask the question of, if we wanted many people to have access to this, what would we actually do? And we hardened it. People across the globe can use it, and we've changed the cost from \$200 to about \$20 each time. We're partnering with Gates Foundation to make it so that we're using it right now as a global health epidemic monitoring tool. So, right now we have 10 groups across the globe who are trained up on how to use these machines that actually a lot of them have and have no idea how to use. So they go to Joe's lab, we train them on how to use the technology, and we're using it to surveil—like, is chikungunya coming back to Bangladesh? If it is, what strain is it? Are there mutations in this that can tell us how to better treat this? It's about making every scientist better at their job. And we think tools are the keys to actually seeing the world differently, making discoveries, and accelerating the way that we can advance science and advance medicine. But that's an example of a very niche thing that we think we are uniquely suited to do in a broader ecosystem that involves other philanthropies, involve other governments and universities. And we get really excited about playing our role.

DARREN WALKER: You guys have done the Giving Pledge.

PRISCILLA CHAN: Mm-hmm.

DARREN WALKER: You are enormously generous. How do you think about this idea of justice? You are a trained physician. Your husband is a technologist. Do you think about justice in your work as a philanthropist?

PRISCILLA CHAN: Every day. Um, I'm—I can't not. Uh, I'm going—after this I'm going to Boston to see my family where I grew up. And, um, you know, my mom lives, uh, in like a 600-square-foot house. And I grew up in a working-class town where—actually, if you've ever seen the movie "Good Will Hunting," that's literally where I grew up. Matt Damon was not my neighbor, because he actually grew up in a nicer part of town. But I'm—I'm always grappling with my privilege and how unfair it is that I get to live the life that I have. And, um, those who, you know, worked on my right and left who were just as smart oftentimes don't have those opportunities. And even before CZI was a thing, I knew I was going to give back. I already knew that as the child of refugees, I'd been lucky beyond my wildest dreams. And I try to embed that value of staying close to the work, staying close to the frontlines. So I still have—uh, for me, that—I still have a reading group at a school that I founded. I work with five-year-olds on how to read. I'm in clinic at our safety net hospital once a month, because that's what fuels me in wanting to do this work and hopefully makes me better at my job and makes each person at CZI a little bit more powerful.

DARREN WALKER: So the thing that Priscilla Chan manifests is humility and authenticity, because you have always been the person you are today, a person committed to building a world that is more just and fair, a person who recognizes that you have been very lucky and very fortunate—and that your responsibility is to spread that fortune, and to ensure that others

benefit from your privilege, and that you build the world that we all want to see. Please join me in thanking Priscilla Chan.

[applause]

[New gospel of wealth. What does #GenerosityToJustice look like to you? Ford Foundation dot org forward slash new gospel.]

End of transcript.