



MARCH 2016 HIGHLIGHTS FROM TED2016

As many Honeybee readers know, I've found the TED ecosystem to be a wonderful resource for all sorts of ideas over time, from the highly technical to the deeply human (and sometimes both at once). A number of themes from this year's gathering will surely echo through our research over time, drawn in part from this short list of my personal highlights from TED 2016. The talks are not all up for viewing on the [TED website](#) yet, but should be added quickly, and there's lots of great [commentary](#) already there in the meantime.

I've highlighted some favorite quotes, a few mega-themes, and my personal picks for top talks of the session. Highlights from prior conferences can be found in the Library section of our [website](#). And in case you missed it, [TED blog post about Honeybee Capital](#) from last year!

TOP QUOTES:

*How old do you feel? "I am the peer of whoever I am talking to."
- Norman Lear, age 93*

*"I was the dialysis for a country that needed a kidney transplant."
- Casey Gerald*

*"My country is not one big monastery populated by happy monks."
- Bhutanese PM Tshering Tobgay*

*"When you do data visualization right, it's illuminating; when you do it wrong, it's anaesthetizing. Watch out."
- Luke Dubois, artist*

*"I'm not a visionary – I'm glad there are people looking at the clouds, but I'm looking at the pothole on the ground and wanting to fix it before I fall in."
- Linus Torvalds, father of Linux*

*"Two things are necessary for great achievement – a plan, and not quite enough time."
- Leonard Bernstein, quoted by Dan Pallotta*

"I work in a moonshot factory... we combine enthusiastic skepticism and boundless optimism."

- the aptly-named Astro Teller, describing X (formerly GoogleX).

What is a better term for 'director'? A more compelling term is from the Mohegan language: "Kutáhun Uyasunáqák -- our heart, she leads us there".

- Maddy Sayet, director, playwright, and TED fellow

"The dinosaur extinction was almost impossible – yet it happened, and this is our improbable history."

- Ken Lacovara, paleontologist

"The will to act is itself a renewable resource."

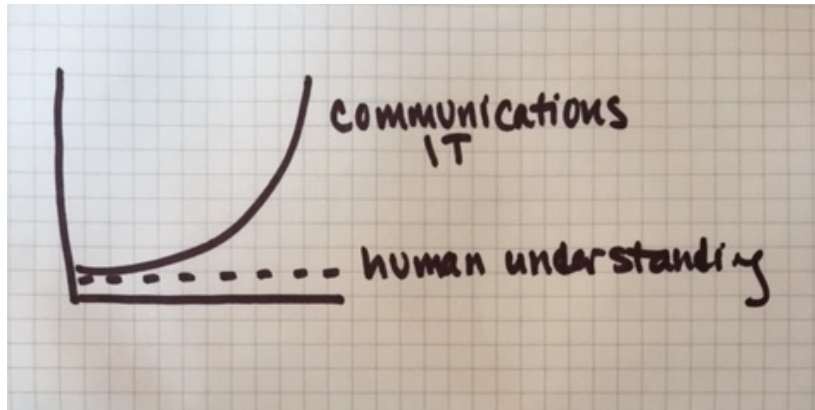
- Al Gore

KEY THEMES:

1) LISTENING OVER LOOKING.

The explicit conference theme for this year was Dream, but the loudest undercurrent to me was Listen.

In the very first session, Dan Pallotta showed one of the simplest and most compelling charts of the entire week:



Our capacity to transfer data has vastly outgrown our capacity for true listening.

Wanda Diaz Merced, an astrophysicist who's lost her sight, showed us the sound of stars, transferring data that is usually presented in visual form into auditory format. Turns out, different patterns become clear when we listen instead of looking.

<http://blog.ted.com/the-inspiring-talks-in-session-3-of-ted2016/>

Joe Gebbia from Airbnb noted a different form of listening, in the form of customer reviews. Though there's a demonstrated and consistent bias towards choosing people similar to ourselves, they've found that for properties with more than 10 reviews, reputation begins to trump the similarity bias. This form of listening could be revolutionary, opening up entrenched bias in all sorts of settings.
<http://blog.ted.com/the-challenging-talks-in-session-2-of-ted2016/>

2) MOONSHOTS AND ANCHORS.

Perhaps because of the Dream theme, at least two dozen talks referenced the moon landing, or more generically, moonshots. Astronaut Mae Jemison noted that this reference point is not nearly as universally understood as we might assume. For anyone under 54, the moon landing is a cool thing, but something that has always already been achieved. For those who are younger, who remember seeing it on live TV coverage, it is a miracle. Be careful when you choose your metaphors!

Al Gore reminded us that the average age of the NASA engineers in the room at the time of the moon landing was just 26 years old (!!). These were people who had heard Kennedy's message at age 18, and signed on for the effort. What are our 18 year olds hearing today? Can we put a worthy and impossible goal in front of them, with enough backing to try, even if we can't see the way forward yet?

HOMETOWN FAVORITES:

I'm glad to live in Boston for many reasons – our curious mix of history and innovation, our quirky combination of independent thinking and mega-institutions, and of course, our ridiculous weather patterns and amazing sports teams. Turns out that three of my very favorite talks this year all had ties to Boston – so now there are three more reasons to appreciate this place.

ADAM FOSS, The Power of the Prosecutor

Adam Foss is Assistant DA right here in Suffolk County, and he spoke about the amazing (and to many of us, invisible) power of prosecutors to reshape our justice system. Prosecutors are the ones who decide whether to arraign, and on what charges. They are also the ones who have the power to take a more creative approach. Discussions about the criminal justice system often get stuck at a mega-level of systemic analysis or at a micro level of compelling individual stories. The prosecutor plays a vital role in the middle – a key leverage point for systemic change.

For more on Foss' session, see the TED blog: <http://bit.ly/1KZ0cdw>

For more on leverage points in a system, see the Donella Meadows classic: <http://bit.ly/1Oobkvi>

MICHAEL MURPHY, Designing for Dignity

Murphy's group MASS Design is well known for their [hospital design in Butaro](#), Rwanda, where they combined local materials, local craftsmanship, and creative redesign to produce a building that is both gorgeous and healthy. The group's approach is to "invest in dignity" in all they do, considering the handprint (positive impact) of their work in addition to the footprint. Murphy is now translating these concepts into plans for a memorial to victims of lynching in the southern US, led by [Bryan Stevenson's](#) Equal Justice Initiative. Please view these plans directly as soon as they're released; the power and importance of this endeavor is impossible to convey in mere words.

CASEY GERALD, The Gospel of Doubt

It's great to be hopeful, or determined --- but not so great to take false comfort from marginal progress. Gerald was the final speaker at TED and what a powerful message it was: "we hardly realize the human price we pay when we fail to question one brick, because we fear it might shake our whole foundation." He wove the narrative of his own search for belief, which most temptingly included a stretch where he himself was welcomed as a savior. However "I was the dialysis for a country that needed a kidney transplant." Gerald concludes by asking us "not to stop believing, but to believe in a new thing...that it's possible the answers we have are wrong, that it's possible the questions themselves are wrong." In a room full of questioners in a week full of answers, this was the most powerful message of all. You can read more about the talk here: <http://bit.ly/1T06egH>

TOP TALKS:

- **Ken Lacovara**, paleontologist
"The dinosaur extinction was almost impossible – yet it happened, and this is our improbable history." To me this was the most well-crafted talk of the entire week, elegantly linking ancient history, modern exploration, and human inspiration. Plus, he discovered the gigantic 65 TON Dreadnoughtus, bigger than seven T-rexes combined! Read more about this amazing dominant herbivore here: <http://nyti.ms/1u4KVwl>
- **Norman Lear**, age 93, in a terrifically moderated conversation with Eric Hirschberg, CEO of Activision.
How old do you feel? "I am the peer of whoever I am talking to." Lear's childhood story of first recognizing "the foolishness of the human condition" will stay with me always.
- **Al Gore**
"The will to act is itself a renewable resource." One summary called Al Gore "The Elvis of TED" and I must say, this talk was electrifying! (bad pun intended). The video version is already available in its entirety: <http://go.ted.com/C7pV>
- **Haley Van Dyck, US Digital Service**
Did you know that the disastrous healthcare.gov rollout was saved by a team of just six people? There is a posse of digital superheroes growing within the US Federal

government, and thank goodness for it. This “Peace Corps for Nerds” is the most hopeful development from Washington since the National Strategic Narrative.

<http://1.usa.gov/1CGttzN>

- **Astro Teller & Amit Sood**

The titles for both of these talks might as well be, Yeah, it’s true, The Company Formerly Known as Google is really really cool.

<https://www.solveforx.com/>

<https://www.google.com/culturalinstitute/u/0/project/art-project>

- **Luke Dubois – artist** creating stunning data visualizations

“When you do data visualization right, it’s illuminating; when you do it wrong, it’s anaesthetizing.” Watch out.

<http://lukedubois.com/>

- **Linus Torvalds, Linux**, in conversation with Chris Anderson

Three cheers for introverts! “I still work alone – I did not start Linux as a collaborative project. I’m not a people person – but I love how people have contributed ideas and made things better.” Torvalds also weighed in on our fascination with visionaries: Everyone thinks Tesla is cooler than Edison, but who really changed the world? Edison. “I’m not a visionary – I’m glad there are people looking at the clouds, but I’m looking at the pothole on the ground and wanting to fix it before I fall in.” Some more choice quotes from the talk can be seen here:

<http://blog.ted.com/the-quotable-linus-torvalds-live-onstage-at-ted/>

- **Sarah Parcak – satellite archaeologist**

Really, what more is there to say? She’s a satellite archaeologist and this year’s TED Prize winner! An earlier talk from Parcak can be seen here:

<http://go.ted.com/C7pg>

FREAKY FELLOW PRIZE

If you had to pick just one element of TED to inspire you, it would probably be the Fellows – you can see more about the program and its amazing participants [here](#). I hereby introduce the Freaky Fellow Prize, awarded to the one who has me most completely agog by the end of a tiny six-minute talk. Competition is fierce!

This year, the prize surely must go to the Fellow who’s making ears out of apples, Andrew Pelling. Yep, you heard me – ears from apples.

<http://ideas.ted.com/a-promising-way-to-grow-body-parts-using-an-apple/>

<http://www.pellinglab.net/>

COOLEST DEMO AWARDS

The tech demos at TED are always amazing – I will never forget the DARPA hummingbird from a few years back, not to mention the vivid robo-version of Edward Snowden. This year, there was a series of amazing drone demos from Raffaello D’Andrea, founder of Kiva Systems. This video is already up: <http://go.ted.com/C7pS>. Most remarkable to me were the mini-drones that looked

like fireflies swooping around the room, gently lit up and coordinated in swarm-like motion.

Virtual reality was also featured prominently this year, including talks from Microsoft's Alex Kipman with the company's Hololens, a popular demo space from the Void, and audience participation during Vrse head Chris Milk's session. All were stunning, but the latter was especially moving. Whereas many applications involve fantasy worlds, Vrse uses this medium to tell real-world stories in more vivid ways; Milk calls it "an empathy machine".

It occurs to me that the common thread between these two – firefly drones and real-world VR - is that they came closest to mimicking our own natural world. Somehow it's a great comfort to be most impressed by the actual world, above and beyond awesome virtual fairylands or robots that look like, well, robots. This is likely the biggest opportunity and the biggest danger for all sorts of technologies – the realer they are, the easier it is to accept them without questioning.

SECRET BONUS SECTION: *a few of my all-time favorite TED talks.*

[Ed Yong - Science Writer, Creepy Bug Expert](#)

[Bryan Stevenson, We Need to Talk about an Injustice](#)

[Brene Brown, The Power of Vulnerability](#)

[Mark Bezos - Volunteer Firefighter](#)

[Louie Schwartzberg - Pollination](#)

[Jill Bolte Taylor - Stroke of Insight](#)

[Eli Pariser - Filter Bubbles](#)

[Hans Rosling - Washing Machine](#)

[JJ Abrams - Mystery Box](#)

***The mind, once stretched by a new idea,
never regains its original dimensions.***

- Oliver Wendell Holmes