

Simon:

In such challenging times, it's critical to think about how you and your business survive, but also to make sure that you support others, especially as we head into the holiday season. After so many crises and now inflation and the prospect of recession, there are more people and organizations in need than ever, and that's where the power of giving by companies of all sizes and individuals that supports the work of nonprofits is so vital. So what's the most effective way to give? How can you make sure your donation works as hard as it can to create the impact you want? And how can you make sure technology is used as wisely as possible to make that happen? It's these questions and more that have inspired James Citron, CEO of the Giving Platform Pledge to bring fresh innovation to this space and to make sure your donation goes as far as it can and inspires the entire industry to help as many people and causes as possible.

So let's dive into the latest thinking and practices around giving because the more we support each other, the better each day and tomorrow will be for everyone. From We First and Goal 17 Media, welcome to Lead with We. I'm Simon Mainwaring and each week I talk with purposeful business and thought leaders about the revolutionary mindsets and methods you can use to build your bottom line and a better future for all of us. Today, I'm joined by James Citron, CEO of Pledge, the world's first software platform to empower brands to integrate impact into their very core, to create better businesses and achieve sustainable social impact. And we'll talk about how to leverage technology most effectively to ensure that every donation dollar does the greatest good, and how we as companies, nonprofits, and donors can combine our efforts to provide the much needed support through these very turbulent times. So James, welcome to Lead with We.

James Citron:

Thank you so much for having me, Simon.

Simon:

Now James, you and I have known each other for a while. I think it's probably 10 years now, on and off, and we both started out in the impact space. I mean, how does someone like yourself who is marrying technology and impact, how does that come together? Because you might have gone off to Silicon Valley and looked for that hockey stick and that exit like so many others have done. Why did you come to the impact space and why through the sort of lens of technology?

James Citron:

Well, two things happened to me and I know a lot of your listeners have probably gone through the same life transition. So I'll tell you what happened to me. Two crazy things happened. First when I became a father, it just made me really think what is my legacy? And I like to call myself a recovering for profit entrepreneur because for about 15 years I was building tech companies and built some to pretty big scale. And when I took paternity and I started thinking about what is really your legacy, when you start having a family, you think differently.

And that's what initially started me thinking maybe tech isn't the only thing for me, but then something else happened to me. At the time, I was running a big text messaging company and we're sending out billions and billions of text messages and I got an email from a nonprofit that said, "Hey, I need to find the best text messaging platform in the world because I think text messaging can save lives." And this little nonprofit called Crisis Text Line realized that young kids were texting 911 from their cell phones

when they were in crisis. And Simon, do you know what happens when you text 911 from your cell phone?

Simon:

I have no idea.

James Citron:

Nothing. So these young kids literally thinking about cutting, needing help, were texting 911 and there was no response. So this nonprofit called Crisis Text Line said, "I need to solve this." Because young people, that's their first language is they pick up their phone, the first thing they start doing is texting. They don't actually call anybody. So she started this nonprofit, used my software, and at the time, like I mentioned, we were sending all these billions of messages, but I saw this little nonprofit use technology and start at one and then 10 and then 50, and then a hundred text messages a month and then thousands. And I realized it wasn't the reason we started as text messaging company, but a byproduct of building a great technology company actually had giant impact. So for me, at that point, I said, "Whatever I go build next, I'm going to marry my love for building technology with a company that's entirely built on impact."

Simon:

Despite how long we've known each other, I had no idea about that. And what's interesting is Crisis Text Line has been so instrumental during COVID and all the issues in and around mental health and young women and there's so many brands and young men who have a higher than one would expect instance of suicide and so on, so that's amazing. And so when you came to this point in your life, what was the giving non-profit do good space from a technology point of view? Was it pretty rudimentary?

James Citron:

It was incredibly rudimentary. I mean, I think unfortunately, this sector, which is a gigantic sector, and I like to call almost the heart of the world and the US economy, right? 2% of GDP is actually tied into the non-profit and philanthropy world. But the technology looked like something out of the 1990s. It was going back to the early days of Windows. To actually donate, oftentimes you go to a website and there's 57 forms to fill out. It's not two clicks with your thumb using Apple Pay. Everything was just complicated, complex. And as we know in today's world, if something isn't easy, you're done. You're abandoning, right? You're one notification away from abandoning that donation. So we looked at it and we said, "God, there's got to be an easier, simpler way to do things."

Simon:

And what year was this? How long ago was this?

James Citron:

This is now about seven years ago.

Simon:

You then started the company and originally had a slightly different name to what it has now. So give us that sort of genesis.

James Citron:

Yeah. So the initial name of the company was called Pledgeling and we liked the name Pledgeling. We met an incredible investor who he actually renamed Zoom, like the company Zoom had a different name. And when the founder of Zoom went and met with this investor, his name's Jim Scheinman from Maven Ventures, Jim told Eric, the multi-billionaire founder and CEO of Zoom, said, "I like your technology, it's incredible, but I think you could have a better name." And he said, "I think you should call it Zoom." So Zoom literally rebranded before they went public. And it's the company that 300 million use a month.

Simon:

You're revealing all of these golden nuggets today. I'm liking this, keep it coming, keep it coming.

James Citron:

I meet with Jim and he goes, Pledging is great, but Pledge is better. So we decided, okay, you were right that first time, so we're going to drop the ling and now we're pledge.

Simon:

You know what? So if anyone has any naming challenges, call Jim. No, I totally, totally... Okay. So to start the company, you started by an investor because I always wonder when do good companies for profit, nonprofit or otherwise, how do they get off the ground? So you actually had this investor to get some traction. And how long did you take before you realize, oh, you're onto something here?

James Citron:

Well, we realized it fairly quickly. Our first big partnership was with the company that everyone probably in your audience has used Evite. And the thing that we realized is there's just this desire for humans to do good, but there's this friction in the entire experience. And so we met with Evite and Evite said, "You know what's interesting? The hundreds of millions of people who use Evite and occasionally we see, or often we see in people are saying, hey, don't bring gifts to our kids' birthday parties." And I have young kids, this is every single birthday party now, everyone says do not bring 20-25 gifts. So Evite was seeing this desire from their users to say can we add a simple way for people to donate in lieu of gifts donate to charity? So we met with them first and I have to tell you, they said, "We see this and can you make it so simple?"

So we built this integration with them and literally the first day it went live, Simon, this blew my mind. He's now the former CEO, but the CEO at the time, Victor, wanted to announce this is the new Evite and they stand for something and they've integrated purpose into their business. So he is going on stage at a big ad tech conference in Vegas and he said, "James, after I give the keynote, would you come spend just 30 seconds to tell people how it's working, it doesn't work, and how all this?"

So I text Paul, our CTO, and I said, "Paul, has anyone used this thing? It's been live for a handful of hours." And he goes, "You would not believe it. Literally our first donation just came in and it was an 11-year-old girl's birthday party in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She was doing a bounce house birthday party, but she wanted to say, in lieu of gifts, please donate to charity. She picked Smile Train and someone made a thousand dollars donation." So we had a thousand dollars in a matter of an hour and then we started hundreds and then thousands of parties adding this capability.

Simon:

So firstly, give us a sense of exactly what Pledge is now because I want to make sure we don't rush past that, but also give us a sense of the scale of impact through other people's donations. What's been generated over the last seven years?

James Citron:

Yeah, absolutely. So Pledge, we like to call ourselves the most innovative charitable donation platform out there. And we do a few things. One, we partner with incredible companies like Evite, like Zoom, all these companies that want to do really good, but don't have a technology platform and make it easy for their customers or employees to donate. And so that started on Evite and now as thousands of companies. We also realized during COVID that in lieu of just working with companies, the humanity and all that wants to give and donate. So we opened up the ability for now anyone can create a fundraiser on Pledge, anyone can add a donate button on their website.

Simon:

So it's open source, in a sense, you can launch your own drive?

James Citron:

Exactly right.

Simon:

How complicated is that? What's that like? What's that look like?

James Citron:

It's super simple actually. And back to frictionless, we've tried to make this experience so easy. In literally 35 seconds, Simon, anyone could go to [pledge.to](https://pledge.to) to say I want to go end hunger, I'm going to create my pledge page, [pledge.to/endhunger](https://pledge.to/endhunger), pick their charity and launch it and share it via QR code, text, social, et cetera. And I mean it happens in minutes. Ariana Grande did something for trans youth about a month ago and raised \$3 million with a few Instagram posts. So it's super simple and easy.

Simon:

And so what sort of impact has the platform had over the last seven years as an aggregate of everyone's efforts?

James Citron:

So we've actually fundraised now for over 35,000, we'll 40,000 nonprofits have actually received funding through Pledge, 40,000 by the end of the year. And we've done over \$73 million to date. And we'll be close to a hundred million if not over a hundred million by the end of the year.

Simon:

It's amazing. It's amazing. I mean it's a credit to you and your team, but also to everybody out there, companies large and small, and individuals who are so generous and selfless and actually put their money where their mouth is. Can I actually back up for a second because a lot of the time businesses in the business are staying in business, especially with these economic headwinds and everyone's looking at their bottom line and trying to keep their employees and the great resignation and so on. Yet throughout this, there's this constant of giving. And so many folks in the United States and also around

the world just make it part of their, I don't know, their lifestyle, how they show up in the world. Give us a sense of how important giving is on an annualized basis here in the United States or around the world and just how many people are giving each year. Because I think it's easy, you just think that's an exception to the rule or you don't really have a sense of how much is going on, but can you give us some sort of detail?

James Citron:

Absolutely. The numbers are actually staggering when you look at the generosity of humanity, and I'm going to give you a few different data points. So there is almost twice as much money given to US nonprofits than all the money given to Google Alphabet, Facebook. So the total size of the charity industry in the US in terms of donations is almost \$500 billion. That's twice the size of the advertising industry, so there is tons of money. And by the way, three quarters of that is given by individuals. It's not from Jeff Bezos and the big foundations. Foundations that are about 20% of that \$500 billion given to charities, so this really comes from individuals. On a global basis, you're talking about \$2 trillion given to charities or equivalent charitable organizations around the world. So really, really big numbers. The most staggering and fascinating stat for me about when you look at how much does a family make and what percentage of their income actually goes to donations, is this really interesting to sit statistic.

So if you look at just let's take the American population and you look at the audience, the household income, which is just slightly above the poverty line, they actually give the highest percentage of their annual household income to charity. A bunch of scientists have studied this over the last 30, 40 years. It is because that audience knows what it's like to be in poverty, to not have homes, not have consistent shelter access to food, et cetera. So because they know they've managed to get out of poverty and how hard it is to be there, they give a higher percentage of their income and oftentimes it can be up to 10% of their household income.

Simon:

Wow. I mean, everyone should let that sink in for a second. I mean, that is so powerful. It's an expression of humanity and our connection to each other and our capacity to share despite how little we have to make a difference in the lives of others and we could only ever do with more of that for more people because there are so many in need. Speaking of COVID and speaking of in folks in need, I know that COVID was a really hard time for everyone and it forced all of us to look at our businesses squarely in the eye and say how do we need to retool and recalibrate? I mean, you've shifted to Pledge. I mean, you've also retooled your platform in some ways during that time. And why was that necessary?

James Citron:

Well, it was necessary because we saw that the needs were just so stark and apparent. There was a headline that came out in April 2020 that one-third of nonprofits may go out of business because they did not know what to do and they couldn't do in person fundraising.

Simon:

Because everyone had hunkered down and they weren't getting anymore or what?

James Citron:

Well, it was most nonprofits, half of them raised most of their money by in-person events, by meeting one another. And it was a combination of that and then COVID, all the funds had to go to schools and

hospitals and finding cures and vaccines. And so to think about one-third of nonprofits going out of business was just a scary, scary thought for the future of our planet.

So what we realized was we had to open up the platform. We had to make it easy to donate on Zoom. Zoom actually came in and fell in love with the idea of building a donate button on Zoom, which we launched for them. And they actually made even a strategic investment in the company, which was out of the blue and really incredible. By the way, and Simon your point, their core value is care and they realized at Zoom, we're connecting the whole world now, but we want to connect people around our vision of care. So Pledge is a great way for us to... By building a donate button, we can actually help the hundreds of millions of people using Zoom actually have really meaningful impact beyond just connectivity. So for us it was about opening up the platform, making philanthropy much more accessible and enabling people to have that inherent desire to help one another but make it easy.

Simon:

So instead of you launching something for someone on somebody's behalf, anyone can, as you described earlier on, can just add the button and launch whatever they want, right?

James Citron:

Yeah, exactly right. The other big thing that we realized, too, is that credit card fees are a big problem in the non-profit world. I mentioned the \$500 billion given to philanthropy. Well, last year probably \$10 billion of the donations that individuals gave to non-profits actually went to credit cards. And our mission is to power generosity. And we realized, is there a way? Because, by the way, vendors don't like it. If you give \$50 bucks or \$500 bucks, many don't realize that when you give \$50 to favorite school, church, your kid's elementary school, they're not getting \$50. Sometimes you're getting \$45 or \$40 because of all of fees taken out of the donation, back to the rudimentary old school nature of the industry. And we said, "You know what? How do we just make sure that when someone gives \$50 or if someone gives \$500, a hundred percent of those funds actually go to the nonprofits? So that's another thing that we've done to retool the platform and try to unlock these billions of dollars of new funding to nonprofits.

Simon:

So let me understand this. So when you donate any amount of money through the Pledge platform or partners like Zoom and so on, a hundred percent of it goes to that nonprofit? And if so, how does that work then? I mean every business has got their own costs and operating costs and so on. So how does that work and is there a threshold to that? Is there a dollar amount?

James Citron:

Yeah, absolutely. So when we thought about it, we said, "How do we build a business model that really aligns everyone's incentives, it's good for donors, it's good for non-profits and it's good for Pledge?" Well what we do is now when you make a donation through pledge to any nonprofit, you can leave an optional tip. So it's just like when you go to a local coffee shop and you get your favorite mocha and it says, "Do you want to leave a dollar to the barista?" You can do the exact same thing through Pledge and that's how we fund our business. It's all based on the generosity of donors and that ensures that when the donor gives, a hundred percent of their funding actually goes to the nonprofit and it aligns us with generous donors. And by the way, we're at 10,000 donations a day and we are seeing the generosity of donors, so we believe that this will be sustainable forever. And by the way, it's up to a \$1,000, so the only caveat is every donation up to a \$1,000.

Simon:

And then what percentage of donations are a \$1,000 or less?

James Citron:

98% of donations are a \$1,000 or less.

Simon:

Right, and then so for the donations above a \$1,000, what happens there?

James Citron:

Just the standard 3% credit card fee comes out.

Simon:

Got it. I mean, so the 98% of donations coming in now have no fees associated with them and you cover those costs by those additional tips. Why hasn't this happened before? Because I think just as someone who's made donations in lots of different forms at different times, I have to admit I'm a bit guilty of not really paying attention to the fees as much because I was more concerned about just giving whatever dollar value our family could give. And so why is it taken until now, I guess, is my question?

James Citron:

Well, it's a good question. I think there's two reasons. One, legacy technology. The industry has functioned a certain way for many, many years and it requires new companies, new innovations to come to the market sometimes to go, you know what? That's just not right. The other thing is we're a mission driven social enterprise. It is more important to us that more money gets raised for nonprofits than in having a higher margin. If we achieve more impact that is our North Star, not do we increase our margin?

Simon:

And I want to keep asking these devil's advocate questions. So how do you vet the non-profits to make sure that all of them legit? Because I'm sure there are bad actors out there sometimes. And then secondly, what transparency do you offer so people know that a hundred percent of their value goes where they want it?

James Citron:

Yeah, exactly. Well these are great questions. So we take incredible pride in vetting and verifying our database of non-profits and charitable organizations, which we think is actually now the biggest in the world. We have 2 million organizations in about 150 countries live in the Pledge platform. So the way we verify them, we use multiple databases to make sure if it's in the US for example, it is an IRS, it has IRS good standing, which means it's not a bad actor, it hasn't lost its standing and there's a number of different checks that we do on this because you're right, non-profits actually lose their status like that. It can happen in a minute. And this is something we take great pride in.

We have a whole trust and safety team that is focused on this. And then internationally, we expanded the database so we're in all these different countries to apply a similar level of discipline and rigor because you know what? Companies are starting, individuals are all over the world in Afghanistan as

great example, we ended up running one of the largest fundraisers during the fall of Afghanistan and we heard all told it was the largest civilian evacuation probably ever, over 2000 people were safely evacuated by funds that were raised on Pledge.

Well, to do that successfully and disperse money overseas to Afghanistan requires incredible rigor and diligence to make sure the funds actually get there, the plane takes off. And that's just a great example of the rigor and diligence we put into the process.

Simon:

And then on the transparency side, if I'm the donor and I go, great, wow, why wouldn't I want all my money to go where I want it to go? So I'm going to go across to Pledge and do that and I'll launch my own thing. Do you get to see how that money is spent or applied?

James Citron:

Yeah, exactly. So today, everyone expects to see it in real time, so that's what we built a real time feedback to that donor. So the second you donate, you're actually going to get a tax receipt that shows you your money is going to the non-profit, this is when it's going to be dispersed. And if we actually have data from the non-profit, we will even tell you how many trees are going to be planted, how many meals will be provided, how many nights a shelter will be provided by that donation. But there's real transparent feedback directly to that donor and/or to the company that's enabling those donations as well.

Simon:

Was that a nervous moment where you are like, okay, we're going to absorb all these up to a thousand dollars and flick the light switch and all the power goes off in your building? What was that moment like?

James Citron:

We decided we don't need power half the day.

Simon:

And candles still work, right? Candles still work, right?

James Citron:

No, you know what Simon? It just felt like we talked about it as a team. We looked at the data and we said we totally can do this and is it the right thing to do? And universally, it aligned with our core values, it aligned with our mission to power generosity and we said, "We're going to do this and we know it's going to work."

Simon:

Right. And obviously, this sounds like a lot of work, corralling over 2 million non-profits, managing the viability of a technology platform in real time with all the challenges, we know what that's like. And then liaising with companies of all sizes and non-profits and individual donors. What's that trajectory been like? How big is the team? What has the company look like to manage all of this?

James Citron:



Well the team has doubled in size in the last, I guess about 14 months. So the beginning of COVID, we were not sure what was going to happen in this whole industry. All of us were, and not just Pledge. I mean, I think humanity was trying to figure out what was going to happen, but we saw amazingly, one of our biggest customers was struggling. Many, many companies, many fundraisers that we might have run historically were struggling. And the first few months of COVID when we were all trying to figure it out, a few things started happening.

Very interesting, Tiger Woods we had no relationship with, but folks, Tiger Woods ended up doing an online poker tournament and ended up using Pledge and raised \$3 million for Mount Sinai in York to fund their COVID efforts. Then it was bizarrely a ton of celebrities who we didn't have direct relationships with start doing these incredible fundraisers. And what happened to our company, in particular, was just this huge new demand from individuals and non-profits to start using the Pledge platform and that really funded a ton of our growth over the last year and a half.

Simon:

So yeah, actually it's interesting you've mentioned a few different component parts. So if I'm sitting here and my ambition is to serve an issue like reforestation or childhood education or for young women in some part of the world, what is the smartest way? I mean, you must have seen strategically lots of different approaches that people take to generate the greatest amount of funds. And I know that there's one silver bullet or one size fits all, but maybe a couple of different ways, like you mentioned celebrities, if you can enlist the celebrity and that commands a lot of attention and engagement because the communities they already have. But what are some of different ways that people can scale or maximize their impact, all the donations they raise?

James Citron:

Great question, Simon. Well I'll share some of the best practices that we've seen. First, a lot of people get excited and then they get nervous. They're like will I actually do this? Will I raise any money?

Simon:

If I throw a party, will anyone turn up? The punch bowl is going to just sit there lonely?

James Citron:

You know what? And once people do this and they share their why, that is 50% of it. So when you create the fundraiser page on Pledge, you can upload a picture, a video literally is worth more than a thousand words. Upload a YouTube video of why you want to fundraise. That is so important. I mean, Simon, you talk about storytelling. The storytelling that's authentic. It doesn't have to be this beautiful polished video. You don't have to have the biggest celebrity in the world, but just telling your why is so important. Sharing on social, that is so critical.

So we built all these new functionality and sharing capabilities in the platform. So you can share via QR code, you can put a link in your Instagram, you can share everywhere, on Discord, all those social sharing capabilities, your audience is everywhere, so that's the second thing. And then the third thing that we find super helpful is to do, sometimes you might do an in-person event. Now that we're in a post COVID world, oftentimes people are connecting on Zoom or other virtual platforms as well. But think about your fundraiser as something that goes multichannel. So you might do a cool party and a lot of non-profits are doing in-person galas, but they're using hybrid to reach their masses who they connected with over the last few years who can't come to the event.

Simon:

Yeah, I've heard a lot of talk of hybrid events now, whether it's conferences, whether it's fundraisers and so on as people start to come back together. What are some pitfalls to avoid? If someone's like, I'm being heart led here, I want it to work, but they might make certain mistakes or gaps that you could help them avoid?

James Citron:

The number one thing, give donors comfort about exactly where their funds are going. Let them know when you're giving \$500, it's actually to go help build the community garden that we're building in this local school. And let me take you there. I'll tell you one of the most impactful hybrid events I was a part of that used Pledge, it was an incredible, incredible nonprofit that helps literally uplift small farmers out of poverty, primarily in regions of Africa. So they did a traditional gala, historically pre COVID. And when COVID happened, they're like, "What do we do?" Well, I remember logging on and watching their gala the first time virtually.

So the executive director or CEO gets on and starts talking about their mission and they had donors from around the world listening in and hearing what you might hear if you were in person. The next thing that happened, another Zoom screen popped up and they took you literally to Mali to see the farmers to participate in a community village meeting. And so everyone who logged on who was sitting in that Zoom room was like, "Oh my god, I actually am seeing the impact. This is where my money is going." And that's the number one, I think, failure of a fundraiser ask these days is not to be very explicit of where the impact is.

Simon:

Right. No, that totally makes sense. And what are you seeing on the corporate giving side or the business side? I mean, either large companies, these large enterprises or very small entrepreneurs or entrepreneurs that still want to make a difference with what they do. What behaviors you seeing there?

James Citron:

Well, the Great Resignation is real. The corporate philanthropy of the beautiful picturesque impact report with a large gift from the company. If it is really not woven into the fabric of the company, if it's not really something that's easy for employees to get behind and participate in, whether it's volunteering or donating alongside the company's mission or a way for their customers to engage in that same mission, individual employees and customers or brands are more empowered than ever to find a competitor brand. And that's what we're seeing. So the companies that are really leading are going, how do we engage all of our stakeholders to really be a part of things?

Simon:

And to that point, I've got another question, which is what's so peculiar about the last couple of years is the multiple crises coexisting at the same time. So whether it's COVID or Ukraine or Roe versus Wade, all these issues that people care about, how does a company or a business, large or small, that wants to be meaningful to their stakeholders, internal employees and otherwise, how do you decide where to put your efforts at what time? It seems like you can almost be paralyzed. There are too many things that need your attention at once. What do you see happening there?

James Citron:

I'll give two examples. I'll give a great big company example, Warner Brothers Discovery, one of the biggest media companies in the world, and they use Pledge in a number of ways to empower their employees, empower their audiences to donate, it's so tied into their values. So on the Food Network, which we all love the Food Network. The Food Network has a partnership with No Kid Hungry. It just makes complete sense, right? So when you watch Food Network, you'll see ads literally for something called Turn Up. And that's our initiative to literally end childhood hunger in America. Well it's really amazing. Guess what? If you love watching the Food Network and you're enjoying watching that programming, you're inclined to do something around hunger because one out of three kids in America is living in a food insecure environment.

Well, just that initiative loan, Turn Up, has raised enough money to provide a billion meals and Warner Brothers Discovery just set a new goal of doing two billion meals provided to kids. So very much tied into their values. Another example from another brand, a little bit smaller, what they do is they actually go to their teams and they say, "Do we have employee resource groups or HR groups or a DEI or DEIB committee? And which causes are really resonating with our teams? And then how do we make sure that we empower our team to have a voice when we make a pledge, when we stand up?" And that's so organic and so authentic that that's also working, we're seeing that as well.

Simon:

So I want to step through each one of the different scenarios. So if you are an individual who has an event like a birthday or something like that or whatever it might be, they just don't want to do it out of the goodness of your heart around the holiday season and you want to launch some sort of donation drive, what do they do? Just walk us through in the basic steps.

James Citron:

Yep. They go to [pledge.to](https://pledge.to), they click start fundraising. They can choose from any of the two million nonprofits in our database. It takes less than a minute. They create their fundraiser, upload their pictures or video of what their why, and then they, with one click, share it out to their social media audience and they can do the exact same thing that they're doing on [pledge.to](https://pledge.to) now built into Zoom as well. So in Zoom, there's a little apps button, the bottom of the toolbar, just click on that, search for Pledge and you can rebuild that exact same experience, literally takes a minute and they can do a fundraiser all on Zoom, so that's typically what we're seeing. We've had millions of donors now go through that experience in fundraisers.

Simon:

I mean, that two million non-profit sounds like a lot. Do you sort by impact or cause or region or issue? How do you do navigate that?

James Citron:

So if you don't know which non-profit you want to choose, you literally can type in I'm interested in this cause area. And we have recommendations based on cause area. We've also reorganized the database around SDGs. So a lot of folks now are, I want to do something around SDG four, they can actually search by SDGs as well.

Simon:

And that's the sustainable development goals, the 17 goals that the United Nations and Heads of State articulated in 2015 as to the most pressing crises around the world and we are truly behind on actually achieving those goals by 2030. And there's a huge push. So that's a great way of leaning into that as well. And so on the business side, is there anything difference to the process or is it the same? Because you might be a very small company with two or three people or you might have 10,000 people?

James Citron:

Well, it's a great question, Simon. What we find a lot of companies doing is they can run a fundraiser just like an individual will. And we've had big companies do that all the time, but also, if they want to do something and they want to really build it into their DNA, they can also use Pledge. And so I'll give you a few examples.

We launched the first donation capability on Shopify. And so if you're an e-commerce brand, you literally can go, I want to enable my customers to donate and round up at checkout or I want to launch a whole new line of clothing and donate X percentage of proceeds to charity. So we have an app called Give and Grow, that's in the Shopify app store. And that's literally, again, back to frictionless, it can be installed, it's a hundred percent free, it doesn't cost anything for the merchant to install. And what's crazy about this partnership with Shopify, over 250 million of products have been purchased now that have had a donation attached to the transaction through Pledge.

Simon:

Wow. So that's amazing.

James Citron:

It's very simple to get started, but has huge impact because you're dealing with the millions of people buying products through Shopify every day.

Simon:

And then for non-profits to go, wow, we'd much rather receive the full whack of donation from somebody rather than to see a lot of a go to fees and so on. What does a non-profit do?

James Citron:

So the non-profit logs on a [pledge.to](https://pledge.to), they claim there's a little button for nonprofits where they can just go, I want to add a new donate button to my website. And literally it's grab and grab and go. They copy and paste a few lines of code and it can go live on their website. It's very simple. We also have tech support. So if they need help doing that or there's CRM integrations, we have a really beautiful easy way for them to integrate all their customer data, so that's the way most nonprofits are using it today. But also, we're seeing a lot of nonprofits, again, doing hybrid events using us on Zoom and creating their own fundraisers as well.

Simon:

It's interesting, I mean it's very easy for anyone no matter whether you are an employee or an entrepreneur or a CEO, whatever, to get disheartened when you look at the headlines every day. I've always known you to be an optimistic and positive person, but it feels like you're excited about what you see through the Pledge platform. I mean, why are you optimistic? Why are you not throwing up your hands and saying the future's a for gone conclusion? What gets you out of bed in the morning?

James Citron:

Every single day we see just these incredible powerful stories, thousands and thousands of positive, optimistic stories of humans figuring out what cause they align with, whether it's donating their birthday party, whether it's rounding up on their e-commerce brand, we're optimistic because we're sitting at ground central looking at the data and just seeing the power of humanity to have real impact. I mean, I was just going through some data this morning, seeing millions of dollars being raised for causes they don't even make the headline news, but it's people really finding something where they know they can have huge impacts. So I would say it's because we get to see the generosity of humanity.

Simon:

And I want to say James, thank you for the inspiration, for the guidance, the support and the friendship over the last few years and for constantly challenging yourself and the Pledge platform to level up, how people give because that heartfelt instinct in everybody is fundamentally human, but then technology and giving needs, to honor that and be of service to that as authentically as possible. So I really respect and admire the way that you've done that and taken to the next level now. So thank you.

James Citron:

Thank you so much, Simon. I appreciate those kind words and it takes all of us to go achieve the sustainable goals. It takes all of us coming together to build better communities to help solve some of the biggest challenge in the world. And by the way, the good news is they're solve hopeful. We can solve many of these issues and it's often just a question of mobilizing funding, the right technology and getting the hands of non-profits and enabling and powering them to go achieve their missions.

Simon:

Couldn't agree more. Thank you, James. I can't thank you enough and everybody put your heart to work through Pledge and let's make a difference to as many lives as possible. So thanks, James.

James Citron:

Thank you, Simon.

Simon:

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