

Doug Smitt ([00:08](#)):

Hey leader, and welcome to episode number 314 of the L3 Leadership podcast, where we are obsessed with helping you grow to your maximum potential and to maximize the impact of your leadership. My name is Doug Smith and I am your host and today's episode is brought to you by my friends at Beratung Advisors. If you're new to the podcast, welcome. I'm so glad that you're here. And I hope that you'll enjoy our content and become a subscriber, know that you can also watch all of our episodes over on our YouTube channel as well. So make sure you subscribe there as well. And if you've been listening to the podcast for a while, thank you so much. And it would mean the world to me. If the podcast has made an impact on life, if you would leave us a rating and review on apple podcast or Spotify or whatever app you listen to podcast through, that really does help us to grow our audience and reach more leaders, which is our whole mission here at L three.

Doug Smitt ([00:51](#)):

So thank you in advance for that. And I do just wanna take a second to highlight a recent review that was left by Dawn M, Dawn said this about the podcast. She said, "I never miss an episode. The guest speakers are spot on Doug, a great interviewer, and I especially love the lightning round. I've learned so much from this podcast and I listen to them over and over again. It should be in every leader tool box." Well, thank you so much, Dawn. It means the world to me that you left that review and I'm glad the podcast has made an impact in your life while leader in today's episode, you'll hear my conversation with charity: water, CEO and founder, Scott Harrison, if you're unfamiliar, Scott, let me just tell you a little bit about him. Scott spent almost 10 years as a nightclub promoter in New York city before leaving to volunteer on a hospital ship off the coast of Liberia West Africa, as a volunteer photo journalist returning home to New York city.

Doug Smitt ([01:35](#)):

Two years later, he founded the nonprofit organization, charity: water in 2006, turning his full attention to the global water crisis in the world's 785 million people without clean water to drink. He created public installations and innovative online fundraising platforms to spread international awareness of the issue in 15 years. And with the help of more than 1 million donors, worldwide charity: water s raised over \$598 million and funded 79,136 water projects and nine countries when completed these projects will provide more than 13.2 million people with clean, safe drinking water. Scott has been recognized on fortune magazines list of 40, under 40 Forbes impact 30 and fast companies. 100 most creative people in business where he earned the number 10 spot. He is currently a world economic forum, young global leader, and, and author of the New York times bestselling book, thirst Scott and his wife, Victoria have two children, Jackson and M in our conversation.

Doug Smitt ([02:30](#)):

You'll hear Scott talk about the lessons he's learned about leadership, vision, casting, fundraising, and more throughout his journey of growing charity: water . And of course, we take him through the lightning round. You're gonna love this conversation, but before we dive into that, just a few announcements. This episode of the L3 Leadership podcast is sponsored by Beratung Advisors, the financial advisors at Beratung Advisors, help educate and empower clients to make informed financial decisions. You can find out how Beratung Advisors can help you develop a customized financial plan for your financial future by visiting their website at [beratungadvisors.com](http://beratungadvisors.com). That's [beratungadvisors.com](http://beratungadvisors.com), securities and investment products and services offered through LPL financial member, FINRA, and S I P C Beratung Advisors, LPL financial and L3 Leadership are separate entities. I also wanna thank our

sponsor Henne Jewelers they're a jeweler owned by my friend, and mentor, John Henne. My wife, Laura, and I got our engagement and wedding rings through Henne Jewelers. And we had an incredible experience, but not only do they have great jewelry, they also love and invest in people. In fact, for every couple that comes in and gets engaged, they give them a book to help prepare for marriage. And we just love that. So if you're in need of a good jeweler, check out, [hennejewelers.com](http://hennejewelers.com). And with all that being said, let's dive right in. Here's my conversation with Scott Harrison.

Doug Smitt ([03:48](#)):

Well, Hey Scott, thank you so much for being willing to do this interview. And you formed a little organization called charity: water . I don't know if, if anyone's listening to this and hasn't heard of it, I'd be shocked, but tell us a little bit about charity: water . What does charity: water do? And what's the story behind it?

Scott Harrison ([04:02](#)):

Sure. Well, it does exactly what it sounds like. I was not very creative in the naming. We are a nonprofit organization bringing water, clean, safe, drinking water to people in need, around the world, been around 15 years now, , and just crossed 15 million people with water, across 29 different countries. Um, that said, there are 771 million people who are drinking unsafe water today. So we're about one 50 the way there.

Doug Smitt ([04:36](#)):

Yeah. And you have kind of a crazy story. You know, people see what you're doing today, but if they were re-round your life, you know, 25, 20 years ago, look a little bit different. Can you kind of give us the, the pre story to, charity: water and then roll into how that actually started?

Scott Harrison ([04:50](#)):

Yeah, so I was raised in a very conservative Christian home, in, I was born in Philadelphia, raised in New Jersey. my mom became, disabled when I was four. There was a carbon monoxide gas leak in our house that, made my dad and I sick, but we were able to recover and she just never did. So she was an invalid, my whole life. I was an only child caregiver role, doing the cooking, doing the cleaning, taking care of mom, taking her to the doctor. And, you know, in the, at phase of life, I wanted to be a doctor myself. So if you'd asked me as a teenager, what are you gonna be when you grow up, I'm gonna be a doctor I'm gonna cure mom and other people around the world. , instead I became a nightclub promoter, Doug.

Scott Harrison ([05:37](#)):

So I moved to New York city rebelled, in a, in a, you know, such a cliché away, and spent the next 10 years drinking, drugging gambling, you know, just, just kind of going my way through Manhattan nightlife, became pretty good at that profession. I worked at 40 different nightclubs, you know, throwing these high end parties and spring thousand dollars bottles of champagne over the audience. And, you know, from the DJ booth and just really a complete idiot, um, but you know, was, was, , was really caught up in the, this lifestyle of sex and drugs and, you know, rock and roll and fashion. and then at 28, just realized, oh my gosh, I become the worst person. I know I hate myself. I hate my life, nobody else is really happy. There's, there's, there's never going to be enough of any of these things that I'm pursuing that would satisfy.

Scott Harrison ([06:37](#)):

And I, had a pretty radical comeback to faith and morality moment, , sold everything I owned and decided to take one year and volunteer on a humanitarian mission to see if I could be useful to the world. And, , it was funny the first 10 organizations that I applied to denied my application because, you know, nightclub promoters are not in, in hot demand for serious credible aid worker organizations, but I was very fortunate to find an opportunity, to go live on a medical hospital ship in Liberia, west Africa. And, , really just completely changed my life. I quit smoking and drinking and drugging and gambling and all that stuff. And kind of, you know, came, , really back to closer to act one. And it was, it was in that two year experience in West Africa where I saw people drink dirty water for the first time.

Scott Harrision ([07:43](#)):

And I had just never experienced a human being, a child drinking brown viscous, diseased water. And I think the contrast was so, you know, noticeable for me because I had been bottled water in my clubs for \$10 a bottle. And just couldn't believe that, you know, 10% of the world didn't have the most basic need for life for, for health met. So yeah, 15 years ago decided I was gonna make that my problem, you know, and, and do whatever I could to bring clean and safe drinking water to every single person alive on the planet before I died. And, , thought that, you know, raising awareness and money through a nonprofit would be the, the way to do that.

Doug Smitt ([08:35](#)):

Yeah. Before we, we dive into more of the story of charity: water from the beginning, I'm curious, you know, you talked about your had a radical comeback in life and you ultimately quit a drinking, drugs, gambling, all those things. What did that journey look like?

Scott Harrision ([08:46](#)):

I'm just curious now, now I, I like my craft beer, so in moderation of course, but never touched any of the other stuff.

Doug Smitt ([08:54](#)):

Can you share more about, about that, you know, and, you know, for someone who may be, you know, struggling with that lifestyle right now, what would you, what would you tell them? Was it, was it just finding a purpose bigger than yourself that got you out of that? What was it?

Scott Harrision ([09:05](#)):

And it was changing community Doug. So I went from a community that, that celebrated dinner at 10, the club at 12 after hours and drugs at 5:00 AM, and then popping ambient at noon to come down and start it all over again. So that, that whole lifestyle was, was fast. It was, it was about sex and drugs and status. Um, my heart changed, you know, but I think I really also needed my environment to change. So I went from that to a group of Christian doctors in Africa. It was not cool to smoke on a hospital ship, nobody was doing drugs. , I think you were allowed to have like one drink with a meal, you know, as a part of the, the code of conduct. So my environment changed and I, I really love that it felt so much healthier. , it felt so much more purposeful here were people who had come from 41 different nations as volunteers to use their talent medical in, in most cases in the service of others who had no access to healthcare. So I, yeah, I, I don't know that I would've been able to just, you know, quit all that stuff while staying in the nightclub business. Yeah. I think it would've been almost impossible, so I really needed to change my environment as well.

Doug Smitt ([10:26](#)):

Yeah. And just outta curiosity, did you think if you didn't go through that season of, the nightclub promotion, do you think you'd be doing what you're doing today at the level you're doing it?

Scott Harrision ([10:34](#)):

You know, I think you could see that both ways. Sometimes I wish I had started charity: water before I was, you know, 28 or 29. Yeah. Um, actually I start, sorry. I started at 30. Um, so it feels like 10 wasted years that said, I learned a lot about promotion and storytelling and the transfer of enthusiasm during those as 10 years promoting 40 different clubs, because that was really the job of a promoter that was in our name. We were nightclub promoters. We were promoting this idea that we had the best party in all of New York city. And if you got past the velvet rope, , if you got in past the one of us looking through the one way glass, and if you spent on a margarita or a thousand dollars on a bottle of V then your life had meaning you had arrived, you know, you, you had made it. So, you know, I'm saying all that tongue in cheek now, um, I think, you know, for the last 15 years with charity: water , I'm still promoting, , a universally good idea of clean water for all and celebrating generosity and compassion and kind of redemptive acts of service instead of, you know, debauchery. So I, I was able to take some of those learnings into, , into, you know, the work with charity: water over the last 15 years. But yeah, also, I, I think a lot of that time was just wasted.

Doug Smitt ([12:03](#)):

Hmm. And so you're 30 years old. You find what you want to give your life to walk us through, you know, the start of charity: water. My understanding is that when you started it, you wanted to change the way charities do charity. , and I think you've accomplished that in the past 15 years. Talk about that journey. What did that look like in the beginning to, to where you are now?

Scott Harrision ([12:20](#)):

Yeah, well, I didn't have any experience. So I think that worked in my advantage in a way I was not corrupted by any institutional philanthropic knowledge, or I just talked to everyday people who worked at chase bank or Sephora or MTV. And as I talked to people, you know, I realized, wow, they were really cynical and distrustful when it came to charities. People told me they weren't giving because they didn't know how much of their money would actually, you know, get there or, or impact anything. So, , I really, yeah, the mission was gonna be to bring clean water to everybody in the world, but the vision was even bigger. It was to reinvent or reimagine the charitable experience, the giving experience and reach out to some of these disenfranchised people bring 'em back to the table, a of giving. So, yeah the first idea I had was could we find a way to give a hundred percent of every donation that ever came into the charity to directly fund water projects that gay people, clean water and, , what that would need to look like and is we would somehow have to raise all of that nasty overhead money separately, the staff salaries, the office rent the flights, the Epson copy machine toner, you know, this would be paid for by a small group of kind of visionary entrepreneurs or business leaders.

Scott Harrision ([13:52](#)):

So that was really the first big idea, two separate the audited bank accounts, all the public money going directly to fund the projects. And then the overhead being paid for separately. The second kind of pillar, or, or big idea was this idea of using technology to prove where the money went, let people see their impact. So we became, you know, the first nonprofit to geolocate every completed water project on Google earth and Google maps. So, you know, now close to a hundred thousand projects across 29

countries, but every single one has a satellite image, a proof location. And we just made all this a transparent from, you know, from the start. And then I think the third, you know, big idea was to build an epic and imaginative and inspiring brand, a brand that rival Nike or apple or Virgin, a brand that was not based on shame or guilt, but opportunity and hope and inspiration.

Scott Harrison ([15:03](#)):

So, you know, kind of put these things together and then also realized, , from a business model approach, I wanted to be asset light. So I didn't wanna start well drilling operations in each of these countries around the world. Um, we would work through the locals in each of these, countries. So I believe for the work to be culturally appropriate and sustainable, it had to be led by Ethiopians in Ethiopia, led by Cambodians in Cambodia. So our would be to find and identify, and then build the capacity and help these local organizations scale their impact. But they would be the ones on the ground doing the work and getting the credit.

Doug Smitt ([15:44](#)):

Wow. Well, I love the, I love those initiatives. I wanna dive into each one, the first one fundraising I was mentioned to you earlier, I'm a fundraiser. That's what I do. Yeah. Vocationally. And so, you know, you have the model where a hundred percent of the overhead is paid for, and I believe you just the model there is you meet with people, have high net worth and basically just pitch them on, on that one. Um, is, is that something, cause I know a lot of other nonprofits now we're trying to, to mimic and copy that model. Is that something you would recommend there's a lot of nonprofits have to raising money? Is that something you recommend today? And no. So tell us more about that. Yeah.

Scott Harrison ([16:18](#)):

I mean, it was, it was right for us. I would do it again today. It was right for the people we were trying to reach out to. And the problem I was trying to solve, what I think donors want is just transparency. Yeah. People wanna know where the money's going. So there are a lot of different ways to, to achieve that goal. Um, our organization has overhead just like yours and just like, you know, I don't know doctors without borders or world vision or save the children. Um, our overhead is about 20 cents on the dollar. We just go get that 20 cents from a hundred families. Therefore millions of people can give in a pure way. Um, but you know, I, I think, um, that has really worked for us. It has been a distinctive, we have heard time and time and time again, that this is the reason people are giving.

Scott Harrison ([17:10](#)):

And we've heard many times, this is the first charitable gift I've made my life. Wow. But I know that all of this money is gonna go where it's needed. So yeah, I don't, I don't, I mean, it's, it's, you're creating twice as much work for yourself. It's incredibly challenging. I mean, you have to run two separate bank accounts in perfect balance in perpetuity. I mean, existentially, we could have a hundred million in a water account, right. And then miss payroll, because we can't touch a penny of the public's money for water projects. We could also over raise, I guess this has never been a problem for, , for the overhead side where, you know, we're an inefficient organization cuz we're not deploying, , a multiple of that into the field on, on water projects. So it's a very delicate balance. It's , again, it's, this has been core to our vision and business model. So we've made it work really well for, for 15 years. But you know, it's not something I I'm, I'm out there, you know, preaching to others. I am preaching transparency and closing the loop and, and showing donors what their money's actually accomplished.

Doug Smitt ([18:18](#)):

Yeah. I think the transparency thing is key. The other thing I think you do extraordinarily well is just cast vision. , I'd be curious. What advice do you have fundraisers, but really just leaders in general. I know you've old, this story, you've done thousands of podcasts. I'm sure. Thousands of donor meetings. What have you learned about casting, a compelling vision that people buy into in your

Scott Harrison ([18:36](#)):

Time? Well, I'm glad you start there. So when people ask me about fundraising, I think there are three things that I think about the first is having a compelling vision and then clearly articulating it. Yes, a lot of people have tried to tell us what their nonprofits do in like 19 sentences. And at the end, you know, they actually may have a compelling vision, but they have muddled it or, you know, you've just lost the clarity of that. Ours is luckily very simple. We're bringing clean water to people like that's it like clean water for people. Good idea. People need it. And, and then, you know, should we need to kind of talk about all the statistics and all the problems that go with dirty water? You know, all of that is there, but at the very core, it's just, it's a vision. Most people can get excited about a world where every human alive has clean water to drink has the most basic need for life met.

Scott Harrison ([19:37](#)):

So that's kind of the vision. The second is momentum. So I've found that people want to be a part of things that are working and are growing donors don't wanna save the day. They don't wanna save, you know, Sally's job. And when you've had a bad year, um, donors, aren't investing in stocks that are laying employees off and are, you know, shrinking, right? So I think the momentum is really important. Celebrating the wins, talking about the progress that your organization is making about the innovation, the new creative ways you are trying to solve your problem is, is really, really important. And you know, the more you grow, the more you grow and the more you innovate, the more you innovate. So it almost becomes this, this flywheel effect. And then the third thing is generosity, which I probably could say the least about, but I just intuitively believe that donors want their organizations or, or maybe even their, their representatives, the people that you know, are representing those organizations to also be generous, to kind of join them in generosity.

Scott Harrison ([20:50](#)):

So, you know, I've got a lot of stories of how charity: water has tried to do that over the years, but I think that's a, you know, that that's kind of a, a secret, um, weapon that you can use, you know, mm-hmm, I mean, I, my wife and I, you know, I donated a hundred percent of my book advance and all the proceeds back to charity: water , you know, we've, we've now given, you know, over a million dollars of our own money to charity: water over 15 years. So when I'm sitting with a donor, you know, I'm not asking them to do anything that I'm not willing to do, right. There's a, there's kind of a sense of eating your own dog food. And I'll use that at times. Um, and sometimes people will ask me, you know, well, have you, I'm like, yo I did three water projects last year, you know, and I'm asking them for maybe 300 and they can afford to do 300 and I could afford to do three,

Doug Smitt ([21:44](#)):

Going back to the vision. And you talked about marketing was one of your key strategies. I'm curious how much of, of view casting vision is, is showing versus telling. So I believe you used to, you know, in the early days you would just meet with someone and stick, you know, pull up an iPad, stick headphones in their ears and say, watch this. I mean, obviously you were casting vision too. You guys do an

incredible job marketing. Um, I was just, I, I was watching the other day, but again, you just have a picture of like every well piece and say for \$10,000 you buy this. Yeah. How much has visual marketing played into your ability to cast vision? And do you have any advice there for, for nonprofits or

Scott Harrison ([22:19](#)):

Really, I mean, early days that guy would say show, don't tell, you know, now it's, it's show Intel. I mean, it is, but, but I think even extreme if, if I told you right now that 7,770 1 million people don't have water. So that's just kind of a, a mind numbing statistic. There's no emotional connection to that. You can't imagine 771 million anything, right. Units of anything, let alone people without water. Okay. 52% of disease throughout the developing world is water born. Okay, 82% of the people live in rural areas, every dollar invested into water yields, four to \$8 in economic returns. I mean, there's, there's data, you know, so much data to make a compelling case for water, but it's not emotional. It doesn't draw people in, um, store do and, and I would argue, you know, I could tell you a story and then I could show you the water that the child in that story is drinking.

Scott Harrison ([23:20](#)):

And it will leave just such a, a visceral imprint, could compel you to action far greater than statistic disconnected numbers or even a story. So we've, we've tried to, I mean, there was a, you know, a story I wrote about in the book of a 13 year old girl who hung herself from a tree after she spilled her water after an eight hour walk in, in Ethiopia. And, you know, I wound up living in this village for a week and walking in her footsteps and learning everything about her and her friends and how people lived and what would've driven her to suicide after spilling her water that she was carrying. Um, but for me, as I knew, I would tell that story, um, in, you know, on the road in speeches or, you know, I was gonna write about in the book

Scott Harrison ([24:13](#)):

When I stood under the tree, the actual tree, I knew that the image of the tree would be very powerful and it would, it would move people in a different way. Um, it's this frail tree, and there's really only one branch that you can imagine a 13 year old's body hanging from, with a noose around her neck. And there's a path that goes right next to this tree, which is where she was walking when she tripped and fell and spilled her water. So, you know, I, I just, for me, that visual image was so resting being there, you know, before I even pulled out a camera and, you know, activated me with, with anger at the time that we live in a world of, you know, 500 million yachts. And, you know, we're talking about colonizing other planets and 13 year old girls are hanging themselves from trees cuz they don't have clean water. You. Um, but I think it's that combination of, I would say it's storytelling it's visuals. And then of course the facts are, are important as well.

Doug Smitt ([25:16](#)):

Yeah. I, I just wanna, you talked about, we live in a world \$500 million yachts. You ran nightclubs where people spent extraordinary amounts of money every single night. Um, and then now on the charity: water side, you've seen extraordinary generosity from people. I'm just curious. What, what have you learned about money throughout this journey?

Scott Harrison ([25:35](#)):



I've seen less extraordinary generosity than you might expect. I've seen extraordinary gifts for sure. Um, but as a portion of, of wealth, um, Um, what have I learned about money? Hmm. Well I think the first, okay, so if there's any other, nonprofit, fundraisers out there,

Scott Harrison ([26:03](#)):

Probably the most powerful thing anyone has ever said to me, , it was a conversation I had in California. It was a partner at Goldman Sachs. Ex-partner at Goldman Sachs. And I was about to make a big gift in Hawaii and I was flying through and I had drinks with him in California and I said, Hey, I'm about to ask this family for a lot of money. It was an eight figure gift. And I'm, I'm pretty nervous about this. I said, so I'm sure you and your wife have been asked for way more money than you were prepared to give. I said, tell me how it makes you feel.

Scott Harrison ([26:40](#)):

And now the fundraiser's perspective going into this is, you know, we're gonna offend them. Right, right. Doug, I'm gonna ask you for money and you're gonna be like, what? Like how dare you? Well, he said the exact opposite. He said, I feel flattered. Hmm. I feel flattered that they think I would be that generous. So that was a big paradigm shift for me. Um, going in, you know, kind of sometimes reluctant or shy or now he said, if they have researched me poorly, then I will take offense. So if they asked me for money that I absolutely could not give, then it would be completely different. But if it's, if it's something I could do, he said, sometimes I go home and I ask my wife, I say, what would it take for us to be that generous? What would it take for us to make a gift that significant? So I've kind of, you know, I've kept that in. And um, I, I, I gotta say though, I asked somebody for what I thought was a whole lot of money just a few weeks ago. And you know, there was a really beautiful proposal and it was, our team spent really months, um, just preparing one ask. And when I synced up with the, the supporter, he said, well, we really only have one question why'd you ask for so little.

Doug Smitt ([28:01](#)):

Wow.

Scott Harrison ([28:03](#)):

And then they wound up giving four times more than what we'd asked now that rarely happens. But I, I think that is, that is what I've learned. You have to really have an abundance mentality. You have to, you have to ask and you have to really, you know, stretch. You also need the organization that could deploy the capital. So it took me 15 years to build an organization where I know exactly what to do with 50 million. Right. Like I, I, I can with a surety deploy 50 million and get the next million people clean water. Hmm. So I, I couldn't have done that five years ago. I couldn't have done it seven years ago. So you also need, you know, cuz cuz people can see through that as well. You can't get far over your skis.

Doug Smitt ([28:46](#)):

Yeah. You've also done an incredible job building an online subscription model for people to, to get involved with giving. Can you talk more about that and ways people can actually get involved now if they're interested.

Scott Harrison ([28:57](#)):

Yeah. Well I was with the founder of, , Spotify in Ethiopia in the back of a land Rover, he'd funded a couple projects. Um, this is six years ago and , you know, we had a, we had, we were really successful in



peer tope, fundraising, charity: water had this idea of getting people to donate their birthdays and instead of gifts or a party, they would ask for their age in dollars and a hundred percent of the money would be tracked to clean water projects. So we raised about a hundred million dollars through this huge, um, movement of birthdays and other fundraisers. But the problem is people only donated one birthday, Doug and we effectively in 10 years had built a one time donation organization. Hmm. And , I remember being in the back of the land Rover with Daniel and he's like, dude, your business model sucks.

Scott Harrison ([29:44](#)):

He's like January one, you know, dark day of the year, you look back and you're like, we have to do that over again. Yep. With different people and then we have to grow. So he said, well, that's not how I think about Spotify. I mean, I'm trying to acquire a customer for life right. And deliver music and content, you know, over a lifetime. I mean, I don't ever want anybody to quit. So anyway, I mean it took me 10 years too long, but I came back and launched a subscription membership program, , called the spring and very simple idea, cost \$40 to get one human clean water. And there's a out of people that could do that, that every month it's, it's two Netflixes a month. There's some people that could do \$10 a month. Right. And every four months, you know, they could get one person access to clean water.

Scott Harrison ([30:32](#)):

So we launched the spring, kind of marketed it as, you know, alongside your 15 other subscriptions, you will get nothing in return. You're not gonna get music or free shipping or a place to store your photos or, you know, magazines. But a hundred percent of the value will be passed on to humans who need water. Um, and you'll provide the most basic need in life that, , did that was that community, , was, and is growing and is so successful. Um, it really tripled the size of the organization. So it helped, um, it helped triple charity: water and, and most importantly, our impact, you know, over the last, , five years or so. So we now have spring members from 149 countries around the world. We have spring members in Africa. We have spring members in, we have spring member in North Korea and know that that was possible that you could give money in North Korea to, to charity: water .

Scott Harrison ([31:28](#)):

So that's, that's been really exciting. And you know, you mentioned how could people help? We actually set up a link if people wanted to learn more, it's just [charitywater.org/13](http://charitywater.org/13). Um, you can see a video there, there's a video that's had about 70 million use, , which the story of charity: water , you can learn more about the spring, but that is where our growth is gonna come from. So I really, I am way more excited about that than seven or eight figure gifts because there are millions and millions of people out there who could do something for the cause of clean water every single month. And, and that adds up to a lot more than, you know, a major gift.

Doug Smitt ([32:10](#)):

Yeah. And we'll include a link to that in the show notes. I also wanna talk to you about just donor experiences. So you guys throw a huge gala or gala every year, raise, you know, millions of dollars. Obviously you did this for a living promoting in the nightclub. What advice do you have for, for those of us who do put on events when it comes to, to raising money, it sounds like you throw quite a party,

Scott Harrison ([32:29](#)):

Try to make 'em awesome. Um, try to make 'em inspiring and fun. You know, no rubber chicken dinners. I mean, we, we always try to include elements of surprise and delight. And I mean, we, you know, have done satellite feeds to live drilling in Ethiopia, across an ocean, connecting our community of givers at the gala with a community about to get clean water, , we've synced 500, the screens, the, in this dynamic experience. So I think a lot of it just starts with having a, a really brilliant creative vision of how to take people through an experience. I mean, a visceral emotional experience, , not serving them rubber chicken and making you a bunch of keynote PowerPoint speeches, and then ask him to, you know, I don't know, bid on a signed Jersey or something.

Doug Smitt ([33:27](#)):

Yeah. So no, so no, you don't do any auctions?

Scott Harrision ([33:30](#)):

No auction, anything like that

Doug Smitt ([33:31](#)):

Great food on guessing

Scott Harrision ([33:33](#)):

Can, anything at the gala. I hate the idea of buying something. You, you have people in a, in a different part of their brain, the trends action. Um, you know, somebody's looking at a watch. It's like, oh, I would get that cheaper. You know, they they're, they're price haggling in their own brain over every item that you would try to sell them. Now we're, we're all about generosity. We want people to think about how they might be able to contribute in a generous way, , to, to the impact change. I don't want 'em buying anything.

Doug Smitt ([34:03](#)):

Yeah. And do you do the ask at the end and is everything there that night is the ask?

Scott Harrision ([34:08](#)):

Everything's that night? Yeah. The whole night Leads to the ask. Right. The whole story of the night leads to a certain thing that we can all do together in this room in the next 15 minutes. Wow. Um, and you know, I mean, sometimes I think the last time we had a goal of 5 million and we wound up raising 7 million. So sometimes we do more than we hoped would we would achieve in that night, but it's, it's always very specific. We're launching a new country. We're we found a thousand Wells that are broken and need to be rehabilitated. Um, and we wanna leave tonight with all thousand paid for, for example, and sometimes get to 1300 or 1500.

Doug Smitt ([34:50](#)):

Hmm. We, this is a leadership podcast. I wanna talk a little bit about leadership. What have you learned about leadership over the last 15 years of leading charity wider?

Scott Harrision ([34:59](#)):

I just think integrity is the most important thing, staying to your values, knowing, just not compromising the, the, the way you do things is so much more important than whatever that is. You're doing the

actual, um, kind of task or tactic. Um, yeah, I mean, and I think you just gotta show up. I saw the 27 year stock chart of Amazon the other day and, oh, it's fantastic, in the first 20 years of Amazon, 7% of the value was created in the last seven years, 93% of the value.

Doug Smitt ([35:43](#)):

That's crazy.

Scott Harrison ([35:45](#)):

So if Jeff Bezo had tapped out in year 20, he would've left 93% of the impact, you know, or the, and, and that's just realizing market cap off the table. So, um, I guess the, the lesson there is things take time. I am massively frustrated that we have only raised 700 million in 15 years. This is a fraction of what is needed to bring everybody clean and safe drinking water. It's a fraction of what we should have done with all the generous people out, out there with all the capital, you know, latent inert capital in the world. And we've managed to raise 700 million and help 15 million people. So, you know, I'm, I'm very much focused on the best, you know, it feels like we're in the second inning and, and that the best is, is certainly at the come,

Doug Smitt ([36:39](#)):

If, if you could go back and, and meet with yourself when you started charity: water, what three things would you tell yourself for the journey ahead? Or maybe something you would've done differently?

Scott Harrison ([36:52](#)):

I, I I'm, I find it very hard, Doug, to look back, I, my brain doesn't really do back. You know, I really spend, I mean, it's hard for me to be in the present. Wow. To be quite honest. I mean, I lose my keys and wallet and, you know, I'm, I'm definitely thinking a lot about the future.

Scott Harrison ([37:11](#)):

One of the mistake when you frame it in mistakes, that's a lot easier so data CRM systems and processes totally botched that there was a point where we, I think we had like a million donors and an Excel spreadsheet. We just never stopped and took the time to invest hundreds of thousands of dollars in sophisticated systems and data architecture. And we've been paying the price over the last few years, um, you know, doing that when we're already at scale. , so those projects are happening now, but boy, I wish I had done that a lot earlier. And I think that looked like hiring the right people and then investing in that. And, you know, when someone says, Hey, , would you like to spend \$250,000 on a Salesforce integration or do an event or hire, you know, a few new employees, right? The, the, the CRM integration never, never happened.

Doug Smitt ([38:10](#)):

That's hilarious

Scott Harrison ([38:11](#)):

And, and we actually would have had, we slowed down a few times, had we invested in those critical systems and architecture? I actually believe we we'd raise more money.

Doug Smitt ([38:23](#)):

Wow. We were there any other...

Scott Harrison ([38:25](#)):

Slower to go faster?

Doug Smitt ([38:26](#)):

Oh yeah. That'll that'll preach. Were there any other pivotal moments or, failures that ultimately led to a success? Any fun stories?

Scott Harrison ([38:38](#)):

Um, I wrote about this in the book. We got sued once in like our third year, because we had raised a bunch of money, from a, a company and deployed a hundred percent of the capital, in Kenya. Didn't really know what we were doing early on. So were just relying on the expertise of our partners. We had, communicated no risk to the company. And 50% of the Wells were unusable because they had such high quality, such high fluoride content, naturally occurring fluoride, which by the way, is very common in the rift valley. You get about one outta two to work. Um, but because we were such a young organization, you know, our, the company kind of felt ripped off like, Hey, we, we got 50% of what we paid for. And, um, it, it wound up being settled, , with a really positive resolution for charity: water in the end, but it was a huge learning that we needed, I guess, to challenge the initial assumption that all we needed to do was be good at awareness and raising money and let all the other good water orgs just do good water work.

Scott Harrison ([39:52](#)):

Well, it turned out like half of them were doing really bad work. Wow or medioc group subpar work. So we needed to build a whole business unit of our own water experts and hydrogeologists and auditors, to so a whole new business, or really half of charity: water was formed through that really uncomfortable, bad situation. Um, and I, I wrote a whole chapter about this in the book and some of the learnings. So it turned out to be kind of the biggest blessing for the organization and the sustainability of the organization and the quality of the work that we did in the 13 years subsequent, but really painful at the time.

Doug Smitt ([40:32](#)):

Hmm. Do you have any advice, obviously, you launched charity: water after you found what you wanted to of your life, to what advice do you have for people with a dream? Maybe they're working a job and they're just content or, or I'm sorry, discontent. They have a dream in their harder, they see a need, they could fail. What advice would you say to someone who, who has that?

Scott Harrison ([40:48](#)):

I feel like this is just cliché now, and like a hundred people are saying this, but you have to start, you just have to start. I talk to so many people that are just paralyzed. I, they just, they don't do anything. They literally will just talk about the same idea for three or five years. I mean, I don't know, start with a fundraiser in the basement of your house. <laugh> raise a thousand dollars for the cause or, you know, , spend time on weekends or at nights, instead of watching Netflix is, you know, new bingeable show researching the issue that you're passionate about or the other actors in the space that are, that are tackling that problem. Um, but I, I think it's, you know, it's it's action that births movements. I mean, if I

think back to the early days of charity: water , you know, we were working a hundred hours a week and that's very unpopular now.

Scott Harrison ([41:36](#)):

And, you know, I've got kids and have a completely different rhythm, but, you know, it was startup days. I mean, we weren't sure whether we were gonna make payroll, you know, three days from now or seven days from now. So there was a flurry of activity, there was a flurry of, of intense, passionate work. Um, and then that actually led to the building of momentum and then more resources, and then the creating the, the creation of a, of a structure and an organization. So, um, my wife was just saying the other day, she asked me like three questions about a campaign we launched. And she's like, like, you really have no idea what's happening at your organization anymore. <laugh> and like this campaign got launched and I'm like, I don't know who had the idea for the campaign. I don't really know how those partnerships came about, you know, the, like this is hiring great people and letting them do their thing. So in the early days, I mean, that's completely different. You know, I was pixel pushing. I was writing every email that went out. I was writing the website copy. I was writing the FAQ for the website. Now there's just people that, that are much more talented that can do all those things.

Doug Smitt ([42:46](#)):

Do you do anything intentionally with networking? You, you have quite a network that you've built and I, I guess I would just ask, has that been intentional or has that been more just the work and the vision opening up those doors for you?

Scott Harrison ([42:58](#)):

It's not, I have not been very good at that. Um, we do have an amazing network, I think, cuz we're doing great work and we're innovative and we're good storytellers. Um, and we like people, but you know, I remember like, I don't know, coming across some of the key fraud stuff or just thinking, wow, I'm so unintentional. I'm so disorganized. <laugh> , my contacts don't sink as well as they should. And yeah, I, I think I could have done a much better job at that, but maybe the flip side is it is very organic. I mean there's no grand plan for contacts and you know, I just talked to a guy, right, right before this, this podcast who I hadn't seen for 10 years, he came on a trip to Ethiopia with me and you know, he is now in the, in the crypto space and running a, a huge, huge company. And we kind of picked up 10 years later talking about our kids and talking about life and you know, our experie during COVID and you know, almost like 10 years hadn't passed. So I think, , you know, I, I take an organic approach to, to a lot of these relationships.

Doug Smitt ([44:07](#)):

Yeah. By the time we have left that wanna run through the lightning round, just a bunch of fun questions I ask in every interview. First one being what's the best advice you've received and who gave it to you?

Scott Harrison ([44:19](#)):

Um, Dr. Gary Parker, on the mercy ship, who was a doctor had been there for 25 years, said something to the effect and I'm gonna paraphrase. But if I really cared about being a doctor or global health or medicine, then I would just get everybody on earth, clean water, and I would have more impact than, than any doctor in the history of the world.

Speaker 3 ([44:41](#)):

Wow.

Doug Smitt ([44:43](#)):

If you could put a quote on a billboard for everyone to read, what would it say

Scott Harrision ([44:51](#)):

Give more.

Doug Smitt ([44:54](#)):

Love it. Um, what do you wish people knew about your journey that they may not know?

Scott Harrision ([45:03](#)):

Man, I don't know. I wrote a hundred thousand word books. I'm like the most transparent guy. That I know my wife says I overshare like crazy. I don't know that there are many secrets or it, it takes a lot of work. It takes a lot of work. You know, people I got asked the other day, Doug. So like, do you do charity: water full time? No, no. We just raise a hundred million a year. You know, I just do like, you know, five hours a week, you know, know just sometimes seven hours a week. Wow. Yeah. I think people don't really understand how much goes into, , starting an organization, building an organization, running an organization, all of the challenges and complexity.

Doug Smitt ([45:49](#)):

What's your biggest leadership pet peeve?

Scott Harrision ([45:55](#)):

Oh, Laziness and people who just want to talk about the problems and not find solutions to maybe kind of pessimism cynicism. Yeah.

Doug Smitt ([46:11](#)):

You've had, , you've had some incredible experiences in your life. , I curious, have you done anything, maybe cross a, an item off your bucket list, if you have one, , that you think everyone else should experience before they die?

Scott Harrision ([46:23](#)):

Yes. Victoria falls on the Zambia Zimbabwe border, just one of the most magnificent sites and sounds, on, on earth.

Doug Smitt ([46:35](#)):

Yeah. I got to go.

Scott Harrision ([46:36](#)):

I've been to 70 countries now and, and that makes, that makes top 10, 10 places.

Doug Smitt ([46:41](#)):

That's amazing. I got to, I Israel as 2007 Israel.

Scott Harrision ([46:44](#)):

Wow. Yeah. I an amazing trip in, , to Israel

Doug Smitt ([46:49](#)):

Any, oh, I mean, you've been to 70 countries. Is there anything left on your bucket list to do?

Scott Harrision ([46:53](#)):

Well, I haven't been to Arkansas, Wisconsin or Kansas, so I'm actually focused on the four states that I have not been to. And I'm, I'm hoping to, I don't know, get invited to Alaska to speak or something.

Doug Smitt ([47:07](#)):

That's awesome. Well, if anyone's out there in Alaska, hire Scott to speak, I know you don't like going back to the past, but I am curious. I always like to ask, if you can go back and have coffee with yourself at any age, what age would it be and what would you tell that Scott

Scott Harrision ([47:32](#)):

Probably 22, 23. And it would be a warning that I am not gonna find happiness and the drugs and the drinking and the, , the smoking kind of the life advice, But I wouldn't have listened. That's the thing about that question, Doug hundred percent of the people would not have taken the advice from themselves at that younger age. So good. We all knew better, but people were trying to give us advice. We just didn't listen.

Doug Smitt ([48:07](#)):

And at the other end of your life, you know, you've, you've left quite a legacy already with what you've done to charity: water. What do you wanna be remembered for? What do you want your legacy to be?

Scott Harrision ([48:15](#)):

Great husband, great father, um, great friend and generous.

Doug Smitt ([48:25](#)):

Anything else you wanna leave leaders with today?

Scott Harrision ([48:30](#)):

I don't know. We covered a lot check out. Um, yeah. And if anybody, really, one way people can help is just to learn more about our story and , share the video or, or join the spring. So check out, the page we made for you guy [charitywater.org/13](http://charitywater.org/13).

Doug Smitt ([48:46](#)):

Well, Scott, thank you so much for adding value to me today and everyone that'll listen to this. And again, thanks for everything you do to change the world for, for thousands of lives every year.

Scott Harrision ([48:53](#)):



Thanks for having me.

Doug Smitt ([48:56](#)):

Well, Hey leader, thank you so much for listening to my conversation with Scott. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did. You can find ways to connect with him in links to everything that we discussed in the show notes [l3leadership.org/314](http://l3leadership.org/314). And just a reminder, if you'd like to get involved in actually become a donor for charity: water, they created special link just for us at L3 it's [charitywater.org/l3](http://charitywater.org/l3) and leader is always, I just wanna challenge you that if you want to 10 X your growth this year, then you need to either launch or join an L3 Leadership mastermind group. Mastermind groups have been the greatest source of growth in my life over the last seven years. And if you're unfamiliar with what they are, they're just groups of six to 12 leaders that meet to they're on a consistent basis to help each other go after their goals, hold each other accountable and to do life together.

Doug Smitt ([49:39](#)):

So if you would like to learn more about joining or launching a mastermind group, go to [L3 Leadership.org/masterminds](http://L3Leadership.org/masterminds) and leader is always, I like to end with a quote and I'll quote, Simon said it today. He said this. He said, integrity is when you say the same things publicly that you say privately. We say it all the time here leaders, character development is the most important development. Make sure you're a man or woman of integrity. Well leader, thanks again for listening to this episode, know that Laura and I love you. We believe in you and keep going, keep leading the world desperately needs your leadership. We'll talk to you next episode.