

TED 2010 Day Three: A New Kind of Middle School and Bill Gates on Energy Miracles

Posted by *Anthony K. Tjan* on February 13, 2010 9:41 PM

Let me begin by responding to one of the last blog post comments: what is the TED conference anyhow? Apologies for the presumption. TED stands for technology, entertainment, and design and was founded 25 years ago by Richard Saul Wurman and later purchased by its current curator and owner, Chris Anderson (co-founder of Business 2.0). The annual gathering has turned into a sort of pop intellectual theatre with a mixture of a couple thousand entrepreneurs, Hollywood people, and thought leaders making the annual pilgrimage to Long Beach, California, and millions more watching the TED Talks at TED.com.

One of the great elements of TED is being inspired to push beyond what we traditionally think is possible. In 2000, Mike Feinberg and Dave Levin, along with the co-founders of GAP, Don and Doris Fisher, started the Knowledge Is Power Program Foundation (KIPP). Their passion is infectious as they talk about a much more entrepreneurial way to motivate kids in schools. Now with 20,000 students in 82 middle schools (their first one was in the South Bronx), they have used a dream-big, character-based curriculum, which has had unbelievable results with an 85-percent matriculation rate of their students to college.

Last year Bill Gates released mosquitoes to the audience to drive home his points on malaria and vaccines. This year he brought fireflies. Following the KIPP founders, Gates took the stage to talk about energy. He lectured on what drives carbon production with the equation:

World's Total Carbon Dioxide = People x Services (everything from the food we eat to TV) x Energy x CO₂ by-product (output from current energy sources).

To reduce this carbon footprint, Gates urgently called for "energy miracles." The design for an energy miracle should focus around the three factors of a) improved cost, b) more efficient transmission, and c) more effective storage. So where can this happen in our lifetime? Gates postulated on five areas for energy miracles. His list included carbon capture, nuclear solutions, solar thermal energy, solar photovoltaic energy, and wind-based alternatives. One provocative statistic he shared was that Paducah, Kentucky has enough uranium stored to power the U.S. for two centuries. His challenge to us: By 2050, can we reduce carbon emissions by 80 percent and have zero-emission innovation deployed in developing countries?

I liked Day Two of TED better than Day One, and this is a very good start to Day Three. The world really needs more next-generation innovators like the KIPP founders together with the wisdom of long-time innovators like Bill Gates.

TED 2010 Day Two: Social Networks and Meatless Weekdays

Posted by *Anthony K. Tjan* on February 11, 2010 5:05 PM

Harvard professor and expert on social networks **Nicholas Christakis** powerfully showed the impact of social networks and how they relate to our everyday lives. Christakis explained why obese people increase the probability of other people in their social network becoming obese. While intuitive at a macro-level, the notion that you may be responsible for a friend's weight gain brings social networking down to a very concrete level. Our positive and negative actions have a multiplier effect in our pervasively socially networked world.

Graham Hill, the founder of Treehugger.com, gave a compelling three-minute talk reminding us not to think in extremes. In considering whether or not to be a vegetarian, he came up with the simple idea that people should consider "meatless weekdays" (that is be a vegetarian from Monday to Friday) and eat whatever you want on the weekends. For vegetarian diehards who are trying to educate the carnivore world on the merits of vegetarian diets, including better health, lower carbon footprints, and cruelty to animals, a more balanced and likely more effective campaign would be to get people to be a vegetarian 70 percent of the time. See more at Treehugger.

Christopher "moot" Poole, the 21-year-old creator of the often-controversial site 4chan.org. The site allows complete anonymity and does not create a permanent archive of comments. Poole is willing to accept the trade-off of dealing with vast amounts of offensive content in order to offer what he believes is a more risk-free forum in which people can say whatever is on their mind. His goal is a comprehensive view of people's true sentiments.

TEDx. One of my favorite parts of TED Day 2 was a short video illustrating how much TED has grown. TEDx was an experiment this year in which the organizers of TED offered a one-day franchise opportunity to use the TED name to people who wanted to organize their own local TED event — from Boston to Dubai to Africa. The video reminded me again of the innovation that can occur when content that not so long ago would have been considered proprietary intellectual property is made openly available (in this case the TED talks which have been viewed by 200 million people) and how that content leads to the creation of self-organizing communities. Like great traditional franchise networks, I suspect that these new communities from local TEDx events will provide a fertile source of innovation for how the TED can improve and innovate as it grows.

TED 2010: Day One Diary

Posted by *Anthony K. Tjan* on February 11, 2010 9:50 AM

For ten plus years now, TED has been one of my favorite weeks of the year. It's a rare gathering: an incredibly dynamic and interesting set of people together for a week of "pop intellect" to stimulate the mind and soul. Here are a few highlights from Day One at TED 2010:

Chris Anderson on the permission to dream big. Against the backdrop of the Verve's "Bittersweet Symphony," TED's curator, Chris Anderson, kicked off his annual confab with a challenge to think about "what the world needs now" (this year's conference theme). He encouraged us to think hard about the question and to give ourselves and others the permission to dream big.

Daniel Kahneman on the thesis that more money won't necessarily make you happier, but lack of it will make you miserable. The first speaker for TED was Nobel Laureate and inventor of behavioral economics, Daniel Kahneman. He spoke on the disparity between what people experience versus what they remember — how we feel when we are experiencing something is often very different from how we will eventually remember that experience. His survey of hundreds of thousands of Americans has shown that \$60,000 is a critical salary inflection point. Income above that level leads to few changes in the level of one's happiness. However, below \$60,000, people are measurably less happy.

Jake Shimabukuro played the ukulele like you have never seen it played before. Shimabukuro brought inspiration and artistic genius to the TED stage. He performed a trio consisting of a flamenco piece, Ave Maria, and a rendition of Bohemian Rhapsody. Words just cannot do a special musician like Shimabukuro justice. Check out one of his many clips on YouTube.

Dan Barber is chef and co-owner of Blue Hill restaurant in New York. But he also plays a much larger role as a scholar and evangelist of the sustainable food movement. This guy just gets it. In my view, Dan gave the TED talk of the day. He passionately shared the story of a sustainable fish farm in southern Spain where there is no need for any feed for the fish as the ecosystem naturally produces sufficient plankton. The farm has turned into a bird sanctuary for flamingos — a stunning example of how a community can be self-sustaining. His message was clear: we need a new model for agriculture and greater education and transparency on our food supply systems. Dan, your standing ovation was well deserved.

Jamie Oliver's TED Prize and Wish. Building on the theme of food and how it directly impacts the way we live, the evening session featured this year's TED Prize winner, Jamie Oliver, a UK celebrity chef and activist who believes that "the power of food has a primal place in the home that binds us to life." He crusaded in the UK to encourage the government to invest over \$1 billion to change lunch in the school system. He shared with us his vision for a "food revolution" and what he plans to do in America, in part through a new television show. In the show, Jamie will try to change the eating habits of families and schools prone to unhealthy diets. Despite some moments of exaggerated showmanship (a little too much for me), his energy and authenticity wins you over. The power of some of his recommendations was in their mass appeal, concreteness, and simplicity (like his style of cooking) such as the need for all schoolchildren to know how to cook ten healthy recipes that in his words "can save their lives." His TED wish: "I wish for everyone to help create a strong, sustainable movement to educate every child about food, inspire families to cook again and empower people everywhere to fight obesity."

Like many at TED and certainly past TED Prize winners, Jamie Oliver is a leader you just desperately want to succeed. And as Sheryl Crow capped off the evening with a performance she summarized the purpose and first day of TED well — "at the core of it, this is about people with great intentions."

What Tiger Woods Should Do Next

Posted by *Anthony K. Tjan* on January 6, 2010 12:28 PM

While I've tried hard to not be part of the peanut gallery throwing advice Tiger's way, I like the guy too much not to take advantage of my pulpit to offer a few thoughts. On the golf course, Tiger has proven time and time again that one should not count him out when things look bleak. He's curved shots around trees, hacked out of knee-high rough, and made more up-and-down saves than possibly any other golfer in history. But golf is a game in which you can control the moment, whereas what he's gotten himself into on the personal side is not something that can be fixed in the moment. But I believe that there is a chance for him to reset and rebuild. It won't happen overnight, but I bet it can happen faster than most think. Here's a five-part plan for Tiger to consider:

1. **Come out of hiding.** Tiger needs to lose the scripted media statements and come out and talk to the public directly. This might be a Barbara Walters interview, Oprah, or a media tour. He needs to do this immediately; too much time has already passed. Waiting just exacerbates the frustration and disapproval of fans and colleagues. Though this is a private matter, his public persona and the extraordinary sums of money he has been paid give him a responsibility to the game of golf itself.
2. **Demonstrate sincere remorse.** I have no idea how Tiger is really feeling or what drove him to his infidelity, but he's going to have to give an apology that people believe. If I were a defense lawyer and if he were on a trial, I'd coach him to reiterate his shame and apology to his family, which better come across as damn shameful without excuses. He has to show that he means it.
3. **Embrace vulnerability.** What makes Tiger a great player is his unwavering mental toughness and concentration. While I have always admired this machine-like prowess, it has made him a less approachable person. The public has accepted this, understanding that it is what keeps him winning. But family values and integrity are basic assumptions, which is why many contracts with "personalities" have "moral turpitude" clauses. This is a time to show vulnerability, humanize himself and let his guard down, and dissipate the schadenfreude - the German expression popularized when Martha Stewart was convicted that means to take pleasure in someone else's misfortune. There are two types of superstar personalities: those at high risk of schadenfreude and those at low risk of schadenfreude. Guess which one Tiger is.
4. **Play golf and play well.** Tiger has to get back on the course and remind people why they loved him in the first place - for his extraordinary god-gifted golfing talents. As he hopefully wins again, he'll have to do so in a different more quiet style, at least for the near term. Ironically, if he shows and admits his vulnerability, he may enjoy playing the game even more and whether winning or losing, he can start to rebuild a modicum of respect
5. **Expand or refocus non-profit and community service endeavors.** Tiger needs to commit to the fact that change is possible. By committing to change he can also commit to helping others who are victims of related fates. For example, helping kids from broken families gain support and confidence. If I were in Tiger's shoes, I'd make a public statement about committing to give some large amount of my future earnings towards this cause.

Why might this work? Because we like our heroes and are willing to put aside their faults. I'll take a contrarian stance and say that if he follows a plan focused on reconnecting to the public in a way neither he nor they are used to, he'll make a comeback sooner than people will think. It'll be tough for him to stomach the near-term humiliation, but the chance of a reset is a prize bigger than winning a Major right now.

The Next Crisis: Coming in 2011

Posted by *Anthony K. Tjan* on September 28, 2009 11:54 AM

With the Dow reapproaching a five-figure level, we have felt at least some temporary economic reprieve in recent months. But I have talked to many astute people recently (both Democrats and Republicans) who question the stability of the upturn. Some of the those who believe that this might be a dead cat bounce, or what economists term a double-dip recession, are pretty damn smart. Among them is Harvard University professor Martin Feldstein, who explained in a recent interview with CNBC that the massive stimulus is supporting the upturn and that support runs out by 2010. We may be in a precarious position by 2011.

Bill Achtmeyer, my long-time partner and Chairman and Managing Partner of the Parthenon Group, agrees that macroeconomics eventually win out and we should carefully brace ourselves for what might loom ahead — the next crisis in 2011. Below I share excerpts and the footage from our video.

Give us your perspective on what we have to look forward to, or not look forward to, in the next eight quarters.

I think we have six quarters that will be very promising between now and the end of 2010, and then I think we are going to hit huge headwinds in 2011 and 2012.

Why the headwinds in 2011 and 2012?

The key reasons are the aspirations of this congress and administration, while laudable, in terms of health care and global warming, there is the reality of the cost burden. The cost of putting both of these programs in place and the necessary requirements to fund them through tax increases is going to have a very dampening effect on our recovery.

Why do the next six months appear to be stronger?

Macroeconomics are inextricable. You get the benefit of lag times, and we are going to benefit from a combination of a lot of factors which I think will let us sail through in a positive way during this period of time. But things catch up. And by the time everyone sorts out what's being contemplated here it's going to rear its head in 2011 and 2012, and it'll be very hard to get in the way of that.

You advise CEOs every day. Assuming you are CEO of a company today, what do you do?

I'd be extraordinarily focused on investments outside of this country. To the extent you have a global footprint, if you are not overinvesting in Asia and the developing countries, you are out of your mind because that's the source of growth.

I would also do everything I could within the Western countries to gain share in the next six quarters, whether through acquisitions, prices, or whatever it takes to get you in an extraordinarily strong market position. If you're not there, or don't think you can get there, then I would get out of those businesses. I think we'll find another consolidation hitting those businesses in 2011 and 2012 when we've gotten rid of the riffraff. We're definitely going to be getting rid of a lot of other things.

That perspective is great if you are in a position of strength. What about if you are someone is in the bottom half; someone who is likely to be part of the riffraff?

Great time to sell, particularly in 2010. Values are coming up. They will look to be pretty good relative to what you've had in the last 24 months. They won't look as good as they were in 2007, but they'll look pretty good, and they're not going to get much better.

And the debt availability to support that is going to return?

I think you will have debt availability during this time and then it may get tight a little later.

What about inflation?

Pretty low for now. It'll all come home to roost in 2011 and 2012.

Final thoughts?

It's comes back to relative market share. The stronger your relative market share — that is the more distance you can place between you and your nearest competitor — the better off you'll be.

Tiger Woods' Loss: A Reminder for Leading Businesses

Posted by Anthony K. Tjan on Monday August 17th, 2009 at 9:40 AM

Yesterday, Tiger Woods, the world's undisputed number one golfer, lost a major after having the 54-hole lead for the first time in his career. His prior major record was 14-0 going into Sunday with a lead. He started yesterday with a two-shot lead and wore his symbolic Sunday victory red shirt. Every Tiger shirt at the venue was sold out by end of day Saturday. The consensus was clear that Tiger had this all but wrapped. Unless someone played brilliantly, Tiger would never lose it.

Y.E. Yang played amazing golf on Saturday and Sunday. But make no mistake about it, Tiger (and I am a huge Tiger fan) let this one slip. What does this moment in golf history have anything to do with business?

First, there is inordinate pressure at the top. Tiger Woods' focus and mental intensity are peerless, but he is human, just as businesses are, well, just businesses. Companies that are on top today have the odds stacked against them being leaders in the long run. Getting there is easier than staying there.

At the end of the day, statistics win and the statistics of business say that those in a top market-share position will almost certainly lose it or cede share. The question is not if, but when. It does not mean that the companies will not stay strong, important, and highly relevant, but it means that existing and new competition will take some shine off the star. Think of IBM today versus a couple of decades ago or GM as a government bailout asset versus its glory days. Heck, don't even go back that far. Just look at the top ten Internet properties today versus those three to five years ago and you find that many were barely in existence let alone on a top list a few years ago.

Second, competition will come from where and when you least expect it. Y.E. Yang was hardly a household name (at least in America) before this weekend. He was the 110th ranked golfer in the world with only one prior PGA tour win. There are business parallels. I don't think when Sony was on top of the portable music player market they ever suspected Apple to rise from the dead and dominate that space today. I doubt that the Clinton contingent ever imagined that the Junior Senator from Chicago (who they helped get elected) would move a nation behind him to win the presidency. And I doubt that Tiger Woods ever imagined that he'd lose this major

to Y.E. Yang in the last major of the year. Padrig Harrington, Vijay Singh, Ernie Els, maybe, but Y.E who?

Being on top can foster complacency or an "if it ain't broke don't fix it" attitude. But to stay there, you need to continue to reinvent and learn. You need to pay attention to people and areas where you don't suspect a threat. Staying relevant means staying abreast of those who want to be relevant and of customers in your industry and your adjacent industries. This is so challenging because it requires both intensity and open-mindedness.

One of Tiger's greatest qualities is his push to revisit and adjust his swing towards maintaining his domination of the game, which despite yesterday's aberration will continue for some time. Successful businesses also need to continually reframe their markets and business definitions to try and understand where things are going and where new competition might emerge. This means focusing on current customers while also understanding the customers of tomorrow.

I am often amazed as I watch my five-year-old navigate effortlessly on the iPhone to find his videos, pause them, switch to the key pad, and then play with one of the apps he has downloaded. The smart phone leaders of Apple and BlackBerry might want to project forward to what my son will want when he is ten.

6 Lessons from the Downturn

Posted by Anthony K. Tjan on Wednesday July 1st, 2009 at 3:48 PM

Last week we held our Annual Meeting for my firm, Cue Ball, and as part of it we gathered our investor members for a stimulating dinner discussion with HBR editors Eric Hellweg and Katherine Bell, and group publisher Josh Macht. One of the unique aspects of our firm is our [Cue Ball Collective](#) -- an invited set of 25 luminary executives and thought leaders who form not just the core of our capital base, but a critical brain trust of human capital for our firm.

Cue Ball Collective members present at dinner included: Alan Hassenfeld, Hasbro's Chairman of the Executive Board; Mike Overlock, former co-head of Goldman Sachs Investment Banking; Bill Achtmeyer, Chairman of Parthenon; Henry McCance, Chairman of Greylock; serial entrepreneur Mukesh Chatter; and about a dozen others from across the private equity, venture capital, and Fortune 500 firms.

Over some good Italian cuisine and syrah in Boston's [North End](#), we enjoyed a stimulating evening as Eric Hellweg, Managing Editor of HarvardBusiness.org, moderated a discussion centered on the question of key lessons learned in the economic downturn.

Alan Hassenfeld from Hasbro was "cold called" to open the remarks, and he explained that as long as the entertainment business remains creative, innovative and reasonably priced, "we get hurt, but not as badly as other industries." That said, he emphasized a key learning: even the smartest people don't know (and can't predict) what will happen. He believes that there will likely be some tough times ahead.

The sentiment of "tough times ahead" was largely shared across the group. We need to reset expectations. Feelings as to the magnitude of how tough these economic times will continue to be were a little all over the map, but folks nodded as Hassenfeld and Overlock commented that "down 20 to 25% is the new up." And as to the debate over whether we are in a recession or a depression, Overlock continued with, "It's a recession if you're still working. It's a depression for your neighbor who lost his job."

If the biggest take away was the need to re-calibrate expectations, here are six other key lessons learned by the Cue Ball's Collective over the last year:

1. Cash is king. In my one of my prior posts in February on my outlook for opportunities in 2009, I commented that in these times [cash gets promoted from king to God](#). Those who have it, and are willing to invest it during these times, will have some unique opportunities. At the same time that cash may be God right now, debt has become the devil. To say that the last year reminds us again of the perils of over-leverage is an understatement -- to say the least.

Related to "cash is king," is a comment made by Cue Ball's Chairman who was most recently CEO at Thomson Reuters -- in good times and bad, we have learned that it all comes back to *focusing on the basics* (such as operating metrics) that drive fundamental value creation. This means businesses and business models that can generate superior cash flow relative to their peers will be the ones that have the best long-term staying power.

2. Innovation and creativity matter -- we cannot forget that and we need to keep investing in it. Greylock's Henry McCance commented that in the venture community, cloud computing, Web 2.0, biotech and healthcare continue to have favorable longer-term trends and that though the pace of investing was slower, these sectors continued to receive funding. Innovation moves everything. That said, the bigger question McCance posed was: Will the US continue its innovation and be in a leadership position 40 years from now -- and what does it mean if it is not?

3. The customer buys first and foremost on price. A key lesson in this downturn is that during difficult times, consumers make purchasing decisions based on price. For example, it was brought up that green products and cleantech are "nice to haves" right now -- but not for a premium. We should never forget that, ultimately, the customer is at the heart of a business.

4. For better and for worse, information moves at lightning speed. Jose Lopez, a former Managing Director of CitiGroup, reminded us of how different this era is in terms of the speed at which information is shared globally. The speed and amount of information available created the depth of the credit crisis -- a crisis of confidence -- and it's also responsible for the *rebounding* of the economy, for the stock market being way ahead of where the recovery actually is.

5. We don't know how the government stimulus will play out. The discussion over government's role in all this was as mixed as a Palin / Biden debate. But there was consensus amongst both the left- and right-minded in the audience that we need to see some results quickly from all the stimuli being put forth. As one participant commented, "Damn it -- if we are giving all this fertilizer and water, we'd damn well better see some green shoots." And yet even with some bounceback in the economy, a lesson that many observed including one of my Partners, Mats Lederhausen, "You have to be careful that it is not like an anesthetic -- [that] after it wears off you begin feeling some pain again."

Expectations have been set high and some, like Larry Lepard, worry about the inflationary risks we have exposed ourselves to. Bottom line: we cannot expect government to fix it all for us and we must have realistic expectations for the actions the Obama administration is putting in place.

6. Focus, focus, and focus. Don't focus on too many things, but rather the big and basic things that will help you come out on the right side of wrong timing.

It was an excellent dinner gathering: interesting mix of people, tasty Northern Italian cuisine, and lively conversation punctuated with a few back-and-forth debates. No clear conclusion, but people were pushed and stimulated by the discussion. If nothing else, it is hard to argue against recalibrating expectations, staying focused, and remembering that real value comes from innovation and business fundamentals. Old fashioned principles for new times ahead.

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We also had the chance to record some one-on-one perspectives from Collective members the next day. Check out five sage perspectives online at harvardbusiness.org.

The Economic Crisis Feeds on “Macromyopia”

Posted by *Anthony K. Tjan* on Wednesday February 11, 2009 10:49 AM \

With the plethora of big stories already unfolding for 2009 - **Obama's transition, the economic crisis**, bailouts and stimuli, and globalization revisited - we may be too preoccupied and will miss the biggest story that has yet to happen: **The moment the economic reset begins.**

The majority of us are (and should be) bracing for continued economic volatility at least through the first half of the year. Historically, even when markets get better, the economy lags. In a recent meeting for my investment firm, **Cue Ball**, I asked one of the most prominent venture capitalists in the country when he thought our industry would start swinging back. His response captured the right sentiment, "I think it has to finish swinging out before it can start to swing back."

While pundits will pinpoint the "bottom" with great certainty ex post facto, let's make one thing clear, **no one, but perhaps a higher being, knows how long or how deep this economic downturn will be.** That caveat said, the optimist in me believes that we will begin the swing back towards the later part of 2009. Why? Because the majority of doom and gloom reports believe it will take much longer to get better.

Why? I believe that most current sentiment exaggerates the immediate short-term trends at the expense of long-term opportunities. The question for me is that **whenever the economy turns, will we notice it, and if so, will we do anything about it?**

Just as few of us saw this economic mess coming, few will see it improving. The beginning of a swing back is not that palpable. Any recent signals and economic stimuli to quell its quake have at best given temporary reprieve, only to be met with whiplash volatility of "another bad news" issue - another company downfall, another bailout, another scandal, another state of economic emergency. When the turn happens it will probably be a quick and jerky against a period of protracted indifference, making it tough to see and feel. **The trick is not to determine that bottom inflection point, but to recognize that between now and a good part of 2009, that we may be in a period of as much opportunity as uncertainty.**

Last week, I came across on the blogosphere, the term "**macromyopia**" - the notion that it is human nature to over emphasize the short-term and underestimate the long-term. Macromyopia is trendier jargon on "**Amara's Law**" which I first heard back in the day of Bob Metcalfe's Agenda conferences. **I have recently wondered if this is beginning to look like an anti-irrational exuberance era.** Are we approaching a macromyopic level of absurd apathy? Don't get me wrong. The market needed to seriously reset itself given the credit craziness and unrealistic expectations for growth. But we run the risk of creating a self-fulfilling negative mindset concomitant with actions that prolong distrust and unpredictability. While in the short-run we will see more macromyopic behavior or market and economic apathy, my long-run optimism remains resolute. As Buffet has preached, "in the short term the market is a voting machine, and in the long term it is a weighing machine." Let's hope the weighing begins soon.

TED Diary: Cars 2.0 and a Tiananmen Survivor

Posted by *Anthony K. Tjan* on February 06, 2009 5:37 PM

As the TED conference crosses into its second half, the highlight most people are buzzing about today is the TED Prize Awards from last night. As I was co-hosting a dinner event last night, I only had the chance to catch half of the Prize Gala presentations, but the one that I hear people discussing this morning is Jose Antonio Abreu who founded El Sistema ("the system") to provide an opportunity for disadvantaged Venezuelan children to learn classical music.

The images and sounds of these orchestras composed of children expressing themselves through the gift of music are really quite magical. As a lesson in leadership and uncovering hidden potential, the most well known "graduate" of El Sistema is Gustavo Dudamel, the next music director of the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

Here are my picks from the talks since my last posting and from an especially strong line-up yesterday:

Shai Agassi - a former top software executive at SAP who resigned in 2007 to develop his vision for a world of electric cars. His talk was nothing short of thinking big: a hope to shift the way consumers think about buying and using their cars by leading a revolution in the market infrastructure required to support consumer transportation. One part of his "car 2.0" framework is to have a transport model analogous to cell phones where consumers have their electric battery-powered cars subsidized and subscribe to some number of monthly miles that allow them to recharge their batteries at ubiquitous smart charge spots. He is early, very early, in his mission (has only one car built), but has the track record of making a boatload in selling his company to SAP and then becoming a president there. But it is his evangelistic passion and conviction that makes him one of those people you just want to succeed.

Catherine Mohr is an engineer and oversees the development of surgical robots for Intuitive Surgical. She unveiled a new surgical robot that has not yet been approved by the FDA, but showcased just how far we have come with robotic applications - a recurring theme at TED this year. To see first hand the advanced surgical procedures possible with these machines was awe-inspiring.

Off-the-Schedule - Last night I co-hosted a small dinner gathering with Jason Pontin, the Editor of MIT Tech Review. In the spirit of TED, I thought it would be classically "TED" (not to mention Harvard Business School like) to cold call on a few people to make a few remarks. I decided to call on Li Lu, who is President of Himalaya Capital, one of the most respected investment firms in the country. I asked him to speak not on his investment insights, but on the fact that this year represents the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square massacre. Li was the co-leader of the student movement. His story is one of courage and inspiration as he was certain he would die like so many of his fellow demonstrators. But he narrowly survived, like two other near-death occasions - first, when he was left for adoption as a baby because his mother had to make a choice between which child to take into a labor camp and took his older brother; and then second, when he was 10 and his adoptive family died in an earthquake.

It definitely made for a special TED moment.