



S1E1: Transcript

with Dr. Andrew Serazin

Introducing the new Stories of Impact Podcast,
Sir John Templeton & TWCF

Tavia Gilbert:

Welcome to Stories of Impact. I'm producer Tavia Gilbert, and I'm excited to bring you the first episode of this new podcast series, which I'm producing in collaboration with Richard Sergay, who's a 30-year veteran television journalist. Stories of Impact offers conversation about the newest scientific research on human flourishing and how those discoveries can be translated into practical tools. It builds on the success of Richard's award-winning Stories of Impact video series. And we'll be sure to drop a link to the series in the show notes, so you can explore those videos yourself. They're amazing.

Richard has a ton of experience interviewing some of the most fascinating people in the world, and he's also covered science and technology for decades, so he's the perfect host for a program that delves into cutting edge research and tech. Richard is going to be interviewing researchers from across the world who are exploring the "Big Questions" of life. We're going to go all over the place in this series – not only all over the world, but to the depths of the ocean and all the way to the stars: bringing you conversations with scientists studying things like the relationship between humpback whale song and the search for alien intelligence; what young students think about science and religion; even whether artificial intelligence might help us be more moral.

You and I are going to be exploring a lot of different subjects and a lot of different researchers' bodies of work, but if there is something that is essential and a throughline of all of those episodes of exploration, is there something that you can say

“This is the essence of the Stories of Impact podcast?”

Richard Sergay:

I'd say if I were to make us a suggestion, it would be around the broad issue of keeping an open mind and be deeply curious, because the exploration and the journey that we will be on will take us to some fascinating corners of human nature, of science and technology, spirituality, and both you and I will not be expert in any of these areas, but being human, we'll be able to help the listener navigate some of the edges of issues that they may not have ever thought about. So keeping that open mind about some of these issues, I think will be critical throughline to every one of the stories that we tackle.

Tavia Gilbert:

In the midst of preparing to launch the Stories of Impact podcast, the focus of the entire world shifted to the Covid-19 pandemic. So Richard and I decided to start our first season in conversation with five researchers whose work centers around the topics of health, well-being, and hope. The first special Covid-19 episode of the Stories of Impact podcast will feature Dr. Barbara Fredrickson, an expert in positive psychology. She'll offer tips on how to nurture our positive emotions and resilience amid the stress and anxiety we are all experiencing, and she'll talk about how to foster strong social connections going forward post-Covid. We won't stay pandemic-focused for long, but in the short-term, we do hope the conversations will be a support to you, your families, and your communities.

Today, I want to introduce you to another voice. We're going to be hearing from one of the driving forces behind both the Stories of Impact video series and this new podcast.

Researcher, entrepreneur, and executive Andrew Serazin, Doctor of Philosophy, is president of our supporter, Templeton World Charity Foundation, and Dr. Serazin is responsible for advancing the philanthropic philosophy of Sir John Templeton. Richard sat down with Dr. Serazin recently over Zoom to talk about Sir John Templeton – what he believed in, and what Dr. Serazin's own work and vision for the organization are all about. Here's Dr. Serazin talking about Sir John, TWCF's unique founder.

Andrew Serazin: He was an amazing man who, through a combination of intelligence and perspective and humility, just managed to, make a number of really amazing contributions to the world of finance. And the Templeton World Charity Foundation seeks to continue his legacy, searching for new ideas around the world, to achieve his philanthropic vision. That philanthropic vision focuses on, in my perspective, the endless possibilities for humanity, its wonderful inheritances throughout history and culture, but also the important role that science and technology can play in securing a more durable and lasting human flourishing.

Richard Sergay: If you were to describe Templeton World Charity Foundation's core values and its mission statement in 2020 and beyond, what would they be?

Andrew Serazin: Our mission is to fund scientific breakthroughs and provide practical tools to fuel the human search for meaning, purpose, and truth. The values that animate that rest upon humility, rest upon rigor, rest upon the radical embrace of differences, the idea that truth exists and we can seek it as humans through our various faculties. But it requires a kind of engagement with different perspectives around the world, engaging with different communities and different cultures in order to seek that truth. But that ultimately these skills and faculties are more than just about survival actually, more than just about physiological signals, like blood pressure or heart rate or physiological tone. That there's something about human existence which is special and distinctive and can be manifest if we put the best minds towards such a flourishing.

Richard Sergay: You've touched on truth in that statement. Tell me what meaning and purpose mean to TWCF?

Andrew Serazin: Well, we use those terms, meaning, purpose, and truth, to try and denote a more expansive vision for the construction and the pursuit of a good life. And I think one of the things that is unique about our philanthropy and which, philanthropy means a love of humans, but one of the things that I think is distinctive is we're not just about the securing of physical needs, although many philanthropies do that, and those are

very important, you know, the reduction of hunger, the control and prevention of infectious diseases, or grappling with income inequality, those are all very worthwhile goals. We have a more expansive vision and I think a more far-looking vision about what it means to live a good life. And that requires deep philosophical engagement, deep engagement with religious traditions, deep engagement with cultural traditions, and most importantly perhaps rigorous research to help us move forward.

So meaning: we are meaning seeking creatures. We require sense-making to convert the stimuli that we see every day and are confronted with, to motivate us, to make sense of it, and to be fulfilled by it emotionally and intellectually. And so the construction of meaning and the ways in which human beings live their lives to generate meaning is incredibly important. And that's about this internal sense of fulfillment.

Purpose is necessarily externally directed because we're not just, we don't just sit and contemplate. Human beings are action-oriented, and purpose is really about the attainment of some sort of external goal that is worthwhile. The translation of desires into action that is part of human nature. So when we talk about meaning, purpose and truth, those are just signals of this more expansive, deeper and richer understanding of what it means to be human and how human beings can flourish.

Tavia Gilbert:

I want to just jump to share a brief clip from an interview Sir John Templeton gave to Maria Bartiromo. This is from CNBC's Market Watch in the early 2000's, and it gives us a chance to hear more about Sir John's unique mission in his own voice.

Maria Bartiromo:

Welcome back. Although his talent as an investor is undeniable, Sir John Templeton's true passion lies in philanthropy. In 1972, he created the Templeton Prize for Progress in Religion and award of over \$1 million, which slightly exceeds that of the Nobel prize. Mother Teresa was the first winner almost three decades ago. I sat down with Sir John to talk about his religious beliefs.

You sold your mutual fund empire in 1992. You devoted yourself to philanthropy. You have a quest to find the common ground between science and religion.

Sir John Templeton: Not quite. My quest is toward helping humanity to know more than a hundred times as much about divine infinity, divine reality as any human ever knew before. What we're trying to encourage is spiritual information. The really important area of life is your spiritual wealth. In all the years I helped up to a million people to increase that money wealth, it made them happy temporarily, but didn't really add to their productivity or their permanent happiness. What does make people happy, what makes them useful, what makes them feel their purpose on earth is to be spiritually productive. So what everybody should do is try to find some way to increase spiritual understanding, spiritual information.

Tavia Gilbert: Sir John Templeton's unique perspective still guides TWCF today.

Richard Sergay: And this helps distinguish TWCF from other philanthropies around the world?

Andrew Serazin: Definitely. Yes, definitely. So a good example is that, most medical research done today is really about stopping or preventing a disease. Much less has been done, and investment that goes into the understanding and the pursuit of well-being. Being alive is much more than the absence of a disease. It's about the presence of something.

And so we're trying to define a presence that requires factors like meaning, purpose and truth. And I think that's a very distinctive approach. It's very innovative. It puts human beings at its center and at its core, but seeks to reach beyond the immediate material needs and towards some greater, you know, if I can say it, transcendent and expansive possible future that we just, that we just don't know about and we can only glimpse at.

And I think that's really an exciting place for a philanthropy to be, because philanthropy is really, I believe, the most free form of capital in existence. It can pursue ambitious agendas beyond shareholder quarterly reports or election cycles. And so this pursuit of meaning, purpose, and truth positions TWCF outside of the mainstream, and rightly so.

Richard Sergay:

Talk for a moment, a little bit about you. You come to TWCF with a deep background in science and understanding of quote "traditional philanthropy" from your time at the Gates Foundation. You've run a startup in the science field, you've worked on issues like malaria. Tell me about the lens you bring to TWCF and how you're pivoting.

Andrew Serazin:

I've always been fascinated with the natural world and how we can understand what we see and what we experience and those big questions of existence have always been of extreme importance to me. I sometimes joke, I've had 16 years of Catholic school education and Sister Mary Jane Rohr, God bless her, instilled in me a sense of responsibility for taking care of others right from my time at St. Mary's School in Ohio. And I think those, the twin institutions of science and in my case religion provided a grounding for issues related to social justice, issues related to the reduction of poverty.

Importantly, the sort of religious motivations that I have are foundational to attacking these social issues. And earlier in my career, as you mentioned, I was deeply involved in work in Africa and deeply involved in the creation of new drugs and vaccines against malaria, because it was out of a sense of responsibility that these wonderful technologies like genomics and genetic techniques to exquisitely understand the action of DNA and how it produces infection, how the DNA of the malaria parasite or the DNA of a mosquito is exquisitely tuned to enable that organism to cause disease. That there was something really exciting about taking the high point of our civilization – that is this really exquisite science and technology – and developing tools to treat an infant who's dying in Sub-Saharan Africa, whose parents make less than a dollar a day.

The process of discovery, and how you translate that discovery to make an impact, is something that is of enduring value and of interest to me.

And so there's a kind of magical quality, I think, to science, but it goes beyond that. The production of that knowledge is insufficient. You must translate that knowledge. We have an obligation to translate that knowledge into something that's practical so that others may benefit. It's not good enough to have that research wind up in a high-impact publication. It actually must be translated. It must be translated from a sense of social responsibility, but also, that translation can help the science move forward even more quickly.

That's the perspective I bring to the Templeton World Charity Foundation, and that's why I'm so excited about our new five year strategic framework, because it seeks to not only make new discoveries but develop some specific practical tools based on those discoveries and then launch those tools and interventions into the popular culture. And that process of discovery, development, and launch comes out of my background as a scientist, entrepreneur, someone who's very interested in translation of evidence to make a difference. It's why I'm excited to do the work that we do now.

Richard Sergay:

So it's not just, if I hear you correctly, science for science sake, but it's a human connection that's really at the heart of what TWCF is about.

Andrew Serazin:

That's right. So our mission statement is about the supporting of scientific breakthroughs and the development of practical tools. Those two things are very important. Scientific breakthroughs give us a sense of progress, a sense that something is possible, but that promise is only fulfilled in the production of a useful tool. Moreover, once people start seeing that that is possible, that translation from discovery to development, then it changes people's perspectives.

So I'll give you a good example from our, our current work.

Over the past 20 years, the Templeton philanthropy has been investing heavily in the science of forgiveness. What its psychological origins are, what its neurological origins are, how is it that people can go through a process to forgive? And the science is clear. Over 30 trials now in human populations around the world of various forgiveness interventions, all show benefit. It works. Forgiveness works.

And our task today, and right now, is to use that evidence to ignite a whole ecosystem, a whole constellation of new innovations and tools around forgiveness where, forgiveness should be accessible and available to anyone at any stage in life, in any place. And a tool should be available, just like how we've seen an explosion of tools and interventions and resources for mindfulness. So that's an example of taking really rigorous scientific research and translating it into practical tools. And we're almost there and we need to take that one step further and get others excited about this process, this new science of forgiveness.

Of course, it's an old concept. It comes out of many faith traditions. But what I think is unique about the work that we do is supercharging that, or an electrifying those old concepts with the most rigorous scientific data available today. And if you do that correctly, I think, what's interesting to me is, that is inspirational for a whole new generation of researchers, policymakers. If you can prove you can make progress on something like forgiveness, a whole bunch of other things open up. Completing that circle between discovery and development is a virtuous circle, when you do it correctly.

Richard Sergay:

That brings me into an interesting point about a new program that you've launched here at TWCF, which we're all a part of, which is this new podcast called Stories of Impact, which is based on a pretty successful video version that we've built. Talk to me a little bit about it, its intended audience, and why it's important to Templeton World Charity Foundation, who you're hoping to reach, who you're hoping to have an impact on.

Andrew Serazin:

One phrase that I keep coming back to is the igniting of a second scientific revolution that the first scientific revolution was all about the study of the stars and celestial mechanics, and, how plants make energy. So it's all about the external world. And I think we in a sense need a new science of the investigation and probing of our internal world. And many of our projects do that. And so if we do that correctly, the possibilities for humanity as a whole are really endless.

And so my hope for this podcast series is to really be inspired by the grantees that we've funded and have been successful through this media and that offers a sort of high degree of intimacy. And then also take forward a sense of optimism and an enthusiasm for what Sir John Templeton called the blossoming time in the creation of man.

Tavia Gilbert:

One of the things we're most excited about in this podcast is that we're hoping to appeal not only to adult listeners, but to young listeners and families who listen together. I'm not a parent, but I do love my godchildren and all the children who brighten and enrich my life. Richard Sergay, Dr. Serazin, Sir John Templeton – they're all parents, and of course many of you, our listeners, will be parents. Each of us believes in the importance of cultivating relationship with and sparking curiosity in the next generation. And in a previous conversation with Richard, Dr. Serazin expressed how important young people are to TWCF's long-term strategic mission.

Dr. Andrew Serazin:

So impact is everything at the end of the day, but it's that cultural change that it can occur over a 10-year period. That's impact to me, because it changes the way people see themselves and changes what society values and what people value, particularly young people, because that's a real focus for TWCF, is that if we can inspire early stage thinkers, innovators, problem solvers, that that will affect them for the rest of their lives.

My biggest hope for the foundation in terms of impact is to move from a space where people think these why questions,

the big questions of meaning, purpose and truth, they're too important to keep inside the academy. They're too important to keep, locked within esoteric coursework, or esoteric journals, it's more than just interesting to sit around and sort of navel gaze. It's actually important, it's important for our future, it's important for almost every other aspect of life that we can think about. And so that would be impact to me, in ten years, that we inspire a new generation of thinkers who deem our work to be important and not just interesting.

Tavia Gilbert

Curiosity is the essence of the Stories of Impact podcast, and Sir John Templeton's mind and spirit are the inspiration. Richard and I are hopeful that the Stories of Impact podcast can help inspire a new generation of thinkers – and maybe a new generation of thinking. In fact, just getting to know Sir John Templeton's history and legacy, I've been inspired. Sir John Templeton seems to me to set an example of the kind of curiosity that the world so desperately needs right now.

Sir John Templeton was a uniquely American pioneer, and he embodied a unique combination of characteristics that I find so refreshing and hopeful, particularly in 2020 divided America: he was active in his Presbyterian church, but that didn't mean he wasn't deeply curious about the variety of faith traditions, world cultures, and value structures he encountered in his global travels. He had a profound respect for learning, a belief in the centrality of spiritual life, and a higher purpose beyond profit for profit's sake. He was fascinated by big questions of morals and ethics, but he didn't see those questions as being disconnected from science. Sir John Templeton believed that scientific exploration and human being's perpetual search for meaning, purpose, and truth, could and should go hand in hand with science.

He was a passionate man, excited to learn all he could, and even better, he offered support to countless curious learners who also wanted to explore the furthest reaches of the human soul and the universe. And his creative, compassionate, courageous spirit will guide our explorations.

Richard Sergay: I think it's going to be a fascinating journey. We have a really interesting adventure ahead of us both in audio and video form.

Tavia Gilbert: Agreed. I'm really pleased to get to work with you and to take this journey with you. So I'm excited to see where we go.

Richard Sergay: Yeah. Me, too.

Tavia Gilbert: Listeners, we're excited to take you on this journey, as well. We hope that you're already intrigued by the conversations we're going to have, and that you'll come back for the in-depth explorations we'll be bringing you throughout the coming year, starting next episode with Dr. Barbara Fredrickson, who will talk with Richard about why her work in positive psychology is more relevant than ever during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Richard Sergay: Are you an optimist?

Barbara Fredrickson: I am. Sometimes that gets me in trouble, but I'm always thinking that, um, you know, we will get through this, and it's been scary times, but it's been remarkable to see how people have adapted.

Tavia Gilbert: We'll be back next with the full conversation. In the meantime, we'd love to connect with you. You can find us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [Instagram](#), which we'll link in the show notes, and we invite you to subscribe to Stories of Impact wherever you listen to podcasts.

From Templeton World Charity Foundation, this has been the Stories of Impact podcast, with Richard Sergay and Tavia Gilbert.

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