

## Masters of Scale Episode Transcript – Wendy Kopp

“Build the right flywheel, w/Teach for America / Teach for All's Wendy Kopp”

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**KAYA HENDERSON:** We spent a very interesting summer in Northridge, California, complete with a killer earthquake and all kinds of other things happening. And I would say we were less than wholly prepared to enter the classroom.

**REID HOFFMAN:** That's lifelong educator, Kaya Henderson. Kaya is describing a time in the early 90's, where she spent a summer training with a group of young teachers for Teach for America.

Teach for America recruits young people from top colleges to teach in under-resourced schools. Kaya is the former executive director for Teach for America's DC office, the former chancellor of the DC public school system, and now, she's the co-founder and CEO of the education technology firm, Reconstruction. But back in the early nineties, Kaya was a brand-new recruit for a brand-new experiment in teaching and learning.

**HENDERSON:** I was in the third class of Teach for America, and they were figuring it out. And at the time Teach for America didn't really have a solidified training model in place.

There were roughly 500 of us that were training. I think we all entered the classroom feeling woefully inadequate, but feeling bound and determined to figure it out for our kids.

**HOFFMAN:** Kaya was gearing up to be a bilingual teacher. And her first placement after that summer of training was in the South Bronx.

**HENDERSON:** I taught Spanish, half of my kids were African-American, and the other half of my kids were Latino. My Latino kids could speak Spanish, but they had problems reading and writing it. My African-American kids, it was easier to teach them to read and write and harder to teach them to speak. And so we did a lot in pairs so that they could build off of one another's strengths and weaknesses. I wanted them to learn some Spanish, I wanted them to have a curiosity about Spanish and Latino cultures, and I wanted them to feel like this was a skill that could be helpful to them in their lives.

**HOFFMAN:** Even as a novice teacher, Kaya saw the power of pairing up students whose skill sets could complement each other's. It was important for her to teach them, but it was maybe even more important to create a format where they could help each other learn.

**HENDERSON:** Some of my kids dealt with things that I wouldn't wish on my worst enemy, and they were resilient and they kept going. And some of my kids were affected negatively and couldn't pull themselves out of their situations.

It is optimistic to believe that one school experience can overcome a bunch of life circumstances. I believed that my job was to help my young people see themselves as worthy and valuable and smart in the same way that people told me that that's what I was when I was younger.

**HOFFMAN:** Scaling this sense of possibility was at the heart of Teach for America's goals. Kaya went on to hold senior leadership positions at Teach for America and its international counterpart, Teach for All. So as these programs scaled, Kaya was there to see the power of this growing network of leaders, teachers, and alumni.

So how do you do that? The answer is, don't just build an organization – build a network for your team, your customers, and yourself.

**HENDERSON:** My first year of teaching, which any teacher will tell you, is hell. I only made it through because my Teach for America friends and I learned from one another and we supported one another.

To this day, some of my closest friends are my Teach for America friends. And so it makes a significant impact on your life.

**HOFFMAN:** That's why I believe that networks are the key to amplifying scale. They help you find what you need, share what you learn, build enthusiasm, and motivate talent. So if you haven't found the right network, build your own.

## **[THEME MUSIC]**

**HOFFMAN:** I'm Reid Hoffman, cofounder of LinkedIn, partner at Greylock, and your host. And I believe that networks are the key to amplifying scale. They help you find what you need, share what you learn, build enthusiasm, and motivate talent. So if you haven't found the right network, build your own.

I'm obviously a huge fan of networks. LinkedIn was created to leverage the power of networks. And unlike some headier business theories, this is one that people intrinsically understand. The idea is much, much older than social networks, or network TV. It's even older than the concept of actual nets. In our earliest hunter-gatherer days, we understood that collectively when we share information, we succeed.

But not all networks are created equal, any more than any two actual nets are. Some are tightly woven; others loose and stretchy. Are you building a fishing net, or a mosquito net? What are you trying to catch? Because all this will affect your net's size, stretch, and weave.

I wanted to talk to Wendy Kopp about this because she's founded not just one, but two networks across her career. The first, Teach for America, was a brand-new model for connecting high-performing college graduates with under-served school districts across the country. Since their founding in 1990, they have trained and placed over 60,000 new teachers across the United States. With Teach for All, the learnings of Teach for America are scaled globally, reaching children in 59 countries around the world. But the shape of these two networks are very different. And they each contain different lessons for entrepreneurs.

The first seeds of Teach for America were planted when Wendy herself was an undergraduate at Princeton.

**WENDY KOPP:** I was in my senior year. For the first time in my life, I found myself in a total funk. I was just searching for something I wasn't finding in terms of what I wanted to do with my life. I mean, I had become a very concerned college student, concerned about the inequities in our country, and all the recruiters in 1989 of liberal arts graduates like myself were investment banks and management consulting firms banging down our doors saying, "Commit just two years to work in our firms. And I just, I really didn't want to do that.

**HOFFMAN:** This aggressive recruitment didn't just happen in 1989. In venture capital too, you're not betting on the product or the tech, you're betting on the person that will make it happen. And these financial firms had built themselves a highly efficient network to scoop up top candidates from universities as soon as they were available.

But to Wendy, it seemed odd that other sectors weren't doing the same.

**KOPP:** Our generation was called the "Me Generation." And supposedly we just all wanted to go work on Wall Street, and all we cared about was ourselves. And I just thought that was so wrong.

And one day I just thought of this idea: why aren't we being recruited as aggressively to commit just two years to teach in urban and rural communities across our country?

**HOFFMAN:** Wendy wasn't an education major. But the desperate state of the country's school systems had been all over the news.

**KOPP:** I became obsessed with that idea. Like it was my answer to what to do. And it was my thesis topic, which I also hadn't thought of.

**HOFFMAN:** Wendy might have written her thesis, gotten her grade, and been done with it. But the more she researched, the more the idea wouldn't let go, which led to a classic entrepreneurship moment you might recognize...

**KOPP:** When I started writing the thesis, it wasn't to say, I'm going to start this. I started just researching this as a policy idea. And as I researched it, I became all the more obsessed with the idea. And in fact, I spent two months of the thesis process trying to figure out, you know what, someone must be starting this, it is so obvious. It was the kind of thing you would tell people the idea. And they'd say, "Doesn't that already exist?" And I just kept thinking it must.

**HOFFMAN:** That moment of "Doesn't this already exist?" is key to the founder's journey. It's actually one of the first signs a new product, or a new network, is needed. Another sign? If you see a potential talent base to create the thing that's missing. Wendy saw that right there in her own graduating class.

**KOPP:** It just felt to me like the window was going to pass. Like the mood on college campuses is perfect. There's tremendous need in school districts. There was a front page article in Fortune magazine saying, "Corporate America committed to education reform." So it just seemed like it had to happen.

**HOFFMAN:** Wendy drew up a proposal, modeled on the Peace Corps, a government-run volunteer organization where volunteers commit two years to serving global communities in need.

**KOPP:** The Peace Corps started with 500 people. They thought that was the lowest possible number to convey a sense of national importance and anything bigger would be unmanageable, so that became my number.

The thesis developed this four-page plan with a budget saying, "We need to raise \$2.5 million." My thesis advisor's like – he calls me in and says, "Do you know how hard it is to raise \$2,500?" He introduces me to the head of development at Princeton, who's going to explain to me how hard that is.

**HOFFMAN:** Even though she was hearing bad news, this was a pivotal moment for Wendy. In making that introduction, her thesis advisor had expanded her network. Wendy was now connected to someone who had critical experience she lacked. So even though the message was, "This is going to be almost impossible to do," the introduction itself was a major win. It helped her connect with some early funding sources after she graduated and let her get started on making her thesis a reality.

She worked out of donated office space in Manhattan, building a skeleton staff and recruiting those first 500 corps members.

But Wendy had her sights on adding a new piece to her network – someone she believed would be invested in the same mission.

**KOPP:** I said, "I think Ross Perot is going to fund this."

**COMPUTER VOICE:** H. Ross Perot, billionaire CEO, philanthropist, and Texan.

**KOPP:** "He's from Dallas, I'm from Dallas, and one thing I know about him," I mean, I didn't know him. I had no access to him.

**HOFFMAN:** Wendy's only connection to Ross Perot was in their shared geography. Being from Dallas wasn't a strong enough reason by itself to get her an audience with him. But it did give her advance knowledge of what he cared deeply about.

**KOPP:** He kept pushing all of these education reform initiatives.

I believe I wrote him 11 letters. He disputed that fact. But one of them he responded to. He called in the office, and I said, "I'm coming to Dallas. Can you meet with me?" By that point, we had raised maybe \$400,000, and this was beginning to become pretty much the most existentially stressful situation.

I told myself, "I am going to glue myself to the chair in his room, and I will not leave until he gives me a million dollars."

**HOFFMAN:** While I wouldn't recommend this exact technique, there's a lesson in Wendy's persistence.

**KOPP:** I cannot tell you how many times he tried to get me out of his office, and I just said, "Honestly, you are the one person who will do this." He finally said, "I'll tell you what, if you can raise the other 1.5 million you need, I'll give you 500,000." At that moment, I knew that it was all done because the credibility, the leverage, I just knew. I had enough people out there who were just sitting on the fence and, sure enough, it all came together, so that's how the first year funding came together.

**HOFFMAN:** As it turns out, Perot wasn't the only person who would help fund Teach for America. Because he knew that if he gave her some of the money, others would follow, in a sort of domino effect. His gift would open up a whole new network of funding sources for Wendy.

Once they'd secured funding, Wendy and her team got the Teach for America ball rolling, somewhat chaotically that first year. Because, as with any early-stage network, the funding was only one part of it.

**KOPP:** It was a bunch of people recently out of college and we were giving it our all.

We really forgot to plan for a lot of stuff. For instance, we had no plan for what to do when 2,500 applications came in and needed to be reviewed. We did have people interviewing, but there was just never thought given to, who's going to review those applications and figure out who we're selecting?

**HOFFMAN:** But despite the youth and inexperience of her small team, it all managed to come together. They lined up donors, visited schools, and recruited a board of directors.

**KOPP:** One year after I graduated, I was looking out at the first 500 Teach for America Corps members who were such pioneering spirits and who started teaching in six regions across the country. I always think that's the moment Teach for America really began because the learning curve was just ... it was even steeper from that moment forward.

**HOFFMAN:** The steepness of that learning curve wasn't just due to their inexperience. What Wendy and her team were attempting is hard. Teach for America made a promise to young, raw talent from elite universities that they'd train them, and then deploy them to high-need school districts across the country. But American school systems are locally run. Each school district has its own distinct community, and its own challenges. As networks go, it was a loose one.

**HENDERSON:** Teaching is a little like driving...

**HOFFMAN:** Once again, Kaya Henderson, founder and CEO of Reconstruction.

**HENDERSON:** There's a lot that you can learn in the classroom or in these kinds of simulated environments, but you actually learn teaching when you do it – just like you learn driving when you drive.

**HOFFMAN:** That's a timeless lesson not just for teaching, but for entrepreneurship. Now back to Wendy.

**KOPP:** We ran into the education politics and, most importantly, figuring out, how do you recruit and select people who are actually ready for this and train and support them so that they don't just survive but actually succeed? There were just immense lessons on all fronts.

**HOFFMAN:** Teach for America worked to pull these lessons together into centralized institutional knowledge. They met their first funding targets, then blew past them. They made national headlines for their approach to education reform. But like many startups, Teach for America hit a snag a few short years into their existence.

**KOPP:** We hit the wall like year four. I call these the dark years. We spent three years where literally every two weeks I was truly uncertain that we would have the money to meet payroll.

We had all of these startup donors who had never thought that they were going to stick with us. We had an \$8 million budget with grants dropping off in 500,000 and

million-dollar chunks. We're still a staff of, like, people in their lower 20s who really have no idea how to pull this off.

**HOFFMAN:** It's very common in early-stage companies to hire the people in your immediate network – in Wendy's case, young, enthusiastic graduates from premier universities like herself.

But as you grow, you must look beyond your own circle, and start thinking strategically about who you need next.

**KOPP:** We had huge management challenges. I had the idea that we were all on a mission, and it's funny because I've kind of returned to this idea 30 years later that we shouldn't need a lot of hierarchy. We would just hire people who were aligned in spirit and send them off. That was, of course... I ultimately came to think that whether or not we fulfilled our mission would be so much about whether we were well-managed or not.

**HOFFMAN:** There was also another challenge Wendy faced as Teach for America scaled: how to grow their network of recruits.

**KOPP:** Every year for 10 years we would get no matter what we did 3,000 people would apply. I mean it did not matter. The first year 2,500 people applied, and every year thereafter 3,000 people applied.

We would put these posters out, and the people who would look at the poster and intuitively think, "That's what I want to do," would apply, and that was 3,000 people a year. And we started realizing what our competition was doing.

**HOFFMAN:** By "competition," Wendy's referring to that legion of consulting and investment firms that recruited aggressively on college campuses.

If Teach for America wanted to grow their applicant pool beyond the same fixed number every year, they'd need to do more than put up posters. They'd need to recruit like a McKinsey ... without McKinsey's budget.

**KOPP:** We don't have a million dollars a campus, but we do have a lot of volunteer energy. We ultimately staffed up our recruitment team pretty significantly, but each of them would then find volunteers for each campus among core members, alumni, student volunteers, and we would just go at headhunting. Every year we'd have coffee with 40,000 people, and some of them we'd have coffee with 10 times, like the people we would most want. Like, "What's holding you back?" It was very relationship driven. Once we figured that out we started being able to manage our growth.

**HOFFMAN:** Once Teach for America had reimagined their recruiting, the organization broke through their hiring ceiling. By year 10, they'd reach 80,000 students.

The “dark years,” it would seem, were over. But a funny thing happened on the way to scale. People from outside the U.S. started to notice.

**KOPP:** We were 15 years into the Teach for America journey, and I was like all-in on Teach for America. We were scaling at 20% a year and working to increase impact in classrooms and alumni impact.

It had actually never occurred to me that this would be something that people in other countries would think would make sense for them. Looking back, I'm not sure why that didn't occur to me, but it really hadn't.

I met 13 people in one year from India to Chile, to China, to Lebanon who were just determined that something similar needed to happen in their countries. And they were looking for help. And I felt like I needed to be responsive. But I was a little bit conflicted because I knew that I needed to stay focused given the massive continuing challenges in the U.S.

**HOFFMAN:** When did that, "Okay, we need to have another organization, and it needs to have learnings from Teach for America but be a new model," when did you go, "Okay, that needs to happen and that's for me to do?"

**KOPP:** There is a very inspiring woman who had found her way to my office who herself was a very accomplished social entrepreneur from India who ran these incredible transformational after-school programs in India. She met a couple of Teach for America alumni who were volunteering in her centers, and she's like, "We need Teach for India" because her biggest challenge was to figure out, "How do we actually intervene in the school day? How do I find enough people power to actually provide the kind of transformational education they were providing?" Anyway, she said, "You have to come to India."

**HOFFMAN:** Before we go any further, let's replay something Wendy just said.

**KOPP:** She met a couple of Teach for America alumni who were volunteering in her centers, and she's like, "We need Teach for India."

**HOFFMAN:** This is a powerful example of the network effect in practice. Teach for America had recruited, enlisted, and placed these corps members in schools in the U.S. After their two years in that program, some of them went on to work in India, bringing their expertise with them. That's how networks can evolve. Even if you're sitting at the head of an organization, your work can spread and reach borders you can't even see.

Ironically, Wendy was the one who most had to be convinced.

**KOPP:** I got on the plane to head over there, and even then, I was thinking, "This makes no sense." Like, "Whatever I've learned is not going to have relevance in India. Everything will be different." But the minute I got there, the first thing we did was go on a school visit. I was having déjà vu. It was, like, down to sitting in the principal's office and having them wipe off the table and put the doughnut holes so that we could have a conversation with the principal.

The principal started telling me, through a translator, "I need to explain to her why our kids can only accomplish so much given their background."

**HOFFMAN:** This sounded very familiar to Wendy, and it might to you too. You might remember Kaya Henderson at the top of the episode, speaking about teaching in the South Bronx.

**KOPP:** I just thought, "I can't believe it. I can't believe I'm seeing the same movie here." We then went into the classrooms, and I realized the kids' circumstances are actually probably closer to the circumstances of the kids in the Bronx than the more privileged kids in India.

**HOFFMAN:** In this moment, Wendy saw that lessons from Teach for America could be applied directly. The schoolchildren had similar needs. But that was only one half of the equation. Teach for America had learned how to scale their teaching corps by recruiting at American universities. Would that method work in India too?

**KOPP:** We went to a college campus, and I still remember this because Shaheen Mistri, who actually ended up going on to found Teach for India, was so depressed at the end of this session. It was one of the really selective colleges in Mumbai, and only maybe 10% of the kids were super into this, but those 10% were like live wires.

I'd left thinking, "This works. This is incredible. This is going to take off in India." She was just so depressed, and I'm like, "You only need 10%. That's like Yale. Go to Yale. These kids are on the edge of their seats saying, 'This is what I want to do with my life.'"

**HOFFMAN:** Let's take a moment to appreciate what just happened. The administrator who had invited Wendy to India was devastated by what she saw as a low engagement rate. To her, 10 percent enthusiasm meant 90 percent failure.

But because Wendy had spent 15 years on recruiting visits just like that, she had the experience to say, "No, actually, 10 percent is great." And sharing that insight would help scale not just Teach for India, but Teach for All.

**[AD BREAK]**

**HOFFMAN:** We're back with Wendy Kopp. When we left her, she had just finished a revelatory trip to India, where she learned that it might be possible to scale the practices of her first

organization, Teach for America, in a global way. But a lot would rest on how they structured this new entity, Teach for All.

**KOPP:** We decided to set it up as a network of independent locally-led organizations with a global organization that could help accelerate progress of the network by helping everyone learn from each other.

**HOFFMAN:** Note: this networked structure is different from how Teach for America was built, which had a more centralized organization. There isn't a separate "Teach for Cleveland," "Teach for Tucson," and "Teach for Brooklyn." But Teach for All would be sort of like that, except here it was Teach for India, Teach for Estonia, and a co-founding program, Teach First, in the UK.

**KOPP:** The night before we launched Teach for All on the stage of The Clinton Global Initiative, I had a total panic, like I called the person who was my partner in crime at the time. I was like, "I don't think this is going to work." I had learned so much at Teach for America about the challenge of scaling with quality, and this is such an intensive program to run, and I just started worrying.

**HOFFMAN:** You can't blame Wendy for those last-minute butterflies. Her prior experience had been in building a centralized organization – like the Peace Corps – that would then dispatch corps members to their posts. But as a distributed network – a "meta network," if you will – Teach for All would leave most of the control in the hands of the local organizations.

This is a concern for any franchised business. There's a certain amount of trust handed to each individual outpost, each regional manager, each store manager, and on down. That can be scary.

But it wasn't long before Wendy's expectations evolved from panic to a different feeling.

**KOPP:** What I have seen through Teach for All has been mind boggling to me. I mean it shattered all of my preconceptions about how to generate scale with increasing quality over time just to see the power of a network. I mean brilliant people all over the world in very diverse contexts which inspire different ways of thinking and innovation, but also supported by a lot of central capacity building, the peer effects.

**COMPUTER VOICE:** Peer effects: the theory that when a student is surrounded by high-performing peers, their grades will go up; and when surrounded by lower-achieving peers, their grades will go down.

**KOPP:** So what I've seen is problems resolve themselves much more quickly in the network than in a more centrally-managed structure.

**HOFFMAN:** This is a phenomenon that isn't unique to Teach for All. Examples of quality-distributed networks abound, from host communities on Airbnb to Wikipedia. Wikipedia,

in fact, is a perfect example of how quality can actually be improved by a less centralized structure. Imagine the errors, embellishments, or acts of wiki-vandalism that might linger if corrections had to run through some Wikipedia Central. Instead, Wikipedia scales its value system of factual integrity amongst its editors. Mistakes get flagged quickly, and quality improves.

This is the sort of pattern Wendy saw emerge after Teach for All's launch in 2007.

And its fast success was nothing but good news. Except, that the sheer speed of scale forced Wendy to make a choice.

**KOPP:** We launched Teach for All with seven network partners in year one and 13 in year two, and by year five there were 25. And Teach for America doubled in that time from something like 4,000 teachers to 8,000. So I had no option. I was just realizing, "I need to choose. Teach for America needs a dedicated leader, and so does Teach for All."

**HOFFMAN:** Wendy transitioned out of the CEO role at Teach for America in 2013, though she stayed at the head of the board. It was time to commit to Teach for All full-time. Since then, Teach for All has grown to include 59 organizations across five continents.

**KOPP:** We have a set of unifying principles, which you could write on half a page of paper that every one of these organizations now, 59 of them that's part of Teach for All, are committed to living into. They say a lot, but there's nothing prescribed about how to do it.

We don't go trying to expand into countries. We respond to people who come to us and say, "I really want to start Teach for Nigeria," or whatever it may be. Then, we come behind them, we never get out in front of them, as they work to develop the plan to adapt these principles to their context.

**HOFFMAN:** This 'you come to us' approach to the distributed network is actually the opposite of that early method Wendy described for recruiting Teach for America teachers.

**KOPP:** Every year we'd have coffee with 40,000 people, and some of them we'd have coffee with 10 times, like the people we would most want. Like, "What's holding you back?"

**HOFFMAN:** This kind of aggressive recruitment wasn't the way to scale Teach for All. Because if each network node is going to grow and scale locally, it needs to be 'opt-in.' You can't force a school system, much less a sovereign nation, to do things your way. Each new country that joins the network needs the space to make their version, and innovate at their own pace.

At times, that pace has been shockingly fast.

**KOPP:** I don't know if it's like the power of local ownership or the pure culture created across the network, but I would just see problems getting solved maybe more quickly because there are problems everywhere. But the question is, how quickly are you solving them and evolving and improving? I've just seen the power of a network approach.

**HOFFMAN:** Was there one particular kind of place where you saw this kind of learning and this particular country context that had spread that was the, "Aah, this is the validation of that network thesis?"

**KOPP:** Probably the first place this really struck me was in India. One of the things that we were always and still are all across our network, trying to figure out is, "How do we grow the percentage of truly transformational teachers?" There are really good teachers, and then there are teachers who are just fundamentally somehow overcoming all of the constraints of the circumstance and really putting kids on a meaningfully different trajectory.

**HOFFMAN:** Remember, it was in India that Wendy saw 10 percent of college students respond positively to their recruiting pitch. That percentage had delighted Wendy, even as it had frustrated her host and colleague, Shaheen Mistri. Keep that in mind when you hear this next story.

**KOPP:** I remember visiting a year into Teach for India's launch and realizing, "They might have more percentage-wise truly transformational teachers than we have." Shaheen had taken what we had done and said, "Okay," like for instance the summer training curriculum, she said, "Okay, 90% of it at Teach for America is building skills and knowledge about how to be a teacher. Maybe 10% is working on people's mindsets." She was like, "We're going to go 30 or 40% mindsets. We're going to immerse people in experiences and help them reflect because this is a mindsets game."

**HOFFMAN:** If you're starting to feel like you need a Masters in Education just to follow along, don't worry. This isn't all that different from the mindset work we talk about on Masters of Scale. We go in depth on this in the Masters of Scale courses app.

What Shaheen had done was shift the focus of Teach for India's summer teacher training program. Putting less emphasis on what the new teachers would be teaching ... and put a little more time into how. The results impressed everyone.

**KOPP:** In fact, Teach for America sent 50 teacher coaches to India just a very few years later to say, "How are you all doing this?"

**HOFFMAN:** This is the beauty of a network. It allows information to go, not just from the top down, or the center out, but in all directions. Networks are how you find what you need, share what you learn, and scale enthusiasm for your mission in every way.

**KOPP:** For the first year or two we actually did think, "Okay, Teach for America and Teach First, we have so much we can share." We had a set of lessons from our experience, and we went out and tried to propagate them to inform people's local choices. I realized in our second year that this was a bad idea and that, in fact, we needed to reorient our support from being around answers to being around questions.

**HOFFMAN:** This lesson cannot be stated enough. In fact, let's say it again.

We need to reorient our focus from answers to questions.

A network is not just about "What can you give me" – it's about what we can give each other. You don't show up at an industry mixer saying, "Hey, what can you do for me?" The success rate for that kind of approach is very, very low.

But we don't talk enough about how important reciprocity is for organizations too. This organic give-and-take can be a little messy – but it produces better information overall. And it puts a lot less demand on the overarching organization to be all things to all groups. Instead, it can facilitate conversation and learning between two of its network nodes.

So, Teach for All is structured as a distributed network with information flowing across it. But its structure isn't the only network it produces.

**HOFFMAN:** What have been some of the things that have come out of that alumni network?

**KOPP:** In the U.S., to start here, there are probably 70,000 Teach for America alumni. 84% of them are working full-time in mission-related work.

They become a huge percentage of the school principals and the district leadership and the people running the NGOs and the school board members.

We weren't sure how this would play out across the world. In fact, a lot of people thought, "That part of it is not going to play out in our country." They thought, "They're never going to stay." Across the world 74% stayed full time in education alone. They're in their 20s often, but they are starting social enterprises, moving into the ministries, running the schools' networks.

Seeing that leads you to wonder, "What is happening during these two years?" Because it's not even that they are staying in this work and that they're exerting leadership, it's that they're the kind of leaders we need.

**HOFFMAN:** If you go back to your mental image of a network as a physical net, this alumni effect is like building it with an ever-stronger weave. Those who come out of the system emerge transformed. And they put their energy back into the system.

**HENDERSON:** We actually went through a huge shift in how we were pitching the organization to folks.

**HOFFMAN:** One more time, Kaya Henderson.

**HENDERSON:** In the beginning, it was all looking at pictures of cute little kids and talking about educational dysfunction and really what we ended up shifting to was helping potential corps members understand that you are absolutely helping the communities that you were serving. But you are also learning and growing and developing leadership skills that would take you into whatever you wanted to do next.

**HOFFMAN:** Kaya is a prime example of an alumna who has gone on to make a lifelong difference in the field of education. That includes her most recent venture, the online learning platform Reconstruction.

**HENDERSON:** Reconstruction was a dream in my head for a very long time. I watched other cultures be intentional about the cultural and identity development of their young people, and I wondered what would that look like for African-American kids to learn our history and our culture from our perspective, not from the public school's perspective?

Many of us don't live near our extended family anymore, and so, how are we teaching our young people to cook the dishes that we love and that are hallmarks in our community? Or to play the games that we play? Or what have you. I was really worried, frankly, about who was minding the cultural store for African-American people. We have a history of educating ourselves from citizenship schools to freedom schools, to Marva Collins and Westside Preparatory in Chicago. I thought, why not extend that tradition in a new way, by taking advantage of technology, to allow kids wherever they are in the country to access these classes and this curriculum? That is how Reconstruction was born.

**HOFFMAN:** As it happens, Kaya co-founded Reconstruction while she was running a global learning lab for Teach for All.

**HENDERSON:** I was spending my time traveling the globe, working with communities to help them think about how to transform education, and when the pandemic hit, I was grounded. And I thought, this is as good a time as any to try to work on this moonshot project that I had in the back of my head.

**HOFFMAN:** The global pandemic, of course, upended more than Kaya's Teach for All work. Wendy could see its effects play out across the entire network.

**HOFFMAN:** Teach for All and each of the Teach fors across countries would be one of the things you would think would be massively affected by the pandemic asteroid. It's the congregational places. We've seen troubles with schools like, "Can we teach online? Should we get back to person? What's happening with socialization of our children?"

**KOPP:** It has been, of course, just a very challenging year for sure. It was also just a year for our network. I think we were kind of built for this.

Within a week of March 15th or whenever, we had 1,500 teachers teaching without internet WhatsApp groups in four different languages with solutions there just flying across like, "How are you keeping kids learning where they don't have access to the Internet?"

We put a posting up about these Teach for Nigeria fellows who went to the government and said, "There's no way we're going to reach kids if we can't take over the radio station." We put this out, and a bunch of people in Chile saw it, alumni of Enseña Chile, and said, "We're going to start a radio station," and within two weeks they were on 200 radio stations with their episodes.

Now, they're creating what they're calling the Netflix of education. It's basically a podcast library, and they're saying it's never going to go away. Now, we have a whole community of practice among people all over the world.

A year ago, I, too, was worried. These many countries were going to see such a diversion of resources to food security, to health. Would all of these organizations make it? They have all made it. They have more than made it. They're thriving.

**HOFFMAN:** There is no one magic bullet when it comes to navigating a crisis, or scaling a business. But harnessing the power of a network really might be the closest thing. So look around you: Do you have a network that supports you, and you can help support? If not, it might be time to build it for yourself.

I'm Reid Hoffman. Thanks for listening.