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Philanthropy & Nonprofits

Amy Lesnick is inspiring corporations to commit to giving back

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Amy Lesnick is chief executive of Pledge 1%.

LIPO CHING | SAN FRANCISCO BUSINESS TIMES

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By Diana K. Murphy – Special Projects Editor, San Francisco Business Times
9 hours ago

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Amy Lesnick joined Netscape in 1997 — two years after its IPO and the same year that its homepage was the most visited website on the internet. She used to joke with late adopters that the internet was here to stay. Today, she hopes the same will ring true for corporate giving.

Co-founded by Salesforce founder Marc Benioff and Atlassian co-founder Scott Farquhar, Pledge 1% is a global movement — and a nonprofit based in San Francisco — that challenges corporations at any stage in their trajectories to make a significant impact by taking a pledge to give back at least 1% of their resources.

Companies wishing to take the pledge can choose from a selection of personal equity, company equity, time, a product and profit and then work with Pledge 1% to conceptualize larger philanthropic goals and issues of interest to company leaders and their employees, all the while empowering decision-makers to do more.

I spoke with Lesnick about how she gets companies to give back and how the landscape of corporate giving has evolved from an afterthought to core value.

20%

You have an MBA from Wharton. Were you always drawn to nonprofit work? I've had the great fortune for my career to spend one foot in tech and one in social change.

I'm not the founder that has the initial idea, but I love helping scale those ideas, and all the ideas I've worked around empower individuals and engage communities and really drive systemic change. So there is a common thread.

At Netscape, we were transforming how people communicate; at Full Circle Fund [where Lesnick was CEO for six years] we were redefining philanthropy and not just being about money, but about time and talent. What I love about Pledge 1% is it's another force multiplier. It's not just the one issue or one company's impact. It's about building coalitions across ecosystems and changing behaviors and creating new norms.

Tell me about Pledge 1%. How did it begin and evolve to where it is today? The reason for being is to inspire, educate and empower every company, regardless of its size or stage, to leverage their assets to be a force for good. We do this by providing a flexible framework for companies to leverage their time, their product, their profit, their equity to support local communities, or tackle the most pressing issues. The real magic comes when these companies layer these pledge types together and embed it into their core.

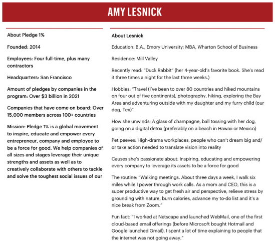
30%

It used to be that companies would wait until they were much bigger and much more successful to even think about this. Now with Pledge 1%'s help, these companies are weaving it into the fabric of their business.

Is 1% enough? Our approach is to support organizations. We don't judge or evaluate. We inspire, educate and empower. What's nice is that so many of our companies are doing so well that an equity pledge at the time of IPO really grows exponentially over time as the stock goes up.

How do you get companies on board? I think companies now more than ever recognize that they have an important role to play in solving the most important issues of our time. For a long time, that used to be a choice: Should I focus on profit or give back? And that's no longer the case. Companies are realizing that this can be both the right thing and the smart thing to do.

We're all living in this Great Resignation with 40% of the workforce leaving their jobs. Reports show that 50% of employees are open to new roles, or to leaving their companies. But that drops to 12% or less if employees feel that their company is having a positive impact on the world. ESG is here to stay.



AMY LESNICK

About Pledge 1%

Founded: 2014

Employees: Four full-time, plus many contractors

Headquarters: San Francisco

Amount of pledges by companies in the program: Over $3 billion in 2021

Companies that have come on board: Over 15,000 members across 100+ countries

Mission: Pledge 1% is a global movement to inspire, educate and empower every entrepreneur, company and employee to be a force for good. We help companies of all sizes and stages leverage their unique strengths and assets as well as to creatively collaborate with others to tackle and solve the toughest social issues of our

About Lesnick

Education: B.A., Emory University; MBA, Wharton School of Business

Residence: Mill Valley

Recently read: "Duck Rabbit" (her 4-year-old's favorite book. She's read it three times a night for the last three weeks.)

Hobbies: "Travel (I've been to over 80 countries and hiked mountains on four out of five continents), photography, hiking, exploring the Bay Area and adventuring outside with my daughter and my furry child (our dog, Tex)"

How she unwinds: A glass of champagne, ball tossing with her dog, going on a digital detox (preferably on a beach in Hawaii or Mexico)

Pet peeves: High-drama workplaces, people who can't dream big and/or take action needed to translate vision into reality

Causes she's passionate about: Inspiring, educating and empowering every company to leverage its assets to be a force for good

The routine: "Walking meetings. About three days a week, I walk six miles while I power through work calls. As a mom and CEO, this is a super productive way to get fresh air and perspective, relieve stress by grounding with nature, burn calories, advance my to-do list and it's a nice break from Zoom."

Fun fact: "I worked at Netscape and launched WebMail, one of the first cloud-based email offerings (before Microsoft bought Hotmail and Google launched Gmail). I spent a lot of time explaining to people that the internet was not going away."

I want to return to that statistic. The number of employees looking for new positions drops to 12% working for companies that make an impact. Is corporate giving a retention mechanism? Even before Covid hit, both Salesforce and Atlassian would say that their Pledge 1% programs were one of the top three reasons people joined their companies and why they stayed.

How has corporate giving changed since Pledge 1% was founded? One thing that made Pledge 1% different is that companies used to wait till they were bigger to give.

I've seen it change through the pandemic – within a couple of weeks we mobilized over $20 million for Covid relief – and we met like every week in 2020, dealing with crisis after crisis, and holding the space for top social impact leaders in their fields. You see much more of a blurring of the lines between social impact and DEI efforts. You also see a much greater focus on ESG.

People are aware that this mass acceleration or digitization has enabled a lot of companies to thrive. But at the same time, it's been difficult for vulnerable populations who are already feeling the digital divide. Now, it's even worse.

Has the pandemic significantly impacted corporate giving? Companies used to have in-person volunteer engagement efforts. Now, a lot of that has been virtual.

We're also seeing companies stepping up and really creating this huge fund of money that they can use to fuel their social impact for the long term. I think a lot of our companies are very concerned about racial inequity, and inequities in vulnerable populations.

You co-founded the Strategic Philanthropy course at Berkeley Haas School of Business. What's the biggest lesson students walk away with? It was a long time ago! [laughs]

There's a certain humbleness that needs to be taught where a business person might know what it's like to scale an organization, but nothing about what it's like to be a teacher in the inner city.

I'd say a second thing is approach. At Full Circle Fund, we said if all of our grantees succeeded, then we failed because we weren't being risky enough. So that was part of what we taught was how to evaluate opportunities, but also defining your own risk and being willing to find some solutions that have the potential to scale and make a difference.

What are your goals in the next year or two? We formed a coalition of CEOs from DocuSign, PagerDuty, Twilio, SendGrid as well as some VCs last year to launch our CEO playbook for equity in June of 2020 — and from June 2020 to about July 2021, we ignited a billion dollars of new philanthropy.

The playbook talked about the need for a CEO to find their boardroom ally — the person in the board who's most likely to support this kind of talk through the relevant models and work with Pledge 1%. We provided a lot of board mapping to help companies understand who on their board might be supportive.

I was early at Netscape and I remember a time when I had to explain over and over again to people that the internet was not going away. Five years from now, I hope we're not even having this conversation — it's going to be natural that any successful company needs to embed social impact into their core from day one.

You mentioned you like traveling. Where's your next destination? If you would have asked me like five years ago, it'd be like, hiking the next mountain in Mongolia. Now — I have a 4-year-old — we go to Disney World.

The List

Largest Nonprofit Organizations

Ranked by Most recent fiscal year revenue

Rank	Organization	Most Recent Fiscal Year Revenue
1	**Regional Center of the East Bay Inc.**	$547.06 million
2	**Pac-12 Conference**	$533.79 million
3	**SRI International**	$390.02 million

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80%

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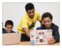

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