

Geoff Green

When a Bell Rings

Unlike matter, history can be created or destroyed, rewritten to erase the suffering of millions from the collective human consciousness. This realization struck Geoff Green hard as he heard the voice of Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, then the President of Iran, over the radio, aggressively questioning whether the Holocaust had actually happened. "Hearing his words, I understood that if people in positions of power say something enough and wield the right propaganda, others will start to believe it," Geoff recalls today. "It was infuriating to me that someone could revise history by telling lies as truth, and I wanted to do something about it."

In this way, in that moment, Geoff Green heard the ringing of a bell. It's a sound that was, by then, familiar to him, and he knew what to do. He pulled together a board, rallied resources, and put in an application for 501(c)3 status, launching a nonprofit called AtrocityWatch.

The organization began as a way of looking backward and honoring the past, but as Geoff heard from stakeholders and mentors, his mission shifted to the present. "Looking back is important, but we wanted to be relevant in places where similar activity was occurring," he explains. "It was this notion that we honor the events of history by doing something to change the events of today. There's a powerful sense of spirit in that."

With his renewed focus, Geoff recast his organization as NeverAgain.org, committed to bringing the transformative power of mobile applications and big data-driven programs to the humanitarian space. "I love this work because we create something out of nothing. We heard the bell ringing, calling us to try and make an impact in a very complicated arena," he says. "Once you begin to focus on a problem that feels so vital and resonates so deeply within you, you have to see it through. When the bell rings, you answer."



Like all good things, NeverAgain.org started with a cup of coffee and a bright idea. It was 2010, and the concept of big data was just beginning to take hold on the technological horizon. After many years working in civil service, Geoff wondered how this new power could be harnessed to save lives. "If you know more faster, and if you can get the right information into the right hands at the right moment, you can actually do something to help people in danger," he explains. "Take, for example, the case of the woman raped on a public bus in India in 2012. Imagine if she'd had an app that could notify someone who could help when she realized she was in an unsafe situation. She died from the wounds incurred during the incident—something that should never happen again."

Geoff, through a mutual colleague, was put in touch with a partner at Deloitte named Chip Cottrell. Like Bonnie and Clyde, the two hit it off and began putting together the nonprofit, inking deals with the University of Stockholm in Sweden and licensing agreements with innovative tech companies like Splunk, MITRE and others looking to be a part of the solution. "We create win-wins for companies we partner with," he says. "If someone gives us free software to use in the humanitarian space, for instance, we'll help them get a forum to showcase the power of their innovations for a net-new audience. And Chip has been very well-respected in this global arena for many a decade, so he was consistently the face of experience that opened doors for our organization when we truly needed it the most."

As the company began to flourish, Geoff and Chip assembled a core of dedicated volunteers led by Vin Sigfried, an incredibly talented technology executive from the financial services space. "Vin has been there every step of the way," Geoff says. "I'm so very thankful for his

commitment to the vision. Vin never quits, and we have benefited immensely from his work ethic.”

Now, the cutting edge nonprofit that won the 2013 Deloitte Global Humanitarian Competition is named after the powerful words of Elie Wiesel, a Holocaust survivor. “*Never again* becomes more than a slogan,” Wiesel famously declared. “It’s a prayer, a promise, a vow. There will never again be hatred, people say. Never again jail and torture. Never again the suffering of innocent people, or the shooting of starving, frightened, terrified children. And never again the glorification of base, ugly, dark violence. It’s a prayer.”

Driven by this prayer, NeverAgain.org is working to bring industrial grade technology to humanitarian crises around the globe, both sweeping and small-scale. Geoff envisions deployment of a situational awareness platform to save lives—one that utilizes geofencing and the calibration of big data in the service of humanity. “Outlining the value proposition for bringing true industrial-grade technology to the humanitarian arena has been a process,” he says. “We continue to build momentum each and every day to turn prototypes and minimum-viable products into production-ready applications. You can feel the momentum continue to build as we construct the right ecosystem of private sector partners, humanitarians, and social entrepreneurs. It’s all there for the doing.”

Geoff stepped up to the NeverAgain.org challenge after a lifetime of learning what stepping up is all about. He was born in Westchester County, New York, and grew up in a village called Briarcliff Manor. His father had come to the U.S. from England in his teens to work for Vidal Sassoon, and would become the best standard bearer for America that Geoff has ever known. “Nobody loves this country more than my father,” Geoff says. “His endless creative ability, combined with his passion for his family and love of country, has always been an inspiration to me.”

In New York City, Geoff’s father met his mother, a born and bred New Yorker. A brilliant and strong woman, she went on to focus her career on writing and producing educational videos steeped in core values. Geoff grew up in the suburbs with an older sister and a younger brother, and he remembers nights around the dinner table full of engaging conversations about world events, values, and music. “We always had

the Eagles or the Beatles playing in the background, and the meaningfulness of the music soaked in,” he recalls. “My parents taught us to always do right by others and to never waste a beautiful day sitting indoors. We were also very close to our cousins and always had big holiday celebrations at our house, creating a strong sense of togetherness and community. Above all else, my parents taught us unconditional love.”

For the most part, Geoff’s young life was fully engrossed in sports, where he was a star. Geoff played baseball, basketball, and football, focusing on athletics above academics. He was a varsity baseball player as an eighth grader, and a varsity football player by his sophomore year of high school. “I loved the competition and leadership of athletics,” he reflects. “It was also my first experience in learning how to step up, which would become incredibly important throughout my life.”

As a senior in high school, Geoff caught a fleeting glimpse of life beyond sports when he volunteered as a firefighter. “My friends and I decided to do it because it seemed exciting and worthwhile to be racing around being useful in a crisis,” he recalls. “And riding the fire rig and the ambulance, I came across these situations where you have to step up and really be in the moment. It put things into perspective for me and began to teach me how to get focused in times of crisis. When someone’s in a car accident and you have to pull them out of the vehicle, you learn how to drop the other things that are weighing on you.”

Geoff dreamed of playing football in college and was very focused through his high school years on finding the right program. With the help of his mother, he made videotapes and wrote letters, ultimately landing a scholarship to Ithaca College as an All-State linebacker. “My mother and I put together all the football game films and sent them across the country,” he says. “I am not really sure I would have had the type of wonderful outcome I had without my mom. We must have sent out a hundred game films. We’d wait by the mailbox every day to see the handwritten notes that we received back from coaches.” He started off his freshman year with the intention of majoring in sports management and loved his time on the field.

But when Geoff ran into a procedural issue transferring from one major to the other, he was forced to sit out from playing football during his

sophomore year—something that felt like a curse at the time but has proven a blessing in hindsight. “Up until then, I hadn’t been able to see past the small little box that was my athletic prowess,” he recalls. “All I cared about was football. But I saw that there were linebackers lined up to take my place, and that I needed to get myself together. I had three years left of varsity ball to play, and I wanted to make them count.”

Around that same time, his mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, and his father was dealing with the challenges of the investor class as he was launching a business. It was a very hard time for the family, and a trip to Israel with extended family turned the world even darker when Geoff’s uncle passed away suddenly from a heart attack before they reached Jerusalem. “On that day, the Sabbath, I watched my entire family, but in particular my father, set aside the highs and lows we were facing, and launch into crisis management mode,” Geoff remembers. “Watching him step up was really incredible, and a defining moment in my life.”

With quiet strength and fortitude, Geoff’s mother ultimately triumphed over her illness, and Geoff focused on redefining himself both on and off the football field. He successfully changed his major to politics, where he had an inherent knack for understanding relationship dynamics between people. He also proved himself to the coaching staff, making fifty tackles in his second season and helping to take the team to the Division III National Semifinals. They lost that night—another disappointment with an incredible silver lining. He went out to a club with some friends and happened to run into a pretty girl he had noticed in the stands earlier in the season. Apparently Jen, the brilliant physical therapy student, had noticed him too, and they hit it off immediately. They were inseparable for the next six months, engaged before they graduated, and have now been married for 18 years.

After finishing college, Geoff started a musical production company, honoring his love of rock and roll until he decided to get an advanced degree and pursue work in public service. He was accepted to the Maxwell School at Syracuse University, the premier Public Administration school in the country. There, with energy fully focused on academics for the first time in his life, he excelled.

Upon graduating, he moved to

Washington, DC to take a job as an analyst at the Government Accountability Office. “It’s a great place, but the quiet environment wasn’t a great fit for me as an extrovert,” he says. “During my first performance review, my boss literally told me I should go work at Booz Allen Hamilton or someplace like that. As fate would have it, I met a Booz Allen recruiter through the Washington Rugby Club and ended up taking a job there after all.”

As a Senior Consultant, Geoff spent the next couple of years working on engagements in the emerging IT space. He was then offered a Senior Analyst position at the Small Business Administration, where he worked for one of his former graduate school professors for several years. He decided to return to Booz Allen toward the end of 2004 as an Associate, but after a few months, he realized he yearned for public service. “SBA had been an environment where I could really step up and make some important decisions, versus being one person amongst thousands where it was a constant challenge to differentiate yourself,” he reflects. “I decided to return to SBA in September of 2008, just before Hurricane Katrina hit.”

It was a step up moment more dire than any he had encountered before. There was no end-to-end plan or model for how to handle the national crisis that was Katrina, and when Steve Preston stepped in as SBA Administrator, Geoff became his right hand man. As the Staff Director for the Accelerated Disaster Response Initiative through Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, his efforts accelerated the agency’s direct disaster lending operation through the highest levels in the program’s history.

When Steve Preston was then named Secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development by President George W. Bush, Geoff followed him and served as a Senior Advisor. There, as a civil servant, while dealing with the housing crisis and the Hurricanes Gustav and Ike responses, Geoff got to thinking about the homeless man he had seen living beneath an underpass for years—someone he noticed every morning on his way to work. “HUD had just joined forces with the VA to establish the VASH program that granted housing for life to honorably discharged service members,” Geoff remembers. “After consulting with the right employees at HUD, who shared the same passion to get things

done, we got the right person from the local homeless program to go talk to him. It took persistence and fortitude, but we finally got him off the street and into his first apartment.”

Every Veteran’s Day, Geoff checks back in with the system to ensure that the man is still safely off the street and living in the apartment. Once he was living in one place and “on the map,” so to speak, the Social Security Administration was able to pay him a notable sum of money it had owed him for years but couldn’t pay because they didn’t know how to locate him. “As that entire process played out, I made the conscious decision to stay in the background,” Geoff says. “My instincts told me that if he thought that somebody he didn’t know, or trust, was sticking their nose in his business, he’d get turned off and walk away. Consequently, I have never formally met him, and he knows nothing about me, though we’ve undoubtedly had a huge impact on one another. Helping him was really transformative for me because I saw that I was capable of making things happen – even if it meant accomplishing the outcome from behind the scenes. That’s when I really knew what a ringing bell sounded like, and it’s the wave that pushed me toward launching AtrocityWatch.”

Geoff continued his career at HUD, and as the Chair of the Federal Housing Administration’s Transformation Program, he worked to better manage and mitigate risk across the agency’s insurance programs through technology. “Jen was on bed rest a lot through that time with the birth of our children, and her mom went through a life-altering health event, so we were balancing intense family issues with my job as a civil servant,” he recalls. “But we made it work, and I enjoyed the autonomy and resources I had at my disposal while at HUD.”

In 2012, Geoff decided to leave the government and take a job as a Managing Director at Phase One Consulting Group, a 150-person firm where he oversaw the company’s Financial Services, Social Infrastructure, and Innovation practice areas. While there, in April of 2013, he obtained official 501(c)3 status for AtrocityWatch. Then, the following October, he transitioned from Phase One to Oracle. “Phase One was a wonderful place to work, and they did right by me and my family which I’m extremely grateful for. But when the opportunity presented itself, I was drawn to the global brand that an enterprise grade

technology firm like Oracle had to offer,” Geoff says. “Oracle had a footprint everywhere, and I learned so much working there. In many ways, my experience at Oracle prepared me for what it was going to take to truly meet the mission of using industrial grade technology to save lives at a global scale.”

Geoff has recently transitioned from Oracle to Salesforce as a Senior Director on the Digital Transformation and Innovation team—an opportunity for him to leverage his crisis background to help clients facing transformational service delivery challenges across the globe. The work also includes a very clear mandate for community service and social impact, which resonates deeply with Geoff. “If you research what Salesforce has accomplished through its 1-1-1 business model, you’ll see for yourself how innovate and meaningful the company truly is,” he says. “But it’s not until you join the company and witness how this ethos manifests itself firsthand as a core value, that you appreciate the breadth of its impact. In a company overflowing with innovation, the collective focus of Salesforce as a brand—comprised of talented human beings—to achieve a higher purpose, is perhaps the most impressive innovation the company has to offer. I just couldn’t be more proud to be a part of it. All systems go.”

Whether at Salesforce, through NeverAgain.org, in the community, or at home with family, Geoff’s leadership style is wholly human, focused on genuine connections with others. “My relationships are based on trust and respect,” he says simply. “We value each other as people and understand that we’re committed to doing what’s right. That takes a strong sense of self and of right and wrong.” His leadership style is also fundamentally defined by courage and breadth of vision, embracing stretch goals that might appear impossibly daunting to others. “Neveragain.org is about ushering in innovation to prevent needless suffering and loss—and I know we can do it,” he affirms. “Interestingly, sometimes that means stepping back and allowing for goal achievement to occur from a distance, the same way we were able to get that homeless vet off of the street through the VASH program. Wouldn’t you know it, but it looks like that model of leading from the shadows is repeating itself.”

In this sense, Geoff’s life is all about alignment, ensuring that each piece of his existence

accentuates and empowers the others in an elegant crescendo. A far cry from the one-dimensional character that was his high school and early college self, he is now fully focused on his harmonized roles as father, husband, son, coach, Salesforce Executive, and NeverAgain.org Founder. “I bring the same fortitude and leadership when I’m executing at Salesforce, helping a kid with his swing on the baseball field, savoring time around the dinner table with my family, helping to support my wife’s projects, advising a friend, or setting up the next steps for NeverAgain.org,” he says. “It’s all the same focus and the same spirit. It all comes from the same place.”

Jen remains an integral part of this wellspring. Through the adjudication of old opportunities and the creation of new ones, she’s remained a pilot light, bright and constant. “It’s been a team effort all the way through,” Geoff avows. “There’s no fire burning in me without the spark from my wife and my family. Everything that’s possible in my life is because of them.” Geoff, Jen, and their three young children—Jake (11), Caden (9), and Mckenna (6)—live in Vienna, where Geoff coaches his children’s sports teams and treasures the close-knit fabric of the community.

In advising young people entering the working world today, Geoff reminds us not to take ourselves too seriously, and to be patient when it comes to success. “No band plays the big arena without paying their dues somewhere,” he says. “Evidence of success doesn’t happen overnight. It takes time, real dedication to your core values, and a little luck too. If you can focus on being human

and genuine in the pursuit of meaningful outcomes for those you love, and the company you work for, you’ll get there.”

Beyond that, Geoff underscores the importance of keeping your ear to the wind and your hand on your own pulse. “I believe it starts with a strong sense of what’s right and what’s wrong, as well as being honest with yourself about the skills, time, and effort you truly have to invest to have the impact you want to make,” he says. “From there, you develop an instinct for what you’re accountable for delivering in this life, and you set forth on that road—even if it’s a long one, and even if it seems impossible. You answer the bell when you hear it ring because it’s such a privilege to hear it at all, and you see where it takes you next.”

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