



Season Two Episode Five – released June 2022

With Duncan Goose – Managing Director of Global Ethics Limited and Founder of One Water

Duncan founded The One Brand, an ethical drinks company, which alongside its partner The One Foundation has donated £19.3 million to clean water and sanitation projects in Sub-Saharan Africa

Great Human Values

Jeff Dewing:

Hi, and welcome to Doing the Opposite: Business Disruptors. The podcast where you get to meet leaders who have swum against the tide, thrown out the rule book and changed the way their sector does business.

I'm Jeff Dewing and I'm the founder of CEO of Cloudfm, a business where we thrive on taking risks so our clients don't have to. Today, you're gonna meet Duncan Goose. Duncan is the founder of the bottled water brand One, which has now donated over 20 million pound to fund clean water and sanitation programs in Sub-Saharan Africa impacting over 4 million people. It all started when he fulfilled a lifetime ambition of riding his motorbike around the world, taking nearly two years.

During this experience, Duncan's eyes were opened to the fact that 1 billion people did not have access to safe and clean water. He knew he couldn't fix the problem for 1 billion people. So he began with one person at a time. And so the momentum grew.

Reading Duncan's story and watching some of the captivating videos of his journey, it simply showed me that when a human being is exposed to something they cannot consume or they find totally unacceptable, it can create an incredible passion and desire to make a positive impact. And Duncan is evidence to that fact.

So welcome Duncan. And thanks for joining me today.

Duncan Goose

Hello, Jeff, how you doing?

Jeff Dewing

Very well. Thank you.

So Duncan I find this story absolutely fascinating. So I want to try and probe a bit. So can we begin by trying to understand how you felt, how you actually felt when you went on your round the world motorbike trip and you were first exposed to the challenges you witnessed with people having no access to clean or safe water?

Duncan Goose

Ah, that's a really interesting and very difficult question to answer if I'm completely honest. And the reason for that the first time that I experienced that I was actually in a hurricane in Honduras called Hurricane Mitch in October, 1998. And it was a category five hurricane, which is the largest grade of hurricane you can get. And I didn't know it at the time, but it killed 20,000 people. And I was in the midst of that. And when you go to bed one day and the world's the right way up and you get up next morning and, and the world is, is very much inverted it's a very strange experience. And it was only actually quite recently that I unlocked some of those memories, which is a very strange experience to go through because I think they probably got buried for, you know, fairly obvious reasons.

Duncan Goose:

But one of the things that happened, I <laugh> only came to like quite recently, was that the first time that I'd ever given people access to clean water was actually during that hurricane, there was

myself and an American guy who had a Russian military vehicle. And we went off into the mountains with a load of Jerry cans and we got water and we brought it down to some villagers who had nothing. I mean, their houses had been washed away. There were, you know, everything had been decimated and that was the first time that I'd ever done that. And, and as I said, that, that I didn't actually appreciate, I don't remember that memory and until literally a couple of months ago, and this is going back a long time. So I think it must have had a really profound effect on me, even though it perhaps been buried for, for quite a long time.

Duncan Goose:

But water is really the, the basis of every aspect of life. You know, if you don't have access to water, let alone clean water, you have nothing. And one of the amazing things about that experience was that I, for a very short period of time lived in what most people would call a refugee camp actually wasn't, it was the red cross had come in and they'd put up a load of tents and, and then disappeared off. And I lived with people that had in fact, if you Google Morolica, M O R O L I C A you'll find it doesn't exist anymore. And that's where I was. And they've never rebuilt the town there. They've rebuilt it somewhere else. But the American military came in with their I dunno what they bought, they fly, but those massive kind of, you know, transport planes, they fly.

Duncan Goose

And I was talking to one of the squaddies there and I I'd, at that point, the only food that I'd had for a while was grapefruit. That was the only thing I could find to eat or, or drink. And and I said to this, this American squaddie, you know, if you've got any water and he said, I can't give you any water. He said, I can give you a ready to meal. But I can't give you any water because we need that for our own guys. And, and I said to him, like, you know, I'm, you know, I'm not desperate, desperate, but It'd be great. If you could just gimme a bottle of water and he gave me one, but he made me smuggle it out under my jacket. And that was, that had a really a massive impact on me. And you know, I can't say thank you to him or to the US for coming in and doing what they did, but they did. And it, it changed a lot of people's lives.

Jeff Dewing:

Mm. So was it the hurricane experience that was your true exposure to the importance of water? Was that, was that it, or was there other parts of that journey that brought that same thing to life?

Duncan Goose:

No, I, I think that was probably the segue into what I do today. And that was the first time that I'd done that. But certainly, you know, after I was in Honduras, I was up in the Andes and I spent a lot of time in a, a community up there. And there was a lot of children that went to school and there was no access to clean water. There was no sanitation. And after I came back from riding around the world my grandfather had passed away and he'd left me a little bit of money. And I used that to help fund the building of some of the trees and shower blocks in the schools and putting some IT equipment in there. So that was a kind of another part of, of that journey. But the focus of what I really do now was because of a photograph that was published in the Guardian newspaper on the day that Saddam Hussain was captured.

Duncan Goose:

And it was of a young girl sat by a padlock tap in a place called Kibera in Nairobi, which is the largest slum in Africa. And it said that there were four taps for half a million people there. And that image, it was a very powerful image and a very powerful statement so much so that I actually tracked down the photographer that had taken that photograph, who worked for AFP – a guy called Marco Longari and asked him about this photograph. And he said, he didn't even remember taking it, you know, professional photographer. It takes thousands of photographs a day. And this one photograph of a young girl, he, he went, 'I don't remember it'. But he and I have stayed in touch ever since. And we met up in Kibera in fact there is a brilliant film. If you go and look up on the internet of him and I going to try and find this girl in the photograph - 10 years after he'd taken that photo.

Jeff Dewing:

No, I've, I've watched it. And, and I think for the benefit of the listener, let me just try and paint that photograph. It was a, if you can imagine a tap that doesn't look like a tap, it's like a square little construction with a with a box, you know, probably four times the size of a cigarette packet. And underneath that box, there is a very, very large padlock holding that box together, preventing you from getting inside that box. And what was so powerful about the image was that in the background, and when I say in the background, literally only two or three feet away from this box was this young girl with these puppy eyes, looking at the padlock, waiting for it to be unlocked so she could get some water for her family. Does that paint the picture of that photograph?

Duncan Goose:

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. You completely nailed it. And actually you describe it so beautifully because it's a, it's a, I, I use that photograph and other photographs of people like the Afghan girl that was on the cover of the national geographic - the falling man from the twin towers, from the Vietnam era with the young girl running down the street naked after being hit by Napalm. And, and they are very, very powerful images. And that, that moved me to the extent that I was so committed to stop or to try and help people who had no access to clean water that that's where my life pivoted, I think. And, and that's what I spend my entire time doing now is trying to figure out how to get water to people.

Jeff Dewing:

So when I play back that, that story, which is fascinating, but you know, aside from your emotional connection to either a powerful photograph or image, or even your experience during the hurricane and the impact of water and, and various other bits and pieces, you've gotta come home to what you would class as your natural reality. And you've got a family and a wife and children. And, you know, you've just said that your, your, your grandfather have passed. How do you obtain the support of your family in going off and doing these, this sort of incredible work that is gonna have such a draw on your emotion, your personal life, your time, how does that happen when you've got such a passion for doing something? How does it, how does it affect the people around you?

Duncan Goose:

I think in a, in a beautiful way, it rubs off on them. So my, my kids are 10 and 12 and they're huge advocates for what I do. And in fact, I got asked going speak at my daughter's school a couple of weeks ago. And and I was like, oh, but I'm gonna embarrass you in front of your friends. She said, no, you won't dad. You know, it'd be brilliant. <Laugh>. And and I think, you know, every, everybody that that's got family around them will understand that they, they want to support you in any way possible. And that's one of the best things about, about doing the work that I do. It's a shared experience. So anytime I go over to Africa and we shoot a bit of film, you know, we'll sit down as the family and watch it and, and talk about it.

Duncan Goose:

And and we've promised the kids, you know, when the time is right, we'll take them over and and show them, you know, what that experience is like and why it's important. But they've almost got that sort of gene in some ways in-built into them. And my wife is she's an HIV consultant. So but during the COVID pandemic, she got drafted into do a lot of the drug development for one of the vaccines. She was advising the WHO you know, and, and was really in the thick of it. So, you know, we were all, we were all, you know, deeply concerned in the early days about what she was getting herself into, but we felt all incredibly proud and were, were, you know, doing everything we could to support her, particularly in the early days when nobody really knew what, what was gonna happen. So, yeah, we were, we were really tight family and, and I absolutely adore them all. And you, you need that kind of power that, that strength behind you, I think, to do the things that we do sometimes

Jeff Dewing:

You're absolutely right. And obviously it's certainly more power to your elbow, but I guess the, the, the bit that I'm just picking up on - this comes back to solid human values, right? Because if you've got people around you, your wife, your parents, your children, especially, especially young children, the knowledge that they're gaining, whether it was intentional or not, is the experience they're getting of zero self-orientation. It's, it's selfless. It's all about 'what do I do to help somebody else' and more importantly, the pleasure you get out of that. So when you say to me is you just have that, your daughter said, 'you won't embarrass me, daddy, you'll be brilliant'. That's because she believes in what you're doing, right. That's, that's the hundred percent element. And I think rather than we are all wired as we grow up, I believe that, you know, to a certain extent, this is gonna sound, this is gonna sound a little bit challenging, but we're all wired.

Jeff Dewing:

We're all wired to a certain extent that says the world owes us a living. You know, we go out, we're entitled to a job we're entitled to earn money. We're entitled to live, you know, a reasonable life. When in actual facts life should really be about what can I do for you? And then you naturally get repaid without the expectation of repayment. And I think when you can get people to behave that way you are, you become truly fulfilled because you're helping the people around you. And if your children are feeling that way now, then - that's an incredible lift in life for their future years.

Duncan Goose:

I absolutely. And it's and they, they do it by themselves. I, I must just tell you one story. It kind of a sad story, but it's beautiful at the same time. So we live on a small road in, in west London and they're all terraced houses and we lived we still do live opposite, a couple of old boys who are widowers, they, they lost their wives. Yeah. And one of them is a gentleman that, that lives upstairs for the house was conversion to two. And my son wanted to give him an east Easter egg. And I said, well, you know, he can't really come downstairs because he's a bit, you know, he's less able than he used to be. So my son rigged up a way to get an Easter egg up to the second floor of this building <laugh> *oh, bless.*

Duncan Goose:

And we, we phoned him and said, look, how of your window <laugh>. And my son was there with this thing with a message on the end of a long pole with an egg attached to it. And this old boy's face was, was just an absolute picture. And his daughter rang me up afterwards and said, you know, you made his, you made his day. And, and I think that's - somebody said to me that the other day, you know, 'living is giving'. And I, I think there's a lot of truth in that sometimes the pleasure you get from helping others really is, is a very powerful thing. You know, everybody everybody needs things and wants to buy things and that's absolutely fine. But I think sometimes you get more pleasure from perhaps giving away that fiver or whatever happens to be to somebody else that needs it a bit more than you do, perhaps so

Jeff Dewing:

Well, of course, and more importantly, the, the thrill of seeing their face, their reaction, their happiness and it's, it's, it's priceless. And I think hence why I'm saying it's about great human values. And, and I think, you know, we could all learn a lot from behaving in that way. And that's why I always ask myself, when you look at some people that go into a job and they're negotiating their salary, or they're unhappy with their bonus or, or their holiday pay or wherever it is yet, those very same people when they get a holiday using their own money will finance a flight to Africa will live in a tent for two weeks, will help build a hostel, be paid no money and have to buy their own food and are happier than coming back and being paid a very healthy salary for doing a job that they didn't have to pay to arrive at the office at and so on.

Jeff Dewing:

And you think why? Well, why is that? And for me, it's a really easy answer. It's because when they're supporting what they do in Africa, it's not about charities. It's about - they're doing what they love. Therefore there is no, there is no claim required. It's doing what you love.

When you go to work. The reason you find it challenging is I would argue because you don't love what you're doing. And therefore it's something that is a means to an end. Whereas if you can find a job, a role, a function, you can get paid for that you love what you are doing. You'll never work a day in your life and it just changes your entire outlook. And it helps you get to that utopia of fulfillment a lot quicker.

But anyway, that's, that's enough for me, right? The next piece I wanna ask you is that in your journey, - once you've decided your passion about going, how can I help the world or the piece of the world I can effect in trying to create easier access to water?

Jeff Dewing:

You decided after reading your story, that you was never gonna fix a problem for a billion people, but you were gonna do it one person at a time. And that's similar to another charity that that I'm exposed to, which is a similar charity in South Africa. And it's, and it's called Smile. And their objective is to create one smile at a time. And so it's a similar principle, which, which I love.

But then of course you realize that, well, I can't just produce one bottle of water. It starts with one, but where does you go from there? And you then decided to sort of commercially start approaching different businesses and water manufacturers. So sort of tell me how you come up with that idea, but more importantly, once you did, how did you get to collaborate with these people, for them to take you seriously and for you to create the outcome that has now resulted in such incredible donations for the impact of water, to people that, that have got no access?

Duncan Goose:

It's a really interesting story. So we have a bottled water brand called One, and we supply that to people like Starbucks and to all the duty free shops in airports and to big corporates and small corporates and schools and universities and everything else. And the premise is very simple, which is that for every bottle that you buy, we make a donation. And over the years of doing that with a few other things, that's resulted in us giving away 25 million pounds and helping 4 million people.

So to your point, you can't, you know, we can't change a billion people's lives overnight, but because of what we've done, we've now changed over 4 million. So maybe we should change the brand name from one to, to four, 4 million now or something <laugh> but bit long for a label, perhaps.

Duncan Goose:

But that, that, that kind of premise is really simple. So in the early days, it took a long time to try and convince anybody to work with us. But I would sit there with, you know, a bottle of one water and a bottle of Evian or, or something like that and say, well, look, you can, you can buy the, the bottle of Evian and it's a bottle of water and it'll make money for Danone and their shareholders, or you can buy bottle of One and it might just save somebody's life or help a child get into school rather than walk for five hours a day to collect water. Or it will stop some of the 2 million people each year dying from water related diseases and actually pretty much it's the same cost, you know, that I can sell you this water, you know, what do you want do?

Duncan Goose:

And actually most people would say, 'well, actually, yeah, okay. We'll, we'll, we'll buy your water'. And in some instances, you actually, I had this, this happen this morning. I had a retailer, I won't mention who but I was explaining what, what we were trying to do. And they said, 'oh yes, well, we'll, we'll pay you two pounds for a case of water. And I said, oh, well, we can't really manufacture it and give money away for two pounds. I said, if you buy it for five it's a bit more than you want to pay, but I'll then be able to give away like three pounds. And they were like, okay, well, we'll buy it for five. So they'd gone from like negotiating at two to paying at five. And that's just an example of, you know, when people get it, they, they really get it.

Duncan Goose:

But for the world's, the world's a difficult place, particularly at the moment, you know, the economy is, is being battered and continues to be battered. You know, inflation is where it is, costs have gone up hugely. You know, people don't have as much money in their pocket and we've just come through two years of COVID. So, you know, it's hard. And I understand that. And I wouldn't say to somebody, you know, pay over the odds, if you can't afford it, it's just, it's not the right time to do that. It's like, let's get everybody back onto an even keel. And if we can do something, then that's

brilliant. But if we can't, I, I understand that and I accept it and, you know, we'll just carry on doing what we're doing.

Jeff Dewing:

Would you have then gone to Evian - bear in mind that my knowledge of water brand is somewhat limited - but would you not be able to go to Evian and say, look, guys, what, why would you not consider putting a penny on every bottle and then donating that penny that you receive to this incredible charity for giving underprivileged people access to water?

Duncan Goose:

Yeah. So that's, that's a great, that's a great side story to this. So about five years ago I was looking at what we were doing and going, you know, 'this is great. You know, One Water is donating all this money and we've done 25 million, but how do you scale it?' And, and actually you can end up saying, 'well, we'll go and bottle it in all these different countries', which we have done a little bit in the past, but not to a huge extent or you can do exactly, as you could say, I go to Danone or, or Nestle or CocaCola or PepsiCo or whoever, and say, can you give us 1 cent off every one of your bottles? But actually what I did is that I did go and see them all of them around the world. But I also went to the United Nations and had a long chat with them.

Duncan Goose:

I also went to the British and German governments. I had a long chat with them. I also went to the EU, we went to the G8 and had lots of conversations with them. And I basically laid this kind of concept in front of them and said, look, if we could get all the bottled water companies in the world to agree with the retailers, cause it's the retailers that make the money, not the bottlers to give up 1 cent for every litre of water that you sell, we would raise \$5 billion a year and wouldn't that be useful? And then actually I went and had conversations with The World Bank and with a lot of big development banks. And they said, well, if you can do that, we'll then multiply that money up between three and 10 times. So we'll, you know, we'll leverage that money and the real, like the, the real kind of epic point, and this was a lot this was done during COVID.

Duncan Goose:

But I, at one point I lived on an airplane for about five weeks and, and went and saw governments and retailers and bottlers all over the world and went all the way around in, in five weeks. And like I said, pretty much lived on an airplane and it culminated at a meeting with two, the UNs, the prime minister and 30 of the world's biggest economies and 30 of the world's biggest retailers all sat around a virtual in this case, because we couldn't do it physically in New York, but a virtual Zoom meeting and we had a billion dollars on the table and I was like, 'Fuck, this is gonna happen. We're gonna do this'. Yeah. And, and couldn't get it over the line. And I was just like, at that point I was so really like, come on guys, just like, it's such an easy thing to say yes to.

Duncan Goose:

And, but the politics involved in stuff, it was just unbelievable. And instead of collaborating, it became this kind of bun fight of the, the British government wanted to go one way and the Germans wanted to go another way. And then the retailers in Australia wanted to do their own thing. And it was just like, you know, I spent five years of my life unpaid doing this and I can't do it anymore. And I, it was absolutely soul destroying. But in, in the same time we kept One Water going and you know, we added another million lives to, to our total. So, you know, maybe one day these bottlers will come round and, and do it in a different way. Maybe governments will get together and do it. But I, I, I'm not the man for that job anymore. You can do it. Jeff. You're more convincing than I am. <Laugh>

Jeff Dewing:

<Laugh>

Duncan Goose:

That's your, that's your next challenge!

Jeff Dewing:

<Laugh> it is. Yeah. But no, it's a great story, but it's more importantly, it's a real story. And and it, it it's, it's far more authentic cuz it, it, it doesn't happen with flakes and rainbows. It doesn't end with flakes and rainbows, you you've you've culminated on something that was right on the tip of it. And I'm just trying to place myself in your position in that moment when you think, 'God, this is it. No, this is

here, this is here'. And then to watch it fall apart because of pride and egos across different cultures, you think, think 'what a waste, what a waste of opportunity'. But yeah, I completely, I completely get it.

Okay. So Duncan, I'm just gonna move on to my final question. So bearing in mind, the experiences you've now had, not just in your round-the-world trip, not just in what your exposure was in the hurricane, not just through the impact you've had at starting the brand One and then also the experience of nearly solving the world's problems and then not... What advice, what one piece of advice would you give somebody or a budding entrepreneur who sees that there's a way of improving the world, how they see it in their business or sector or their area, but they're nervous, they're worried, they're concerned. They're fearful. About the impact of becoming a disruptor, what one piece of advice would you give those people?

Duncan Goose:

I would just say to them, just do it, just go for it and, you know, aim high! You know, that, that classic statement of, you know, aim for the moon and you'll land amongst the stars, I think is absolutely true. If anybody had told me five years ago that I would be sat down with a prime minister and, you know, two UN agencies and 30 of the world's biggest governments and 30 of the world's biggest retailers and have a billion dollars on the table. You know, people would have laughed at me. In fact, they laughed at me when I said I was gonna ride a motorbike around the world. And they also laughed at me when they, when I said I was gonna create a bottled water company and give all the money away. You know, and, and failure is part of growing and part of success and nothing is ever really a failure because even with the UN project, there's a bit of it that's still going on and it's probably put another, I don't know, five, 5 million or so into the pot, that's helping people. So I, I think you, you just have to go for it. You have to be willing to start and to keep going. And you know, like I said you might not hit the moon, but you'll end up amongst of stars.

Jeff Dewing:

Yeah, yeah. Which is a, which is a, a great second option. And you could argue was the initial option in the first place. But, and again, coming back to what you just said in life, you know, I've, I'm a great believer in 'it's impossible to fail'. You only succeed or learn and that's part of life's journey. Right. So, Absolutely. But anyway, listen, Duncan, that's been absolutely fantastic. Incredible story, absolutely fascinated from start to finish. I wish you all the luck for the future. And I hope that I'm speaking to

you again in a year's time where you've helped another 5 million on top of the existing four. So that'll be fantastic. And and I look forward to meeting you again sometime soon.

Duncan Goose:

Thank you very much, Jeff.

Jeff Dewing:

Wow. What an incredible story. A big, thanks to Duncan for taking the time to talk to me today. There's some real nuggets I took out of that. I guess when you listen to someone like Duncan, talk about the importance of water, which is pretty much a given to all of us, but when he talks about, you know, donating the cost of the profit of the water bottle to enable us to create safe and clean water and sanitizing, the sanitization plants and so on for the underprivileged and people that got no access, that all seemed clear. But what was interesting is when he said 'it also helps children go to school' and you sit and you think, well, how'd you make that connection. And of course it's really clear and really obvious because if the children haven't gotta spend half a day or walking for five hours to collect water, they can go to school.

Jeff Dewing:

So the impact isn't just about the monetary value of contributinal donation, it's about the wider impact, the ability by creating and making available, safe and clean water locally means children can go to school. So the impact is far greater than just a donation. And that really struck me. Unbelievable.

Please do listen back to earlier episodes of Doing the Opposite where you are here from some incredible guests. One of which was Pat Murphy who owns a worldwide advertising agency, working with some of the biggest brands, such as Mars and Cadbury and Chanel. And he's also worked with some incredible A-lister celebrities, such as Jennifer Anniston and our, and our national treasure, Joanna Lumley, he's got some incredible, incredible stories. So I urge you to give that one a go, if any of them.

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