Agency for Change Podcast: Cullen Schwarz, Founder & CEO, DoneGood

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Cullen Schwarz:

The dollars we spend are the world's most powerful force for change.

Announcer:

Welcome to Agency for Change, a podcast from KidGlov that brings you the stories of change makers who are actively working to improve our communities. In every episode, we'll meet with people who are making a lasting impact in the places we call home.

Lyn Wineman:

Hey, everyone. This is Lyn Wineman, president of KidGlov. Welcome to another episode of Agency for Change podcast. Today's guest, Cullen Schwartz, is the founder and CEO of DoneGood. This is a shopping site where every purchase you make does good for people and the planet. Cullen's journey is truly a testament to the belief that our everyday purchases have the potential to change the world for the better. Just in time for the holidays, Cullen has issued a special discount code for Agency for Change listeners. That code is AOC20 to get you an extra 20% off everything on the site. We'll put that code in the show notes as well. All right. Cullen, welcome to the podcast.

Cullen Schwarz:

Thank you very much for having me, Lyn.

Lyn Wineman:

I am excited to talk to you, particularly as we're going into the holiday shopping season. Could we have you start by telling us about DoneGood?

Cullen Schwarz:

Yeah. DoneGood... Forbes called us the Amazon for social good. We're a shopping site where you can find all sorts of stuff, from clothing to home, goods to coffee, and a wide variety of other things, self-care, bed and bat. But everything that you buy on our site makes the world better. Every time you're spending money, you're doing good for the world, supporting things you believe in because we screen all the companies that sell on our site to make sure that they all pay living wages. They're all super eco-friendly. They all support a bunch of other good causes so you can get the things you need but make the world better instead.

Cullen Schwarz:

For us... We think we're working on what can be the world's most powerful force for change, which is consumer spending. Where we spend our money is our number one source of power. It's a supply-and-demand economy. Whatever we demand as consumers, the market supplies. Along with the certain kinds of products we demand or price points we demand, we can also demand more living wage jobs. The more that we shop at companies who are paying living wages, the more living wage jobs there are in the world, and the less poverty there is. The more that we shop with companies that are super eco-friendly, the more climate change-fighting business practices are supplied.

Cullen Schwarz:

We always cite the stat that Americans gave $320 billion to charity last year. That's good. I hope the number goes up. There's a lot of great nonprofits doing a lot of great work in the world. We spent $14 trillion buying stuff. That means just 2% of our spending. If 2% of our spending could fight poverty, fight climate change, make the world better in other ways, then 2% of the dollars we spend could do as much good as all the donations to all the nonprofits in the country combined.

Lyn Wineman:

Wow.

Cullen Schwarz:

I can't believe there's not more people working on galvanizing the power of consumer spending. That's the point, is that we try to make it super quick/super easy for people to find things that they would buy anyway but know that their money is supporting things they believe in and making the world better instead.

Lyn Wineman:

Cullen, right there, in your first answer, you gave us so much good information. I mean, when people call you the Amazon for social good, we all know exactly what that means. We all know. That statistic you gave us there about the importance of our spending power... I mean, think about how much we get wound up about politics and advocacy. We're all going to be home over Thanksgiving and over the holidays arguing with our brother-in-law about politics when, honestly, where it's at is where are you spending your dollars.

Cullen Schwarz:

I really think that's true. I used to work in politics. I used to work on Capitol Hill in DC. I was a spokesman for a couple of US senators.

Lyn Wineman:

You seem like a very nice guy. I would not have guessed that.

Cullen Schwarz:

Well... But I got out of that line of work also. I mean, look, I got into that line of work 'cause I wanted to fight for economic justice and environmental justice. I think there's a lot of good people, both members of Congress and staff, working in DC there for the right reasons, trying to do the right things. The system sucks. Gotta raise money to fund your campaign. There's so much gridlock. Ultimately, that's why I got out because it's just like you said... Look, I think everyone should still vote. Public policy-

Lyn Wineman:

Yes, everyone should still vote. Yes.

Cullen Schwarz:

Public policy is still important. I mean, all the ways that we can donate and volunteer and march and post on social media, all the ways that we all think about making an impact in the world, look, everybody should still keep doing all those things. But I realized I'm working in DC. They're paying me a paycheck. Then, I'm giving my money to people who are working against me. I just do think of all the things I can do. I can send it. I can tweet. I can post on social. I can talk to my friends. I can join marches. I can volunteer. I can donate. But how much money am I spending every year, and where's that money going?

Cullen Schwarz:

Who I give my money to is probably the number one way I impact the world. I got to think about that. I wanted there to be a place where it was super quick and super easy, where I didn't have to think about it too much, or I could just be like, "Okay, look. I just want to go here, buy stuff quick, but also just know that someone else has screened these companies." Well, now we're the ones who are screening those companies so that it can be quick and easy for people to know. But to use that super powerful... I mean, it's so much power: your money. Money is power in the world. Well, then, who you're spending with... It's your power, man.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely.

Cullen Schwarz:

It's important. Yeah.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely. I actually was on the site earlier because, as it is holiday shopping time, and I do have a list of shopping to do, I was on the site. The first thing that struck me was I could feel the quality of the products in the way they were presented. It was really interesting to me, the different search opportunities I had. I could search by companies that ensured a living wage. I thought it was really interesting. As somebody who wants to be thoughtful about how you spend your money, you really give a lot of great opportunities to do that.

Cullen Schwarz:

Thank you. I appreciate that. I really appreciate what you said about the quality because I think that's important, too. We always talk about... well, how these products can do good for the world. But we think they're better for you or the person you're giving the gift to also, too. There's a lot of cheap stuff out there, a lot of big deals especially-

Lyn Wineman:

We've all bought it.

Cullen Schwarz:

Of course.

Lyn Wineman:

We've all seen a really cheap, unbelievable price. Then, we've pushed the button, the buy now button. Then, a week later, it arrives at our house. We're like, "Huh, you get what you pay for.

Cullen Schwarz:

Yeah. Well, totally. This is becoming more and more well-documented. There's a reporter at Vox who's done some really good work on this in the last year or so, where, even in the 20th century, companies figured out planned obsolescence. Before that, making the highest quality thing was everyone's goal, especially when it's a lot of "you are the carpenter in town." You take pride in that work.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely.

Cullen Schwarz:

You want it to be in... They're going to say it's going to last forever. In the 20th century, companies and ad agencies started both figuring out how to keep us on a hamster wheel of consumption. First, they bombard us with ads that make us feel insecure about ourselves and make us feel like we need stuff that we don't really need. Then, they sell us stuff that has got that low price tag, but it's made purposely to wear out.

Cullen Schwarz:

Appliance makers figured that out in the 20th century, but now it's everything. It's clothes. This Vox reporter talked about how she got the same bra from the same company. The one she had for 10 years. Then, she noticed that 10 years later, it was still the same price. She got that one for $40 10 years ago, and now it's $40 again. She said, "Well, that's great." How could it possibly be the same price as it was 10 years ago? Because she said this time it lasted a couple of months 'cause instead of metal hooks or this or that, it was just stuff that was glued on. The glue came off in the wash.

Cullen Schwarz:

This is the other thing is that I really think, yes, one, that stuff is cheaper because they might be making it with poverty wages. But it's worse for you. They're making it junky, or they're making it with toxic chemicals. I mean, the things that got us laying down in the bedsheets and the clothes that we put on our body... filled with toxins or the candles we light in our house are killing us. Yeah. This cheap, janky candle... It's cheap. Candles on our side are more. But they're like, one, hand poured by refugees in Massachusetts earning 20 bucks an hour plus. You know that they're having a good life for their families, but also they're high-quality hand poured. Then, they last forever. They're going to last longer than that stupid little janky candle. You know what I mean? But also, it's not killing you.

Cullen Schwarz:

That's the other thing. We say, "Look, the cheapest thing is not always the best deal." If they're giving you 20 bucks, but it's going to wear out in a year, or you can pay 50 bucks, but it lasts for five years, the $50 thing is a better deal.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely.

Cullen Schwarz:

That's the thing. The stuff on our site, we think, is certainly better for people, better for the planet, better for your conscience because you feel good knowing that this is supporting in line with who you are and your beliefs. Also, it's just better stuff. It's higher-quality stuff. That came through even just from looking at the site because it really is true. Of course, it's true because stuff that's handmade by someone who's paid well, who does take pride in their craft, is going to be higher quality than stuff that's rolling off a giant mass production facility someplace.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely.

Cullen Schwarz:

Actually, it's going to be that way. It saves money over time. Of course, it also means buying more intentionally/thoughtfully; buying things you'll keep for a long time means you're less on their hamster wheel of consumption. You're out of that system. For me, it's just not being on their conveyor belt, not just being a consumer like they want me to be, instead being thoughtful/intentional, still buying stuff because I want to support what these companies are doing. I want to know that people are getting lifted out of poverty. It's like I will still buy a moderate amount of things. But I'm not on the hamster wheel-

Lyn Wineman:

That wheel. I got to fill up the stockings with this cute little thing or that cute little thing. My family... We just had this conversation for the holidays. None of us need more stuff just for the sake of having more stuff.

Cullen Schwarz:

Exactly.

Lyn Wineman:

Let's buy fewer things but more thoughtful things.

Cullen Schwarz:

We hope the slower feels good. We sent an email recently. It was like, "If speed was the goal, everyone runs in, and they just chuck the presents on you. Then, they run out." I mean, look, we know Amazon gets it there fast. But do you want everything to be fast? McDonald's is fast. Fast and cheap. But we hope that we feel like going to a nice restaurant that's owned by-

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. Slow it down.

Cullen Schwarz:

...mom-and-pop. They're making the food that they've made for years. It's good for the world. We hope it feels better. It's just like, look, this stuff will still get there in four days or whatever.

Lyn Wineman:

Honestly, four days is really-

Cullen Schwarz:

It's not going to be like one or two days.

Lyn Wineman:

Not bad.

Cullen Schwarz:

Also, the company might ship the products themselves. If you get three things from different companies, it might arrive on three different days. Now, you get three of those happy moments when the thing comes in the mail. You know what I'm saying? DoneGood is a better experience and just feels better spiritually for the person shopping. It's good for the world. But DoneGood feels better and, like you said, higher quality. Then, we also do things to try to help make sustainable shopping more affordable, too. We negotiate discount codes with a lot of our partner brands. We hold major sales events where they all agree to do 30/50/70% off of various... We like to talk about Shop for Good Sunday. That's the Sunday after Thanksgiving, a day that we-

Lyn Wineman:

Okay. Coming up then. Shop for Good Sunday coming up.

Cullen Schwarz:

We usually do something extra special on that day. But, of course, like everybody, we actually have sales going from the Tuesday before Thanksgiving here, so happening right now, as this airs, the Tuesday before Thanksgiving through Cyber Monday.

Cullen Schwarz:

Of course, we've got big sales events. All the time, we have a sales page that automatically... Any of the 120 brands who sell on our site, anytime they mark down a product on their own site, that sale price/those products are all on our sales page. You can shop 120 sustainable brands. Whatever they have on sale, you can see it all in one place. We try to do all of that. We try to make it faster and easier to shop from companies you can believe in. We try to find ways to make it more affordable. We try to remind people that, also, these things are going to last longer. That does make them more affordable. Then, like we were saying, we just hope it just feels healthier than on the hamster wheel, on the conveyor belt that they try to keep us on by bombarding us with ads and selling us cheap junk.

Lyn Wineman:

As a marketer/a brander, I felt wholesome while I was on this site.

Cullen Schwarz:

That's so nice.

Lyn Wineman:

I felt wholesome. I have been on the sales section, too. It's quite robust.

Cullen Schwarz:

Yeah, good. Well, good. I mean, you should. I mean, that's the thing. Again, I feel like that's a service that we can help provide, is to put all of those in one place because look, often this... I mean, it's certainly usually more than the cheapest thing you can find because it's higher quality and because, look, paying people living wages costs a little more than keep paying people profit. There's a reason all the big companies do it. It's just because they subcontract with factories throughout the world. They don't even know what's going on.

Lyn Wineman:

They don't don't know what's going on. That's exactly right.

Cullen Schwarz:

They just contract with whoever's the cheapest bid. Well, how do you get the cheapest bid? Well, paying poverty wages. This part's a downer. Always hate to be a downer during the holidays. Or human trafficking in those factories in the supply chain. Slavery. It's called human trafficking now, but that's a sanitized term. We try to call it what it is, which is slavery. Modern-day slavery. That's still a $150 billion-a-year industry.

Lyn Wineman:

None of us want to support that. Nobody wants to support that.

Cullen Schwarz:

Exactly.

Lyn Wineman:

But we are unknowingly, unwittingly.

Cullen Schwarz:

Unknowingly. That's the thing. We try to make it easier to not. If you go to slaveryfootprint.org, that's a great site. They actually can tell you... If you tell them what your buying habits are and what kind of stuff you have in your house, they can tell you how many slaves have likely touched the products that you-

Lyn Wineman:

Whoa!

Cullen Schwarz:

The average American... It's usually like dozens or maybe even triple digits. I'm the founder of DoneGood. My score is 10. But that's from shopping on DoneGood, pretty religiously or secondhand. Some stuff I get secondhand, or I just buy less. I buy less things, too. Those are the three ways, really. Buy on companies like DoneGood, or buy secondhand, or just buy fewer things. Still, my score is 10.

Lyn Wineman:

Amazing.

Cullen Schwarz:

That's considered extremely low. That still means 10 slaves have made things for me. That's freaking weird and not cool to think about. Again, I don't want to be the downer. We try to have the positive messaging.

Lyn Wineman:

Right. Right.

Cullen Schwarz:

Okay.

Lyn Wineman:

But that's reality. That's what we're fighting against.

Cullen Schwarz:

It's reality. Exactly.

Lyn Wineman:

Anybody who's had a political conversation or voted for a candidate that feels like a human rights candidate, and then you turn around and purchase a product that was made by slaves... Wow. Those are words that have never come out of my mouth before.

Cullen Schwarz:

Yeah. But here's the other thing we tell people. Don't feel guilt or shame about that. Don't feel like you have to change all... My therapist says, "Cullen, you could be a super enlightened guy. I'm sure you would be completely enlightened if you went to a monastery in Tibet and just meditated all day. But you are living in American society. There's challenges, and there's crosscurrents. If you're still going to buy some clothes, you're not just going to wear a handspun robe. You're going to go out to eat. It's just about it improving and having fun improving.

Lyn Wineman:

I appreciate that.

Cullen Schwarz:

You talked about if only 2% of our spending, if every American shifted 2% of our spending, that would've as much impact as all the donations to all the nonprofits. Well, then, what if some of us did 10 or 20%? Just take 10 or 20% of what you would've spent on Amazon or at Walmart or wherever-

Lyn Wineman:

And redirect it,

Cullen Schwarz:

Redirected through DoneGood. Of course, we appreciate that. Or you also know other companies that are locally owned in your community that are amazing and doing all the right things. But I mean, 10%/20%... Then, in 2024, ooh, you up it to 30%. The impact of all that is huge. I try to say, "Look, it's like you're trying to break..." I try to do this now with everything, every way I'm trying to improve. Instead of talking down on myself or feeling the negative emotions around it, feeling like I'm trying to break a workout record... You know what I mean?

Cullen Schwarz:

You don't have stress when you're like, "Oh, I'm going to try to run three miles faster than I did before." It's just you're having fun with it. If you miss it by a few seconds, you still got a great workout. If you do beat it, it feels good. I think it's more just like that. It's like, look, just be conscious and mindful and thoughtful. Then, move some of your spending. If everybody moves just a little more and a little more-

Lyn Wineman:

I love it.

Cullen Schwarz:

...the ripple effect of that is huge. It's not about feeling the guilt about the slavery. Or go to slaveryfootprint.org. See your score. Then, in a year, see it again. Watch that you cut it by two-thirds or whatever. You know what I mean?

Lyn Wineman:

That's amazing. I mean, the thought that you could is amazing. I think most listeners are going to be somewhat shocked by all of this. But it is the kind of data, it's the kind of information that does cause you to say, "Wait a minute."

Cullen Schwarz:

Most people know this stuff, or we've heard it by now, but then we forget, which is also normal. You know what I mean? It's like, look, we're all trying our best out here, man.

Lyn Wineman:

Right. That's true. That is true.

Cullen Schwarz:

There's a million ways that you could make the world better all the time. You can't do them all. At the same time, I used to say to myself, "Well, I hope that thing doesn't make me cop out." Okay. Well, then, just don't cop out. Just don't feel guilty, and don't cop out. Just try to joyfully-

Lyn Wineman:

Make a shift.

Cullen Schwarz:

...make improvement. Make a little shift. Make a little better shift. Try to make the impact. Do what you can and feel good about it as opposed to..." You know what I mean? I feel like that's a healthier way to tackle...

Lyn Wineman:

Thank you for that.

Cullen Schwarz:

I try to do that. I try to do that even just with all this stuff. It's like, "Oh, I have to work. It's evening. But I really have to get this done." You don't have to do it. "Do you work out?" "Yeah, I want to do it." Okay. Just make that mind shift.

Lyn Wineman:

I love it.

Cullen Schwarz:

It's a good one. Yeah. Anyway.

Lyn Wineman:

I love it. Cullen, I want to hear more about the story because a lot of us do want to make the world a better place. Even since the pandemic, I think a lot of us have gotten more realistic/more focused. But you, actually, went from a career in Washington to starting this company that's very successful, that's making a difference. How did it happen?

Cullen Schwarz:

I'll give you even the longer story. I guess I'll date myself. I was in college, undergrad at the turn of the century, like '99 to '03. That was the first wave. I was involved in a bunch of different progressive organizations on campus. At one point, we were protesting the Iraq war and this thing, but one of the organizations I got involved in was United Students Against Sweatshops. It was called. I got in, actually, the national leadership of that organization. The '90s was really when reporters were first doing investigative journalism on the supply chains of all these products that were now being made abroad and shipped back to the US and where people were first learning that... "Oh, some of the products that are being made now are in terrible conditions, in sweatshop conditions." That term entered the lexicon.

Cullen Schwarz:

This is now early 2000s working at United Students Against Sweatshops. We would get universities across the country to put codes of conduct in their apparel contracts. Anytime you see a university, they're selling in the bookstore or stores, wherever, with the university's logo on it, that is their licensed apparel. You've got an apparel maker every couple of years bidding to get those contracts. If you're talking a big state school or whatever, those contracts are very lucrative. Worth a lot of money. We get the colleges to put in a code of conduct that says, if you want to bid on our contracts, "You have to be able to demonstrate that you are operating in basic safe conditions, no forced overtime, past 50 hours a week, paying basic non-poverty wages, decent wages, and other provisions." That essentially basically said, "We don't want our clothing made in a sweatshirt."

Cullen Schwarz:

That was really, at 20 years old, or whatever, the first exposure to just how powerful consumerism can be as an advocacy tool because this wasn't public policy. This wasn't nonprofit work. This was just a big customer with a lot of money saying, "If you want my business, then you have to have basic decent standards. These customers, with their purchasing power, are making the world better, positively impacting people's lives, changing the world by their purchasing decisions." I thought, "Wow. That's really powerful. That hadn't occurred to me before." Now, imagine if you could get millions of people doing this, millions of individual consumers doing this, moving billions of dollars. This is how you change the economy. This is how you change the world.

Cullen Schwarz:

If we want to solve problems like global poverty or climate change, you've got to change business behavior in mass. The way to do that is through consumer demand. If you can use market forces to get businesses to compete... Now, imagine their ads aren't about us feeling insecure. All the ads are about competing over who's making the world better more than their competitor. You can use that competition. It's happening. It's happening in the world now. We see it all the time. I feel like we're hopefully getting to that tipping point where there's about to be... the tipping point of this movement of the... What do you want to call it? The social enterprise movement, the business as a force for good movement. I think we're getting to that tipping point where we're about to see massive change. Anyway, I took that idea where I was like, "Consumer spending is the... That's the key." I wrote a paper in college actually about how conscious consumerism will be the movement for change of the 21st century. That was-

Lyn Wineman:

Wow. You were ahead of the curve on that.

Cullen Schwarz:

I was ahead. Yeah, that's the thing. I wish I would've published that paper somewhere. I just handed it in to my professor back when we were still printing papers and handing them in.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. That's right. That's right.

Cullen Schwarz:

The old days. Yeah. No, I wish I would've gotten it published because that was pre-B Corp existing. In '01/'02, that was forward-thinking. Anyway, now here we are. But I got out of college. I started getting jobs in politics. But I still always had in my mind... I want to do something around galvanizing consumer spending. But same thing. Like, "Okay, I'm in DC. I'm fighting for these things. Again, now I'm spending my money." My sister and my mom and whatever girlfriend at that time would all be like, "Dude, your clothes..." My work clothes were always nice. I had to wear suits and shirts and ties to work. I just refuse to buy any casual clothes. There was no DoneGood. At the same time, I had now been aware of all this work with the anti-sweatshop movement. I'm like, "I don't want to support anything negative. I'm not going to buy anything." But then I was just-

Lyn Wineman:

They were like, "That is really not a good choice for you. You need to buy some things."

Cullen Schwarz:

They were like, "Man, you got holes in everything. Can you just get a new thing?" Anyway, that's the longer story. I had this career in politics, but I was always trying to think about doing something. Then, we applied to the Harvard Innovation Lab, the university's incubator firm. Just the idea for DoneGood... We got in. Then, it was like, "Oh, now I have to do this thing that I've been thinking of." But I think it's better-

Lyn Wineman:

So many people are out there looking for those grants and that support. You got it. You got it right off the bat.

Cullen Schwarz:

Well, there was no money. But we got training in a cool coworking space.

Lyn Wineman:

Hey.

Cullen Schwarz:

We'll take it.

Lyn Wineman:

It's a good start. It's a good start.

Cullen Schwarz:

But more, it was even just the... "Now, you have to actually do something." Okay, cool. That is a nice catalyst. That's a nice thing to have.

Lyn Wineman:

We have to go from idea to actuality pretty quickly now.

Cullen Schwarz:

Yes. Yeah, totally. It's nice to have a thing that makes you do that. Then, at some point, after some time doing that, it was like, "Well, I mean, if I'm going to do this, I'm going to have to quit my career and really do it." I wanted to. Now, eight years/eight and a half/nine years later, here we are.

Lyn Wineman:

I think that is the most scary point right there, is the "I got to quit my lucrative career-

Cullen Schwarz:

Of course.

Lyn Wineman:

...and sink or swim and make this work."

Cullen Schwarz:

It is. Yeah, it is. But it's also the most fun. I mean, I said, "Look, I don't know how this is going to turn out. But how am I going to feel if I do it and it fails? I'll be proud of myself for going for it. How will I feel if I don't try? Ashamed of myself for never trying." Okay, cool. That's an easy choice, then. I'm quitting this job. I don't give a shit. Whatever." Just reckless abandon at that point.

Lyn Wineman:

I love it. I love it. Cullen, you and I met at a B Corp event, and both of our companies are certified B Corps. But you have something that KidGlov doesn't in that you are a Best in the World award winner.

Cullen Schwarz:

Best for the World. Best for the World.

Lyn Wineman:

Best for the World. Thank you for that. That's an important distinction. Can you explain what that recognition means and, really, how it reflects your commitment to doing good?

Cullen Schwarz:

B Lab is the nonprofit organization that will certify B Corps. I mean, I guess I imagine a lot of people listening know what that is.

Lyn Wineman:

We've talked about B Corp quite a bit.

Cullen Schwarz:

I'm sure. I guess if there's a new listener who might not, certified B Corp means that you have been certified to have exceptional social environmental impact in a number of ways. The Best for the World is an award that B Lab gives out for B Corps. I don't know. It's exceptionally good, cool B Corps, I suppose.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely. I have to say, I'm also on record in saying that the B Corp certification process is quite rigorous. For KidGlov, for being a company that has a very small carbon footprint... We don't do a lot of bad things. It was hard for us to just qualify.

Cullen Schwarz:

Sometimes, it's hard for small because it's like a lot of this stuff would have only apply to bigger companies.

Lyn Wineman:

That's maybe fair, too. But I do have to say I believe that being a Best for the World designation is something that's pretty fantastic.

Cullen Schwarz:

Oh, thank you very much. I really appreciate that. I mean, we just say our job is to help other companies who are awesome be more successful, really. I mean, to help people who want to be able to know that their money is supporting things that they believe in. Then, ultimately, we hope by putting them all on one site, that means more people will shop with the companies that are at the forefront of the movement. The companies that we work with are doing such incredible things. I almost hate to tell stories about any few of them because they're all amazing. It's like talking about your kids. I don't have any favorites. There's like 120 brands on our site. Just Starfish Project Jewelry... It's cool jewelry. It's affordable. Funky people like it. I mean, I don't know. I don't really wear jewelry. But I definitely get it as gifts. I'm aware it's-

Lyn Wineman:

I love wearing funky jewelry. I'm there. I'm there for it.

Cullen Schwarz:

Well, it's one of the top-selling brands on our site. But they help women escape sex trafficking in Asia. They provide them with a living wage jewelry-making jobs. But then, they also provide them with skills training so that they can graduate to professional careers. Women are becoming entrepreneurs, or teachers, or photographers, or whatever that they might want to do. That opens up more jewelry-making jobs. Then, the whole thing funds their nonprofit wraparound services so that they can support even more of them. They're a smaller company. We've got a bigger company that some people may have heard of, Solo Shoes. That's 100% carbon-neutral, 100% living wages.

Lyn Wineman:

That's amazing for a shoe company, really.

Cullen Schwarz:

I know. Exactly. Yep. Then, now we're back to... Well, these are some really high-quality boots and shoes and stuff. You're like, "Well, those are 175 bucks. I could get some for 90." Yeah, you could. But Solo Shoes are also super high quality. I mean, this is traditional craftsmanship, too. You know what I mean? It's cool. They're really good products. They're really good. They're really good for the world. They're run by cool people. Look, Jeff Bezos is probably going to be able to build his penis rocket without my help or your help. But John at MPOWERD... MPOWERD does these really cool inflatable solar-powered lights. They're a certified B Corp. They're great for camping 'cause they're super lightweight.

Cullen Schwarz:

I got one of these. They're all solar-powered. It's all clean energy. But they have one that has a USB. You can charge your phone. When I'm out camping in the middle of nowhere, I can charge the phone with the power of the sun. Then, it's a light inside the tent. They're also good for/cool decorating the house. They got some flicker candles. They got all sorts of cool stuff.

Cullen Schwarz:

But also, just John's a cool guy. They started the company after they went to Haiti to volunteer after an earthquake in 2010 or 2011. They were like, "Oh, the lights were out." All the nonprofits were trying to figure... Every time you make a purchase, they donate lights to nonprofits doing work around the world.

Lyn Wineman:

Amazing.

Cullen Schwarz:

They get to families who don't have access to electricity. They're super effective, again, because it's super lightweight and very low shipping and all this. It's very effective for nonprofits. Then, ultimately, for families who lack electricity. Bezos is going to be fine. But John, actually... I was also going to say. But we also know a lot of these people now personally. His son, Deb Boogie, at least his social media name, and kids all over my Instagram... The best part of my day is seeing their stuff. It just also just feels better. Yes, fight against climate change. Good wages for people. All those. That, yes, absolutely feels good, but also just knowing that we helped John and Deb Boogie instead of Bezos.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely. It's so personal.

Cullen Schwarz:

That's what mean.

Lyn Wineman:

It's so personal.

Cullen Schwarz:

Yeah, definitely.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. Cullen, I'm curious. What do you believe is the future of sustainable and ethical consumerism? How does DoneGood continue to play a part in that?

Cullen Schwarz:

I still think it is the movement of our time. This century is when tipping point will be reached: when more and more people realize the power of their spending, that that's where really the action is in terms of all that, especially as DC gets more gridlocked and more dysfunctional. The action is where you spend your money. I think it's true. I think more and more people realize that. Every movement hits tipping points. It's well-documented that... Where is it exactly? I feel like we're already on the upswing of the exponential curve. When you look at even just the last 20 years, the word social impact/social enterprise wasn't invented yet.

Lyn Wineman:

Oh, yeah. I'm not even sure five years ago that it was even that big of a deal, really.

Cullen Schwarz:

Really that mainstream. Exactly. I think we're really on the upswing of the tipping point. I do think that it will be the most impactful movement of our time. The World Economic Forum already said there's 11 million social enterprises worldwide now. They said this is already one of the largest movements of our time.

Lyn Wineman:

Wow.

Cullen Schwarz:

That's the World Economic Forum saying that. It will only continue to get bigger and stronger. The more that these kinds of companies that are revolutionizing economic systems succeed, the more other people will jump in and start companies like those. Then, you start seeing even major companies. Now, some of it's greenwashing. But I say even the fact that Greenwashing exists is progress because, 10 years ago, nobody was even lying to us about their environmental impact. The fact that they're lying to us about it means they've taken notice that we care. You know what I mean? You want to be able to sort that out. But it's a good problem. It's a new problem because of progress.

Lyn Wineman:

I love that.

Cullen Schwarz:

I'm glad for the greenwashing, even-

Lyn Wineman:

I love it. Part of what gives me hope for the world, Cullen, is the fact that Gen Z seems to be so thoughtful, so conscientious, so intentional about this stuff. They're going to be the difference makers.

Cullen Schwarz:

Yep. I think that's right. I think it's just like they're skeptical of corporations and authority. You know what I mean? It used to be in the '90s and before. I don't know when it started. '80s/'90s, it was like, "Wear the logo of the corporation." Nike or Miller Lite, or whatever. Now, everybody's like-

Lyn Wineman:

That was back in the yuppie phase.

Cullen Schwarz:

Now, everybody's like, "No, I want the small offbeat brand that no one's ever heard of before." Yeah, that's cooler. You know what I mean? That's the other thing. I mean, these brands on our site are just cool and weird and interesting and good for the world. But also, they're just cooler, man. They're just cooler than corporate box store bullshit. Sorry. I think that's twice I'm swearing on here. I said at the beginning of this, before we started, I was going to try to watch that.

Lyn Wineman:

We're going to have to put a disclaimer on the front of this that you should not listen out loud with small children.

Cullen Schwarz:

Well, I don't know. Look, I think the small children are the ones who need to hear the message the most. They have to hear a couple of S-words. I don't know.

Lyn Wineman:

I love that.

Cullen Schwarz:

Anyway, that is what that corporate schlock rolling off assembly lines is. You know what I mean? It's just not that cool. The thing that makes me super excited about the movement is, I think, when it first started, it was like, "Well, just make a sustainable thing." But now it's, one, the diversity... Social enterprises are in every industry. It used to be... well, organic food. Then, it was sustainable fashion. Now, it's everything. Every category has a social enterprise or more. It's becoming ubiquitous across the economy.

Cullen Schwarz:

The other thing is the quality. Sustainable used to be... I don't know, wearing some burlap or it was all granola hippie stuff. Now, it's ethically and sustainably-made lingerie. It's actually sexy. Avocado Mattress has won... I don't know how many years, number one Consumer Reports' best mattress, not best sustainable mattress. They're just kicking ads.

Lyn Wineman:

The best mattress.

Cullen Schwarz:

They're just the best. These companies are just awesome. The stuff is high quality. The stuff is cool. It's really what people want. It's not just like, "Well, I have to sacrifice my look or anything." It's like, "No, all these companies are just doing really cool stuff. They're just good at..." We had a mentor at the I Lab. Actually, that's who I was just talking to before this. We were reconnecting after... It's been a couple of years maybe. She told me, back in 2015, "Everyone's trying to be the sustainable blank, like we're the sustainable Amazon." She's like, "You got to be really good at being the blank." You still have to be good at what you do, the nuts and bolts. We've had to be a student of... I mean, we're still learning, but e-commerce UX and shipping fees. You know what I mean?

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. Absolutely.

Cullen Schwarz:

All these sorts of things that... You have to be a really good e-commerce company. You got to give people a good experience. All the companies on our site... Whatever they make, they need to be good at it. It needs to be good. It needs to be good quality. The movement is more there than when it first started. It was like I said... I don't know, "Here's some burlap or whatever."

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. That's not a great tagline. Here's some burlap.

Cullen Schwarz:

Or whatever.

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah. Speaking of taglines, actually, I'm going to ask you my favorite question next. I've asked it on every episode of this podcast because I am really inspired by motivational quotes. I feel really lucky that I get to talk with smart, passionate, interesting people like you. Could you give us a few of your own original words of wisdom to inspire our listeners?

Cullen Schwarz:

Original.

Lyn Wineman:

Original.

Cullen Schwarz:

The one that's not really... well, maybe very generally related to what we do. I think I came up with this when I was a kid. I haven't really heard it said anywhere else. It was in response, of course, to my mom. My mom: giving me the old... I don't know if parents say this anymore. Back in the day, certainly, it used to always be, you'd say, "That's not fair." They'd say, "Well, the world's not fair." I'm like, "One, is that what you want to teach a kid?" Of course, the world is not fair. But I said, "Yeah, but a person can be. You could be, Mom."

Lyn Wineman:

Whoa!

Cullen Schwarz:

You know what I mean? "The world's not fair, but a person can be," would be one that I think I made up.

Lyn Wineman:

I love that. If you said that as a kid, that's amazing. Honestly, that's a-

Cullen Schwarz:

Again, I think it was more snotty.

Lyn Wineman:

...foreshadowing of your future.

Cullen Schwarz:

It was. It might've been. "But you could be, Mom." It might've been more like that, but the general gist... I was just retorting my mom, as she reminds me of that often. She was like, "Raising you was having a lawyer." Then, geez, I should have more pithy things about DoneGood. I feel like I used to have more at the ready. The dollars we spend are the world's most powerful force for change. I think that that's true. I just think it's undeniable. Like I said, it's where the action is. It's where the power is.

Lyn Wineman:

Absolutely.

Cullen Schwarz:

Really, it's the economy. It's what impacts everything. Well, there's companies changing the economy/revolutionizing the economy. When we choose to spend our money, we choose who to support. Anyone we give our money to means that they get to do more of whatever it is they're doing. If it's good things, it's good. If it's bad things, it's bad. I just think that part is also true. The dollars we spend are the world's most powerful force for change. Who we give our money to is the number one way we impact the world. I guess any formulation of any of those things. In a supply-and-demand economy, we have all the power. The market supplies anything that we demand. I don't know. Various ways of saying the same thing.

Lyn Wineman:

I love it. I asked you for one, and you gave me two. I knew you were an overachiever before we even started. All right. Cullen, for our luck listeners who want to go shop at DoneGood, tell us how to find it.

Cullen Schwarz:

DoneGood.com. DoneGood.com. Again, we have big sales. The biggest sales of the year, just like everybody else. That's the thing. We're saying, "You still got to be like other e-commerce companies." Yes, of course, we have sales. Again, we do extra special things on Shop for Good Sunday. Usually, it's a donation on Shop for Goods Sunday. Shop for Good Sunday, again, is the day we made up that we said, "Well, this is the day dedicated to supporting social impact brands." But the sales are Tuesday now, the Tuesday before Thanksgiving through, and including Cyber Monday. We just have really-

Lyn Wineman:

Excellent.

Cullen Schwarz:

...huge sales all these days, just like everywhere else. You got to do it. You got to do the basic stuff, of course. Again, part of our mission is trying to help make sustainable shopping more affordable and more accessible to more people. We're glad to be able to... We can't do it all the time, but we can negotiate. It's onto our partners. Ultimately, it's up to them. But we work to negotiate and get as many of them as possible. I mean, a huge percentage of them during this weekend are, of course, doing big sales on DoneGood, too.

Lyn Wineman:

I love it.

Cullen Schwarz:

DoneGood.com. Go there this weekend during the big-

Lyn Wineman:

Perfect.

Cullen Schwarz:

...shopping weekend to save some money. We also have a sales page all the time, every day of the year that's automatically bringing in all the products that all our companies have on sale. We are always able to help people get deals and know that the dollars that they spend are making the world better.

Lyn Wineman:

I love it. I love it. What a fun conversation today. I feel so lucky that we talked literally minutes before I started my Christmas shopping. Ready to get back into the site and do that.

Cullen Schwarz:

I really appreciate it. Thank you for having me on, too, because I was going to say, "Every time I do one of these, it makes me have to step back and get off the to-do list." You're in the company, working on this or that, and the stress. This makes me stop and step back and recenter why we do all this in the first place. I always really appreciate. The rest of my day is going to be better. It's always better.

Lyn Wineman:

I love it. If I can make your day a little bit better, that's great, and everyone's day a little bit better. I'd love to ask you one last question here. What is the most important thing you'd like our listeners to remember about the work that you're doing, Cullen?

Cullen Schwarz:

Well, I think it is that this is where the action is. This is where the power lies. DC is a whole bunch of performative gridlock. Look, again, it's important. Everyone should vote. You know what I mean? At the same time, man, who we give our money to is really how we impact the world. It's about just you exercising your power and another huge way to be in alignment with who you are and what you believe. I'll say tack that on to... I don't know if this is the same idea or another. But back to "don't feel guilty about the money that is going to..." Sometimes, you got to get stuff on Amazon. I get it. Sometimes, you do need stuff that day or the next day.

Cullen Schwarz:

My sister took my computer charger apart. I thought I grabbed it, and I didn't. It was two and a half hours away. I'm like, "I need a computer charger so I can keep running this business that fights Amazon." I had to run it from Amazon. I called three places in town in Denver. They don't have it. Look, they said they were going to get it to me. I used my buddy's Prime 'cause I don't have a Prime membership, of course. But I used my buddies. They said, "Well, it can come in 24 hours, or it can come..." This was like 2:30 in the afternoon. It could come at 8:00 AM for $2 more. I paid the $2 more. It was on my porch at 8:00 PM that night.

Cullen Schwarz:

Look, I get it. It's fast. Or sometimes, if it's little kids for Christmas, you're going to get them whatever piece of plastic made in China-

Lyn Wineman:

Yes, that's right.

Cullen Schwarz:

...that they asked for because it's whatever. Look, maybe you also get them one thing from Tikiri toys that is non-toxic, first of all, especially if it's a baby. They're putting this in their mouth. Get something non-toxic. But look, it's both. This is where your power is. This is how you impact the world: who you give your money to. I exercise that power and just feel good about the improvements like we were talking about. Move 10% of your money. 20% the next year. Up that by 10%. Just keep finding ways to move. But the thing is, these things become a feedback loop because once you... I feel so just liberated that I am pretty much off there, the corporate hamster wheel of consumption, because I am either buying DoneGood, or buying secondhand, or just not buying things at all. It feels better. I feel liberated. I feel free. Let it make you feel good. Let what you are doing make you feel good instead of feeling bad if it's not 100% of my spending isn't going to good stuff. Okay. Cool, man. Do you know that 50% is amazing?

Lyn Wineman:

Yeah, right. I mean, you said it. A 2% difference.

Cullen Schwarz:

2%.

Lyn Wineman:

A 2% difference. Any of us can figure out 2%.

Cullen Schwarz:

Yes. 2% of our Christmas spending does as much good as all the nonprofits in the world combined. If you're moving 10%/20%, you're doing way more than your share. Then, just keep improving it. Just let it go.

Cullen Schwarz:

Again, it feels good. For me, it's just about being free from them/being free from the corporate overlords, man. I'm not on their conveyor belt, dude. That's really as much of the motivation. I know I'm supporting the living wages and the fight against climate change. I'm just not falling prey to their bombardment of ads that are trying to make me feel insecure about... Everything is you're too fat. You're too ugly. Your neighbor has a better one. Piss off with that. You know what I mean? It makes me angry. These messages, when you watch... Or it's, "You'll get laid more." Don't let the kids listen. But seriously, everything is that. It's like, "You would get laid more if you would just give us money." It's like, "Oh, you're disgusting." Your ads disgust me. Your cheap products disgust me. Get out of here. It's even just about that. Anyway.

Lyn Wineman:

Cullen.

Cullen Schwarz:

One thing to remember: it feels good to not buy corporate BS. How about that?

Lyn Wineman:

That is a great one thing. I have so loved this conversation. It's very timely. You're doing some really important work, enlightening people/making a difference in the world. I really believe the world needs more people like you, Cullen, and more retailers like DoneGood. Thanks for talking with me.

Cullen Schwarz:

Really nice of you to say, Lyn. The world needs more people like you who give us a chance to talk.

Announcer:

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