

MEET

CARRIE MORGRIDGE

V.P. AND CHIEF DISRUPTOR, THE MORGRIDGE FAMILY FOUNDATION

Going Big and Rarely Going Home

It isn't easy to get Carrie Morgridge on the phone for more than a few minutes at a time because the Denver-based philanthropist is rarely in one place for very long. Carrie and her husband John recently biked from Canada to Mexico in 46 days, a life-altering journey they documented in a new book, *The Spirit of the Trail* (available through Amazon). But compared to the miles she logs in pursuit of her philanthropy, that 2,774 mile-long bike ride seems like a brief pedal around the block. Because the vice president and "chief disruptor" of The Morgridge Family Foundation is committed to connecting likeminded nonprofits, funders, and other stakeholders, she spends a lot of her time on the road.

"Great programs aren't just happening in Denver, but all over the United States," Carrie explains. "I often times bring nonprofit leaders with me to meet the best and the brightest in other cities, and they, in turn, collaborate and amplify each other's work. That's why I travel so much!" For Carrie, this collaboration is essential because the Morgridge Family Foundation invests in transformative gifts and is laser-focused on scalability.

"To scale our impact, we try not to touch a project unless it can impact at least a million people, either directly or indirectly," she explains. "We don't give money and walk away. Not only do you get a grant from our foundation, but we

also roll up our sleeves and connect people in our network, from great nonprofits to great philanthropists. Because we've done so many grants and come across so many wonderful people, we've put together an amazing group, and we've organized them into sector categories in which they work. They're sharing ideas and amplifying their capabilities just by connecting."

Another way The Morgridge Family Foundation has leveraged the power of collaboration is through the creation of mindSpark Learning, a nonprofit that provides professional development for all educators across the country. "For the STEM schools that mindSpark Learning works with, the 'E' in STEM stands not just for engineering, but also for entrepreneurialism," Carrie explains. "Another program we are working on is linking industry with teachers for summer internships. If educators are going to teach STEM, it is vital to expose them to an industry experience. There is a huge ripple effect that is occurring when the educators present authentic and real problems to their students for them to solve. The result is that students benefit from having real-world experience, like launching a company or solving a complex problem, as a major focus of their learning. We are seeing these skills also pass directly to their families and their communities."

Carrie is also investing in another scalable project, Impact 100, a growing network of

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women's giving circles founded by Wendy Steele in 2001 in Cincinnati, Ohio. Every Impact 100 is unique to its own city and consists of 100 women who give \$1,000 each. Collectively, they give a \$100,000 transformational grant in their own city. "When I met Wendy, the first thing I asked her was how was she planning to scale globally? That led to a great conversation where the foundation gave the Impact 100 Global Council a gift to scale," Carrie says. "Impact groups are starting each year across the country, and combined, they have given millions of dollars to transform their own communities. What I love about Impact 100 is that all the women in the group are equal and have equal power over the decisions. Every woman can decide how much or how little she wants to be involved, but every vote is equal. From ladies who are lifelong philanthropists to young girls, we are all equal, and that is really powerful."

Because Carrie looks for ways to touch as many lives as possible through philanthropy, she's increasingly interested in policy. "If you want to touch a million people, the best way to have impact is through policy," she explains. "We've been funding Morgridge Fellows in Poverty Alleviation, Medical, Human Dignity, and Education. They are helping shape policy, and we are starting to see a profound change and impact."

If Carrie sounds like a woman with a lot on her plate, that's because she is. "We tried to cut back to 100 projects a year, but at six months we were already at 100," she admits. "There are just a lot of amazing ideas out there." One source of these ideas comes from Carrie's stints as a "shark" at a philanthropy-themed forum based on the popular TV show, Shark Tank. Whereas the TV show features entrepreneurs pitching their business plans to investors who are successful entrepreneurs themselves (the "sharks"), the philanthropy version gives grant-seekers an opportunity to pitch their programs to funders. "I'm a shark!" Carrie enthuses. "You have to have a minimum of \$25,000 to play, and I can put in as much as \$100,000. I have found the most amazing projects by participating in 'Shark Tank,' and we're starting to host these events at our foundation."

From funding a new wing at the Denver Museum of Nature and Science that hosts 1.6 million people a year to constructing girls' bathrooms in India ("The girls actually have to hold their pee all day, so their attendance and health suffered"), Carrie gives new meaning to the word "ambitious." What keeps her motivated? "I think about the experience of biking from Banff, Canada to Antelope Wells, New Mexico on the Mexican border," she said. "It really taught me a lot about grit and determination. I know it sounds silly, but on the bike ride, I'd celebrate every 100 miles that I and my husband logged by ringing my bike bell. Philanthropy is like that. Whether it's a new museum wing or a bathroom, you need to celebrate the wins, keep on pushing, and don't forget to 'ring your bell' in celebration of milestones."

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