



## To change the world, tell a good story, says World Toilet Organization founder

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If you have a good story, you can change the world. If your story makes people laugh, you have an even better chance at success.

That's the message of Jack Sim, who decided after a thriving business career to take on the issue of global sanitation. Expanding the use of toilets would help stop diseases spread by people defecating in the open. More toilets would also lead to more women going to school, since a lack of toilets is often a reason that girls don't attend school.

In 2001, Sim began building the World Toilet Organization to promote sanitation by expanding the use of toilets. The United Nations has since recognized an annual World Toilet Day and through its World Toilet Summit and other initiatives, Sim's organization continues to spread the word.

Sim says he first had to overcome people's reluctance to even discuss the issue:

**Whatever you don't discuss you cannot improve. The kind of work we do is to make people laugh, and how I learned about this is I saw there was another man in Thailand, he was called Mr. Condom. I think those in the health sector will know him very well, he's very famous. He's called Mechai and I asked him, 'How did you make condoms so popular?' If you don't use condoms, there are going to be terrible diseases spread, plus also the babies unplanned, and he said that 'If you make people laugh, they will listen to you. You also must be happy that they laugh at you, because you become the joke, but you also become the storyteller.' I said, 'That's fine, they can laugh at me as long as they're listening, that's okay.' So, he said, 'In that case, you already have the advice you need, you can go.' I started to make it very funny, and we started the World Toilet Summit the first year.**

Sim said he had to enlist the media in his efforts because he knew that if they became interested, politicians and celebrities would also join in.

Eventually, the media wrote a lot about it, and the tone of the communication was humor. Of course, if you go to a university or very official places, they tend to not want to take the risk of humor. Humor is a very risky approach, but I have nothing to lose, so I could tell the story in the most free way. I designed this logo, which is very self-explanatory--love your toilet, and it is a toilet seat cover, and an acronym like this, the media loves it very much, and suddenly it was a very big story.

Once the media were involved, politicians began to take up the cause, celebrities joined in, and academics saw the issue as one they could tackle in their research. At that point, the movement began to take on a life of its own.

You do not need to be the one feeding the movement, the movement has a life of its own, and you lose control and that is the whole idea: do not have control, lose control and they will grow by themselves. Eventually, it will bloom, and you will just be one dot in this whole movement, but you are not the movement. The movement is the vision, and the other people come in because they have other incentives, for example: to get elected, to sell advertisements, to get the next movie, to publish and have the professorship continued and everybody wins, yes?

If you can give people a reason to become involved, if you have a story they can participate in, you can promote more than just toilets.

So, if you look at the entire supply chain here, for most of the people, the priority is not toilets. But, the end result is everybody gets a toilet, yes? If you understand how to benefit the people, then we don't moralize the problem, we incentivize the solution, and if we can incentivize the solution for a toilet, you can do this same with this theory of change on solar energy, on water, on education, logistics, supply chain, healthcare, I think everything can work like that. Of course, not everything works with humor, but everything works with storytelling.

That was Jack Sim, [speaking](#) about the World Toilet Organization at the Asian Development Bank Institute, in Tokyo.

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