

Over just 12 years, Daniel Lurie has made Tipping Point Community one of San Francisco's most prominent—and effective—charities to take on poverty.

BY HEATHER WOOD RUDULPH | PHOTO BY SPENCER BROWN

**W**orld peace. A cure for cancer. Ending global poverty. These all-encompassing causes are marketing mainstays, but the reality of tackling issues so huge and complex seems almost unfathomable to most people.

Daniel Lurie is not most people.

It's been 12 years since the career philanthropist started Tipping Point Community, an organization that aims to not only help the poor, but actively change the systems that put them there in the first place. By exclusively supporting local nonprofits that address poverty, Tipping Point builds housing for the homeless, but also gives them job-training skills. It promotes literacy for at-risk youth, and works with their families, giving them access to drug treatment, mental health care or other critical services that can dramatically change the trajectory of their lives. The organization writes grants for these charities, but sticks around to ensure that the dollars are put to work where they are needed most.

Lurie grew Tipping Point from two employees and three beneficiaries to a team of 45 that serves 44 grassroots charities throughout the Bay Area. Two of the original nonprofits—The Homeless Prenatal Program and Rubicon Programs Inc.—remain in

Tipping Point's portfolio, which points to the organization's secret formula for sustainable success: It vets hundreds of charities, but only partners with those that exhibit strong leadership and a proven track record. They must also be willing to have Tipping Point work as an engaged partner indefinitely. "We are not the type of group that writes a check and walks away," Lurie says. "We are there to partner with you, do the work, get our hands dirty and stay engaged."

Lurie named Tipping Point after **Malcolm Gladwell's** blockbuster book, *The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference*, and modeled it after New York's Robin Hood Foundation, considered a leader in sustainable philanthropy. Lurie spent his first two years after college learning from Robin Hood's leaders. Then, with their blessing, he brought the same model to his hometown of San Francisco. While most nonprofits rely on endowments or grants to cover operating expenses, Tipping Point is fully funded by a board of directors—composed of tech and finance executives, and Lurie himself—who make sure that every dollar donated goes directly to fighting poverty. Even in disasters that affect the greater community, Tipping Point targets its fundraising to help the most vulnerable. Recently, in the wake of this fall's devastating North Bay fires, Lurie created an emergency relief fund for low-income victims, and organized a charity concert.

Tipping Point has become a darling of Silicon Valley heavyweights who tend to focus their in-

vestment dollars on humanitarian causes. While individual contributors are kept anonymous, such luminaries as **Jack Dorsey**, **Marissa Mayer**, **Marc Benioff**, and **Mark Zuckerberg** and **Priscilla Chan** have attended the foundation's fundraising events. For these business minds who know a thing or two about ROI, Tipping Point offers the best deal in town.

"We think of it as an opportunity," says Lurie, who talks about his dozen-year-old organization like a proud parent ushering his child into tweenhood. "We not only provide, on average, \$300,000 grants to our organizations each year—and some get up to \$1 million—but we're also able to team up with Latham & Watkins, Boston Consulting Group, McKinsey & Company, Google, Box, Salesforce, Apple, Dropbox and many more big businesses—all of the resources we can bring to our [charity partners] so that they can be more effective and efficient. That's

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something you're just not able to do as an individual donor. The impact that we can have is unparalleled."

Tipping Point, which has raised more than \$150 million from personal donors, is typically not in the business of cause matchmaking. Instead, donors come to Lurie and his team with an understanding that they will find a way to best utilize those contributions and effect the most change. For example, in 2008, at the height of the Great Recession, the government slashed its contributions for mental health services. The hardest hit were those already living in poverty, or newly unemployed. Tipping Point saw a need and directed its donated dollars to the Mental Health Initiative, a partnership with UC San Francisco, Stanford University and other mental health specialists that delivered much-needed care to the people served by Tipping Point's charities. More than \$7.7 million has been invested to date.

Another key to Tipping Point's success in luring and retaining big donors is its commitment to keeping its nonprofit partners in business. The lifecycle of a local charity—especially those addressing underbelly causes such as homelessness, drug addiction and mental health—can be very short. Tipping Point not only seeks out established charities with proven results, but works from the inside out, helping them build better leaders and teams, upgrade their technology backbone and take risks they otherwise couldn't afford.

Tipping Point has its own research and devel-

opment arm, T Lab, which works with charities to strategize new solutions for tackling their biggest problems. R&D is an essential part of any business—notably in risk-fueled Silicon Valley—but nearly nonexistent in the charity world.

"The Bay Area companies around us spend billions and billions of dollars a year testing new ideas, and we don't do that at all in the nonprofit sector," Lurie says. "We expect our nonprofits to perform Herculean tasks and yet give them no bandwidth to try new approaches."

While Lurie has been a press mainstay because of his philanthropic roots—his father, **Brian Lurie**, is a prominent rabbi who served as executive director of the Jewish Community Federation of San Francisco, the Peninsula, Marin and Sonoma Counties, and his mother, **Mimi Haas**, is a philanthropist who married Levi's heir **Peter Haas**—Tipping Point has largely stayed out of the news.

"For years we've wanted to let the work speak for itself," Lurie explains. "But we came to the realization that we needed to be more 'out there' because the more we could tell people—especially those in our business community—the story of what's going on in this region, the bigger impact we could have."

Lurie hired his first communications manager, **Marisa Giller**, in 2015. The next year he led the pitch to bring Super Bowl 50 to San Francisco—a job typically assigned to a mayor—and committed the city and the NFL to tie charitable giving to sponsorships, in turn collecting \$12 million for local nonprofits that benefit needy children and young adults. In May, Lurie announced that Tipping Point would make a \$100 million donation to the city to cut chronic home-

lessness in half within five years. Giller helped the story go viral.

Lurie is also becoming a larger figure in local politics (although he denies the rumors that he's eyeing a run for office). Tipping Point made its financial commitment in partnership with the City and County of San Francisco, in effect leaning on local government to prioritize homelessness as an issue. It's working. Two recent bills passed by the State Senate, SB 35 and SB 36, approved funding for more low-income housing, and relaxed zoning laws to make space for it. In September, San Francisco Mayor **Ed Lee** issued a directive to speed up the rate of creating new or refurbished affordable housing units, and commit to a minimum of 5,000 units per year. The measure will not only help impoverished individuals and families find a place to live, but allow middle-income earners (think: teachers, firefighters and journalists) to reside in the city that they serve.

"It will still take us years to build more housing, but we're seeing movement. We need the government to take the lead on that front, and I'm excited to see the progress," says Lurie, who quickly admits there is much more work to be done. "We're only just beginning to address the issue of chronic homelessness, and talk about a problem that people run from. Our team is consistently hearing, *What are you thinking? It's not fixable*. And our response and my response is always, *If we don't fix this, who will?*" **NHG**

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