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MAGAZINE

TONY BLAIR

HAS A PLAN TO MAKE PEACE ON EARTH

(NOW HE JUST HAS TO CONVINCE
SEVEN BILLION PEOPLE THAT IT'S
A REALLY GOOD IDEA)

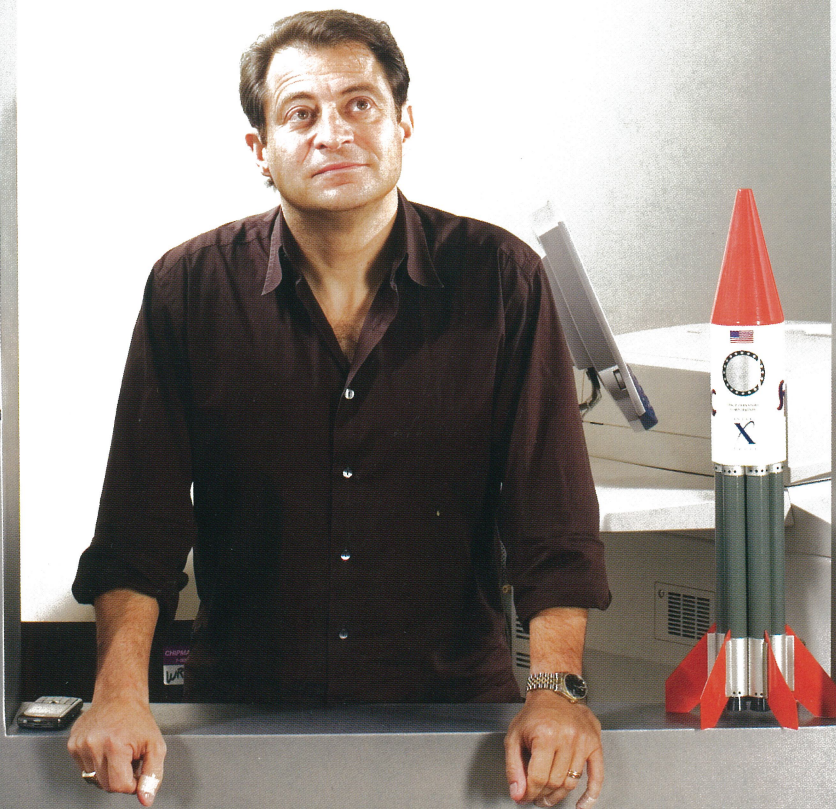
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EYES ON THE PRIZE

X PRIZE founder **Peter Diamandis** wants to change the world—and he's willing to put his money where his mouth is.

By Nancy A. Ruhling



“We see the world’s biggest problems as the world’s biggest business opportunities.”

It was only 10 days into the new year, and Dr. Peter H. Diamandis found himself onstage in Las Vegas giving the opening keynote for the 2012 Consumer Electronic Show, announcing his latest global incentive competition.

The chairman and CEO of the X PRIZE Foundation, which offers big money to solve big-time problems, is betting you, me and the rest of the people on the planet that \$10 million is all it will take to finally start to revolutionize health care.

The Qualcomm Tricorder X PRIZE, announced on January 10th, will go to the team that, by June 2015, creates a handheld device that can make routine medical diagnoses without the help of a physician.

“Such a device will change the health care dynamic,” he says. “It literally will put health care into the hands of consumers.”

It will save time and money, which will be especially important in the coming decades, he says. Diamandis begins rattling off the numbers: It takes an average of 21 days to get an appointment with a doctor, and once you get to the office, you’re likely to wait an average of two hours for treatment. That’s assuming, of course, that you can find a doctor—by 2020, according to his calculations, America will be short some 91,000 physicians.

With the Tricorder, people won’t have to see a doctor; the device,

when and if it is developed, will allow them to do routine things like check blood pressure, respiratory rate, and temperature so they can determine whether they even need to get professional medical help.

If this all sounds a little too *Star Trek*, it’s because it is. Diamandis, who launched the personal space flight industry through a previous prize, got the idea from the Tricorder of the cult-classic TV series. “We’re seeking to make 23rd century science fiction a 21st century medical reality,” he says. “The Qualcomm Tricorder X PRIZE looks to empower consumers to take control of their own health care and improve the quality of life for people everywhere.”

Just thinking of all the good the Tricorder will do makes Diamandis as giddy as a kid in a candy store. After all, his other competitions—the \$10 million Ansari Spaceflight X PRIZE, the \$10 million Archon Genomics X PRIZE, the \$30 million Google Lunar X PRIZE, and the \$10 million Progressive Insurance Automotive X PRIZE—have been heralded as groundbreaking.

X PRIZE trustee Amir Ansari, chief technology officer and co-founder of Prodea Systems and the title sponsor of the Ansari X PRIZE, says that the contests “have proven that grand challenges that are deemed as impossible to solve can indeed be solved. The Ansari X PRIZE, for instance,

helped usher in a whole new industry of commercial space travel. The prizes also are vehicles that allow dreamers with grand ideas to continue pursuing their dreams into reality.”

Diamandis has shown that private-sector space travel is as viable as an airplane flight, but nobody’s been able to enable health care reform (remember Hillary Clinton in the 1990s?). So what makes him think that his X PRIZE will be the cure?

“We’re not looking to fix the system; we’re hoping that these competitions invent a completely new system that is efficient and easy to use,” Diamandis says. “And like all of our competitions, this X PRIZE is open to everyone—it doesn’t matter where you went to school or what you’ve ever done before. True breakthroughs occur when you look at an industry or an area from a completely new point of view.”

Diamandis’s view of philanthropy certainly offers a different point of view. The X PRIZES, he asserts, put the future in the hands of the techno-philanthropists—guys like Virgin’s Richard Branson, and eBay’s Jeff Skoll, who made their money in the last 30 years in the technology sector when they were in their 20s and 30s.

“For techno-philanthropists, writing the check is the beginning, not the end,” he says. “We see the world’s biggest problems as the world’s biggest business opportunities.”

RIGHT: Stephen Hawking floats on a zero-gravity jet.



He believes that prizes like those the X PRIZE Foundation is launching are important philanthropic tools that will not only proliferate, but also spur the kind of innovation that America is built on.

"I'd like to see five to 10 percent of philanthropy be in the form of incentive prizes," he says. "Governments as well as foundations will continue to use and increase the use of prizes. As we get more billionaires, there will be bigger and bigger prizes that could go up to \$100 million or more."

X PRIZE trustee Naveen Jain, CEO of Intelius, says Diamandis has "motivated and inspired philanthropists around the world" via the challenges' unique democratic process. "What fascinated me most was seeing how many of the top finalist teams were formed by students or impromptu teams of individuals from various disciplines with no direct industry expertise," he says.

But Diamandis says that the techno-philanthropists and their prizes

aren't the only ones who will continue to make the world a better place. According to *Abundance: The Future Is Better Than You Think*, a new book Diamandis co-wrote with Steven Kotler, the world has become stronger in the last 50 years than in the previous 500 because of three more drivers:

- Exponential technologies: They are improving at a rapid rate across the board and are becoming so easy to use and so inexpensive that they are available and accessible to everyone. Think of 4-year-old kids who Google and Maasai warriors who carry smartphones.
- DIY innovation: Small teams of do-it-yourselfers who have access to powerful exponential technologies can take on challenges that until recently only government or multinational corporations were able to tackle.
- The rising billion: In 2010, some 2 billion people used the Internet; by 2020, the number will increase to an astounding 5 billion. Diamandis

calls the 3 billion new minds entering the global conversation the "rising billion." He points out that they will become a powerful consumer group and an important source of innovation.

"These people will help solve the world's problems," he says. "Everyone can be part of creating this abundance. We can create a world in our lifetimes where the basic needs of every man, woman and child will be met."

If these problems are indeed solved in this century, it will be in large part because Diamandis has devoted his life to the large picture.

"I joined the X PRIZE board in 2007,



inspired by the way the foundation encouraged people to dream big, tap into their own fearlessness and creativity, and change the world,” reports blogging baroness Arianna Huffington. “Peter Diamandis’s commitment to these principles, and insistence on encouraging those who share them, have made him a standard bearer in the search for solutions in a world facing multiple crises. That’s why I was delighted that Peter blogged for the launch of HuffPost Science, where he wrote, “Today the average citizen is more empowered to change the world than ever before.”

An engineer, physician, and entrepreneur, Diamandis has made a

name for himself by founding more than a dozen educational institutions and companies that segue with his personal interest in space travel and penchant for helping the world. They include:

- International Space University, which offers a space studies program and two accredited master’s of space studies degrees on its \$30 million campus in Strasbourg, France.
- Singularity University, which focuses on the development of exponentially advancing technologies.
- Zero Gravity, which offers parabolic weightless flights to the public.
- Space Adventures, the world’s lead-

ing space-travel company, which has flown eight civilians to the International Space Station.

- Rocket Racing League, which is devoted to developing a new sport that offers the thrill of Indy car racing and the intrigue of rocket flights.

“My life, thus far, has been dedicated to opening the space frontier,” he says. “My efforts have been focused on creating the technology, the marketplace and the leadership required to irreversibly open the cosmos for all of us. Now, in addition, I’ve broadened my mission to include a focus on slaying humanity’s grand challenges as well.”



by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen.

The next year, Diamandis broadened the X PRIZE Foundation's mission to include four topics: explorations (oceans and space); life sciences; energy and environment; and education and global development. "I felt a moral obligation to create prizes in these categories because they are the world's biggest problems," Diamandis says.

"They are the areas where we are stuck and where non-traditional solutions might work."

It was the X PRIZE that really started him on his outer-space crusade. Diamandis, whose parents were Greek immigrants, was born in 1961, on the cusp of the U.S.-Soviet space race. He became a fan of the final frontier when he was 10 and Apollo 13, America's seventh manned mission to the moon, was aborted amid much drama. "I felt like there was nothing more important in the world than exploring space," he says. "Everything in my life became about space—every page of my schoolbooks was filled with doodles of rockets and far-away planets."

He began pondering the planets and at 11 was giving lectures to his friends. At 12, he won first place in a rocket-design competition.

While Diamandis was dreaming of becoming an astronaut, his parents were doing their utmost to bring him down to earth. They were in the medical business, and they thought their only son should be a doctor.

He did what they wanted: He earned a degree in molecular biology from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and a medical degree from Harvard. But he also did what he wanted: He co-founded Students for the Exploration and Development of Space and earned two more MIT diplomas—a master's degree in aeronautics and astronautics, then a health, sciences and technology degree.

It was *The Spirit of St. Louis*, Charles Lindbergh's account of his daring 1927 New York-to-Paris flight, that led Diamandis to conceive of and create the X PRIZE Foundation in 1994; it was a means to make private space flight a reality. The first \$10 million competition, the Ansari X PRIZE, focused on developing private space-ships. It attracted 26 teams from seven countries and was won in 2004 by SpaceShipOne, the entry funded

L-R: Bob Weiss, Larry Page, Diamandis, and Buzz Aldrin during the announcement of Google's funding of a \$30 million prize to safely land a robotic rover on the moon.

In the future, he hopes to create X PRIZE contests that focus on creating clean water, reinventing the educational system and developing the ability to re-grow transplantable human organs from a patient's skin cells.

Diamandis hasn't made a trip into outer space yet, but he's itching to go. It was his hope that the original X PRIZE competition would make space travel more available to the masses, just as Lindbergh's feat spurred the growth of the aviation industry. That hasn't happened—it still costs \$25 million to \$40 million for a private trip to orbit. "I hope to go," he says. "But before I do, I would have to sell one of my companies."

He has taken 80 "fantastic" weightless trips in the Zero Gravity plane, and he has a ticket for a suborbital

PHOTO BY RIC FRANCIS/AP PHOTO

PROFILE
PETER DIAMANDIS



flight in 2013. In the meantime, he'll keep doing what he does best: Keep his eye on the X PRIZE.

It takes a lot of thought—and fundraising—to create challenges that make a difference. “We get contributions from individuals and corporate sponsors like Qualcomm,” Diamandis says. “Some of the things we do require hundreds of millions of dollars.”

Diamandis likes to think of fundraising as a transfer of energy—where funds represent the energy required to do something new, risky and important. “Fundraising is really about having a donor with confidence that the goal you’re going after is attainable and worthwhile and has confidence in you or your organization as a mechanism to achieve that,” he says.

“So it’s a transfer of confidence as well as a transfer of energy.”

The \$10 million Qualcomm Tricorder X PRIZE, he says, is a prime example of the power of prizes. In making the announcement about the Tricorder, Qualcomm CEO and chairman Paul Jacobs said that the contest “will stimulate the imaginations of entrepreneurs, engineers, scientists



and doctors to create wireless health services and technologies that improve lives, increase consumer access to health care, and drive efficiencies in the health care system. This competition will accelerate the development of tools that can empower consumers to take charge of their own bodies and manage their own care.”

The X PRIZE takes up most of Dia-

L-R: Rob McEwen, James Cameron, Diamandis, Elon Musk, and Jim Gianopulos on a ZeroG Flight.

mandis’s days, which start around 6 A.M. and don’t end until midnight. He has six-month-old twin sons, so he’s cut his travel schedule to spend more time with them.

Diamandis knows he’s set an am-

bitious agenda: He plans to launch \$300 million in prizes in the next five to seven years, at a rate of one to two per year.

“I love what I’m doing,” he says. “The X PRIZE is a huge global lever to do good in the world.” **LM**

For more information, visit xprize.org and abundancehub.com.