

Planning a vacation or how to spend your professional development budget? I could not more highly recommend an investment of time and resources than PopTech's next gathering. You can think of it as a luxurious intellectual cruise, where you consume delicious visions for the future, innovations to improve lives, arts to stimulate the mind and heart, and fellow passengers with whom to dream and more importantly, take on future adventures and paths of service.



FAB was honored to be a participant of PopTech 2011. You can get a sense of what this gathering of minds and hearts is like by [viewing this recording](#) and this follow-up [written interview](#)

Namely, PopTech convenes an eclectic mix of thought leaders and visionaries and invites them to share their ideas and progress towards realizing them through a number of activities, including 20-minute presentations. These are not the typical powerpoint-filled plenary presentations or panels to which you're accustomed at other conferences. The day FAB was on stage, for example, examined the themes of rebalancing, reframing, restoring and researching; presentations were made by a family historian, a Nobel Prize winner, a space suit developer, and a President. The same day, an iPad app was launched; a funky band played; and we met a slew of impressive young scientists and innovators. The experience was truly a cynicism evaporator.

I am grateful to PopTech for this agora of ideas and came away with so many takeaways--some of which might end up on my list of resolutions for 2012 and most of which will directly contribute to my work. I encourage you readers to download the related podcasts and listen to them as you stand in holiday lines and travel to meet family and friends—you can think of it as continued education and inspiration sessions. Further, some of the speakers have written books that you might add to your reading or gift shopping lists. I hope they elevate your thoughts and spirit as they did mine.

Thank you to PopTech, the speakers, and the audience for your undaunted ideas and gusto

towards a world rebalancing.

1. For those of us who design and deliver products and services for the poor—

Be Tough on Ideas, Gentle on People: A “recovering” visual artist turned community builder, [Milenko Matanovic](#) shares his path from the pallet to The Pomegranate Center that builds much more than open-air gathering places—certainly a different approach to community development that honors consultation with all.

[Here's](#)

a must see for anyone who calls themselves a community organizer as well as great ideas on methodology for the design of a product or service for a wider population.

2. For impact investors and practitioners working in Africa—

Rethink Africa: [Unity Dow](#) (Botswana's first female high court judge, human rights activist, and writer) presents her version of “Dead Aid” and encourages those of us who seek development in Africa to think beyond grants and invest in its productivity. Enjoy her festival of ideas

[here](#)

3. For those who seek to enable common tasks in uncommon ways—

Reprogram your Brain: Founder and leader of World Access for the Blind, [Daniel Kish](#) explains how the visually impaired can reprogram their brain to achieve greater freedom and mobility through echolocation—yes, the same technique that bats use to navigate using sound. See and hear how

[here](#)

4. For those who are in the business of empowerment training—

Remember Power Poses Work: [Amy J.C. Cuddy's](#) presentation demonstrates (with the help of Wonder Woman) how body language might empower us and send inferences that determine outcomes related to decisions, elections, hiring, promotions—perhaps success at accessing credit? Learn some moves [here](#) .

5. For those who write and report about our work in development finance—

Refer to it as the Majority World: Especially for those of us in Washington, we often pause to make the appropriate and respectful word choice when writing about our work outside our

borders. Photographer, writer, curator, and activist

[Shahidul](#)

[Alam](#)

suggests that instead of the “developing,” “Southern,” or “low income countries,” we call it what it truly reflects—the reality experienced by the majority of the world’s population. Click

[here](#)

to consider his rationale.

6. For those who work with youth—

Hey young people: don’t apologize for being smart. [Aiden Dwyer](#) (13-years-wise) reminded us of the power of youth and how they can move the world with their ideas—or in his case, design more efficient solar power. Yes, he is a junior high student with Venture Capitalists trying to “friend” him on Facebook. See his solar innovation

[here](#)

7. For those who manage foreign exchange risk—

Consider alternative currencies: [Bernard Lietaer](#) explains how we might reduce economic instability and liquidity crises by setting up alternative currencies, such as our frequent flyer miles. Learn more [here](#) about successful initiatives of new currencies, such as the Lithuanian Doraland Economy, the Torekes in Belgium, and Switzerland’s famous alternative currency, the WIR.

8. For those who seek real, new solutions instead of tweaking others; copying and pasting—

Build from scratch: Designer [Thomas Thwaites](#) can relate what it’s like to produce a product from scratch. His story of reverse engineering a \$7 toaster is relevant to those of us who design products and services for people whose lives are very different than ours as well as senior managers who aim to develop sustainable strategies that yield measurable and sustainable change. Watch how he made plastic from potatoes and what type of patience and tough-thinking is required to understand a value chain, opportunities of economies of scale, and importance of access to resources [here](#) .

9. For those who believe in transitioning from informal systems to formal systems—

Think differently about “System D”: [Robert Neuwirth](#) argues that if the world’s street markets and other unregistered businesses were allied in a single political structure, it would represent the second-largest economy in the world, behind the United States. Listen

[here](#)

to find out to what he refers as “System D” and how it might create opportunities of employment

and access to capital, one umbrella at a time.

10. For those who believe in using the arts for financial education—

Crowd sourcing and gaming can help you do your work better: Professor of Computer Science and Robotics, [Adriane Herman](#) directs research that brings crowd sourcing, games, and advanced simulation techniques together to advance key areas of engineering and medicine. Click [here](#)

to see think about how computer games, simulation, and animation might be useful to your work on educating clients or conducting market research.

11. For those who finance SMEs—

The American dream is alive in India: Despite all the challenges the Indian microfinance industry has faced [Anand Giridharadas](#) presents how access to finance and other changes in India are creating a “me-centric” individualism that breaks the shackles of the class system, which has limited upward mobility. Click [here](#)

to consider his findings.