



Episode 751: Help People Around the World by Going Over the Heads of Governments and Aid Groups

Guest: Gret Glycer

WOODS: Very interested in your story, which I found out about through Twitter –

GLYER: Right.

WOODS: – because I guess somebody was talking to you, and then they just inserted my Twitter handle or whatever in the tweet, and then before you know it we were exchanging contact information, and here you are. So one isolated tweet. You never know where life's going to take you.

GLYER: That's right.

WOODS: You have an extremely interesting app that you've developed, and that was the primary reason I wanted to have you on, but I have a funny feeling that this app is not exactly a million miles removed from other details of your life, if we may put it that way, from other things that you've been up to in your life. I rather suspect it evolved out of that. That's just my wild guess. I didn't go over with you all the details of your life before we went on, because I thought that would take all the fun out of it. I want to talk to you as somebody who's just getting to know you, and I want to ask the kind of questions that somebody who's getting to know you over coffee might ask.

So first of all, you graduated from Grove City College, which is one of my favorite colleges in the country. I've had Shawn Ritenour and Jeff Herbener on as guests. I've heard that you had Shawn Ritenour as an economics professor. That's awesome to me. That's tremendous. But after you graduated from Grove City, apparently you did something that most people don't do. And what was that?

GLYER: Okay, well, the first year after I graduated, I actually started working at Enterprise Rent-a-Car immediately. And I did that for a year, and the whole 9-to-5, customer service, management-track job wasn't for me, so after a year I quit, and I moved to Malawi, Africa.

WOODS: Now, that is a little bit of an unusual choice. Why Africa, and why Malawi in particular?

GLYER: So I don't know why Africa; I always had this just gut feeling that Africa was the place that I wanted to go. Maybe it just felt like that was where most of the work needed to be done or most of the help was needed, so I guess that could have been it. All I knew was that I'd spent a year of my life working in a job where I felt like I was basically working for a paycheck, and I wanted to do something more meaningful, so I thought if I move to Africa maybe I'll have a chance to do that. So yeah, I moved to Malawi, and I moved over there at first to be a teacher.

WOODS: Tell me what it was like to adapt to life in Malawi. People say to me – I moved from New York to Alabama, and people said, boy, that must have been an adjustment. I don't think it was as much of an adjustment as you had.

GLYER: So yeah, on the one hand, you know, it's a third-world country. In 2015 it was the poorest country in the world by GDP. So there is that aspect of that. On the other hand, though, when I moved over there it was actually pretty nice. I was living on the campus with a pool, and we had really nice academic buildings and soccer fields and all this other stuff. So that kind of gave more of a first-world feeling than you would probably expect. So I had a nice life for about two or three months, and then a good friend of mine, Blessings, who I had gotten to know, he took me out to a village, and that was when I really saw what real poverty is, like extreme poverty where people are living on 50 cents a day or less.

WOODS: So when then did you do? And you stayed – well, how long has it been? How old were you when you got there, and how old are you now?

GLYER: Well, let's see. I must have been 23 when I got there, and I'm 26 now. So I've been there for three years.

WOODS: Okay, and you're talking to me right now from the United States, but are you planning to go back?

GLYER: I'm planning – yeah, that kind of factors into the whole app thing that we'll get to later on –

WOODS: Okay.

GLYER: – but I've lived there for three years, and I've started a ministry over there, and now I'm working on this app. And I'm pretty much willing to live wherever I need to live to make the app a huge success, so that's what I'm working on right now.

WOODS: Okay, I definitely want to get to the app. I'm thinking about, I had a friend in college who lived in Egypt. You know, Egypt is obviously wealthier than Malawi, but he said, you know, the thing that you don't realize about the US – this was back around 1990 – he said is that for all the complaining that we do here, he says the country basically works. You pick up the phone; you get a dial tone. This was 1990, after all.

GLYER: Right.

WOODS: But you know, you turn on things, they turn on. You turn the light on; the electricity is working. He says with Egypt, it's kind of a roll of the dice. You don't really know what to expect, whether basic things are going to work. What was it like in Malawi? I mean, for example, if somebody mails you something, do you get it?

GLYER: If I do get it, it'll come weeks or months later. I think some of the most concerning stuff would be things that would be considered typical government institutions in America. So like, if I were to go to the government hospital, I could be waiting in line for 24 hours to three days or even longer, and then once I do get seen by a doctor there's no guarantee that they have medicine. If I want to call the cops and report a burglary – or this has actually happened. If I call the cops in the middle of a burglary and I say, hey, someone is trying to rob me right now, they will respond by saying, okay, we'd love to help, just come pick us up.

WOODS: Oh.

GLYER: Yeah, for all of the complaining that we do in America, it's a place – you know, the other day I was walking my dog, and it got really wild and actually fell down a storm drain, and we had an ambulance, a fire truck, and a police car all come to come help my dog out of this storm drain. That's not exactly what would happen in Malawi in the same situation.

WOODS: Now, I don't want to make any assumptions about your views, but it's particular kinds of people who go to Grove City College. They know what to expect; they know the sorts of ideas they're likely to encounter there. And I'm wondering if you would be the sort of person who has more or less the same ideas that the economics department of Grove City College has, and if so, how did that affect the way that you looked at what you were observing in Malawi?

GLYER: Yeah, so I do lean towards libertarianism, and living in Malawi can definitely help reinforce that. In 2013, which was my first year there, there was a huge government scandal that you can go online and look up. It was called Cashgate, and basically a bunch of money that was supposed to go to hospitals to save people's lives or to rural areas to get people food that they wouldn't otherwise have, a bunch of that money was actually being siphoned and just given to government officials so that they could pocket it and use it for themselves. And it turned out that billions and billions of Kwacha was being stolen from just poor people. It was a horrific thing to find out. So yeah, I am of the opinion that less government does lead to economic freedom. But you don't; it's definitely complicated. We have a very – like, America is very prosperous, but it's also a very educated nation. Malawi isn't nearly as educated, so you would think – there are certain things that I think could be done to help out that situation.

WOODS: Describe for us what you observe there. I mean, when you say you went to this village and you saw absolute extreme poverty the likes of which probably nobody listening to this program has ever seen –

GLYER: Yeah.

WOODS: – what do you mean? What's the flesh and blood reality of that?

GLYER: So I'll tell you the story of the very first time I went out to a village. My friend Blessings, he picked me up in a truck and we drove 30 minutes down an asphalt road and then another 20 minutes down this dirt road. And we got out of the truck, and as soon as we got out there's this big, like, chief-like figure that comes out. He comes, and he shakes my hand, and we exchange greetings to one another. And then Blessings starts walking me through the heart of this village, and I'm seeing – it's like grass-thatch huts. The houses are just dirt floors. There's naked kids playing on the ground with just dirt. And people are making their food on fire, like an actual fire that they built with sticks and stuff. That's their kitchen. And I'm walking through this village and I'm following Blessings, and I don't know exactly why he brought me out there, but I said, hey, if you ever need any help, let me know.

So we're walking through this village, and off in the distance I see this old lady, super, super old, and she's got this stick next to her, and she uses it to lift herself up. And she starts hobbling towards Blessings and I. So she's hobbling towards us; Blessings and I are walking towards her, and as soon as we meet she falls to her knees and she puts her hand out for a handshake. And so I shake her hand, and Blessings told me that this particular lady had not eaten in a week. And she looked like it. She was skin and bones. She just looked really, really frail. She was 70 years old at the time. And Blessings also told me that she didn't have a house. She was homeless. And that was the very first time I was exposed to anything like that in my life. And it's one thing to see pictures of it or videos or whatever. It's a whole other thing to have it right there in front of you. Yeah, it makes you ask a lot of questions.

WOODS: Yeah, no doubt. I want to talk about – you developed an app, and that was what got me interested in talking to you. I hadn't been familiar with what you were doing, but this app helps to – I mean, when I looked at this app, I thought this to me is what this new technology that we're experiencing really does make possible. I mean, this is kind of almost what it's there for –

GLYER: Yeah.

WOODS: – when I saw what you had done with it. So I want you to tell us about that as soon as we thank our sponsor.

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All right, what's the name of your app, and what does it do?

GLYER: The name of the app is called DonorSee, and the basic idea is that it helps people who want to give money see exactly how their money is spent. So if you give money to help a girl get hearing aids, you should get a video back for your donation of that girl hearing for the first time. Or if you donate to someone building a house, someone who needs a house like that lady Rosina I talked about before the break, you should get to see the actual house that you helped build. That's the whole concept behind the app. And the way that we do that is through – it's a peer-to-peer, send-money-directly-out-to-the-field app. So there are these missionaries and aid workers

and Peace Corps workers like myself who are living all over the planet, all over Africa, South America, Asia, all over the world, and for the most part they all have iPhones. Some of them have Androids, but in my experience people just have iPhones out there. It's like the best way to keep in touch with people. And so me as a missionary out in Malawi, Africa, I take a picture of a lady like Rosina who needs a house, and I say, hey, friends and family back at home, she needs \$800 to build her her new house; would you consider donating. And so my friends and family, they donate through the app, and then we use the funds to build the house, and then after the house is built I take pictures and videos and I send all of those back through the app to the people who donated.

WOODS: So this is really something else. This is a matter of — I mean, this is a matter of here's a specific need, I want to contribute not to the general fund, but I want to contribute to that specific need. In fact, there is a charity — I don't want to single them out because I think they're doing good work. There's an organization that I've donated to where they'll say, you know, for \$50 you can provide a family with blah blah blah. But then they say, now, that doesn't mean that if you send us \$50 a family is going to get blah blah blah. But in your case, that is exactly what it means.

GLYER: Yeah, exactly. We're calling it the most direct way you could possibly ever give. Money goes straight from your pocket to the people who need it.

WOODS: How is that possible? Do you have to have — it seems like you would have to have a global infrastructure to dole out the money everywhere.

GLYER: Not really. There's literally just aid workers and Peace Corps workers and missionaries living all over the world, and they're the ones who are doing the fundraising.

WOODS: I get it, okay.

GLYER: So they're using their friends and family to fundraise for these things. And the app is live right now, but next week we're adding a Staff Picks section, which will be projects that we personally have vetted and recommend, that we think are best for society. So people who don't necessarily know a missionary or an aid worker living overseas but they still want to give directly will be able to go through the Staff Picks feed and give to those projects and know that their money is going to the right places.

WOODS: That's smart; that's smart. So how recently did this launch?

GLYER: A week ago. Last Monday.

WOODS: Okay, so it's super, super new. Are you working through any bugs?

GLYER: We spent about six months making and testing this thing, so there are a few bugs that come up here and there, but we had five developers working on it; we had a very professional team. And yeah, it's pretty much good to go. We have a very solid app in the App Store right now. You can go to DonorSee.com and use the web platform as well. So yeah, it works great, actually.

WOODS: How did you raise the money for this?

GLYER: It was a venture capital — I raised it through venture capital. So I raised \$150,000 through some venture capitalists in exchange for some equity, and I pitched it to them as we're going to revolutionize what it means to give online. And yeah, they got very excited about it, and that's what we did.

WOODS: So this is — this goes completely around governments. This is just individuals helping other individuals.

GLYER: It goes around governments and even organizations. I mean, when you give to any — I'm not going to specify any particular charity, but when you give to a charity you're giving to a CEO and an accountant and a bunch of other people. And then the rest of it goes out to the field, and most of the time the most you can hope for is a "thank you" email. And in our case what we're trying to do is just, hey, you've got a credit card; there are people out in the field who need that money; let's just get it straight there, and we'll facilitate it through these missionaries or aid workers to make sure it's being handled properly.

WOODS: How are aid workers — I mean, I would think aid workers everywhere would love this thing. How are they going to find out about it?

GLYER: Through things like this podcast. I'm really well connected out there, and one of the things you realize once you get overseas is if you're living overseas, you find all the other people who are also living overseas. So it's spreading through word of mouth pretty quick.

WOODS: What would you say — okay, you've only been running it about a week. Can you tell me, if I were to — I don't have the app right now, but if I were to look through it right now, how many projects would I find, roughly?

GLYER: So since we launched, as of today I think we've had over 40 to 50 projects launch, but almost all of them are funded, because we had this super successful launch. So you can go through; there's a handful of projects that you can still give to, but most of them are funded because we had this really successful launch.

WOODS: Yeah, sure.

GLYER: We've had several thousand dollars go through the app already. Like there's a boy named Whyson who got a wheelchair through the app — there's just all these stories that have already happened just a week after launch, so we're pretty excited for how well it's gone.

WOODS: Do you have a website for the app, or do people just go right to the App Store or something?

GLYER: Yeah, so we call it an app just because we want people — the whole idea is I want people to feel the instantaneous response. So this boy Whyson got a wheelchair; the missionary took a picture of Whyson and sent that picture to all the donors, and

they all got a notification on their phones saying here's a picture of Whyson with a wheelchair. And I love how instant that is. The picture was taken; a few seconds later all the donors got to see it. But at the same time, there is a web platform; it's just DonorSee.com, and it works the same exact way. I just like it when people download the app, because then it's that instantaneous feedback on the money that they're spending. That's what I really want people to appreciate. But yeah, if you don't have a smartphone you can just go to DonorSee.com, and you can give through there either way.

WOODS: So is this something that you envision entirely being used by aid workers in the developing world, or could it be – is there any necessary limit to what could be done here? Could there be some project in a poor town in Italy, or is that just ruled out by the nature of the program?

GLYER: Yeah, my actual goal for the app – and we'll link to the video. My goal for the app is to get one funded need in every country on the planet by the end of this year, 2016.

WOODS: Wow, that's quite a goal. We've only got a few months left to go this year.

GLYER: Yeah, we launched a week ago. We're in five countries right now, but I'm set on that. I'm going to do everything in my – I'll do everything I can to make sure – to do my best to make that happen.

WOODS: Wow, that is something else.

GLYER: And my team is very committed to that. Yeah.

WOODS: It's going to be tricky to get Liechtenstein, and I don't know if you're counting –

GLYER: (laughing) Yeah.

WOODS: – I don't know if you're counting the Vatican or not, but okay (laughing).

GLYER: I mean, we are. It's on the list. There's 198 countries on the list that we've created. So yeah, I mean, there's people living all over the world; there's people with smartphones all over the world. I know this is a surprising statistic: 42% of the world has a smartphone right now, and if you're dealing with a missionary or aid worker, there's almost 100% chance that if they're living in a foreign country they have a smartphone. So it's ambitious, but it's definitely doable.

WOODS: You know, I think I'm of two minds on these kinds of things. Part of me, I feel like I like to be connected in my local community, and I look around my local community and I say here's a need and I try to meet that need and I feel satisfaction that I'm part of the community and I've made my contribution. But at the same time, I am part of the human race too, and there are people I'm never going to meet and I won't know, but once in a while why not lend a hand. I mean, I'd be grateful if somebody lent me a hand from time to time, and the prospect of being able to

evaluate different ways that my money could be spent, looking for the one that I consider to be the most urgent, and then getting a notification instantaneously when that need is met, seeing a photo of the need being met, I mean, for me it's really breathtaking even to contemplate this.

GLYER: Yeah, I also think I want to add on top of what you've said, that helping locally, that might be the main way that it's most useful for you to help. At the same time, as people who live in the United States, we're just unbelievably more wealthy and privileged than a huge – like, over half of the world. Easily. You've got these people living on so much less. So for very small amounts of money – you know, the wheel chair that we bought that boy, I think it was \$150, and you can help someone get a house for, like, \$800. Like, a house. It's almost unfathomable to understand how much of an impact small amounts of money make, because the money feels small to us, but it's a really big deal to the recipients, and I hope that this app facilitates people being able to understand and appreciate that in a way that they haven't been able to do before.

WOODS: Now, I've never lived abroad. I've visited a few countries, but I've never lived anywhere other than the United States, and I certainly haven't spent any time – I haven't spent any time in Africa at all, so I can't even – I have no idea what your lifestyle is like. I am curious about, do you keep in touch with people back in the States, or is this not feasible? Do you have good enough Internet to use Skype? I don't even know.

GLYER: (laughing) Yeah, so basically when I first went to Malawi, I had never been to the country before. I made the decision super quick and just hopped on a plane a month after finding out about the opportunity. And I remember getting on the plane, thinking, like, wow, I just took my last hot shower this morning; this is crazy. And then I got to Malawi, and I got to my house, and I had hot water, and I had Wi-Fi and all this other really nice stuff I didn't think I was going to have because I was in a third-world country. So yeah, I actually, when I'm in a village I can get on my iPhone and I can Skype my mom. I can FaceTime my mom so she sees my face, and I can give her a tour of the village, and she can see everything, because there's actually a really robust 3G network, because they never had to build the wire network before it.

WOODS: Tell me what am I leaving out in this story that you want to say that I haven't let you say, because I think somebody who develops an app like this deserves to be able to say whatever he wants. So go ahead.

GLYER: (laughing) That's very kind. I guess – so that lady Rosina who I talked about in the beginning, she needed \$800 to build a house, one of the things that I learned from that – what we did is I made a video, and we raised money to build her a house for \$800. Then we took pictures of it, and I sent all of that stuff back to the donors. So this was three years ago, and when I sent that back to the donors, they loved it so much that they kept sending more money to build more houses, and I had to go, like, find more people that needed houses at that point. And then after a while, we built an organization around that, and most recently we built a girls' school using a very sustainable model. The people who are listening to this, some of them might have questions about sustainability, and there's books like *When Helping Hurts* and stuff like

that. All of that stuff is addressed on our website if they want to read more about that.

But yeah, so this whole process, this whole app, what's led up to this, it all has come from me spending the last three years running an organization. Like, I've literally run a charity for the last three years, and I've realized there's a lot of donor frustration out there, or just really low expectations that people have, and I'm trying to create a way for people to – I want people to be excited when they give money. I want people to feel like their money is making an impact, because it really does. Like, I'm on the other end of the world facilitating where the money goes, and I see how it completely transforms lives. But I'm also in America, and I see how people just don't get it. They don't get that 10 bucks can save a person's life. It's impossible to really understand that, and so I've created this app to make it as easy as possible for people to feel like their money, the gifts that they make, make a real, tangible impact in people's lives.

WOODS: All right, here's a question: who is allowed to post projects? Does it have to be an aid person? Can it be the person who needs the thing? Who does it?

GLYER: So right now the app – anyone can post, but you need either an American bank account or maybe a bank account in Europe or something. We're using Stripe to facilitate all of the credit card transactions. So yeah, anyone can post, and some people might ask, okay, how do you prevent abuse on the app, how do you prevent someone from posting a picture of a needy boy – you know, it's just a picture –

WOODS: Right, they got it off Google Images, right.

GLYER: Right, so my response to that is it works the same way Kickstarter or Go Fund Me works. Some random guy can post a picture of a poor kid that he found online, but that guy can't raise any money for it, because he doesn't have an existing donor network. But all of the missionaries and the aid workers and the Peace Corps workers who are using the app to raise money, they have this existing network, because they need it to survive over there. So the people who are already raising money, they can be trusted, because they have a trusted base of people who know that they're going to use their money well. And you can also look at past projects and stuff like that. So I have something like 10 projects that I've funded through the app, and you can look at how I've facilitated it in the past, you can look at the pictures I've done as follow-ups, and you can say, okay, well, this is how Gret's behaved in the past, so this is probably how he's going to behave in the future. And then like I said, we also have the Staff Picks section that's coming in a week or so to help those people who don't missionaries and aid workers living overseas.

WOODS: Well, this is really – you know, I keep thinking about this, how similar in a way this app is to so many other things that the Internet has revolutionized, in that it goes over the heads or around all the established institutions. It's like musicians who can make music without getting a record contract, or authors who can publish books without ever having to talk to a publisher. People who can just – or bitcoin or just one thing after another without any central clearing house, yet somehow great things happen, and they happen reliably, and there are networks of trust built in. Of course as more of these projects get funded, there's more trust built up; there are more people who are submitting these projects who have a track record of successful

completion and who are reliable that people can have even more confidence in the future. You really are part of a transformation. I mean, you're part of a historic moment in world history. I mean, do you sometimes – in other words, have you sat and appreciated that, that you're part of this – ?

GLYER: (laughing)

WOODS: I mean, it must be hard not to get a big head with something like this. I mean, this is I think one of the most amazing things I've talked about on the show.

GLYER: Yeah, that's really, really kind of you to say. I have huge dreams and aspirations for the impact that this can make on the world. At the same time, since we launched a week ago I've been out of my mind busy, because it's been – I've had this kind of reception from most of the people I've talked to. So yeah, I'm super grateful, super happy, but at the same time I'm head-down, trying to make this thing – you know, I'm trying to do everything I can to be a good steward of the success that we've had so far and try and continue that along in any way possible. So yeah, thank you very much; I appreciate that.

WOODS: Well, I of course want people to check out DonorSee.com. I'm going to link to it at TomWoods.com/751. This is Episode 751, so TomWoods.com/751. We'll have the link there. I'll also link to your Twitter so people can tweet out to you how much they're thrilled about what you're doing.

GLYER: (laughing) Cool.

WOODS: And tell me what else – is there anything else you'd like linked to or people to go visit?

GLYER: Well, we can include the video that kind of lays out my goal to get every country in the world on board with this app by the end of this year, 2016, because I think a lot of your listeners probably know people overseas that might be interested in using the app, and the video's a really easy thing that they can share with those people living overseas.

WOODS: Absolutely. In fact, about 17% of my listeners are overseas.

GLYER: Oh, no way. Perfect.

WOODS: Yeah, so this will be great.

GLYER: And –

WOODS: Okay. Oh, go ahead.

GLYER: I was just going to say, if anyone wants to reach out to me personally, feel free. This is my full-time job. I want to – this is my baby, my dream, so please just feel free to reach out to me directly. I'd be happy to chat about anything DonorSee-related.

WOODS: And tell me again – I'll put it on the show notes page, but tell us your Twitter name.

GLYER: Yeah, it's @GretGlyer.

WOODS: Okay, so that's the benefit of having an unusual name: no one else on Twitter has taken it.

GLYER: (laughing) Definitely.

WOODS: You can just grab it.

GLYER: Exactly, yeah.

WOODS: So GretGlyer.com, also linking to that on the show notes page. All right, well, best of luck. I'd be interested to hear some time down the road how it continues to go.

GLYER: Thank you so much. I appreciate that.