A
mi Dar stood on stage at the 12th Annual CT Nonprofit Conference and challenged the audience to come together to do more and solve problems on a larger scale.

“Why is it that there are hungry people in the streets? We have so much. Technology, ideas, good will, and yet (we) wake up and look at the news and things do not look good. We need to look again at all we have and ask, ‘Is this all we can do?’ No. Of course we can do more,” said Dar.

Not just looking to inspire the nonprofit sector workers present at the conference, Dar wanted tangible results. He wanted to build a coalition right there in the room and he spent his time on stage convincing the audience that they can do more. Not surprising for the founder and executive director of Idealist, who grew the company from a $3,500 start up in 1996 to the valuable nonprofit resource it has become, with information provided by over 70,000 organizations and over 100,000 daily visitors.

One of the most important steps towards accomplishing more, according to Dar, is to stop dwelling on organizational differences and operational competitiveness that splinter us and to start focusing on our commonalities and the goal of strengthening the nonprofit sector as a whole.

“Our biggest obsession is the work we do. We spend so much time focusing on getting the funding, publicity and resources to make our slice of the pie bigger,” said Dar. “It’s so important that we take a step back and instead see how we can make the whole pie bigger.”

For Dar, common goals and shared values are what hold people together and empower them to do more. As he looked out at the crowd he implored them to focus on these shared goals, values and passions, and to realize the power that comes along with a united and highly functioning social sector.
“We are many. We all have personal causes and we value our independence, but we need that shared goal,” said Dar. “I look around this room and I know everyone here cares and wants a better Connecticut and world. That’s our common goal. We can do this. We have much more in common than we think. We all oppose violence. We all believe no one should go after someone based on who they are. None of us presume that we should take action without involving community stakeholders. These are some of the basic values that unite us.”

He discussed the possibilities of what can be accomplished when people are united to focus on a common goal. He used the example of a farmers’ market to demonstrate his point, highlighting the fact that by coming together to create one large, collaborative marketplace that benefits the entire industry, farmers are also able to further their own individual goals.

“Farmers at the markets are all fiercely independent and they all sell different things, but they have one common goal, which is to sell more vegetables. We can use this model to benefit everyone,” said Dar.

Another key component of creating a highly functioning nonprofit sector and a better world is to encourage others to get involved. Nonprofits cannot do it all alone. Organizations need to reach out and empower community members and stakeholders to get organized and take action.

This goal can be difficult, as engagement is a struggle for many nonprofits. However, he used the attendees in the room to illustrate the point that people at their core really do want to help. Rattling off several different causes and asking the crowd to raise their hands if a stated cause was important to them, within minutes Dar was looking out at a sea of raised hands, demonstrating the willingness of people to become involved. He then shifted to the real issues that keep people disengaged and create gaps between intentions and actions.

“See, most people want to help. They want to take action, but they don’t know how to go about getting involved. We have all these helpful people and great ideas, but we are not building together. We must find a way to reach out and bridge the gap,” said Dar.

One way to combat the action gap is to galvanize stakeholders and community members on a person to person level. We have to reach out to people in order to excite them about becoming involved and encourage them to turn their positive intentions into action.

“To close the gap we need to invite people to imagine, connect and act. We need to focus on the values that unite us,” said Dar, harkening back to the major theme of the address.
Another way to close the gap is to utilize all the tools we have, specifically emerging technologies. Dar explained that the ingrained idealism in people can remain dormant because they simply do not know how to become involved. Aside from person to person encouragement and direction, technology can be a giant galvanizing force for good, directing people to opportunities to get involved and turning their intentions into action with great ease.

"Imagine if we knew all of the people in the world who wanted to raise their hands up and get involved. With technology we can find these people and work with them to solve big problems. We can gather that information and we can see who around us is willing to help. Technology can organize us," said Dar.

Technology has undoubtedly made it much easier for people to become involved in charitable work. However, Dar did not stop at just presenting new technology as a big idea answer for each nonprofit organization to utilize. Instead, much in keeping with his personal style, he presented a concrete idea to bring all organizations together in the virtual world, suggesting that Idealist.org become the main online hub for engagement and involvement for organizations and individuals alike.

The concept of Idealist as the main nonprofit virtual hub is still taking shape, but Dar mentioned the possibility of using apps and other online tools to organize and make volunteer opportunities easily available to people, allowing them to begin acting on their intentions with only a few keystrokes.

"Then when we read the news and see how bad things are we will have the option to take immediate action. We will be able to find anything. We will be able to come together because of our shared values to make an infinitely more positive world." Ami Dar then exited the stage, leaving in his wake a buzz of excitement and optimism about the future of collaboration and engagement. Not only was the crowd able to walk away from the conference with a large dose of inspiration, but also with the seed of a large scale plan to come together as a movement and bridge the gap between intention and action.

“Idealism is the value that bonds and unites us. We need to put the call out to other idealists to give them the chance to raise their hands and become involved.”