



*Dr Edwin Trevor-Roberts*

## **MY TED<sup>x</sup>UQ EXPERIENCE**

Edwin Trevor-Roberts is a thought leader and author in the field of career development, with a vision for a world of work that provides motivation and meaning into people's lives. He is the Chief Executive Officer of his own company Trevor-Roberts, offering specialised career, leadership and team-oriented services across Australia.





For many people, giving a TED talk is on their professional bucket list. There are lots of books about how to craft the best TED talk but what's the experience like? We speak with CDAA professional Dr Edwin Trevor-Roberts on his experience of giving a TED talk earlier this year.

### Why give a TED talk in the first place?

Giving a TED talk has been on my bucket list for a long time, but I only got serious about pursuing it three years ago. When I did, the first question I had to ask myself was "Why do I want to give a TED talk?"

There are thousands of TED talks available, so what was my purpose? What was my rationale for going through a long process of securing, designing and delivering a TED talk? I used the TED tagline of 'ideas worth spreading' as my litmus test to ensure that my idea was, in fact, worth spreading.

I quickly realised that a TED talk is not an opportunity for ego-boosting, nor is it an opportunity to sell anything, because the organisers will quickly see through these veneers. The very ethos of the TED movement is closely aligned to one of my core values of abundance, that is, the more we give, the more we receive back... often in mysterious ways.

It was almost two years before I was able to clearly articulate an idea that I thought was worth spreading. It emerged slowly from my day-to-day work, not as an epiphany that struck me via a bolt of inspiration in the shower one day.

The hardest thing at this stage was testing whether my idea was one worth pursuing, or whether it was something people already knew. This stage was filled with doubt and uncertainty, until I had the courage to write down my idea.

It was then that I realised that the power of my idea was in its simplicity. My simple idea was based on an

ambitious quest to try and change the dominant narrative about work from something negative to something positive. This is what the career profession is all about; helping to provide hope, optimism and pragmatic strategies for people to lead a life well lived.

### Choosing a TED event

The next challenge was to find a TED event at which I could speak. TEDx events are independently organised and run by an individual or a group of individuals. The license is freely given by TEDGlobal, however the organisers abide by very strict guidelines around the selection and training of speakers, and how the event itself proceeds.

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The first time I applied for a TED talk was for TEDxUQ, a student-run event at the University of Queensland. I was very excited the first time I filled in the rather detailed application and I tailored the response to the organising theme. To be honest I was quietly confident

this was an idea worth spreading.

So, much to my chagrin, two months after submitting the application I was rejected by just a short email. I was heartened by the fact that my application was at least reviewed, and that the key reason it was rejected was because it didn't meet the theme sufficiently for that particular event. This was a great learning curve for me, and I started looking around for other TEDx events, trying to find where my idea would fit.

It was the theme of the next year's TEDxUQ that was the perfect fit. The theme of "I am [ ]", was rather abstract, but one which spoke perfectly to my idea around identity, and the importance of work in how we construct a sense of self.

With much anticipation, I resubmitted the extensive application and was delighted when I was invited to the next stage of the application process – a panel interview with the organising committee.

The interview felt like a TED Talk itself as I only had 20 minutes to convince them that not only was my idea worth spreading, but that I was also capable of speaking in front of an audience.

I don't think I have been that nervous for an interview for a very long time. When asked to describe my idea worth spreading, I responded with a shortened version of my TED talk. While it wasn't fully crafted, it at least included the key elements and stories that I wanted to share.

Fortunately, this was well received, and I was selected as one of the nine speakers for the one-day TEDx UQ event on the 27th of July, 2018.

### The long journey begins

I completely underestimated the amount of work and time that was required to deliver a TED talk. After all, if I was only going to talk for 13 minutes, how hard could it be?



As the event was eight months away, I was surprised that immediately after being accepted, I was appointed a speaking coach. I've had the privilege of speaking at many events and have delivered over one thousand hours of keynote presentations and workshops, so I was reasonably confident in my ability to speak in front of the audience. However, my coach quickly, and quite gently, let me know that I had never done a TED talk before and this was a whole new genre.

I was surprised again when by the end of January, still six months from the event, I had to submit a verbatim script of my speech. My typical approach to speeches is to create a mind map, and have a general idea of what I want to talk about. However, with a short video recorded TED talk there is no margin for error or tangential flights of fancy.

The first draft was reviewed by my coach and sent back for further rework. The resulting second draft was certainly an improvement. The second draft went to the organising committee, which made some more suggestions, then came back to me for further changes. By the time the third and final draft was accepted, it had taken three months to finalise the talk itself.

Next came the PowerPoint slides. I did want to use a few, and fortunately mine weren't too complicated. They still went through three rounds of drafts, changing with each until the point of final approval.

The final event was now two months away and I was starting to get nervous. It slowly dawned on me that I had to memorise a 13-minute speech, with only one shot to deliver it perfectly without notes, without any prompting on the computer in front of me, without memory devices at all.

My nervousness peaked at the first informal practice on the stage. I was allowed to hold my notes in my hand, which was fortunate as I did have to refer to them several

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times. Finding out that some of the other presenters hadn't done any memorising yet, and had to read the whole script, put my mind slightly at ease and I started to feel that I could memorise my talk without a mistake.

This informal practice was followed by a full dress rehearsal, and on a separate day, a technical briefing before the event itself. Throughout this process the TEDxUQ team were incredibly supportive, helpful and encouraging.

### **The Day**

The organising committee curated the day so that there was a flow of speakers and ideas to keep the audience interested. As a result of that work, I drew the graveyard shift - the dreaded session after lunch. I was to be the second of three speakers between lunch and afternoon tea.

I don't remember much about that morning. I mostly remember pacing around in the corner of the room practicing my speech. Knowing

that I knew it, but still doubting myself all the same.

We were able to watch the other speakers on the large TVs placed around the room. Once they had given their talk, they would walk back in elated, and relieved that it was over. I admit that I was jealous that they were having this feeling... it wasn't anywhere near lunchtime yet.

About 20 minutes before I was due to go on stage, I was taken to the ante room right next to the auditorium. While I waited nervously and in silence as the speaker before me finished her talk, time didn't slow down. I actually think it stopped.

Next thing I knew the MC was back on the stage introducing me. I walked on and saw the infamous red circle of carpet on the middle of the stage. As soon as I stood on that red dot, looked at the audience and got my first sentence out, I knew it was going to be ok. There was more laughter on my first joke than I was expecting which was a heartening moment indeed!

### **The Wrap**

I learned many things from doing the TED talk. While intensely uncomfortable, I was reminded how important it is that we step out of our comfort zone in our professional life. It is during these experiences that we grow and develop as individuals.

The experience also taught me to be more precise with my use of language. As an extrovert, that was probably a lesson worth learning.

It is my fervent hope that, through this very short video with such a simple idea, there are at least a few people in the world who watch it and are inspired to take action, change their mindset and start the journey of crafting a more meaningful working life. The power of the TED platform is that it allows our ideas to reach so many people.