

Tim Urban - Topics

Topics are listed in order of popularity

What's Our Problem

In 2016, Tim Urban looked out at American society and knew something was off. Political tribalism was on the rise, anger was overflowing on social media, and productive discussions seemed impossible. Tim spent the next six years taking a deep-dive journey to explore the most pressing issues facing society. In *What's Our Problem?*, his bestselling book published in February 2023, Tim shares the many answers he discovered.

In this talk, Tim zooms out on the American landscape, explaining how rapid changes in technology, geography, government, and media have had unforeseen consequences. Tim believes that our political thinking and conversations are constrained by the lens we use: the “horizontal” left-center-right political axis. He introduces the audience to a new way to visualize politics, using the core tool in his bestselling book: a vertical axis that can add a critical element of nuance into the picture. Tim trades the polarizing political “left” and “right” for two new, incredibly useful terms: “high-rung politics” and “low-rung politics.” As we move from high to low, nuanced spectrums simplify to rigid binaries; rich discussion gives way to conformity and groupthink; common-humanity activism becomes common-enemy activism. In short, our problem is that low-rung politics is spreading and high-rung politics is fading.

The solution: We need to be more aware of the vertical story—the high rungs and the low rungs—and we need to be more courageous about speaking out for what we value and what we believe. The audience can use this lens to sharpen their own thinking, have better conversations, and ultimately, help set society on a better trajectory.

The AI Revolution and the Road to Superintelligence

Back in 2014, long before Artificial Intelligence became the subject that everyone is talking about, Tim Urban began some serious research. It hit him pretty quickly that what was happening in the world of AI is not just an important topic, but, by far THE most important topic for our future. After three years of diving deeply into the subject and all its future implications, Tim published “The AI Revolution and the Road to Superintelligence,” taking readers on a deep exploration of what AI is, how it works, and why it will dramatically change our lives. Vox dubbed this Tim’s “epic series on artificial intelligence”

Instantly, Tim established himself as the ultimate explainer of AI to a wide range of audiences—including Silicon Valley thought leaders. Elon Musk shared “The AI Revolution” twice on Twitter, commenting, “Excellent and funny intro article about Artificial Superintelligence! Highly recommend reading.” Tim soon turned his fascinating exploration of AI into a gripping talk—one in which the head of Sweden’s Øredev conference called it “the best keynote in years.” After experiencing the same talk at Social Media Week in New York, conference founder Toby Daniels wrote that Urban “was brilliant, inspiring and terrifying at the same time, and left most of

us speechless, breathless and in a mixed emotional state of wonder and awe at what the future holds.”

As AI races into nearly every industry, every company, and every part of our lives, Tim Urban remains the ultimate (and frequently entertaining) explainer of the most transformational shift in the way we live, work, and evolve as a society.

Procrastination: Overcoming the Greatest Barrier to Success

Procrastination is widely acknowledged as one of the top hindrances to success, growth, and confidence in oneself. Tips on how to stop procrastinating are plentiful and can be found easily, but implementing them without understanding “why” we procrastinate leads to short-term success and long-term hopelessness. In this hilarious, mind-tugging, and optimistically practical talk, Tim Urban shares why we procrastinate and how to stop. This keynote has enchanted over 65 millions of viewers as the third most-viewed (and ranked as one of the funniest) Ted Talk ever. Urban shares three key reasons we procrastinate, identifying them as “players” that vye for our attention, focus, and time. After establishing a “why,” he shares valuable tools that audiences can use to tackle procrastination in their own lives. The tools range from the Eisenhower Matrix to Urban’s set of six strategies for overcoming short- and long-term procrastination. This keynote is uniquely applicable to individuals and teams and catalyzes change and growth. Audiences walk away with side stitches from laughter and an inspired understanding of the greatest barrier to success.

The Magic of High-Rung Thinking: The Key to Group Superintelligence

Tim Urban’s “Thinking Ladder” and the concept of “High-Rung Thinking” are integral to his most recent book, *What’s Our Problem?: A Self-Help Book for Societies*. But way before the book, his articles on the subject captured the attention of business leaders such as Tobi Lütke, the CEO of Shopify, who believed they held critical lessons for teams and leaders. In fact, Lütke was such a fan of Tim’s ideas that he bound the articles into booklets for his entire company to read.

In a world where we mostly focus on *what* we think, The Thinking Ladder is a *how* you think axis. Up on the high rungs of the Ladder, we’re open-minded and geared towards truth. When we drift down to the low rungs, we begin to identify with our ideas, become reluctant to changing our minds, and learning stalls. The Thinking Ladder is an intuitive tool that fosters innovation and creativity and sparks powerful insights relevant to corporate culture, managing teams, motivation, and customers—along with healing and hopeful insights into the most pressing issues facing society today.

In this mindset-shifting talk, Tim explores how individuals think, how groups think together, and how those two things are connected. Using his trademark drawings, Tim explains the Thinking Ladder and its four types of thinking: “The Scientist” and “The Sports Fan,” who keep their thinking on the high rungs of the ladder; and “The Attorney” and “The Zealot,” who occupy the

lower rungs, susceptible to dogma and stuck in outdated ideas. He explains why “high-rung thinking” is better suited to innovation and teamwork.

He also applies the Thinking Ladder to groups and introduces audiences to two broad kinds of intellectual and workplace culture: The Idea Lab, a “high-rung” culture where disagreement is encouraged, where people are always respected, but ideas are not; and The Echo Chamber, a “low-rung” culture that penalizes departure from the prevailing narratives at the company and incentivizes independent minds to remain silent. While Idea Lab culture unleashes the full intellectual power of a group of minds and gives the company a superbrain, Echo Chamber culture leaves that potential untapped—the company brain is simply the brain of the CEO, widely repeated.

This keynote will immediately impact how you perceive, respond to, and strategize about just about everything. Tim’s inspiring guidance helps people stay on the highest rungs of their own ladder and rethink the way that they think—with transformational results. His frameworks for thinking and collaboration are catchy and memorable, and audiences will be using them years after hearing the talk.

Exponential Advancement: AI and the Wild Implications of Technological Growth on Our Future

If the entirety of human existence could be captured in a 1,000 page book, with each page covering 250 years, almost every incredible technological advancement would exist only on the most recent page—page 1,000. Today, we live in an era of exponential technologies, where things like artificial intelligence, brain-computer interfaces—even becoming a multiplanetary species are proceeding at a head-spinning pace. Some of the biggest innovations and new technologies feel ethereal, though, making it difficult to understand their importance, to perceive their impact on our future, and to harness the product of innovation to our success.

In this enlightening, informative, and often reassuring talk, Tim Urban deploys his talent as one of the world’s best (and most entertaining) science and tech explainers. He makes the ethereal real, explaining the major advances happening right now that promise to shake our world in the near future – with the complexity they deserve and the simpleness that anyone can understand. This talk will excite audiences, leaving them with a comfortable understanding of the exponential advancement of technology and inspiring wonder in the future ahead.

Cyborg: Brain-Computer Interfaces, Communicating Through Thought, and the Amplification of Human Intelligence

There’s a world-changing technology on the horizon that’s almost as unimaginable now as smartphones would have been 100 years ago. Still in its early stages, the Brain-Computer Interface (BCI) industry is working towards a futuristic society in which most humans will have a device safely implanted in their heads, allowing us to communicate via thoughts, control our moods through an app, and amplify human intelligence by letting us “think together.” Yes, you

read that right. Brain implants. In this mind-spinning talk, Tim Urban puts on his futurist hat to look at the potential of this technology as only he can.

Drawing on research gained while reporting on the cutting-edge Silicon Valley company, Neuralink, Tim shares the tantalizing possibilities as new frontiers of communication, collaboration, and creativity are opened up through BCI. He also examines the future vulnerabilities on this slow march toward cyborgdom, such as the implications of “thinking together” and the possibility of having our memories accessed by hackers. With thought-provoking wit, voluminous knowledge, and plenty of his trademark drawings, Tim explains how BCI and intelligence amplification works and the future world that’s coming. It’s an inspiring and entertaining talk about the future that will put you ahead of the knowledge curve today – leaving you amazed and informed about what’s next.

Cooks and Chefs: What It Means to Be a True Original And Think Like an Innovator

When we think of great original thinkers such as Steve Jobs, Albert Einstein, Marie Curie, and others, we wonder why these world-changers were able to see possibilities that others didn’t. Are innovators born with an envious knack for genius? Or, do they work so hard that the new and innovative becomes inevitable? In this fascinating keynote, Tim Urban posits that the answer is “neither.” The world we live in was built by people no smarter and no more hardworking than most of us. The secret to their innovative thinking is their ability to view the world like chefs— experimenting with raw ingredients by reasoning from first principles and forming original ideas, concepts, and approaches that no one had thought of before. Others see the world like cooks, experimenting with raw ingredients while pulling from the recipes, ideas, and best practices of others.

In exploring what it means to be a true innovator, Tim inspires audiences to re-think the way they think about thinking. Affirming that it is entirely within anyone’s power to rise above conventional thinking, be more creative, innovative, solve problems, and think differently, he shares how reasoning from first principles makes it possible. Audiences leave with a fresh and actionable understanding of original thinking that will have them looking at the world in a dynamic new way, bringing new ideas, and unconventional thinking to every aspect of their work and life.

Echo Chambers and Idea Labs: Two Kinds of Intellectual Culture

These days, companies give a great deal of thought to their corporate cultures, but rarely does anyone discuss intellectual culture. Language gives groups of people the amazing capability to join their minds together into a superbrain—one that can do far more than the sum of its parts—but this only happens in the right kind of intellectual culture.

In this talk, based on his viral article, Tim introduces audiences to two broad kinds of intellectual culture:

- The Idea Lab: a culture where disagreement is encouraged; where people are always respected but ideas are not.
- The Echo Chamber: a culture that penalizes departure from the prevailing narratives at the company and incentivizes independent minds to remain “in the closet” about what they really think.

While Idea Lab culture unleashes the full intellectual power of a group of minds and gives the company a superbrain, Echo Chamber culture leaves that potential untapped—the company brain is simply the brain of the CEO, widely repeated.

Company and team leaders set the intellectual culture. Tim's shows that by actively encouraging dissent and debate, and by emphasizing the distinction between people and ideas, leaders can bring the power of superintelligence to their mission.

The Three Trademarks of Next-Level Leadership

We think of creativity, reason, and leadership as innate qualities, but a closer examination reveals that they are skills much more than they're talents. In Tim Urban's incredibly thought provoking talk, inspired by his viral articles and bestselling book on leadership and innovative thinking, Tim shares three frameworks that display how unlocking our potential for leadership, creativity, and problem solving is possible by reframing our thinking.

The first two frameworks, “The Cook and The Chef” and “The Scientist and The Sports Fan”, espouse the incredible way leaders can reframe reasoning and creativity to increase ingenuity and output. The third framework, “Echo Chambers and Idea Labs”, shares how leaders can inspire a culture of intellectualism, innovation, and trust. Audiences will walk away inspired to change their individual approaches to leading themselves and their team approach to collaboration and innovation. By reframing our thinking we unlock a new method of leadership that makes us rethink who can be a leader and what a leader looks like.