

# Impact Through Innovation And Technology

An Interview with Mike Gianoni, President, Chief Executive Officer, and Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors, Blackbaud

**EDITORS' NOTE** *Mike Gianoni (mike-gianoni.com) is the President, Chief Executive Officer and Vice Chairman of the Board of Directors of Blackbaud, the leading provider of software for powering social impact. Gianoni leads efforts to deliver unparalleled innovation and value to social impact organizations and those committed to making the world a better place, focusing on customer-first solutions that offer unequalled quality and speed. Through a career in technology spanning multiple decades, Gianoni's leadership philosophy is marked by a dedication to fostering corporate cultures where employees thrive both personally and professionally. In the community, Gianoni is deeply committed to veterans' initiatives, animal welfare, and other causes. He serves as co-chair of the Generosity Commission, a cross-sector initiative of the Giving Institute and Giving USA Foundation. He serves as chairman of the board for Teradata and is also a board member for the International African American Museum, and on the CEO advisory board for the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC).*



Mike Gianoni

**COMPANY BRIEF** *Blackbaud (blackbaud.com) unleashes the potential of the people and organizations who change the world. As the leading software provider exclusively dedicated to powering social impact, it expands what is possible across the nonprofit and education sectors, at companies committed to social responsibility, and for individual change makers. Built specifically for fundraising, nonprofit financial management, digital giving, grantmaking, corporate social responsibility and education management, Blackbaud's essential software accelerates impact through unmatched expertise and powerful data intelligence.*

## Will you discuss your career journey?

I started my career at an exciting time in tech. Companies like Microsoft and Apple were just starting up, and the possibilities seemed endless. I came from a somewhat non-traditional background, having just completed a two-year engineering degree. I threw myself into the scene and got an early start as an engineer with a few different tech companies before moving more towards product management and later engineering leadership. Throughout my early

years, it was energizing to see how tech and software solutions could be scaled with speed and quality across industries and across the globe. After spending several years in the industry, I decided to go back to school. I got my MBA from the University of New Haven in the early '90s and started working at DST Systems, where I stayed for the next eleven years. At DST, I was responsible for the telecoms, mutual fund, and healthcare divisions. This was my first real experience in corporate management, and

it taught me the importance of teamwork and empathetic, decisive leadership for producing high-quality results. We were at the forefront of a lot of new technology, including much of what powered the back-office operations of the mutual fund industry at the time. I left DST in 2005 for CheckFree, as President of the Investment Services Group, which was subsequently acquired by Fiserv the year after I got there. We provided fintech solutions to brokers, dealers, banks, credit unions, and global asset managers. During my time at Fiserv, I served as Executive Vice President and Group President of the Financial Services group. I was intrigued by the chance to work at Blackbaud when I was approached, and was particularly attracted by the opportunity to use what I'd learned in the tech industry and apply it to such an important field serving the nonprofit and social impact space. I joined as CEO in 2014 and have been here ever since. It's been an incredible ten years.

## How do you describe Blackbaud's mission and purpose?

The core of our mission is simple: we power social impact. We unleash the potential

of the people and organizations who change the world. As the leading software provider exclusively dedicated to powering social impact, we expand what is possible across the nonprofit and education sectors, at companies committed to social responsibility, and for individual change makers. We do this by building products that allow our customers to harness the power of data, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, the latest in online fundraising, and much more.

## Will you provide an overview of Blackbaud's services and solutions?

Millions of people across more than 100 countries connect, give, learn, or engage through Blackbaud platforms. Blackbaud's products are built specifically for social impact organizations, powering everything from fundraising to nonprofit financial management, digital giving, grantmaking, corporate social responsibility and education management. Our essential software accelerates impact through unmatched expertise and powerful data intelligence. Our tools enable social impact organizations to find and identify new donors, raise more funds, streamline operations, and focus more on what really matters: making a concrete difference through their vitally important work.

One of our most well-known products, Blackbaud Raiser's Edge NXT®, is an industry-leading platform built for fundraisers that's proven to help social impact organizations increase the number of donors, gifts, and dollars raised. On average, Raiser's Edge NXT users see a 44 percent increase in total dollars raised. Many fundraising professionals have even built their careers around this platform, becoming certified experts that their organizations rely on.

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As a 40-year leader in the social impact space, we also developed the Blackbaud Institute, a research lab that draws from Blackbaud's robust data set – the most comprehensive in the social impact community – and convenes expert voices to equip the community with knowledge, insight, and confidence, all free of charge.

**What have been the keys to Blackbaud's growth and how do you describe the Blackbaud difference?**

Blackbaud's culture is the driving force behind our growth. Not only do our teams care about innovation and creating the best products possible for our clients, we're also passionate about what those products are used for. Outside of work, many of our people are extensively involved in charitable boards and nonprofit initiatives in their communities. Since we're a remote-first company, we benefit from how ingrained our team members are in different communities across the country and globe. We encourage this type of involvement, and I'm proud that Blackbaud continues to be recognized with honors like being one of *TIME*'s Best Mid-Size Companies of 2024.

This culture of involvement and generosity unites us, and inspires us to design innovative products that transform what's possible for social impact organizations. Combined with our deep industry insights, our culture helps us learn from our partners, integrate flexible and low-code modifications to optimize functionality, and deploy other best practices to help users unleash their full potential.

**Will you elaborate on the role of the Blackbaud Institute, Blackbaud's research lab?**

Our vision when we founded the Blackbaud Institute was simple: we wanted to create a single venue where we could simultaneously explore and create the future of nonprofits, corporate social responsibility, and foundations. The Institute facilitates public research studies to drive original qualitative and quantitative insights. We are guided by our commitment to the social impact sector to provide timely, transparent, and well-rounded research that is free to access. From how organizations run to how donors give, we're 100 percent focused on research and resources for this sector. Furthermore, our research agenda is grounded in a commitment to topics that social impact organizations can apply immediately to better understand, benchmark, and improve their essential business operations. Our recent "Gen Z at the Table" report is a good example of this dedication in practice. When we created the Institute, we wanted to prioritize the practical applicability of any research. Resources like these are really at the heart of what we do.

**How important is it for Blackbaud to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?**

A diverse workforce allows companies to gather multiple perspectives, promote learning and understanding, and create products that work for more people. We aim to promote diversity not just as a corporate strategy or a set of buzzwords, but as an integral part of

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Blackbaud's community and culture. We've taken several steps to ensure that Blackbaud's workforce reflects our diversity and inclusion aspirations. When I first joined Blackbaud in 2014, we introduced a formalized diversity and inclusion initiative, and today we are proud to have nearly equal gender balance in our workforce – a stark contrast to most of the tech industry. We have employee affinity groups that meet regularly, and we hold workshops addressing diversity and inclusion-related issues. We take these steps because we know that with a diverse workforce that feels included, we are a more innovative, collaborative, and creative company.

**You also serve as co-chair of the Generosity Commission. Will you highlight the work of the Commission?**

The Generosity Commission is an independent project of The Giving Institute and Giving USA Foundation, made up of CEOs and social impact leaders from across sectors. The Commission's work culminated in a final report released in September of this year, synthesizing our findings and offering pathways for leaders, individuals, and organizations from all segments of society to promote generosity in all forms, including charitable giving, volunteering, and civic engagement more broadly. I've had a number of conversations with my peers in the business community since the report launched at the Aspen Institute, and am enthusiastic about how the private sector can leverage this new tool.

Since its founding in October 2021, the Commission has aimed to survey the current donation landscape in the United States, and use that information to explore how to best support and enable everyday giving and volunteering. We approached this goal in a number of ways: from publishing academic studies on contemporary trends, to making clear recommendations to promote generosity in whichever form it takes.

Business has an essential role to play in fostering a generous society, and I've been proud to partner with the Commission and my fellow members to promote these ideals. From my career in tech, I've come to understand that effectively confronting big challenges like these often requires two things: lots of data and lots of perspectives. The Generosity Commission has both, and it's an important time for American civil society to be equipped with these latest resources.

**What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership and how do you approach your management style?**

Three things: vision, empathy, and action. As a leader of a company like Blackbaud, my job is to create an environment in which employees can thrive and flourish, so the company can grow and best serve its customers. The most effective way to create an environment of this kind is to listen to each member of the team, and genuinely make everyone feel like they have a voice. You're going to have disagreements, sometimes passionate disagreements, and that's only natural. But being able to work through those disagreements, to channel those disagreements into productive, substantive progress requires active, empathetic listening.

Equally important to leadership is commitment to action, and I always try to be decisive with every choice I make as the CEO of Blackbaud. If you're the leader, you're the captain of the ship. It's up to you to have confidence in the course you're charting, including knowing how and when to make necessary adjustments.

**What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?**

Get involved in something that makes you intellectually excited. I started working in tech at a time of unparalleled transformation in the industry. It was the age of the PC, of Apple, a moment of tremendous innovation. That was such an exhilarating environment, and the passion that moment inspired within me has been a guiding force in my career. It's also critical to approach any problem or obstacle you face from a variety of different perspectives. Obstacles are a natural part of life; if you don't encounter any, you're not doing very much that challenges you. If you're single-minded in your approach to a problem, those obstacles seem insurmountable. That's why it's essential to take a step back, talk to other people, and learn to value different perspectives. Finally, whatever you do, always strive to do good and make a difference. Blackbaud is a remarkable company not only because of the products we create, but because we genuinely believe that what we are doing has a positive impact on the world. That belief manifests itself in our culture and ethos as a company, and is a key factor in our success. When you find a purpose, when you find something that you truly believe in and see how it positively impacts others, that's when you'll know what true success feels like. ●