Bryan Guner

9/4/14

FSP (#Eradicate Poverty)

Notable moments from The Blue Sweater

The Blue Sweater is a profound tale of a young and naive girl who set out to change the world and seceded. This success did not however, sprout from good intentions alone. Jacqueline Novogratz entered the world completely unprepared to peruse her ambitions. It was through many years of suffering, determination and most importantly listening, that she learned how to apply novel business approaches to Philanthropy. She put these lessons learned to work, in order to sustain positive change in developing nations. She is now the founder and chairwoman of Acumen, a charitable organization that practices developmental investment and accountability over unsustainable handouts.

One of the best summations of Jacqueline’s approach to eradicating poverty is found in the foreword. While easily missed, this brief passage breaks down her truly complex solutions to a fundamental pragmatism. While most non-profit foundations give away handouts, Acumen invests in for-profit entrepreneurs who have the vision and audacity to tackle the most pressing of issues. The challenges these entrepreneurs face are not inherently arduous, until one considers that they must be provided to some of the most impoverished demographics on the face of the earth. These services include but are not limited to affordable healthcare, safe water and housing as well as alternative energy. This approach is best explained by the proverb “Give a man a fish and he eats for one day, teach a man to fish and you have fed him for a lifetime”. Rather than providing these services to the people directly and as a result temporarily, Acumen set out to support small business within a community and hold the communities responsible for their finances.

While the foreword breaks down Jacqueline’s ventures into laymen’s terms the real profundity of her story lies within first hand encounters with the “invisible“ members of society. Jacqueline is consistently taken by how little some people live on and yet manage to exude optimism and enthusiasm. When she was hired to preside over a soft loan to Gambia she kept the people in mind. Accompanied by Duncan, she spent weeks surveying politicians, business owners, technological experts and commoners in order to make sure the people could affect their own change. Jacqueline did not stop there however, in order to create a sustainable plan she also took lessons from history. She had observed a 20 million dollar irrigation subsidy, and a 1 million dollar maize mill subsidy fail to benefit the people simply because the communities that received such handouts often lacked the logistical capability to maintain them. She proposed that the World Bank provide microfinance loans to small farms for fertilizer to be paid back after the harvest. Offering smaller farms access to quality inputs had been proven to pay large dividends during the Green Revolution in India. (pg,130)Jacqueline’s eventual success was not entirely the result of clever planning and a meticulous work ethic, it took a fair amount of inspiration and perspective for her dreams to materialize.

In The Blue Sweater Jacqueline learns that listening is perhaps the most important and unfortunately least practiced tool in the fight against poverty. It was her genuine willingness to listen that allowed her to embrace perhaps the most impactful statement she had ever encountered, “If you move through the world with only your intellect, you walk on one foot. If you move through the world with only your compassion, you walk on only one foot. But if you move through the world with both intellect and compassion, you walk with wisdom.”(pg 144) During a meeting with a monk named Maha Ghosananda, Jacqueline struggled to decipher half cryptic answers until she dropped her preconceived agenda and allowed him to impart true wisdom upon her.

The Blue Sweater ‘s ultimate purpose is not to serve as a memoir but as a message. Through the experiences shared in the book it becomes clear that the solutions to poverty are not simple or uniform. Each community requires it’s own solutions in order for individuals to invest their time, money and livelihood into the community as a whole. In order for positive change to take hold communities require not just intellect but passion and compassion.