

JACQUELINE NOVOGRATZ'S DIGNITY STORY

TRANSCRIPT OF INTERVIEW

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JACQUELINE NOVOGRATZ: My call to action is first and foremost to recognize that as human beings we want to be seen. We yearn to be seen and known by each other and the youth of today have more tools than any generation on earth have had to do that. So rather than stay within one's own group to extend and do what it takes to learn about other groups both in one's own neighborhood as well as all around the world. The revolution doesn't come from *like*, don't *like*. You got to get out there and, like, do something.

KATHERINE KEATING/HOST: Jacqueline as the Founder of Acumen Fund, can you talk to me about your organization's work in creating a world beyond poverty? How can we create a core ecosystem based on dignity?

JACQUELINE NOVOGRATZ: Too often when you hear economists talk about "the poor" they are consigned in terms of income alone. A dollar twenty-five a day is the global standard but the truth is poverty is, and should be, measured more by a lack of opportunity and choice

that you don't have the capacity to make decisions as to where and how your children get educated, can they get access to health care, all of this is about poverty as well.

I feel that this idea of dignity which also requires empathy to work, has never been more important than today.

Three hundred individuals on the planet own more in assets than the bottom three billion. In that three billion, two and a half billion have no access to sanitation, one and a half billion have no access to electricity or clean water and that situation is unstable, it is unsustainable, it is dangerous, and it is immoral.

We have to recognize our interconnectedness. That the fact that so many lack and that so few have is a real opportunity for all of us, and if we don't find ways to enable the three billion who are left out to get access to dignity through choice and opportunity than well quite frankly none of us have access. I really believe it is the interconnection of all of us that holds the seed to our shared sense of dignity and, quite frankly, the opportunity



to end material and spiritual impoverishment. It's through creating an ecosystem that includes the wealthiest, the poorest, government, the private sector, civil society that is based on these fundamental values and beliefs of the worth of every human being that we really have a chance to take the world into a better future for everyone.

Dignity for me is being able to have choice and opportunity and probably the best way, Katherine, of defining it would be through a story. I make a practice of visiting the customers of our companies to see, are we just handing them things? Or are we actually seeing people participate in their own solutions? So, we go to this rural village in rural Kenya and it's classic, go into a little hut that is as dark as midnight in the middle of the day, and there's a tiny grandmother. She is proud to show me this thirty-six dollar light that she and her daughter have borrowed money to buy, and the reason they chose this more expensive light is because there is a cell phone charger in the light so they can earn additional income by charging their neighbors' phones. I asked the grandmother if she liked the light and she said that she loved the light.

So this time I said, "Well look, you're a customer of d-light. How would you suggest that the company improve the light?" Now with me was the regional director of Africa, this big Aussie, and I look at this tiny woman and look up at him and she said, "Well, I would change the light by ensuring that you could charge the phone at the same time that you charged the light", and I thought that was a good response. I thought she was done. And then she said, "and second" and she ended up giving four different solutions to how to improve this light. She was talking to him with her hands on her hips and I thought to myself, this is why I started Acumen. Because she is neither pandering nor begging to this man. And he is not standing there with a false sense of authority or benevolence, but he is having to earn her trust as a customer, and in this interaction they are dealing with each other as equals. It is in that interaction that you see a sense of human dignity, that they have something to

offer each other, they have an ability to transform each other. It comes from starting with this assumption that we can extend that value that all of us are created equal to every human being on the planet. That each of us are capable and if we provide solutions that enable us to be part of those solutions we'll take that challenge.

Entrepreneurial people, and we're at a moment in history where we need nothing but entrepreneurial people, are those who see the possible in what others view as impossible. They're always seeking new ideas and better ways of doing things. It's this kind of innovation and also understanding of how to move ideas around the world that will allow us to create a cascade, I believe, of entrepreneurial solutions based on shared values and understanding that the only way we'll make this work is if we build sustainable solutions to poverty. If the opposite of poverty is justice, as I believe it is, then the call to action to young people across the planet is to recognize there are these opportunities like never before, and that indeed our biggest problems are nothing but opportunities.

This next generation is the most extraordinary generation that has come through in my lifetime. [They have] the technology to know each other all across the planet. Where we sometimes get in our way is that we think that the end of the game is for us to be interesting. But what we need to focus on, and what young people need to focus on instead is to be interested. It is so much better to be interested than interesting. By being interested that means being curious about other people and finding solutions to those problems. Interesting means figuring out how you get promoted or looking for the next title, and I think at the end of the day that leads to a lot of options but not necessarily the kind of lives that I sense young people today are craving. To think about how one can best use themselves to contribute, to learn, to build businesses and to be part of sustainable businesses that recognize human beings, to stand with the poor and to build solutions based on dignity, based on possibility.

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