Nonprofit CEO Discusses Challenging Times for Philanthropy

The current economic crisis challenges traditional philanthropic models. Giving time and money to charitable causes simply is not as easy as it used to be. But one woman challenges this assertion through her own philanthropic work.

On Dec. 1, the Johnson Institute's Philanthropy Forum hosted Jacqueline Novogratz, CEO of the Acumen Fund, to speak about how markets can be used to help the poor. The event, co-sponsored by the Swanson School of Engineering, the Center for Global Health and the International Executive MBA Program at the Katz School, presented viable ideas for the future of social development through targeted capital investment.

"Poverty is about a lack of choice, a lack of freedom," Novogratz said while describing her vision for the Acumen Fund, a non-profit global venture that builds thriving social enterprises around the world. The Acumen Fund has pioneered ways to make markets serve the very poor with goods and services that change their quality of life. And these investments have transformed the notion of charity to
Pittsburgh City Councilman Bill Peduto (left) and Beaver County Commissioner Charles Camp (right) are both pursuing GSPIA degrees while continuing to serve as public officials.

Alumni Update - Ernesto Butcher, MPIA '71

Every day, three million people travel along bridges, railroads, seaports and airports connecting the New York and New Jersey regions. GSPIA alum Ernesto Butcher is responsible for securing all of them.

Butcher is the Chief Operating Officer for the New York-New Jersey Port Authority, where he manages some of the busiest and most important transportation links in the northeast corridor. Recently, he visited GSPIA and spoke with students about his career path and experiences.
"Each day is different," he said. "Some days are crisis filled, some days are not . . . but the most exciting part comes when you've managed to get through rush hours, ships coming in and out of the port, and nothing has gone awry. Those are the great days."

Butcher originally intended to become a clinical psychologist after completing his undergraduate degree. But after serving in the Peace Corps as a volunteer in Korea in 1967, he became interested in international affairs and decided to attend GSPIA.

"My education at GSPIA was particularly useful to me in several respects. The nuts and bolts of public administration, working in the public sector and understanding how the public sector works as well as the things we learned about the international affairs arena - diplomacy, engagement, scenario building - were and continue to be critical in my day to day work."

Butcher's dedication to public service - both domestic and abroad - has increased as a result of his GSPIA education and work in the public sector. "I tell people that I make a difference every day," he noted. "And you can't make a difference if you are not in public service. You could be in the private sector doing amazing things, but in the public sector that's where you get to impact the lives and the quality of people's lives around you."

One of the most challenging experiences in Butcher's 38-year career with the Port Authority occurred on September 11, 2001. At that moment Butcher was thrust into a leadership role that he never thought he'd find himself in.

"On that day, we lost 84 of our employees, including our chief executive officer. A large responsibility was placed on my shoulders," Butcher said.

Under Butcher's leadership, a command center was established in Jersey City within hours of the attacks, which enabled Port Authority facilities to reopen immediately. He also coordinated the Port Authority's response with local, state and federal agencies to assist in rescue and recovery efforts at Ground Zero.

It wasn't until after the attacks that Butcher realized that he had been training for such a role his entire life. "Of course, over the years I had experienced moments of having to be a leader. I had been prepared in leadership qualities from my education at GSPIA, even to the point where we devised scenarios in international affairs ... But it's not until one finds themselves in a position of actually having to step up and be a leader that you recognize that it's happening to you. And in those moments I became aware that in fact I had been prepared for what needed to be done. "

Today, Butcher never imagined he would use the international component of his MPIA degree as much as he does in his current position. The Port Authority receives daily international shipments and flights via seaports and airports throughout New York and New Jersey. "I've had to take the international piece that I learned as well as the public administration piece that I learned and put them together," Butcher said. "The relevancy of a GSPIA degree will never fade."
Student Spotlight - Oscar Galan, MID/HS ‘10

Prior to coming to GSPIA, I knew I needed the skills necessary to work in post-conflict countries, particularly the Western Balkans. My GSPIA courses allowed me to research development strategies employed in this area, easing the transition from socialism and conflict. When I arrived in Prishtina, Kosovo, for my internship with the Association of Microfinance Institutions in Kosovo (AMIK), I realized GSPIA had, indeed, equipped me with the tools to operate, and succeed, in "the field."

AMIK is an association that promotes and advocates for microfinance in Kosovo. Working with a small NGO meant having to juggle numerous responsibilities, including website maintenance, contacting donor agencies, drafting grant proposals and creating GIS maps and charts for promotional materials.

My most challenging task by far was organizing an information session for local journalists to inform them about microfinance activities undertaken by institutions in Kosovo. With little knowledge of Albanian, I realized I would need to clarify my language and not assume that people reading my e-mails and attending briefs possessed advanced English skills. GSPIA ingrained my foresight of this issue by teaching me the practical skills to work in a foreign setting.

Living in Kosovo during the summer also provided opportunities to interact with a number of organizations that I researched during my first two semesters at GSPIA. The international aid community is still very active in Kosovo, and I was able to talk to many individuals working in a number of exciting fields such as property rights, waste removal, microfinance and security reform. In just two months, I grasped the challenges Kosovo faces in reconstructing itself, as well as the role the international community plays in that effort.

My three month stay in Kosovo helped me gain significant knowledge in microfinance, administrative skills and the challenges of post-conflict reconstruction. But most importantly, my internship reinforced my GSPIA coursework by providing practical, on-the-ground experience of the very lessons I study.