



**Marsassoum Senegal
with a woman from the
village we worked with.**

Transformation is the Solution

Prescribing a New Mind-Set and Operational Model for International Development

By Patricia DiVecchio, President, International Purpose

"You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete." - Buckminster Fuller, philosopher & futurist

I recently attended an international development conference in Washington, DC where themes surfaced throughout that reflected the need for change – *transformation*, if you will. This conference, the participants I talked with, and the information I heard inspired me. A lot was said and a lot wasn't.

The prevalent themes, throughout the conference referred to the need to evolve the very foundation from which we conduct international development initiatives. Numerous times I heard statements of need:

- 1. We are in a new reality that demands a new way of thinking, operating, and interacting based in innovation and transformation. We are begging for new ideas.*
- 2. Our guiding principles need to be – equality, reciprocity, and participation from all societal stakeholders.*
- 3. We need to focus on changing people's lives and building society as we make people feel safer which we haven't been able to do.*
- 4. Decisions need to be strategic, integrated and holistic. We need to get out of operating from silos.*
- 5. The two factors are to grow capacity and national ownership so people can own their destiny.*
- 6. We need to help countries unleash the innate genius of their own people.*
- 7. Women need to be included in the global value chain as we create economic incentives for businesses.*

All these statements of need invite us to look more closely at our approach to international development.

I continue to hear these same themes when I have honest conversations with individuals in this arena who also know we can and need to do better. People seem to agree that we are clipping along but they also know a deeper level of work is needed. What this means and how it translates into action on the ground is what we are searching for. I believe it all goes back to finding a new methodology that focuses on a greater understanding of human nature and the humanity and wisdom in all of us. Through this methodology we and those we support can learn from each other and be collectively accountable for the results over time.

Since all change starts at a level of awareness, we are on the right track. However, at some level, awareness needs to be translated into new action. Change, or any improvement, starts with a stepping back – hard to do in a field when most already feel overworked and overwhelmed given the literal focus on the livelihood of their clients. We need to remember that all change happens overtime and not overnight. It is the on-going effort to do the next ‘right’ step that will make the difference. Based on the need statements mentioned previously, the next ‘right’ step may not be apparent to many organizations.

“If the industrial era emphasized the values of discipline and hard work, the top-down flow of authority, the importance of financial capital, the workings of the marketplace...the new collaborative era is more about creative play, peer-to-peer interactivity, social capital, participation in open communications, and access to global networks.” Jeremy Rifkin, “The Third Revolution: How Lateral Power is Transforming Energy, the Economy, and the World.”



Worked with accountants at Rug Factory in Nepal

Asking New Questions = New Answers

I have learned, over the many years of doing both human and economic development work at different levels, that if we want new actions, we need to start with new questions. Questions that first and foremost challenge us to think beyond our current mental model of how we work and conduct business. These types of questions are needed to expand the mental frame of reference from which we make decisions. Then and only then will we surface the new solutions so dearly needed.



EVOLVING THE WORLD OF WORK

“Where do you start? You start with a philosophy, and the rest follows from that...you begin in your immediate sphere of influence. You start with your own behavior.” Jeffrey Pfeffer, Stanford University

As a starting point, contemplate the questions that follow. Know that the power is in the question and not necessarily the answer.

1. What stops you and your organization from leading in a new direction?
2. What do you know you need to act on but uncertainty stops you?
3. If you trusted and acted more from your years of experience and wisdom gained, then what?
4. If you could start over, from a clean slate, with your work focus what would you do different?
5. If you took your response to #4 to heart then what new transformational idea would you start implementing NOW?
6. What is the benefit of working from ‘Nothing to lose and a lot to gain’?
7. What are you most afraid of? Try drawing your fear.
8. What do you have to learn from the people you serve?

I hope these questions have challenged you to think beyond your norm. Nothing less than a change in culture is needed to get us on the road to gaining better and more sustainable results. As Peter Block says in his book, *Community: The Structure of Belonging*.

“We change the culture by changing the nature of the conversation. It is about choosing conversations that have the power to create a new future. This occurs when we shift the questions we ask from problem solving to possibility, deficiencies and needs to gifts, lip service to dissent, blame to ownership and barter to commitment. When this conversation becomes collective, the community becomes competent.”



**With assistant at retreat center in
Viguichor, Senegal**



Now if anyone is up to this challenge and chooses to act on your responses to the questions posed then 'running a test' may be called for. Try working from the premise that doing something different can't hurt and it may well help. As you do this the following guidelines will assist in moving towards a new more enlightened outcome.



"Now that we have run out of money we have to think!"

Winston Churchill

With colleague in Senegal

Guidelines to follow:

- Challenge the assumptions you hold about yourself, work & business.
- Do one thing different daily to move in a new direction.
- Engage your head and heart in this decision making process.
- Be the student and the teacher so you can learn from this process and from everyone involved.
- Bring your creativity and playfulness into play and leave judgment at the door.
- Be willing to take yourself less seriously.

Ultimately we need to get to the point where we can 'change the way we change' meaning we analyze and then develop a new baseline, new mental model and internal frame of reference from which we make decisions. We develop a new 'normal' that results in the exponential changes needed.

I'll end with a quote from Albert Einstein, *"Any intelligent fool can make things bigger and more complex...It takes a touch of genius and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction."*



At book reading & signing in Pittsburgh, PA.

Please don't hesitate to contact me at patricia@internationalpurpose.com – all comments and dissentions are welcome. This is a living document that will change over time.

My book, *“EVOLUTIONARY WORK: Unleashing Your Potential in Extraordinary Times”*, published by Pearhouse Productions, is available on Amazon.com – as paperback and e-book.