

How Melinda and Bill Gates Taught Me that Great Philanthropy is Not Just About Money.

[Lisa Endlich](#)

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Philanthropy, we are often told, is about far more than money. And while I had heard this many times, I was cynical. As I traveled the country interviewing dozens of great philanthropists I learned many things, first and foremost among them that I was wrong.

Sure the Gates' have poured billions into fighting the global diseases, but Melinda has taken on another role as well. As she traveled the world she saw the excessive burden that poverty places on women and decided that she would give voice to the voiceless. She speaks to the world's audience about the plight of women suffering from the most dire poverty.

When I asked her what were the unexpected pleasures of her philanthropy, she explained that traveling to villages and connecting with other mothers and then seeking change is deeply fulfilling. Then she added, "The chance to work with your husband...on something that you both so deeply believe in from your heart and your head and your soul...there's nothing better than that."

Bill and Melinda Gates have shown that passion and focus and a clear-eyed vision of a better world are what make a great philanthropist. Changing the world is both as simple and as complicated as changing one person's life. Money helps but if we have learned one thing it is that it is remarkably easy to give away money, massive huge piles of it, to absolutely no effect.

Great philanthropists see something that everyone else sees, but they refuse to look away.

Connie Duckworth, a former Goldman Sachs partner, is now running a rug business, called Arzu <http://www.arzurugs.org/> in Afghanistan. She employs thousands of women, who now have a steady income, education for themselves and their children as well as prenatal care. I knew Connie as a colleague, the mother of four school aged children and a woman unfailingly dressed in high heels and a tailored suit adorned with a string of pearls. Then she took a trip to Afghanistan,

"We went to a bombed out school building, a cinder block building, and as it was January the temperature was in the twenties. There were dozens of women and children living in this bombed-out building, no windows, no heat, no electricity, no running water, no food, no

furniture, trying to live through the winter. I looked at these children's faces and I thought those could be my children. I literally went back on the plane and thought, "I am doing something, I don't know what it is, but I am doing something."

Great philanthropists improve the lives of others and in doing so better their own. Steve and Liz Alderman experienced terrorism up close and personal. Their 25-year old son Peter worked for Bloomberg News and was at Windows on the World on 9/11. Now their lives are in service to the 1 billion people on our planet who have experienced the pain of terrorism and genocide. For the past five years this middle aged suburban couple, he a doctor and she a school teacher, have worked with the Harvard Program in Refugee Trauma to train physicians in treating the psychiatric wounds of trauma. They have established Peter C Alderman <http://www.petercaldermanfoundation.org/> clinics in Rwanda, Uganda and Cambodia to provide treatment for those suffering the after effects of witnessing genocide. "I didn't think I would ever, ever feel good about anything again, but I feel good about the work that we're doing." Liz Alderman explains, "It doesn't take away the grief. Nothing will ever take that away. It doesn't heal the sorrow, but it helps us to function, and to be productive, and to do some really important good in this world."

Great philanthropists know that failure is almost certainly one of the first few steps. As one successful philanthropist, who gives both generously and anonymously told me, "I have given to the wrong organizations, given to the wrong people, given too much, too early, too quickly, or without doing enough due diligence." The path to good giving is often a series of wrong turns and dead ends and no one should think for a minute that it will be straight and error free. Each philanthropist gave the exact same advice: in good economic times and in bad, with small effort and with larger---get on with it, get over it and just start.