



Working title: *THE ART OF DOING GOOD: Where Passion Meets Action*

ABRIDGED MANUSCRIPT

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Chapter 7

...A number of the entrepreneurs from our sample ended up relying on larger host organizations, and, as a neophyte, you might also. For existing organizations have much of what you need to acquire, chiefly experience, security, and stability. They have a public identity that can give you, as a new social entrepreneur, a sense of legitimacy. And, of course, most important of all, if they are established, going concerns they have funding, and they might provide you some of it, either in cash or in kind, if your mission meshes with theirs, and they find it beneficial to take you under their wing.

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Sara Green: A Non-Merger Merger

This happened to Sara Green of Art for Refugees in Transition, ART, her plan was to bring art to refugees, and it was providential. She had gone to business school to learn how to handle her nonprofit, and her nonprofit professor encouraged her to write up a business plan, laying out her idea, and describing the potential market and funding sources. As part of it, she performed the usual due diligence to determine if any other organization was doing this kind of work, and she discovered, to her relief, that the answer was none. But she wasn't sure how her nonprofit would survive on its own, either. It was hard enough to raise funds for domestic arts programs; she feared it would be nearly impossible to find donors for foreign ones, involving refugees no less. Without such donations, she couldn't afford the airfare, let alone the necessary infrastructure expense to establish a presence in a refugee camp miles from anywhere, as her plan entailed.

“So my professor encouraged me to partner up,” she says. He recommended a connection he had at UNICEF, which proved to be unreceptive, as did Save the Children, which

she tried next. By a quirk, the president of the International Rescue Committee was also teaching in Green's nonprofit course. It had been in operation since the close of the Second World War, and had outposts in many refugee camps in Africa, Asia and Europe. The president was intrigued, and passed Green on to the head of a department called Children in Armed Conflict. "I met with her, presented our idea, and she said, 'Wow! This is fabulous! Nobody's doing this.'" Bingo. She offered to bring Green's ART into partnership with their community development programs. Unable to offer a program like Green's on its own, it welcomed her project into the IRC fold. And, better still, it offered to help raise money for her program, and to implement it overseas, starting with a program for Burmese refugees in Northern Thailand, and continuing to other spots, under the auspices of other organizations, from there.

The merging of the two entities, one large and established, the other small and untried, has not gone smoothly. There have been the usual assortment of bureaucratic tussles, ego clashes, communication breakdowns. But in the end, the IRC did deliver.

The IRC graciously welcomed Green into the camp in Thailand, providing her entrée there, and a base for her operations, neither of which she could have acquired on her own. "There's no way to get into a refugee camp unless you are already registered," she concedes. "You can't just walk in and say, 'Knock, knock. I'm here. I want to do good. It doesn't really work that way. I knew that if I had to sit down and do the financial for this, if I had to raise money for an interpreter, for a Jeep, for somebody on the ground, a runner to get me camp passes, to have enough money to bribe the people to give them to me, because they don't know who I am. To build all of that basic infrastructure, that's ridiculous. Nobody's going to give that money to me. Who am I?"

Chapter 12

...Like all social entrepreneurs, Sara Green had no idea what to expect when the moment of truth arrived. She believed deeply in the value of bringing the arts to refugee camps. Would others? Would the refugees themselves? Sara Green came to ART obliquely. She'd been a professional dancer for ten years. To supplement her income, she'd done some fundraising and development work for various arts organizations, and, in 1999, thought she might combine her passions and try to start a nonprofit. Under prodding from the Clinton Administration, NATO had started bombing the Balkans, creating thousands of refugees. Green had visions of countless families pushing through the snowy mountains of Kosovo, some of the children hugging teddy bears. "I was really struck by that," Green recalls. "And I thought: those poor kids are going to Albania and they've seen horrors we don't even want to think about—family members killed or raped right in front of them, horrible things that have taken away their childhoods, and things they can never get back."

"Probably it's just Western thinking," Green goes on, "but I had the idea that if something is wrong, you have to talk about it. And here were these kids who have been through so much trauma, and they're going into a dark, cold, lonely place—literally—with nothing that reminds them of home, with traumatized family members as well. Wouldn't it be wonderful if there was an opportunity for them to express themselves? I've had difficult times in my life, everyone has, and people always say: 'You need to talk to somebody. You need to talk it through.' But I was a dancer, and I would always say, 'I don't want to talk about it. Let me dance. Let me go to dance class. Let me go to rehearsal. Let me perform'. Whatever it is, that would be my way of working through, working out, whatever was troubling me."

That perception started to lead her to ART, Art for Refugees in Transition, the work she does today. “I thought: wouldn’t it be great if these children had a place where they could find themselves, where they could sing or dance or even just play and feel safe.”

It wasn’t until one night though that the full idea came to her. She woke up very early, and it was clear as anything. She actually said it out loud. “My God! I know what I want to do. I want to start arts programs in refugee camps.”

She’d been in fundraising and development long enough to know that it would take more, and more from her, to bring her idea to fruition. She went to Columbia Business School for an MBA, and learned many of the business skills she would need, and received a helpful credential as well. But she still worried, after all this, how would the refugees actually respond? There was no way to test the idea without actually doing it, and there was no way of doing it without getting her nonprofit going. It was largely to jumpstart that process that she turned to the International Rescue Committee. ART would be a cultural offering that the IRC could add to the array of services it provided to the refugees. Green would train some of the IRC staff, who would in turn set up the program for the refugees themselves to run. It turned out that the IRC did work in a pair of Burmese refugee camps in Thailand. Green decided to begin with one that was located in a tiny village right deep in the rain forest on the Burmese border. The camp itself dwarfed the village, a sprawling of ramshackle wooden homes, all of them up on stilts.

When Green arrived in the camp, she asked the IRC staff to assemble the elder refugees. They were the ones who would be best able to determine if the refugees would be interested in the program Green was offering, and whether it would work. Would anyone show up? Supposing she made this big offer of help, and no one took her up on it? “In my heart I knew it was right, and in my head, too,” she says. “But practically?”

Her translator told her not to worry.

The announcement about the big meeting of the elders went out over the camp loudspeakers at top volume, in several Burmese dialects. At first the roads and alleyways were deserted, but then the elders started to emerge from their shelters, first in twos and threes and then by the dozen, and then more: hundreds and hundreds of them came out onto the street to make their way to the meeting place. When they were all assembled, Green managed to quiet everyone and, through her translator, explain what she had in mind. She explained who she was, and where she had come from, and then she asked: “Is it important for you to continue your cultural traditions? Your songs and dances and the other things you pass on to your children?” There was a general murmur and people started shouting back, in Burmese, Yes.

“And I asked, is this something you are doing now? And they said, ‘No.’ And I said, ‘Is it something you want to do?’ ‘Yes, yes, yes.’”

With that, one woman started to sing, slowly and expressively. In that tribe, the Karenni, much of the history and tradition are passed down in song, and the translator explained the woman was singing about how she missed her homeland, and she wanted to be back home. As she sang, many of the others elders gathered near her started to weep.

Then, suddenly, there was music, and Green looked up and saw some of younger refugees emerge from the trees, loudly playing flutes and gongs, as if cued by the woman’s song. And everywhere people rose up and started dancing wildly to the music. Recalls Green: “And everybody was crying, just crying and crying, hundreds and hundreds of people. And I had these goosebumps, and I was trying hard not to cry, just as I am trying hard not to cry now, thinking of it.”

Puzzled, she asked one of the women, why had everyone reacted like that? “And she said this was the first time that anyone had given us permission to feel.”

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