

Global Leadership

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Recently, I met Dr. Terry Neese, a dynamic business leader who turned her attention and considerable talents to promoting world peace. About ten years ago, she was asked by The State Department to spearhead an initiative that could help women entrepreneurs in disadvantaged countries by enhancing their business skills.

The task ahead was certainly daunting: develop and fund a program that would promote positive relations between women in the U.S. and Afghanistan. At first, Dr. Neese was reluctant to visit Afghanistan, but decided to do so in 2007 and her enthusiasm grew. Since then, the program has expanded to Rwandan women. To date, the PEACE THROUGH BUSINESS[®] program has trained nearly 600 female entrepreneurs.

Participants in this leadership program understand that they must be change agents in their countries to ensure economic viability and sustainability. Funded entirely through private donations and unfettered by the politics of government-issued foreign aid, an aspect of the program involves women traveling to the U. S. to meet with leaders who can mentor them. In an interview with *Woman Entrepreneur*, Dr. Neese stated that “if you teach women about business and provide them with the tools to succeed, you will change the world.”

One example of this involves an Afghan woman, Taj Sirat, who began participating in the program several years ago. She now runs a successful company that manufactures soccer balls. She has also started a dairy business. Ms. Sirat is making a difference: employing nearly 500 employees, many of whom are handicapped because of the war.

There are those who disagree with reaching beyond America’s borders when we continue to combat poverty here. While it is important to acknowledge our needs at home, we must not attempt to isolate ourselves in the increasingly interdependent global economy. What happens abroad impacts us. Poverty begets oppression and war, whereas a selfless approach promotes trust and peace.

Thanks to Dr. Neese, we now have women in Afghanistan and Rwanda who understand capitalism, can advocate for a free market system and have greater exposure to democracy in action. The PEACE THROUGH BUSINESS[®] program demonstrates virtues that every business leader should embrace: cooperation, courage and compassion. For all those reasons, we must continue providing temporary visas for these women to visit our homes and businesses.

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