



A Path Appears: Transforming Lives, Creating Opportunity

Nicholas D. Kristof, Sheryl WuDunn

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A Path Appears: Transforming Lives, Creating Opportunity Nicholas D. Kristof , Sheryl WuDunn
An essential, galvanizing narrative about making a difference here and abroad—a road map to becoming the most effective global citizens we can be.

In their number one New York Times best seller *Half the Sky*, husband-and-wife team Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn brought to light struggles faced by women and girls around the globe, and showcased individuals and institutions working to address oppression and expand opportunity. *A Path Appears* is even more ambitious in scale: nothing less than a sweeping tapestry of people who are making the world a better place and a guide to the ways that we can do the same—whether with a donation of \$5 or \$5 million, with our time, by capitalizing on our skills as individuals, or by using the resources of our businesses.

With scrupulous research and on-the-ground reporting, the authors assay the art and science of giving, identify successful local and global initiatives, and share astonishing stories from the front lines of social progress. We see the compelling, inspiring truth of how real people have changed the world, upending the idea that one person can't make a difference.

We meet people like Dr. Gary Slutkin, who developed his landmark Cure Violence program to combat inner-city conflicts in the United States by applying principles of epidemiology; Lester Strong, who left a career as a high-powered television anchor to run an organization bringing in older Americans to tutor students in public schools across the country; MIT development economist Esther Duflo, whose pioneering studies of aid effectiveness have revealed new truths about, among other things, the power of hope; and Jessica Posner and Kennedy Odede, who are transforming Kenya's most notorious slum by expanding educational opportunities for girls.

A Path Appears offers practical, results-driven advice on how best each of us can give and reveals the lasting benefits we gain in return. Kristof and WuDunn know better than most how many urgent challenges communities around the world face today. Here they offer a timely beacon of hope for our collective future.

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Mlg says

Another fabulous book from Kristof and WuDunn. What makes their work especially meaningful is their ability not only to highlight problems in the world, but to also suggest real, workable solutions where the reader can contribute. Beginning with poverty issues in the US, they move to a section that discusses the efficacy of different charities. A large section on water charities and how to market your charity also made interesting reading for those who work with these types of organizations. The book finished with the altruistic reasons to volunteer: It lengthens your life, makes you healthier and of course, makes a contribution to the world. There was a great quote where one charity worker stated what he believed was the secret of life: "Think early on what you want your legacy to be, what you would like to be able to say on your deathbed. Then work backward from there." I couldn't agree more.

Melissa says

While reading this book I considered becoming a foster parent, going back to school to get my masters degree in social work, adopting a child with special needs, and on and on. While I am not quite ready to take a big step like these things I've mentioned, it really opened my eyes to possibilities. This book takes a compelling look at how people can make a difference in the world. It looked at altruism from every angle possible. Why we give, how we feel when we help, the best ways to help, how some things we do help more than others, and it was all interesting to me! Just like when I finished their other book "Half The Sky," I finished this book determined to do better in making this world a better place and more committed to encourage my children to find ways to serve as well. I listened to the audiobook, but I've ordered a copy of the book because this is one I plan to return to many times for inspiration, ideas, and encouragement. The only negative thing I could mention is that early in the book they voiced their approval of UNICEF, an organization which I don't regard highly, because it has discouraged and made more difficult the process of adopting children internationally.

Drtaxsacto says

This book is really three resources. Two of them are useful, one not so much. First, it is a series of stories about successful fund-raising and charitable activities. Most of the book is centered on what I believe are a very narrow definition of charitable activity. The authors are prone to making blanket statements about which charities are serving the needs of society (they believe social welfare and cause charities are), I think that is a very limited view. But the stories are interesting and some very compelling. At the end of the book the authors offer a series of helpful suggestions for potential donors - the most important one being do some research about charities you and to support AND focus your contributions. A thousand dollar contribution may be more useful than 100 \$10 contributions.

The second part of the book is the demand that charities become more "accountable" - the authors make the statement that most charities operate on 19th century standards and they think they should operate with more "evidence". That is not a bad point but it may not reflect current realities. It echoes the writings of one person

they mention a lot - an author named Dan Palotta. In a Ted Talk (http://www.ted.com/talks/dan_pallotta...) Palotta argued that charities should do a better job of marketing, collaboration, compensating their key employees and host of other things. Palotta is a promoter who got bounced from one of his charities because of the way he was compensated. Many of the best charities have developed data, compensation systems (including incentives) and marketing approaches which rival some of the best for profit companies. There is some creative thought about how to do more of that. In the area of compensation - there is a balance that needs to be struck, One only need to think about the troubles faced by former United Way Exec William Arimony to understand some of the constraints on how compensation in the non-profit sector should be different. The IRS rules on Intermediate Sanctions provided some useful guidelines for charities that want to think creatively. The authors also seem to think that Direct Mail is a good technique to raise money. That may be useful for some but the returns on direct mail continue to drop. Compare the fund-raising techniques for the Ice Bucket Challenge to the kinds of returns in the book using direct mail and you might come to a different conclusion.

The call for evidence based philanthropy is good but I am not sure they have taken the whole notion in. A lot of the evidence based examples they use started from simple cost benefit analysis where the variables do not include alternative uses of funds. For example, the best evidence based philanthropy would make some comparisons among choices (what Frederic Bastiat called the "seen and the unseen") - the authors don't seem to be willing to extend that point to its logical conclusion. A good part of the rationale for charities, was, as Waldemar Neilsen argued in his books of more than forty years ago, to give society an option between public and private activity.

Where I think the book was not helpful was in their call for additional lobbying to link social causes with governmental programs/activities. Unfortunately, Wudunn and Kristoff seem to believe that ultimately anything social in nature starts with government - they should re-read DeTocqueville.

All that being said there is a lot of meat in this book. I have taught graduate level courses on non-profit management and this would be an obvious choice for something for the students to read (much better in my opinion than books by Palotta - which seem to come from the same side of the political ledger but are much more hyped in rhetoric. Could charities do better, indeed they could but are they stagnating in old techniques - not as much as the authors generalize they are.

Melissa Gans says

I did not enjoy this book very much. The authors are equally condescending towards their subjects, poor people who apparently just don't know any better and their readers, expecting them to simply accept their carefully chosen details and cherry-picked studies without analysis. Throwing money at social problems does not always work and rewarding people for participating in a culture of dependency is not prudent use of anyone's funds.

Giving can be good and make a difference. Find a good cause and people you can trust with your time and money.

I think the best point this book makes is about the difference between fighting poverty in developing countries and fighting poverty in the United States, where poor people here already have a television in every room, indoor plumbing, cars and cell phones, all of which provide a very high standard of living relative to the rest of the world. Who cares about books and education when you already have a iPhone?

It's no wonder that the volunteers do not experience gratitude from the fellow citizens they help, but rather scorn. It seems that we are not so civilized after all.

Janalee says

There. This oughta make up for all the candied fluff I've been indulging in lately. There is so, so, so much to comment on here. I think this should be required HS reading instead of drivel like The Great Gatsby. In fact maybe the Great Gatsby characters would do well to read this. 45 stars.

Marzie says

Another wonderful book by Nick Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. While some might find the book less emotionally powerful than *Half the Sky* this book is an excellent resource for those who are looking to make a difference in the world around them. It's packed with suggestions about how to give mindfully on any scale, including the importance of looking at Evidence-Based Programs and Practices. With an emphasis on the importance of early (like even pre-natal) interventions, all the way through trying to aid teens and homeless adults, this book doesn't emphasize far flung corners of the world as much as it does helping in our own backyard, here in the US. Kristof and WuDunn have pulled together an enormous amount of research and made it accessible. They have also looked again at programs that have gotten poor reviews (for example Head Start) in recent times and what made the actual literature review of a program questionable itself. The authors drive home the point that *nothing is facile* when it comes to either funding or being "the change." They also make it clear that *bettering even a single life is invaluable to the child or adult who lives that life and escapes a cycle of poverty, poor health or lack of opportunity*. Another amazing book, from an amazing couple. And loved the backstory on Nick's parents, two people whose own opportunities in the land of opportunity have resulted in a powerful advocate for the disadvantaged everywhere.

Julie says

If you've ever felt that you are too small to make a difference in the world, then reading this book is essential. The authors examine not only the art and science behind giving, but describe successful local and global initiatives that have reshaped the world. The combination of practical advice and moving stories will motivate and inspire you.

Clif Hostetler says

The purpose of this book is to encourage readers to join efforts to end poverty. This is a wide ranging subject, and this book often admits to its complexity. The book doesn't shy away from mentioning the mistakes and unintended consequences that have resulted from some past philanthropic attempts to fight poverty. But the overall tone of the book is upbeat and positive.

The overall message is that modern tools such as data mining, academic studies, professional bookkeeping practices, and worldwide web provide a means to determine what works and what doesn't. The book provides a variety of heart-tugging vignettes followed by a reviews of the evidence that give examples of efforts toward amelioration of the effects of poverty around the world (both in developed and under-developed countries). The book contains discussion of human psychology, possible evolutionary reasons for human motivations for giving and caring, and known physiological and psychological effects on the giver.

The title of the book is taken from the Chinese essayist Lu Xun (1921):

Hope is like a path in the countryside. Originally, there is nothing--but as people walk this way again and again, a path appears.

This book is suggesting that if we try, a path will appear toward ending poverty. The book explains that there is cause for hope based on past progress even though many of us may feel overwhelmed by the magnitude of the problem.

Crippling diseases such as leprosy, guinea worm, and polio are on their way out, and in the next twenty or thirty years malaria and AIDS are also likely to be eliminated as public health threats (although cases will still be reported here and there). The number of children dying before the age of five has almost halved since 1990, even though the number of children has risen. As recently as 1980, half the population of the developing world lived in extreme poverty, defined by the World Bank as less than \$1.25 per person per day in today's money. That share is now down to 20 percent, and the World Bank aims to lower it to near zero by 2030. At that time, just about every boy and girl around the world will go to primary school and learn to read. For all of human history until about 1950, a majority of human adults were illiterate; in one lifetime the adult illiteracy rate worldwide has dropped to about 16 percent. On our watch in the next few decades, we have a chance to eliminate the conditions--illiteracy, famine, parasitic disease, and the most abject poverty--that have shaped the majority of human existence since our ancestors began to walk upright.

The following are some excerpts from the book that caught my eye. They are NOT the most important things in the book. They're just little snippets that brought a smile to my face.

This first one provides an idea for a unique Father's Day Gift:

One Father's Day, our teenage kids banded together and gave Nic the perfect gift for any dad--a rat. It was an African giant pouched rat, to be precise, and it has a wondrous sense of smell that allows it to do heroic work detecting landmines. Our kids sponsored one rat's training in Nick's name. The breed is thirty inches long including the tail, with poor eyesight but a superb sense of smell. A Belgian aid group called Apopo figured out how to train these animals to do this lifesaving work. The rats are too light to set off the mines, and they are easily trainable. With a life span of eight years, the rats have plenty of time to earn back the training costs. In a single day, one of these rats--dubbed HeroRats--can clear 400 square meters of land otherwise unusable because of landmines. The HeroRats are deployed to clear mines in Mozambique and Angola, and in twenty minutes they can help clear as much land as human could in two days.

The following story is in this book but is credited to the crowd-sourced book *Random Acts of Kindness Then and Now*. I think it is an illustration as to why poor people give away a larger proportion of their incomes than rich people:

A friend who was working in the Dominican Republic with Habitat for Humanity had befriended a small boy named Etin. He noticed that when Etin wore a shirt at all, it was always the same dirty, tattered one. A box of used clothes had been left at the camp, and my friend found two shirts in it that were in reasonably good shape and about Etin's size, so he gave them to the grateful boy. A few days later he saw another boy wearing one of the shirts. When he next met up with Etin he explained that the shirts were meant for him. Etin just looked at him and said, "But you gave me two!"

At the end of the book there's a two paged "Gift List" of suggested charitable presents that can be given in someone's name that may have a truly transformative impact. There is also a ten paged list of "Useful Organizations" at the end of the book, but the authors make no claim to have screened the list for charitable effectiveness. They suggest checking with Charity Navigator, CharityWatch, Philanthropedia, or the Better Business Bureau's Wise Giving Alliance for evaluations. The audio book does not contain these lists found at the end of printed book.

Lori Cox says

This book is by the authors of Half the Sky and goes into various ways a person can make a difference in the world.

The main points are:

- *Even if you think what you are contributing is just a drop in the bucket, it is how buckets get filled.
- *There is a charity or organization out there for you, which fits your interests, your time and your purse.
- * Just like you would do research if you were in the market for a new TV, make sure to research various charities.

This book has a lot of stories of people doing good things in this world but it is a very dry read. I found the book was too long and dense and ended up skimming over the last half. Some unknown charities to me were interesting, but a Google search would have been shorter and easier.

Laurel says

I needed to read this book. Lots of great suggestions as well as a better understanding of the non-profit world.

Andy says

A foggy cliff-side path.

The premise of this book is wonderful: let's do more of what's proven to work to decrease poverty, disease and other problems. "A Path Appears" starts off well with NFP, the Poverty Lab and other monuments of evidence-based practice. But then it detours into stories about charismatic individuals, trendy concepts, and other dead ends.

The authors acknowledge that they have been led astray at times, for example, by the "Three Cups of Tea" charlatan. But even there, they muddy the moral of the story. The issue wasn't just accounting shenanigans, as they imply. Tea-dude was supposed to be building schools, but many of the schools didn't even exist. So you don't need sophisticated evaluation to tell if something is fishy. And that's without even looking at outcomes like literacy.

The authors want to follow the path of evidence-based practice. What throws them off track? I'm not sure, but this is an important question. You can't just believe people who stick the term "evidence-based" into their brochures. Lots of programs claim to be effective but aren't. People lie, or fool themselves.

A better recent book for understanding this tension is "The Idealist." And if the point is just to highlight a bunch of decent programs, I would recommend "Give a Little."

Pam Giarrizzo says

Caution: Don't read this book unless you want to help make the world a better place. It is extremely inspirational, and it will motivate you to take actions that may never have occurred to you otherwise.

A Path Appears was written by Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, the same husband and wife team that wrote Half the Sky, another favorite of mine, which highlights problems facing women and girls throughout the world.

Their new book discusses challenges that aren't just bad in and of themselves but also in the fact that these problems interfere with the ability of people to take advantage of opportunities that might make their lives better in the long term. Much like the nursery rhyme that describes how for want of a nail, a kingdom was lost, this book describes how for want of a fifty-cent per year de-worming pill, a child in Asia or Africa may suffer from health complications that will keep him or her from attending school regularly and result in decreased earnings as an adult of up to twenty percent. This is just one example of the multitude of ways in which strategically-placed donations can better the lives of children so that their quality of life is improved in adulthood too.

As the authors explain, "talent is universal, but opportunity is not." They make the point that those of us "who are successful need to understand that the root cause of [our] achievements isn't just hard work and innate intelligence but also often luck in the lottery of birth followed by a supportive middle-class upbringing." The birth lottery robs many children, not just in other countries but here in the United States too, of opportunities to become the successful, contributing members of society that we expect our own children to become.

A Path Appears offers information about dozens of programs that are working to address issues such as poverty, access to decent health care, sex trafficking, violence, and illiteracy. I was particularly interested in the section of the book that discusses the thirty-million-word gap between the number of words that a U.S. child from an impoverished family will hear before the age of four and the number of words that a child of a professional couple will hear. Research has shown that "the more parents talked to their children, the faster the children's vocabularies were growing and the higher the children's IQ test scores at age three and later."

This means that children whose parents don't talk to them as much are already far behind other students by the time they start school. In this chapter, I learned about the Reach Out and Read program, in which doctors actually prescribe books and educate parents on the value of reading to their children beginning in infancy. I've already sent a message to the Reach Out and Read program in my area to find out how I can help.

Another reading program that caught my attention was First Book, which partners with publishers, nonprofit organizations, and donors to get books into the hands of children in low-income families. In many cases, these may be the first books these children have ever owned. Knowing how important books were to me when I was growing up (and how important they still are), I made a donation to help First Book provide new books to homeless and foster children.

See, that's two actions I've taken already that I would never have known about if I hadn't read this book. "Inspirational" doesn't even begin to describe *A Path Appears*.

For all the discussion of innovative programs that have changed people's lives for the better, however, the authors make the point that if you have a good idea, it doesn't necessarily mean you should run out and start your own nonprofit organization. Not everyone has to be a founder. They quote Cheryl Dorsey, the head of an organization called Echoing Green, as saying that "the biggest need now is for the 'intrapreneur,' the person who can move into an existing enterprise or institution, shake it up, and boost its productivity."

For people who want to get involved in making this a better world, Kristof and Wu Dunn suggest the following:

1. "Find an issue that draws you in and research it." The issue that appealed to me was literacy, and I'll be looking for ways to get more books into the hands of more kids and helping to ensure that they know how to read them.
2. "Volunteer, get involved, or do something more than just writing checks." In addition to the actions I mentioned above, I got in touch with my local Reading Partners chapter to see about helping an elementary school student with reading for one hour a week.
3. "Use your voice to spread the word or advocate for those who are voiceless." I guess that's one reason for this book review -- to tell other people about how easy it is to change the life of a child with just a tiny investment of time or money.

We can all make the world better, and I loved this piece of advice that the authors said was given to John Wood, founder of Room to Read, by one of his friends: "Think early on what you want your legacy to be, what you would like to be able to say on your deathbed. Then work backward from there." Words to live by.

Donna says

I liked the idea of this book. It was a reminder that we all need to do our part to help others and this is always a needed message. Charitable hearts are needed in this world to do big things and little things. In this book many practical avenues were explored for everyone....some were easy and simple and others were quite extensive.

I liked the history of this and how certain efforts have worked well for the impoverished. What I didn't like was the nay saying. I realize there have been epic fails with the "one and done" mentality of 1st world organizations trying to fix 3rd world problems. They step in, fix the problem with equipment, then they leave. But because of poverty, the villagers are unable to replace parts, or whatever, and life for them resumes to the way it was before the improvements.

But overall, I liked the emphasis on the "path appears" message. If one has a desire to help and is willing to share talents, time and money, there is a path for them.

Barry says

The most expensive book I've ever purchased? Yes, by a lot if you count the four times I got up from reading this to make a donation to one of the amazing organizations whose stories are included. More importantly, this has the potential to be the most impactful book ever. Coming at a time when I'm beginning to think about my own future in larger terms than the usual "which necktie will I wear tomorrow morning," this book was an inspiration, a challenge, and I think a very useful tool to focus/re-focus the thinking. Whether you are pondering seriously what brings meaning to your life or just how to allocate your annual charitable giving before the tax year slips away, you need to read this. I mean 100% of you, no kidding. And give it to your children. They can benefit even more. It's that great.

Karen Ashmore says

While Kristof and WuDunn are certainly on the right path, they tend to advocate more for charity than a sustainability perspective and lean more towards hype than substance. For example, they are big fans of charity:water -- which is full of glitter, marketing and celebrity presence but does not always focus on sustainable, long term solutions like water.org or other organizations that work for community wide, permanent and self-sustaining solutions for clean water. Still, they present some good ideas and this book is worth reading by folks who want to better understand global poverty.
