

**HOPE EXHIBITS PRESENTS:
“ENGAGING MEN FOR POSITIVE CHANGE” - BACKGROUND & VISION:**

Advertising often sells us things that we don't need and that aren't even good for us. Still, we end up buying these things, or adopt the attitudes and paradigms promoted. Why? Simply because advertising works. Period. What we see influences us and changes the way we think, whether we want them to or not - whether good or bad.

So what if we used the *power* of advertising to spread positive messages throughout the world? Inspire towards change by showing positive stories and testimonies that can influence and attract more of the same.

What if we used images and stories of positive male role models to provide young men, fathers, and boys the world over with new ideas and connotations of what manliness and manhood means? What if we use images to spread the knowledge that research has already proven – that when men have the opportunity to be close to young children – they become not only happier, but also more empathetic and engage in less risk behaviors.

What kind of impact could a paradigm shift like this have on our world? Is it possible that as men's priorities shifted more to simply being there for their children, certain “root causes” and “core problems” would disappear. Is it possible that long-term, there would be less armed conflicts and wars, less violence, less orphaned and abandoned children, less gender discrimination and inequalities, less poverty, even less environmental destruction? If so, why? Because with a shift in consciousness, a “new” perceived reality emerges, priorities change and different choices are made.

In what ways could such a shift in consciousness create real change? The possibilities are limitless, and range from reducing the spread of HIV/Aids to reducing the amount of children growing up fatherless or with violence in the home. Throughout the world today, 30-50% of women and girls have experienced physical violence from the men in their lives, with 10-20% experiencing sexual violence. In South Africa, 70% of children grow up without present fathers. And when we get to a point where UN workers stationed to help some of the most vulnerable populations in the world, instead end up molesting and sexually abuse refugee children as young as six, have we then not reached a point when we need to look at what kind of qualities we teach our boys and what kind of role models they look up to and emulate that creates such a reality?

Why is it that in the media we are so often shown images of men in wars and armed conflicts. We read about domestic abuse, sexual abuse, child predators, sex tourism, child pornography, rapes, rapes as a war methodology, and other violent behavior, but we are so seldom presented with the more accurate picture of the majority of men who are indeed caring and loving fathers, grandfathers, uncles, brothers, and friends. The young boys who want to do well, the young teenagers and men who coach football teams or serve as community leaders inspiring others.

Why don't we hear more about the wonderful male teachers out there, or about the men who quit gangs to instead mentor at-risk youth. Why are there not more stories of the single fathers in Africa who single-handedly raise their children after their wives have died from Aids, creating a loving and nurturing home for their children. Sure, maybe they are not yet the majority, but if this is what we'd like to see more of, this is what we need to bring forth to inspire towards more of the same. Show the Afghani father who values his daughters' education, the Chinese fathers who cherish their daughters,

the Ethiopian grandfather who says no to Female Genital Mutilation for his granddaughters. Let us celebrate all the good out there that is too seldom seen, so that these positive role models may inspire towards more good.

Is there a need for an exhibit such as INSPIRATIONAL MEN? With the kinds of statistics and the amount of violence in the world, certainly, a paradigm shift is what is needed. We need to give young boys a proper chance to grow up with positive role models, and with more positive connotations of what “manliness” means. We also need more gender equality in the world, as indeed the 3rd MGD goals of the UN is the furthest behind. Gender equality is necessary for successful development, for economic growth, to combat poverty, to achieve better health. There is no separating gender equality from otherwise successful development. INSPIRATIONAL MEN serves to change attitudes, in a non-threatening and positive way, with a promising potential to contribute to changing core problems and root causes behind inequalities and negative gender attitudes and behaviors.

A natural consequence of a shift in attitudes and consciousness – in successful social advocacy - is a new generation of more present fathers and engaged men, which in turn equals a new generation of more safe and secure children. How, in turn, would this generation create a different future for our planet? How would they be with their children? If the main focus shifted from ‘what is good for us today’, to ‘what is best for our children and their futures’, is it also possible that this generation may better care for the environment?

We already know how gender equality benefits the entire world – men, women, children and the whole society and in the forms of social, peace and, not least, economic developments. We also know that gender equality is not possible to achieve merely by empowering women, but that it is just as important to engage men and young boys in creating real and lasting change. After all, women and girls will only be able to participate in the paid work force or go to school once men assume their role as partner care-takers of home and family too. Gender inequalities will only disappear when men, husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons no longer accept that the women, wives, mothers, sisters and daughters in their lives should be treated worse or lead lives with less rights or opportunity merely because of their gender.

Certainly, children need to be loved and to have their fathers present, but also men have the need to love. Research shows that men experience psychological and physical health benefits from being close to children. They learn to better express their emotions, become more empathetic, and engage in less risk-behaviors. Let us envision what kind of world we will have with more fathers being present in the lives of their children. Such a change can happen fast.

Let us envision a world where gender and sex will play a much smaller role in a human beings life, opportunities and rights, than they do today. Let us envision a world where current gender violence, discrimination, and inequalities are replaced with future cooperation, equality and a more peaceful society. Gender equality benefits *everyone* in the whole world.

Obviously, we need to keep working on empowering women in all ways that we can and continue to do the work that has proven to work – microloans and village bankings giving women the chance to become financially independent and provide food for their children, access to health care and family planning, get more girls into school... all of the above. But let us also compliment this work with inviting, and involving men and boys in the process. This will make the women’s “new” position in society less threatening, and more welcomed, and surely, help speed up the process in every way, shape and form.

Of course, to achieve change, we need to know where we want to go. We need to have a goal - a vision for the desired change. But we too often focus only on what we do not want. HOPE Exhibits says, let us for just a minute look away from the seeming insurmountable “problems,” and instead focus on what works and what we DO want, and want more of . It is vital to fund the vision and not the fear. One way of achieving real and lasting change in gender equality is to promote images, stories, and examples of what we do want to see more of, to inspire towards more of the same, more good. This is, in a nutshell, the idea behind the “The World’s Most INSPIRATIONAL MEN” campaign.

Let the young boys and men growing up today see more positive role models, and get familiar with the strength and power behind being a responsible, present, and caring person. Let us show the young men and boys all the engaged teachers, coaches, community youth leaders, health workers, brothers, uncles, grandfathers, and fathers that are out there, but too seldom seen or celebrated. Let us give the young men and boys new connotations as to what manhood and manliness means. Let us create more of what is already working, and more of what we want to multiply more of.

Let us put up exhibitions in various forms – larger exhibits in public policy forums, such as the Engaging Men 2009 Symposium in Brazil, and at UN and international, multi-lateral forums – as well as smaller, inexpensive campaigns - in the forms of posters in communities – globally. This can easily be achieved in cooperation with NGOs and global organizations on grass-root levels. Cover the walls of schools, health clinics, bus stops, or the walls next to football fields where kids go to play. Spread positive images and stories in cities and villages everywhere and offer young men and boys new and more positive role models to look up to, identify with and emulate.

Remember, we know that advertising “works”. We know that we are influenced by what we see. Let us through “INSPIRATIONAL MEN” use its power, and create more good. And let us compliment the images with seminars, trainings or community discussion groups when possible.

This is a wonderful, and very feasible and tangible way, to promote gender equality throughout the world and improve not only the lives of women and girls everywhere – but also the lives of men, young boys, and the whole world. “The World’s Most INSPIRATIONAL MEN” is a “Win/Win” project for all.

HOPE Exhibits

“The World’s Most INSPIRATIONAL MEN”

A Global Photography Exhibit Promoting Gender Equity and Positive Male Role Models

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