



The Three Meanings of ODFL

(audio version http://odfl.org/article.php?story=3Meanings_of_ODFL)

People ask, “What is ODFL all about?” And there’s a simple, immediate answer. But there are two deeper levels of meaning that are perhaps more important than the obvious one.

The first meaning, of course, is the one about building schools and other projects in the developing world; the classrooms and other projects in Kenya, Malawi, Nepal, Nicaragua, and Indonesia. These exemplify our highest purpose and our most noble pursuit: a single humanity working to reduce human suffering.

But there is another, deeper level of meaning: to transform a generation of teenagers from being isolated, selfish, cynical, and impotent to being connected, compassionate, cooperative, and competent. We call these the 4 C’s. If we can cultivate these values in tens of millions of teenagers, we *will* create a different world. That’s why we say, “It’s not about the dollar.” It’s about the choice by teenagers to engage their world in a way that makes them into bigger people and the world into a better place. The dollar is only a token, a symbol. It’s in the act of *choice* that a person’s character is changed. It is by helping someone else that a person becomes a bigger person. Growing bigger teenagers by offering them the chance to create a better world is the second thing that ODFL is about.

The last thing ODFL is about is helping turn upside down the way culture is created on the planet. For 500 years, since Gutenberg, we’ve lived as recipients of culture, passive consumers at the bottom end of a one-way pipe. It’s no wonder so many people feel isolated and impotent. Yet soon, every person on the planet will be able to connect to every other person. Even more important are the new tools that allow us to create culture ourselves, to upload rather than simply download. Instead of being passive recipients of culture, we can be its co-creators, its active owners. But connections and tools are still only mechanisms.

What we need is the content—the equivalent of the programming for television—that reflects a different set of values. How do we model the *values* of a single humanity working to reduce human suffering? How do “bigger people” really act? Instead of “me”, “us”. Instead of want, sufficiency. Instead of predation, stewardship. If we give teenagers the chance to embody those values, they will grow organically, as an integral part of this emerging global culture. That culture will come to reflect our highest ideals rather than our deepest fears. It will look like the world we’ve always longed for but scarcely dared to believe could be possible. It is possible. But only if we act now, before the new values are fixed.

Noble projects. Bigger people. A transformed global culture. All of these levels of meaning are there for those with the daring to believe in a better world, and the courage to act to bring it about. YOU are one of those people. Thank you for your participation in this vision.

Yours in a Better World,

ODFL