

Help yourself by helping The Poor

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How to get rich in the 90s

You still don't have your own EN-GE-OH? You haven't got a non-profit foundation, complete with legal status? Not even a private consulting firm? Then, my friend, you're really out of it. Any professional who hasn't got one of these late twentieth century accessories is lost — clearly someone with no imagination, no sense of opportunity, no strategic vision, out of time and out of place. You might as well forget about your career, and go and sell lottery tickets or become a street busker.

Let me explain. Twenty years ago a newly qualified graduate in the humanities or social sciences had various employment options. He or she could climb up the ministerial ladder, or use their contacts with the students' movement to wangle a university post. Or they could start at the bottom, doing market research for some transnational toothpaste company. If Daddy had the cash, they might start up a business, selling spaghetti, for example. If they liked action films, they could go into the military — or possibly develop a theory of revolutionary armed struggle. If all else failed, they could go and wash plates in Los Angeles or New York.

Today things are different. The state is in collapse and out of fashion. Forward-looking businesses don't want trendy left-wing sociologists, but people who know how to sell things and who can speak English. Setting up a company means playing roulette with the family fortune. The military are unemployed. The guerrillas are dead and buried. To do the washing-up in Los Angeles you need a PhD from some European university.

But, make no mistake, EN-GE-OHs are the business of the 1990s. If you wasted your time studying philosophy, social sciences, history, international

relations, literature, pedagogy, political economy, anthropology, journalism, ecology — and anything else that won't earn you a living selling fried chicken — a good EN-GE-OH is your best option. Let me explain.

Fairy tales

To understand what an EN-GE-OH is, you need to understand The Project. It's rather like a fairy tale. Take Cinderella. You know she has problems: her mother dies, then her father, then she's adopted by a wicked stepmother and so gets stuck with two ugly step-sisters. Cinderella has many nice, simple friends, such as little birds and mice. She wants to go to the prince's ball, but she can't. The Fairy Godmother come and fixes things for her. Cinderella goes to the ball. The prince falls in love. More problems come up, but in the end they are married. The birds sing and the mice dance, and everyone's happy. Projects are a bit like that.

Terrible problems afflict good, kind, and simple folk who have harmless beliefs and picturesque customs. Other kindly souls befriend these folk, who've been marginalised by capitalism, and want to help them — but they don't have the means. A representative from an international agency arrives, sees what's needed, uses a special magic spell to get hold of the cash, and everyone lives happily ever after. That is how the story goes.

EN-GE-OHs are a bit like the birds and mice in the fairy tale. They want to help poor people and support the Fairy Godmother as she goes about her noble business. You get the picture. Projects are Fairy Tales. Cinderella is The Poor, or The Beneficiary. The Fairy Godmother is the International Agency representative. The Little Mice are EN-GE-OHs. The Magic Coach is the Funding. And marriage with the Prince is Sustainable Development. The only difference is that in the real world, it's the birds and the mice who marry the prince, and the EN-GE-OHs who ensure their own Sustainable (Self) Development. It all depends on understanding the subtle charm of Projects, and their intimate relationship with EN-GE-OHs.

First step: setting up an EN-GE-OH

First you need to get your legal status sorted out. This is invaluable, especially if someone who's resentful of your relationship with the Fairy Godmother (whom they'd been courting) decides to denounce you to the press, or the police, because of some impropriety committed on the difficult road to Sustainable (Self) Development — such as leading poor

Cinderella up the garden path. To get legal status, you usually need a general secretary, a treasurer, some trustees, and a well-connected contact who'll help you get it through the Ministry. But a word of advice: don't involve other like-minded professionals, if you want to stay at the top.

Second step: the sales pitch

The sales pitch is the aphrodisiac that drives the Fairy Godmothers wild. Here, you have to be up to date and well prepared. For instance, it would be fatal to start talking about Integrated Rural Development, when everyone knows that today we talk about Sustainable Natural Resource Management. You'd be ruled out if you talked about Mother-Child Education when the fashion now is for Peasant Women's Participation. It would be like raving about Michael Jackson to an opera buff. You have to be flexible. An EN-GE-OH Director needs to be familiar with all the existing or potential fads of the Fairy Godmothers. If one of these decides to take up an interest in protecting a threatened species of tropical monkey in Ray-Ban sunglasses, you need to be able to show that from childhood the fate of these endangered animals has been your burning concern.

Third step: public relations

Once you've mastered all the standard jargon — Activities, Conceptual Frameworks, Experience and Background, Aims and Objectives, Human Resources — you're ready for the next step: Public Relations.

Your first aim as the up-and-coming Director of an unknown EN-GE-OH is to get on to the Fairy Godmother circuit. It's one of the hardest features of the New Order of Civil Society. You'll have to hunt down the Fairy Godmothers at all the cocktail parties to open or close seminars, congresses, and international meetings on the following key topics:

- Critical Poverty
- Protecting the Environment
- Protecting Children and other Threatened Species
- Educational Reform
- New Information Order, New Economics Order, and any other New Order that crops up
- Defence of Indigenous Cultures
- Informal Economy and Micro-Enterprise
- Popular Education and Adult Literacy Campaigns
- Information Technology and Development of the Rural Community
- Anything to do with the 'Challenge of the Twenty-First Century'.

You also need to go to the receptions given at the major embassies: Germany, Belgium, Netherlands, USA, Sweden, Italy, and France, as well as those given by UNESCO, UNICEF, FAO, WHO, UNDP, the World Bank, etc.

Basic tips: You need to be on form for these social-cum-professional occasions. It's not just a question of having a few drinks and smiling inanely in a corner. Take a nap before the event, so that you're at your best. Dress well. Always take a load of business cards and a dozen leaflets about your institution. Eat and drink the least amount possible. Learn how to spot a Fairy Godmother at a glance. They are usually fair-haired, tall, and slightly informally dressed. They are also generally surrounded by locals, who are either listening to every word, in a kind of beatific trance, or energetically reciting one of their prepared speeches, with passionate intensity. Alternatively, they might be looking askance as one of the other supplicants is speaking.

You can learn a lot by watching. The important thing is to get a sense of when it's right to make an intervention. What you're aiming for is the incisive remark that cuts the ground from the others' feet, so that the Fairy Godmother will show an interest in you.

There are various risks here. Some are obvious: alcoholism, divorce, partial or total alienation. Others are more serious. Something to be avoided at all costs is to make any ironic or cynical reference to the holy development crusades in which the Fairy Godmothers and their agencies are engaged. Jokes, however well meant, are only for old hands. Don't even risk seeming flippant, until you've got a couple of projects under your belt. And don't be discouraged if it all takes a long time. That's part of the training.

Fourth step: the funding request

Once you've got the Fairy Godmother's ear, you need to lead her gradually to the point where you can present a Funding Request. This is what separates the winners from the losers. And you want to be a winner. So you need to show the Fairy Godmother how well you get on with Cinderella, and that she in turn respects and supports you. To do this, you'll need to expose the Fairy Godmother to the rarefied atmosphere of what is called 'The Field'.

Field Visits: 'Field' is a word much used in the North, where it has a kind of tantric significance. For the Fairy Godmothers, a successful 'field visit' is almost a guarantee of project approval, a one-way ticket to Sustainable (Self) Development. When you feel the Fairy Godmother is ready for a 'field visit', you need to prepare Cinderella and her little friends, and train up a

couple of Poor Beneficiary groups. It doesn't matter who they are, or how you get hold of them. The important thing is that they are there when you arrive with the honoured guest from the omnipotent North. No detail should be overlooked. Cinderella and the rest need to look the part, preferably dressed in local costumes. A good tip is to make sure they know a couple of the folk songs that political exiles have made popular in the North. You need lots of emotional colour and human interest. Perhaps you could even throw in a birth, baptism, or burial, just to add to the excitement.

Essentially, you're organising a piece of theatre for the Fairy Godmother, who is prepared to pay to see this played out in the day-to-day life of ordinary people in 'The Field'. So, make sure your actors know what's at stake. If they fail to convince the Fairy Godmother, you won't be able to afford the AppleMac or the Land Cruiser — essential for your image as defender of Sustainable Development. Should the locals start to be uneasy, or demand something in return for their part in the play, tell them you'll build a school, or an access road. Whatever. In any case, they're used to broken promises, and after a drink or two they'll have forgotten everything. The important thing is for the Fairy Godmother to witness your good relations with Cinderella and her friends.

Writing up Proposals: You need to write up the proposal, devise a plan of action, and invent a budget. Some EN-GE-OH Directors work round the clock on these, making sure that everything holds together. But why make problems for yourself? Just hire a couple of unemployed specialists for the smallest fee you can get away with. Tell them that if the project works, they'll be taken on full-time on international salaries. They might fall for it and do the work for free. Two words of warning. First, never let the consultants know which agency you're negotiating with, to put them off the track. Second, get the consultants to draw up a budget for only half what you intend to request. You alone should manage the budget details.

Budgets: There are two vital elements that shouldn't be left to informal agreements with the Fairy Godmother: your salary and the overhead. There are others too: international training, travel expenses and *per diems*, teaching materials, consultancy fees (to pay back the odd favour here and there at your discretion), and infrastructure. The better you take care of these details, the more rapid will be your rise to Sustainable (Self) Development.

Conclusion: development is a business

Like any other business, the development impresario needs to keep an eye on the competition. As this becomes more intense, you need to spend about half your time running down the opposition. This isn't the world

of ‘gentlemen’s agreements’, but of people like yourself who’ve learned how to help themselves by helping The Poor. Business is a harsh teacher.

But in the end, the ones you need to be most concerned about are the ones who are, in fact, genuine, and who therefore jeopardise everyone’s career by putting their rhetoric into practice.

Postscript

Much has changed since I wrote the Cinderella story in the late 1980s, and yet the game is still on; probably more subtle, and probably on a larger scale. Yet, the amount of aid money that goes not to the poor but to the NGO managers has become trivial compared with the colossal sums that are syphoned off the well-intentioned programmes that are promoted by the big multilateral institutions, the billions in loans, and the megaproject budgets; and let us not forget, in this age of private and market-driven utopias, the sums syphoned off the private banking sector and private contractors in developing countries. For example, one single banker at the Banco del Progreso in Ecuador managed to ‘disappear’ (sic) at short notice, in an offshore labyrinth, some US\$1,000 million belonging to 700,000 small depositors. Some independent estimates show that about 15 per cent of the sales in the privatisation of state enterprises in Latin America went to build private fortunes for about 10,000 individuals; that is to say about US\$10,000 million in commissions. So, when we trash the NGOs — as so many of them deserve — we should also remember we are discussing the crumbs on the floor while the real banquet is happening elsewhere.

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