

Global Leadership Fellows Programme Graduation | Reflection

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*Dedicated to my mother and father, who have always encouraged me
to experience and encounter all that is different in life.*

Professor Klaus and Hilde Schwab, Dean Probst, Emilio Lozoya, members of the Managing Board, coaches, family, friends and my fellow Fellows,

It is indeed a pleasure and an honor to stand among you and to offer a few retrospective and forward-looking thoughts as we graduate from the Global Leadership Fellows Programme.

We need not look far and wide to know that what we have experienced over the previous three years holds lasting value beyond this day. With some facility, we could characterize our world as *complex* and *muddled* and potentially *broken*. Just as efficiently, though, we could name the many, modern opportunities that await adoption by all people – namely, level-setting technologies such as *social media*, *3-D printing*, *open educational courseware* and many others.

Clearly, we are bombarded by contrasting influences and ideas – conflict and peace; access and isolation; hope and despair – opposing dynamics that create a *dizzying* global theater. Further, it is evident that the world demands new and inspiring and moral leaders – locally and transnationally – who can make sense of these dialectics and gather communities around compelling visions.

But I suggest that we look to the confluence of a few, recent events as the most relevant justification of our individual and collective GLF journeys:

- First, early last month, the newly-installed Pope Francis explained to his Vatican audience that regardless of differences in tradition and belief among those religious *and non-religious* that constructing a “culture of ***encounter***” serves as a “foundation for peace”.

- Second, since the end of May in Turkey, we have witnessed the unrest that has emerged between anti-government forces and the country's ruling party...a fundamental disconnect between groups at odds with one another.
- And third, just under two weeks ago and during the Forum's East Asia Summit, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi implored our very own community of Young Global Leaders to “foster as much *respect* and *understanding* as possible” among competing factions, ideas and peoples around the world.

It is by no accident that we observe precarious events on a daily basis – and there are, for better or worse, many other samples of incongruent parts seeking to make themselves whole, through *exclusive* or *inclusive* behavior. And if I were to highlight a common thread among all of these tensions, I would borrow a single word from that first example: *encounter*.

Encounter. How to do *meet* one another? How do we truly *relate* to one another? How do we *engage* with one another?

That word is a curious one. The roots of encounter, whether drawn from English, French or Latin, reveal some sort of *conflict-ridden* and *adversarial* meeting...not too hopeful – and likely not the implied intent of that Vatican declaration. But digging deeper, we come to realize that an underlying meaning of the word “encounter” involves the idea of *finding* one another. We are, inherently and intimately, bound together as one, common being.

Through encounter, what was lost is found.

A few years ago, I was afforded the opportunity to consult with a civic engagement program being conducted in Central America. During a two-week stint in Nicaragua, I visited a few of the various public schools taking part in the initiative and among the classrooms I toured, one stood out from the rest.

A lengthy set of conversations with the school director, Mario Rojas, revealed that he had worked tirelessly over the previous years to establish a set of outstanding programs: teacher development; adult education; vocational training...and the list went on.

The secret to his success? In his own words, Mario had engaged nearly everyone in the community to offer whatever they could. And before long, his chief supporters became local parents – the same ones that had opposed his previous reform efforts as they pulled their children out of the classroom and into the labor market so they could earn vital income for their families.

But Mario engaged them in conversation...and listened to their needs...and, together, they built something wonderful. With that communal support, he recruited and encouraged his teachers to inspire students...*and to serve as poets and songwriters and cultural preservationists*. In the context of this rural town – located in one of the poorest countries in the Western Hemisphere – he ensured that his community's students were exposed to the riches of global *history* and *music* and *culture*. He made certain that they encountered the world.

If we carry that example as well as the prescriptions offered by the Vatican, Turkey, Myanmar and the rest of the world into our daily practice – something significant as we graduate from this program – a few questions surface for all of us: How do we guide *others* in encountering the world? How do we encourage *competing* or *opposing* ideas to live in a similar space? And more pertinent to our lives as leaders, how do we inspire those around us – including our *adversaries* – to come upon the world?

This appears as a tall task...but the last three years reveal that we are ready to heed this call:

During our GLF program, we delved into geopolitical situations and explored the complexity of environmental and economic shifts around the globe. We wrestled with systems dynamics and the language of finance. We debated the proper role of the state and crowdsourced ideas on building innovative organizations.

We made sense of the BRICs...and climate change...and the provision of healthcare in diverse settings. We exercised personal influence and persuasion...and explored the significance of corporate boards...and transnational water issues...and social innovation.

We spent time on stage, literally and figuratively, gaining an appreciation for what it means to affect others. We learned what it means to *find* and *share* our authentic voice. *We also learned that we are lacking a karaoke voice (although, as leaders, we are working on it).*

We met with countless leaders from numerous domains in locations near and far...and discovered first-hand what their journeys have been like.

In the context of a higher altitude and, notably, through the lessons of a dearly departed teacher, we learned what composes a highly-functioning team.

We practiced our *negotiation* skill with one another – and learned just how difficult it is to do serious back and forth with fellow Fellows – that is, fellow *friends* in the programme. On a personal note, this is where I discovered that Fernando Gomez must be lying when he tells people that he holds a PhD in chemistry...because *clearly* he has a doctorate in *negotiation* instead. In our very first exercise, Fernando cleverly employed the “Withholding Really Important Information from My Negotiating Enemy” strategy. And I was the recipient of that tactic. But...let’s face it. I used the same thing on him, so everything worked out in the end.

We were afforded opportunities to share what we know and what we have learned with others. We were given the platform to *teach* and to serve as *thought leaders*. We were encouraged to *write* and *debate*.

We learned that Swiss timing means that we are probably already late for something and so we should hustle to get to that place as soon as possible. And leaders always need to hustle.

We learned what it means to be *present* to one another. Our coaching groups and friendships established a base for us to guide one another on our personal and professional passages. We learned that grand overtures need not be exercised to affect powerful change. It is our experience that an embrace, a pair of words, or a few, precious moments of *authentic* presence in the company of another can make all the difference.

We learned to *trust* one another...to ask for *help*...and to be *vulnerable*. As difficult and as challenging as that has been, we did so because we endeavored to make something more of ourselves and we realize in retrospect that those dark moments have ultimately allowed us to shine.

We learned what it means to give. We practiced leading from the front of the pack – and learned *when* and *how* to empower another or others to assume the mantle of leadership.

We learned, as well, to live in discomfort. We became *comfortable* with being *uncomfortable*.

In essence and in sum, we spent our three years *encountering* one another and encountering the world.

As we leave this program and look ahead, we are reminded that the structures that are *truly* inclusive in this world are few and far between. It is incumbent upon all of us and to others whom we inspire to create opportunities to bring *The Different*, *The Contrarian*, and *The*

Other into the fold – even if it is uncomfortable. It is our duty to ensure that *The Meek*, *The Anxious* and *The Voiceless* have a say. As leaders, we are reminded that our responsibility is to honor the dignity and creativity of all people by encouraging everyone to be heard.

We do so because resolving the omnipresent complexity of the most pressing issues demands new thoughts, insights and ideas. We do so because it is the right thing to do.

The gift of *encounter* is one that has been bestowed upon us through this Global Leadership Fellows program and, particularly, through our work here in the World Economic Forum. This gift afforded us is one we bring to the world.

Our charge, then, is no less than this: ensuring that our common *humanity* is preserved and celebrated and discovered through innovative – even *unusual* – encounter. Our vision is a universal understanding that *Their* challenge is *Our* challenge.

And as we continue down our particular paths and live in that place where clarity and the truth/Truth are endless pursuits, we can remind ourselves of this: history falls on the side of those *courageous enough to broker such encounter*. If we seek to continue wrestling with things that are *messy* and *opaque* and *complex*...we must be doing something right. We will know that we are living our vocation as leaders.

In closing and on behalf of our entire cohort, I wish to say thank you to a few people who have made this experience possible.

To Professor Schwab, thank you for this opportunity to serve as Global Leadership Fellows. We are truly thankful for – and humbled by – this special gift. We thank you for your endless support.

To Gilbert, Juraj, Selima and the entire GLF office, thank you for all of the hours, days, weeks and months you dedicated to making us better people. You have endured countless questions and suggestions and ideas from all of us...and you have done so with smiles on your faces. Your devotion knows no bounds.

To all of our coaches, we thank you for making time for us. You are wonderful and giving people and we are indebted to you.

To our significant others and loved ones, thank you for allowing us the privilege of spending ample time to grow and develop ourselves. Thank you as well for your help in welcoming no less than six, new Global Leadership Babies (or GLBs) into the world.

And finally, a thank you to my fellow Fellows...you are bright, passionate and honest people. You are talented and hardworking and committed to the cause. But there is a single, common trait that you possess which will continue to set you apart in your respective global leadership journeys: *you are nice people* – and I am most thankful for your example of what it means *to be good*.

My dear friends, it has been a distinct pleasure.

Thank you.