

Every now and then, we come across people who really inspire us with their sense of integrity and ethical core. They speak from higher ground while on their path of ascension and have an infrastructure that deeply roots them, despite all the world's challenges and ill-fated temptations. Douglas Okero is, undoubtedly, one of these role models.

During his days as an undergraduate Business Administration student at the University of the Fraser Valley (UFV), formerly known as the University College of the Fraser Valley (UCFV), Douglas or, as he prefers to be called, Doug, had undertaken several projects that were dear to his heart – the most noticeable being his involvement with UFV's International Development Student Association (IDSA).

Given his recent move to the Fraser Valley from Nairobi, Kenya, Doug recognized the need for community among international students. As a result of restricted financial support and barriers associated with language and cultural differences, Doug helped form the IDSA in 2001 and became its first president.

The IDSA was designed to promote international relations and development while being a support group for international students. By participating in development projects and raising awareness on current world issues, students became more involved with neighbouring communities, which helped them adjust to Canadian culture. Doug also spearheaded initiatives, such as increasing scholarship amounts and assisted students with securing co-op placements.

However, his greatest endeavour involved collaborating with Hope International (a Canadian, non-profit, international development agency) on a fundraising project for a village of 300 in Cambodia. The goal was to raise \$5,000, ensuring access to 46 water wells for clean drinking water and for crop irrigation.

"I was fascinated by the idea of participating in a project of such international scope. The IDSA had a rich multicultural dimension with students and members from a variety of countries. We believed that, with the diverse backgrounds and the resources Canada had to offer, we were compelled to look beyond our borders when choosing projects that assisted people in need. Decades of war, unrest, and its legacies, such as landmines and disease, meant that many Cambodian women were widows or orphans with no support systems in place. They needed our help," says Okero.

Doug undertook a significant leadership role with managing, organizing, and coordinating most fundraising efforts -- while giving his fellow students vision, motivation, and unity. When asked why he wore his heart on his sleeve, Doug replied with a nonchalant, humble answer as though his actions were ordinary. I received a lot of help from people like Erin Brown, who was the Vice President at the time, and I can [honestly] say that without her, the project would not have been as successful. The project's success was a direct result of teamwork combined with empathy," says Okero

"I care deeply about people—people of all backgrounds. We are all one—and by helping someone, no matter how little our efforts might be, it makes a big difference in that person's life. Inspired by my mother, I was taught that God has blessed me to be who I am and to live a fulfilled life, so I feel passionate about sharing my blessings with others. Meeting Kim Phealy, one of the women from Pursat Province in Cambodia, sealed my fate when she explained how our efforts changed her family's life and saved others that may have been lost due to poor sanitation and exposure to water-borne diseases, " says Okero.

Currently a senior consultant with Abbotsford Printing, Doug continues to extend a hand for others as an act of reverence, delivering a generosity that also happens to reciprocate pleasure. He knows it's a big circle and advocates that we are all held accountable and are responsible for one another.

By Summer Dhillon