

“Individuals and nations cannot reach their full potential without quality, affordable education.”

Former US president Bill Clinton on education, poverty, and how NGOs and companies can learn from one another

Bill Clinton was never one to rest on his laurels. Through the Clinton Foundation and the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI), the former US president is out to help resolve problems that afflict humankind on a global scale; problems such as AIDS, poverty and climate change. The former Governor of Arkansas was quick to realize that a better education is one of the pillars on which such solutions can be based. Clinton's charisma brings politicians and corporate leaders, institutions and NGOs to the table, where CGI points out opportunities for them to play a responsible part in helping solve the world's problems. In this, the former president is meeting a need: Many people, he says, simply did not know how they could best help others.

The Focus: In your autobiography *My Life* you describe how, as newly elected Governor of Arkansas, you tried to improve the state education system. What opportunities does a society fail to grasp if it neglects education and upbringing?

Bill Clinton: It is up to all of us to ensure that children throughout the world are educated and are given the skills and tools they need to join the global community. As governor, I tried both to raise the standards for students and teachers, and to provide both with the support they needed to succeed. I knew from my own experience, growing up in one of America's poorest states, that individuals, communities, and nations cannot reach their full potential without quality, affordable education. That's even more true today, in both developed and developing nations.

The Focus: *Forbes Magazine* wrote that, these days, Bill Clinton sounds “more like a CEO than a politician.” You yourself once said of the Clinton Global Initiative: “We take a lot of cues from the business world. We have very entrepreneurial people and a very entrepreneurial process.” What kind of cues and processes were you referring to?

Clinton: The Clinton Foundation works in a number of areas, including HIV/AIDS, global poverty, childhood obesity in the United States, climate change and the Clinton Global Initiative, a three-day annual conference attended by world leaders, CEOs, and philanthropists that addresses some of the most pressing challenges of our time. Throughout the entire foundation and each of our initiatives we take an entrepreneurial, business-minded approach to solving challenges. We employ many former business leaders who know how to get things done and reach goals quickly and efficiently. We keep score



and keep track of our successes and setbacks. So we know how well we're doing and how we can do better. We're constantly evaluating ourselves to determine what works and what doesn't. Finally, we take a pragmatic, businesslike approach, working with businesses to confront these challenges together. As an example, the Alliance for a Healthier Generation, our initiative fighting childhood obesity, recently announced partnerships with leading snack food and beverage manufacturers to set healthy food and beverage guidelines for schools. The Clinton Foundation HIV/AIDS Initiative works with medicine and diagnostic equipment manufacturers to make these life-saving products available to more people at greatly reduced prices, yet allow the companies to continue to make a profit. And we work hard to keep overhead costs as low as possible. There's a lot that NGOs can learn from business and we've had a lot of success taking cues from the business world.

The Focus: What can your foundation and you personally learn from the business world and above all from its leading figures and leadership structures?

Clinton: There's a lot the business world can teach NGOs. Many NGOs that have the best intentions in the world were founded and are staffed by doctors, researchers and technicians who are incredibly talented and hardworking, but don't have the necessary skills and experience to set metrics and build efficient, sustainable systems to achieve their goals. By employing business-minded strategies and working with businesses, my foundation has been able to create a sustainable system for lowering the cost of life-saving aids treatment, which has been provided to over 500,000 people around the world. We're currently working on expanding those sustainable systems to include other projects, from fertilizer to micro-credit loans to clean energy products. And because they are self-sustaining these systems have the potential to keep working and keep helping people.

The Focus: Not all leading figures in the business and political spheres have the necessary sense of responsibility for the demanding roles they are expected to play. How do you think such a sense of responsibility can be triggered within companies and organizations?

Clinton: We can't force people to act how we think they should, but I believe that most people want to do good and play a part in solving some of the challenges that we currently face. Also, a healthier, better-educated, more prosperous world is good for business. Many people

don't know the opportunities that are out there to make an impact. That's one thing that makes the Clinton Global Initiative truly special. We bring in business leaders, CEOs and entrepreneurs who normally might not be interested in working with an NGO. Then we show them what opportunities are available for them to have a positive impact on global poverty; on religious and ethnic conflicts; on AIDS and other health problems, including the absence of clean water and sanitation; and on climate change. Many business and opinion leaders have made extraordinary commitments to do good, just because we pointed them in the right direction and provided them the forum through CGI to connect with dozens of other non-profits and NGOs who could benefit from their resources.

RESUMÉ

Bill Clinton



While still in high school, William Jefferson Clinton, born 1946 in Hope, Arkansas, met President John F. Kennedy in the White House Rose Garden. The encounter led him to enter a life of public service. Clinton graduated from Georgetown University and in 1968 won a Rhodes Scholarship to Oxford. He received a law degree from Yale in 1973, and shortly thereafter entered politics. Clinton won the Arkansas governorship in 1978, lost it in 1980, won it again in 1982 and retained it for ten years. Elected President of the United States in 1992, and re-elected in 1996, Bill Clinton was the first Democratic president since Franklin D. Roosevelt to be awarded a second term. After leaving the White House, President Clinton established the William J. Clinton Foundation with the mission to strengthen the capacity of people in the US and worldwide to meet the challenges of global interdependence. In September 2005, he hosted the inaugural meeting of the Clinton Global Initiative, bringing together 35 current and 10 former heads of state, along with hundreds of other leaders from politics, business, and NGOs.