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The New Breed of City Boys ?

by [Philosopher In The City - Nafees Mahmud \(RSS feed\)](#) on 19.May.2011 at 13:10

Altruism and financial services don't typically go hand in hand. Fictional characters from Oliver Stone's Gordon Gekko to Geraint Anderson's Hugo Bentley and real life villains from Madoff to Fabrice Tourre provide examples of the disparity between the two.

Post recession, many people's perspectives have changed. Several young graduates have been spreading word around the City about entering this industry for reasons more altruistic than hedonistic. This sounded perplexing to me so I arranged to meet with one such budding City professional.



Simeon Williams is an analyst at ING Commercial Bank and a PPE graduate from the University of York. He is also the Head of Corporate Relations at Aiducation UK. This is a not for profit organisation, founded in Switzerland and Kenya, awarding scholarships to high potential students in developing countries (with a current focus on Kenya). They are funded by high flying City professionals in the West. Companies sponsoring Aiducation include UBS and McKinsey Foundation.

Philanthropy is high on Simeon's agenda. He wants to use his time in the City to encourage affluent people to help the less fortunate throughout the world.

I ask why a successful twenty-something would spend his spare time strategising community development in Kenya when he could be partying in a strip club. I am struck by his lack of complacency. Rather than be satisfied with his own good fortune he tells me he is determined to help others experience the benefits he has in life; a thorough education and promising career prospects. He believes the benefits of this impact us all. "The global economy benefits from talented bright individuals realising their potential. If the world economy is to grow substantially again we need more talent than ever before and we need to remove the barriers which have kept certain people from participating. By helping others abroad we are helping ourselves, as individuals and as companies at home".

This last point, probed deeper, will make many sceptical of why the business leaders he liaises with through Aiducation are involved in philanthropic adventures. Aren't they only in it to improve their public

relations or to find the best brains helping to maximise profit? Simeon understands this perspective but believes we shouldn't try to judge the intention, instead appreciate the outcome: "you can start a ripple but you'll never know the end effect".

As I conclude my conversation with Simeon I am intrigued to discover if he and the few others like him are just a welcome anomaly. Most people choose a career in this game to get rich quick and retire by forty, pursuing all that can be read between the lines of such aims. To hear of someone choosing a City career to finance and improve the lives of people across the world, as paradoxical as it may sound, is unique to say the least. I am not doubtful of Simeon's convictions and am impressed by his achievements to date. Recent history has proven the stereotypical city boy cannot contribute to a sustainable global economy. Is Simeon an example of a rising new breed or another hopeful one off? Time will tell.

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