

Make Your Cause Your Career

Want work that feels good, helps people, and challenges you in the best way? Follow in the steps of these inspiring charity leaders—including four past winners of L'Oréal's Women of Worth Awards, which celebrates its 10th anniversary this month. They've already left the world better off than they found it, and they're just getting started.

BY PAULA DERROW

"I created a path for myself I didn't know existed."



Nancy Chang 35

BOARD CHAIR

SKATE LIKE A GIRL

loved it, but it was tough to find other girls into skateboarding.

After college, Chang got a job at a teen center and organized a weekly skateboarding night. The event got the attention of two other young women who had started a group called Skate Like a Girl. In 2007, Chang teamed with them and, using the skills she was learning in graduate school for public administration, took the organization nonprofit, with the goal of making boarding more welcoming to girls. "People don't understand the value of skateboarding—they say it's just boys smoking pot and being bad. But we've created a community where girls can learn, get more confident, and mentor one another. That's really satisfying."

HER ADVICE

Relentlessly assess the change you are making, urges Chang, who is also executive director of Reel Grls, a nonprofit that teaches filmmaking. "You may not see an impact right away. Know what long- and short-term wins would look like."

NANCY CHANG didn't grow up in the kind of family where it was okay for girls to skateboard, much less help build a nonprofit around the sport. "My parents wanted their kids to be doctors or lawyers, not to go into nonprofits," she says. Yet her Taiwanese family also lived a "Buddhist lifestyle—it was always about wanting to help other people." Those kinds of mixed messages were a hallmark of her childhood in rural Washington. "I was a tomboy, so I was told I had to be more girly but at the same time not dress provocatively. I never felt that I fit in."

That's partly why she was drawn to the rebellious culture of skateboarding. "My older brother had a board from Kmart, and in sixth grade, I started teaching myself tricks in our garage." She



A SKATEBOARD BECAME CHANG'S VEHICLE FOR CHANGING LIVES.

“You have to be a little pushy.”



Erika Ebbel Angle 34

FOUNDER

SCIENCE FROM SCIENTISTS

IT STARTED with suicidal crocodiles. Erika Ebbel Angle was in sixth grade, vacationing in Cancún with her parents, when she visited a crocodile farm. “I learned that when a crocodile is mortally wounded, it flips over and commits suicide.” When she got back to her Bay Area school, she decided her science-fair project would investigate whether cells infected with a virus commit “cell suicide.”

Her school didn’t have facilities to help with the project, so the 11-year-old began calling a bunch of labs. Most didn’t call back, but one man, director of a local public-health lab, agreed to help her design an experiment. “He knew that my hypothesis wouldn’t work, but he didn’t tell me that,” she says. Instead, he taught her the fundamentals that

would lead her to a life of science.

Angle went to MIT as a biochemistry major, where, in 2002, looking for a service project, she hit on the idea of helping kids with science fairs. With \$119 from a fundraiser, Angle started Science From Scientists, even while juggling a full course load.

Today, the nonprofit serves 7,000 kids per year in Massachusetts, bringing scientists into schools to teach not only physics and biology but also critical thinking and teamwork. “Kids ask our scientists for their autographs—they’ve never realized science can be a career for women,” says Angle, who also recently launched a biotech company. “That’s the most awesome testament as to why I do this.”

HER ADVICE

Starting out, Angle sought lawyers who’d give pro bono help to untangle the red tape of founding a nonprofit. “If you pick up the phone enough times, you’ll find people willing to donate time and skills,” says the former Miss Massachusetts. “You have to persevere.”



ALI PLANTS SEEDS OF HOPE IN BRUTAL SITUATIONS.

“If you give someone a push and a bit of courage, it’s amazing what they can do.”



Somy Ali 42

FOUNDER

NO MORE TEARS

IN HER FIRST CAREER as a Bollywood actress, Somy Ali made 10 films alongside her boyfriend, a top actor in India. But when the fairy tale ended in a bad breakup in 2006, she found herself in Miami looking for a new path.

One day, a neighbor knocked on Ali’s door. A Bangladeshi, she knew Ali (a native of Pakistan) spoke her language. “Her father-in-law had raped her, and she didn’t know where to go,” Ali says. She helped her get a divorce and go to school. “I grew up with violence all around me,

and I was sexually abused by the household help,” she says. “I needed to do something about it.”

In founding No More Tears, Ali set out to offer abused and trafficked women a way out, securing everything from restraining orders to food stamps. She relies on donations and volunteers, driving victims to doctors and court herself.

“It can be emotionally draining,” admits Ali, who has received death threats, had her tires slashed, and gotten sued. Yet it’s worth it when she sees the results. “We’ve rescued almost 1,500 victims, and only two have gone back to their abusers,” she says.

HER ADVICE

Before creating No More Tears, Ali volunteered at two nonprofits for six months each. “I wanted to get a sense of how I’d run things,” she says. Idealist.org has tons of listings for jobs, internships, and volunteering gigs.

ANGLE AND ALI: COURTESY SUBJECTS; SIDEWALK: GETTY IMAGES.

WORK

“People say they want a career that’s sexy, but that’s not how you find your bliss.”



Maimah Karmo 41

FOUNDER

TIGERLILY FOUNDATION

KARMO WAS 32, a single mother of a 3-year-old, and working for a government contractor in Northern Virginia when she felt the lump in her breast that would turn out to be Stage 2 cancer. Her first reaction was fear: of what would happen to her preschooler, losing her hair, whether she’d find love again. “At chemo, I didn’t see anyone who looked like me—young, dressed in jeans and heels. It felt like an assembly line, a place you’d go to die.”

Karmo imagined a different kind of chemo experience—where women could sit with a buddy or cozy up with a soft blanket and a magazine—all the things young cancer patients told her they wished for.

That led to the Tigerlily Foundation and its “hope bags,” stocked with a blanket, scarves, a hat, lip balm, a journal, and info on coping with emotional issues. “People said, ‘You have cancer, you have no money, you don’t know what you’re doing.’ But I never felt so alive and driven.”

After her treatment, in 2006, Karmo quit her job to work on Tigerlily full-time. “I didn’t even have a board. Sometimes, I’d go home and cry. But I also knew that if I didn’t keep going, I wouldn’t be doing what I was meant to do,” she says. The nonprofit now offers 14 programs, including meal delivery services and funding to help patients with medical bills, rent, and child care.

HER ADVICE

For years, Karmo struggled to find her career calling. So she kept trying things out. “I did communications, marketing, proposal work, project management. Those skill sets all helped me build my nonprofit.”

SUPPORTING OTHER CANCER PATIENTS GAVE KARMO PURPOSE.

FROM LEFT: GETTY IMAGES; VAL CAVALHERI/CAVALHERI PHOTOGRAPHY.

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5 SURPRISES ABOUT GIVE-BACK JOBS

Get the insider scoop from Elizabeth Gore, entrepreneur-in-residence at Dell and advocate at the United Nations Foundation.

1. IT'S AN INDUSTRY

"Think of nonprofits as a career path. Your product is helping someone else's life versus creating a widget. You can study business, finance, marketing, engineering, or writing as an undergrad, then get a master's in nonprofit management or public policy."

2. VOLUNTEERING GETS YOUR FOOT IN THE DOOR

"To get into humanitarian work, you need to live in overseas environments, whether that's a mud hut in Uganda or an emerging economy, like Argentina. Faith groups have programs, or explore the Peace Corps or Teach for America."

3. YOU DON'T HAVE TO BUILD YOUR OWN THING

"If you have a game-changing idea for a charity, try to do it inside the infrastructure of an established nonprofit. By the end of three years, you should have had coffee with at least 25 people there."

4. YOU WON'T LIVE IN POVERTY

"National nonprofits and humanitarian groups need to attract good talent, so they're going to pay what you need. If they don't, go somewhere else."

5. YOU'LL MAKE FRIENDS

"Because this industry is led by the heart, you develop close relationships. The girls I started out with at the Points of Light Foundation are still my best friends."

—AS TOLD TO DANIELLE KAM

"Hold Out for Something Rewarding"

Cecile Richards—president of Planned Parenthood Federation of America and defender of your right to health care—knows how to kick ass at activism.



IT'S A RARE THING to be involved in a group that is not only a health-care provider for 3 million women every day but also a movement. The most exciting thing I do is meet with women who are just getting into becoming activists. The world is totally open to them, more so than for any other generation before.

It's important to find your voice as an advocate because you are going to talk to a lot of people who aren't going to agree with you. We try to provide opportunities for young women to write, speak in public, run meetings, to do the things that help them find their voice. Whether it's at a cocktail party, on an airplane, or in a meeting, I encourage people to have a conversation. Someone who yesterday was

not on your side may be on your side tomorrow.

Fieldwork is a great way to start—whether that's canvassing on a street corner for an organization, volunteering at a health center, escorting women, or visiting with teens as peer educators. Even now, I still spend time knocking on doors. I try to stay as close to the work as possible because that's the only way you truly know what's going on.

It's so hard to win. You have to look back and say, "Where did we come from?" When Margaret Sanger started Planned Parenthood, birth control was illegal. Today, it's the most common form of medicine women use. You are going to make progress and then there is always backsliding. Our team is good at celebrating the victories that are won and then rededicating ourselves.

I've moved around a lot in my career. When I went to work for Nancy Pelosi in Washington, I knew nothing about Capitol Hill! I was so unqualified in so many ways. But I took the job because she was an extraordinary person I could learn from. Women at nonprofits sometimes feel like they are invaluable and they can't move on. Instead think: My time is done here, and I'm going to open up an opportunity for someone else.

People say, "No one ever said at the end of their life, 'I wish I spent more time at the office.'" I actually feel the opposite! You could probably make a lot more money, have a little more prestige, maybe not have as controversial a Thanksgiving dinner-table conversation. But there is nothing like having someone look you in the eye and say, "Thank you for helping me."

—AS TOLD TO SARA AUSTIN