

## Feed The Mind, Free The Body, & Find Your Soul

There are 24 Spirit Principles that Thistle Farms goes by throughout their journey of work and life. These principles are the glue that hold the community together and remind us that we are all thistles with a prickly exterior, but a beautiful soft center. The principles remind us that everyone has to continually work on themselves, but we all need nurturing from others to grow. These principles have fed my spirit; they have kept me motivated, uplifted, and strong throughout this experience. I am very pleased to say that working at Thistle Farms has been one of the best jobs I have ever had. This summer my goal was to work in an environment where I could learn, love the work I do, and grow as a professional individual. I wanted purpose this summer; I wanted to be sure that there was hope in a life of giving and still joy in the pain we hear and see in philanthropy, nonprofit, and social entrepreneurship.

Before I began working at Thistle Farms in Nashville, Tennessee I read *Find Your Way Home*, a book based on the 24 spirit principles written by the women in Magdalene and Thistle Farms. This book was my first introduction to the 24 Spirit principles. It has been the best introduction into the lives of the women I work with and serve. I found grace, vulnerability and acceptance in their words as I read them out loud every night. I was able to paint each scene in my head vividly because I related to their journey. I could sense their power to overcome trials. They were all so strong to be telling their stories because they had an understanding that they were sharing them with people who cared and loved them. They knew that love does heal.

May 18, 2015 was my first day at Thistle Farms, I met Becca Stevens, the CEO and Founder. I was overwhelmed by the community she and the women had created, the trust she

built between them, and at the people who came to her class to learn from the “Rolls Royce of Social Entrepreneurship,” as one woman described in the class. Everybody was booming with questions and I just had one. A question that I have yet to ask her, and probably never will. I just wanted know how she felt on a day to day basis? I wondered if she felt overwhelmed, happy, sad; but the true answer was probably everything in between. When I finally got a chance to shake her hand, I did nothing I had planned to do in my head: I cried. Through misty eyes and a squeaking voice, all I could muster was, “This is beautiful.” She looked at me with a smile and said thank you.

Thistle Farms feels like healing and love. The feeling in the Thistle Stop Cafe, where she hosted her classes was so powerful that there was no way I could contain my joy. I wasn’t crying because of anything negative: I was happy, I was proud of the women, of Becca, her staff, volunteers, people who donated, I was proud of the community. I was proud that I could be apart of the community. Magdalene and Thistle Farms light a candle to help women find their way home and I know I followed the right light. At Thistle farms I feel home.

My task at Thistle Farms personally was to be a sponge; to listen and learn. I wanted to be of service not only in the marketing department where I was assigned, but anywhere they needed a helping hand. In marketing, I was responsible for multidimensional functions such as, public relations, marketing and business operations. As an intern I worked with the marketing team on the Hope Candle Campaign and The Geranium Campaign. I worked alongside the women in various departments, engaged in social media sites, focusing on customer retention, I conducted online research, as well as participated in general marketing and assisted with the

annual fundraiser and conferences. I was assigned small projects each week to help the company to prepare for larger events, while working on larger ongoing projects simultaneously.

One of my larger projects that they allowed me to work on, and is still ongoing is the *Share The Light Campaign*. This campaign was created to encourage the lighting of the candle with prayer and peace that the women who are still on the streets, suffering from women trafficking, prostitution and addiction can find their way home. This is a global initiative to help raise money for Thistle Farms and other churches, non-profits, organizations and businesses. I was responsible for promoting this campaign, keeping up with possible participators by reaching out to them and answering questions they might have had. This particular project along with others allowed me insight to the work it takes to raise a community.

Thistle Farms not only helps the women in Magdalene- they also have a fair trade initiative, *Shared Trade* to empower women all over the globe. They are helping women in Ghana, Uganda, Rwanda, and other countries, to gain economic stability. I worked particularly on The Hope Tea & Rose Geranium projects. Hope Tea is sourced in Kampala, Uganda. “Hope Tea is a social enterprise that partners with local Ugandan tea growers to support the Friends of Canon Gideon Foundation (FOCAGIFO) in providing holistic education to vulnerable youth in Uganda who face challenges such as poverty, high incidences of HIV and AIDS, unemployment, and socially sanctioned violence.”<sup>1</sup> I was as excited to learn about FOCAGIFO as I was to learn about the women in Uganda that make our Rose Geranium for our blossoming product The Rose Geranium Insect Repellent.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://store.thistlefarms.org/product-p/tea-hope.htm>

The second project that I worked on was the Rose Geranium campaign. I was responsible for gathering summer camps to send our story and our product. The purpose of this was to increase awareness and possibly help these summer camps join the community by offering our product in their camp stores. Though this project is also ongoing, I am hopeful that each summer camp will be more than happy to help restore lives of the women in Uganda and Thistle Farms and continue to help us provide stability and hope to many women.

Though marketing and development was an intensive learning experience, and very important to the progression of Magdalene and Thistle Farms, it couldn't measure up to the experience I had working alongside the women in and graduates of the program. Every day I walked into Thistle Farms and was greeted by a good morning and a hug. I was accepted into the circle of morning meditation and prayer. I always felt blessed to be a part of the circle as we lighted the candle, said the trinity prayer, read a spirit principle, reflected on the reading and ended meditation with a moment of silence while others put names in the circle they would like people to pray for. We ended with the third step Quote "God, take my will and life, guide me in my recovery and teach me how to live just for today."

This experience has encouraged me to continue on my path of vocational work and to never give up my dream of starting development facilities for youth age 18-24. I would like to also start a social enterprise helping struggling adolescents find their way. I want to help them get a great education, get good jobs, and restore their lives in the same way that Becca has done. I thank Thistle Farms for this experience and I am forever grateful To Be A Thistle Farmer.