The great innovators of our time are said to be the titans of technology. The invention of the microchip, the founders of Microsoft ... The guys behind google. Far from silicon valley, another great thinker and innovator is changing the world with far less fanfare: He’s Dr. Paul Farmer. More than 20 years ago, he and a few other great minds created a charity called Partners in Health. In the years since, they have revolutionized the delivery of healthcare worldwide, saving millions of lives in a place no one thought there was a reason for hope.

The idea that because you were born in Haiti meant you could die having a child. The idea because you were born in Malawi your children would go to bed hungry. We wanted to take some of the chance out of that.

Dr. Farmer invited us to central Haiti where he discovered his life’s work 20 years ago. That meant a 3 hour, jaw clenched, teeth rattling ride on an unpaved road from the capital city to the hospital.

This is the principal artery through central Haiti.

If the ride does not break your back, what you see when you arrive will break your heart. The squatter settlement of Koj??? is one of the poorest spots of the poorest country of the western hemisphere. The desperate need Farmer saw here as a young man inspired him and 4 friends to create Partners in Health. They raised money and built what has become the largest hospital in central Haiti.

How many lives do you think PIH has saved? In medicine we say TNTC... Too numerous to count.
What began as a small, understaffed, ill equipped clinic in 1985, today, has 100 inpatient beds, an array of staff, and 3 operating rooms. They have nearly 2 million patient visits per year. The medical care here is free. For Farmer, healthcare is a human right. He wants to show the world that children do not have to die of treatable illnesses like tuberculosis or malaria... They treat these diseases every day.

Do you have any idea how many people around the world die of treatable diseases? Probably around 10 million per year. I will give you some numbers, just from AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and women in childbirth, I bet is around 6 million.

Haitians are so desperate for medical care, each night patients sleep on the ground outside the hospital waiting to get treated. We were there when Dr. Farmer was notified that a woman dying in childbirth was being prepared for an emergency C-section.

This is a 45 year old woman, who has 11 children, who is hemorrhaging right now, and
has placenta previa, which is what some people say is a 3rd trimester catastrophe.

The surgical team made up entirely of Haitians. PIH staffs its hospitals with as many locals as possible. They are not dependent on Americans. In this case, the baby was delivered alive. For the mother who lost a lot of blood, it was touch and go. Dr. Farmer, checked on her after the operation.

She’s going to make it. Thumbs up.

That same woman, same circumstances 25 years ago, what would have happened? She would not have made it. What does that say to you? Tells me if you set your sights high and stick with it, you can make real progress. That's what it says to me.

In fact, Paul Farmer has made astounding progress. PHI has expanded, and now works in 9 countries, including Peru, Mexico, Russia, and 3 countries in Africa. 6000 employees worldwide. Their budget of $50 million is barely enough to keep it going.

Dr. Farmer spends most of his time commuting between hospitals in Rwanda and Haiti. One of his priorities: Train new doctors to follow in his footsteps. Physicians, like David Walton, ...I look at you, 31 years old, medical degree from Harvard, you could make a gazillion dollars in United States, and you are in Haiti.

There’s nothing I would rather be doing. Nothing.

It’s a hard life. 7 day work weeks, including house calls. Can mean a hike up the side of a mountain.

You walk 30 minutes, walk for an hour, 4 hours. Patients do it every day, why should not I do it.

On this day, Dr. Walton was visiting 10 year old Claudette, suffering from a damaged heart valve. Her family and neighbors showed up with their list of ailments. No short lines. Some siblings were sick from sleeping on a muddy floor - including parents. 12 people sleep in this one room.

In the scheme of poverty in Haiti, this is pretty bad. We are on the lower end of spectrum. 10 kids living in these conditions, no possessions. And a very sick child.

Even for the well trained, this is difficult.

I cannot imagine turning my back on something like this. Some people can, I cannot. I will not. This is my life’s work.
There was no happy ending for this story. Claudette died, not long after Dr. Walton’s house call.

There are always whispers about programs like this. That they cannot outlive the people that founded it. When Paul farmers move on PIH will be done.

Paul has set up a system that does not depend on his presence or absence. Haiti’s hospital is run by Haitian physicians, the Rwanda hospital run by Rwandan physicians. When all the Paul Farmers are not around anymore, this place will still be here, providing great care.

You know that or just hope it?
I know it.

No question, Paul Farmer has been a driving force. Take AIDS for example. In the 90s, the disease was ravaging Haiti. There was no getting AIDS drugs to the poor, in rural countries. Dr. Farmer did not give up on his patients. He raised money, and gave them drugs anyway. Look what happened. This is Joseph. And this is Joseph after getting his drugs. This is Joseph 5 years later, and feeling fine. And the same kind of transformation happened in patient after patient.

When Paul started treating people in 1998 in Haiti. People said it was impossible. He is nuts. Cannot be done. Forget about it. Dr. Jim Kim was a professor at Harvard medical school, and one of the cofounders of PIH. Here we are, not even a decade later, where the goal is to treat every single human on the planet with HIV/AIDS.

Look at this man, stricken with tuberculosis. They saved his life, and 1000s like it. Farmer and Kim figured out not just a new way to treat drug resistant tuberculosis, but a cheaper way to provide the medicine. Their breakthrough has become the new standard to save the lives of people around the world.

You were able to lower drug prices. How. These are old, generic drugs. There was no reason to be so expensive. We did some very simple things. We talked to drug procurement specialists, who had contacts in India. Who said, we can make these drugs for 1/100 of the price.

But drugs will only work if people take them. So PIH came up with the idea, hiring community health workers, from local villages. They visit the sick at home every day, making sure they take their medicine. The result: Their patients with AIDS and TB stayed healthier, longer, than many patients in United States.

There are people here in central Haiti who get better care than patients in the United
States.
Come on.
I have seen it.

A program so successful, PIH exported the idea of community health workers to American communities like Roxbury, Massachusetts.

You have been an inspiration....

Paul Farmer’s success has made him a celebrity in the world of global healthcare. He won a MacArthur genius award, heady stuff for a man of humble means. His mother was a grocery store cashier. His father a school teacher, who chose an unconventional lifestyle.

You lived on a bus?
It was a bus that had been used to take x-rays in a TB screening program. This is why I do not like talking about my biography. It was a TB bus, and later I became a tuberculosis expert.

He came from a family of 8. Even though it was crowded on that bus in Florida, he did not feel deprived, but rather adventurous.
You ate your meals on the bus?
Yes. Until we moved onto a boat. With a tent in between.
How did that upbringing shape what you are today?
When you grow up in those conditions, surrounded by affection, but not having a lot of things, you cannot put a lot of things for 8 people in 28ft of space, you get resilient.

He went from a bus to a scholarship to Duke University, then onto Harvard University, where he’s on the faculty. He married a Haitian woman, they have 3 children. Though he travels the world, he still considers Haiti home. Though his services are free he still accepts gifts like an occasional rooster! Yesterday I got 2 roosters, a dozen and a half eggs. Some milk.

Enough for breakfast
Yes, I do.
Before we left Haiti, Dr. Farmer insisted we meet one last patient. This is Jollette Sanu, a 35 year old cancer survivor. The chemotherapy worked, her leukemia is in remission.

She looks a million times better.
This is the one place the normally in control, even keeled, Paul Farmer revealed, sometimes his work gets to him. It happened when he read Jollette’s thank you letter. I want to take this time to show my gratitude to you. As for me, I will read it to you later.

This is hard for you?
It’s luck. Everyone should have access to medical care. Should not be such a big deal.

For the sick, poor, forgotten in Haiti, Paul Farmer is a big deal. There’s a Haitian expression some of his patients say when he’s away: We miss him like the dry earth misses the rain.