Life After Senegal

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Synopsis
Mary returned from two years as a Peace Corps volunteer filled with questions. While in Senegal, she encountered and then overcame significant culture shock and learned about influence with and without formal authority. She found attitudes toward women more baffling and leading projects more frustrating than anticipated. Mary found that by comparing experiences between her own culture and the foreign one she had grown to appreciate, she understood both cultures better. She recognized that attitudes about gender in Senegal and America were remarkably similar in some ways while being radically different in others. She grasped how hard it can be to influence others when not in a position of authority. She also came to appreciate the power of reflection through lessons learned from this intercultural experience that might enable her to successfully navigate future multi-cultural situations in her professional life.

Learning Outcomes
The outcomes of this case are:

1. Analyze gender role differences in the U.S. and other cultures by comparing your own beliefs—and those Mary encountered in Senegal—against prevailing attitudes in the U.S.
2. Identify the changes in Mary’s attitudes towards her home culture and the Senegalese host culture, and the relationship between these attitude changes and Mary’s development of intercultural competence.
3. Apply Gardner’s (2004) seven levers of influence to Mary’s role as a non-positional leader in her interactions with women and men in Senegal.
4. Analyze the potential benefit of reflection on learning from experience as well as implications for leadership and professional growth.

Application
This case is appropriate for upper-level undergraduate, MBA, and master’s courses in gender as well as public policy or nonprofit management courses in organizational behavior, leadership, intercultural communication, cultural diversity, or nonprofit management. It could also be used in co-curricular settings to help students prepare for or debrief from study abroad experiences.

Key Words
International business, intercultural studies, gender, diversity

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