

Social Entrepreneurship & You

Brought to you by Hugh Simpson

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Social Entrepreneurship & You

The trend as we go into the next decades of business is going to be Social Entrepreneurship as noted with surveys done with young people. These young people are not only interested in what goes into their pockets but also how they can use their money to further benefit our Planet and its over 6,000,000,000 residents. It goes way beyond community service that my generation was encouraged to offer.

So what is Social Entrepreneurship? I experienced Social Entrepreneurship with a project that I was involved with back in the 1980s when I lived in Atlanta, Georgia. I owned a public relations consulting business back then and was asked to do some pro-bono work for an organization called The Achor Center. It always has been the tradition of the advertising and public relations world to offer these free services to nonprofits.

The Achor Center was a model for serving homeless women and children in the Atlanta area. In fact when now Senator Elizabeth Dole toured The Achor Center she stated that it should become the model for the USA. It was a converted church where we offered training for these homeless and battered women while their kids attended on-location daycare classes with some of the first Apple computers in existence.

We had some incredible stories come out of the Center. Our rate of repeat homelessness dropped to below 5% which was unheard of at the time. We placed one woman with CNN in a high paying position who had literally been thrown out of the house by her husband. We helped other women find positions or start businesses of their own in the service industry.

This was a group of business men and women coming together to use their talents for promoting and marketing something besides the latest gadget. This type of experience was very rewarding to me! I even had the opportunity to bring some of my fellow entrepreneurs into the program to share their talents like my attorney friend.

This is what Social Entrepreneurship is to me and was my first public **REAL**ations experience as I like to call it. This was for a **REAL** worthy cause and not just to further another client's personal bottom line.

Now it might be helpful to look at what others consider as examples of Social Entrepreneurship.

The Roberts Foundation has been involved in supporting Social Entrepreneurship projects for many years. They like us at 7th Haven wanted to look at the problem of unemployment and homelessness from the view point of free enterprise as opposed to government handouts. It follows that old adage about teaching a person to fish for a lifetime as opposed to feeding them for a day.

The Roberts Foundation offers this as the definition of a Social Entrepreneur: “A non-profit manager with a background in social work, community development or business, who pursues a vision of economic empowerment through the creation of social purpose businesses intended to provide expanded opportunity for those on the margins of our nation's economic mainstream.”

Let's look at this definition more carefully.

First, the Social Entrepreneur is working with a non-profit entity like The Achor Center or 7th Haven. However for some of our non USA readers this does not mean that there is no money generated or that salaries can not be offered. Quite the contrary. Many of the new Social Entrepreneurship projects today generate nice sums of money as some non-profits are now running well known franchises like a Subway. This money however can not be shared from a profit point of view but must be used exclusively to run the business and pay salaries. All the money generated must be returned to the non-profit and not shareholders.

Second, we note that Social Entrepreneurs come from numerous backgrounds today. They are not social workers as in the past but even MBAs. Our team for 7th Haven are from the following backgrounds: health, personal coaching, computer programming, and public relations and marketing. As we grow we will need to add others that have strong backgrounds in financial management, business administration, construction, engineering, etc.

Third, is pursuing a vision of economic empowerment. We hear this term a great deal today and I see it as the fish for a lifetime adage I shared. We are not going to break the strangling debilitating cycle of poverty if we don't pursue individual economic empowerment for those people who are on the “margins of our nation's economic mainstream.” Government handouts are not the solution!

As mentioned above, at The Achor Center we were able to help these homeless women find new skills that they could use for the foreseeable future without finding themselves in that cycle of poverty. Our repeat rate of homelessness was one of the lowest in the country because we used the empowerment model.

Finally, a Social Entrepreneur is working on a project that has a social purpose as well as an economic one. 7th Haven will be building these cost effective and energy efficient homes first for the homeless and then eventually we will be setting up micro-manufacturing facilities that can take these homes to a secondary market as vacation homes. Now the economic value of 7th Haven can increase considerably and also offer more employment opportunities. The same construction for a corrugated cardboard dome can also be used for storage, children's playhouses and greenhouses.

Let's look at some experiences that the Roberts Foundation has been involved with in the past. (This information was from the late 1990s and I'm not aware of the current status of the projects).

The first organization we will study is called BOSS out of Berkeley, California that began their social entrepreneurship venture cleaning the streets of Berkeley and then moved to removing graffiti from buildings becoming known as Graffiti Masters and Clean Streets. They came to the Foundation and the Foundation decided to see what they could do. After a comprehensive study of possibilities BOSS settled on three businesses in the category of property maintenance services: residential maintenance, commercial maintenance and full-service vacant space preparation.

The second organization was developed in San Francisco – Community Housing Partnership where this grew out of the Council of Community Housing Organizations and the San Francisco Coalition on Homelessness. It was determined that San Francisco needed an umbrella organization for providing permanent housing, support services and also training and employing the homeless. That became Community Housing Partnership (CHP). CHP has developed numerous permanent housing sites through out San Francisco.

One of the benefits of living in a CHP site is that a former homeless person becomes eligible for vocational counseling and many of the residents are employed by CHP since over 40% of the staff are formerly homeless. Residents are also able to use the computer lab at each site in order to train for jobs that have more of a future. For those that have not been involved with the CHP Property Management course there is training and also a mentor/mentoree program which involves San Francisco business people. Once a resident graduates he/she is encouraged to seek another place of residence so that a person on the long waiting list can take his/her place.

Our third operation is Conard House also in San Francisco that is a mental health and social services agency providing services to mentally challenged homeless clients. One of the divisions of Conard House is called Conard House Vocational Services responsible for employment counseling, job training and job development. Working with over 300 clients this division also runs two businesses: Espresso Thyself, a Starbucks like cafe and Conard House Janitorial providing office cleaning services to businesses through out San Francisco. The clients of Conard House Vocational Services (CHVS) are employed in these two businesses.

Santa Clara, California's Adult Education Program joined forces with the Santa Clara Marriott Hotels and Resorts to develop a program for homeless clients that trained them for jobs in house cleaning and front desk services. First a candidate was tested to see if they could handle the job requirements. Then they attended through the Adult Education Program a four week program that included personal development skills, job interviewing, preparing resumes and the basic skills used in the hotel work. Then there was a two week on-the-job- training program at the Marriott Hotel. We developed a similar program at The Achor Center and it was very successful.

There are so many potential opportunities in all communities including yours!

We are looking for people who will be able to develop a 7th Haven operation in their community to benefit the unemployed and homeless. If that interest you please contact Hugh Simpson at hugh009@hotmail.com.

However even you do not want to undertake this project you certainly have numerous opportunities to offer your skills, talents and experiences as a Social Entrepreneur to the local non-profits.

You are encouraged to pass this report on to every body as we want to get as many people involved in Social Entrepreneurship as possible!

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