

### **Book ~ Review Form**

The opinions expressed in this review are those of the reviewer and do not necessarily reflect the view of CORE Group or its member agencies.

#### **Reviewer:**

Lenette Golding, PhD, MPH, Communications Advisor, Child Health and Nutrition, CARE USA

#### **Book Name:**

***How to Change the World Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas***

#### **Author(s)**

##### **David Bornstein**

Journalist, David Bornstein specializes in writing about social innovation. Bornstein's first book, *The Price of a Dream: The Story of the Grameen Bank*, traces the history of the Nobel Peace Prize-winning Grameen Bank during its first 20 years and describes the global emergence of the now-famous anti-poverty strategy known as "micro-finance." Bornstein developed [Dowser.org](http://Dowser.org) a website that reports on social innovation.

**Year Published:** 2009

#### **Author's argument (or perspective) and summary of the content:**

The two main hypotheses of this book are: 1) social entrepreneurs have a profound effect on society- they serve a corrective function in society; and 2) their presence is on the rise today.

This book profiles nine champions of social change who developed innovative ways to address needs they saw around them in places as distinct as Bombay, India; Rio de Janeiro, Brazil; and inner-city Washington, D.C. As these nine grew influential when their ingenious ideas proved ever more widely successful, they came to the attention of Ashoka, an organization that sponsors a fellows program to foster social innovation by finding so-called social entrepreneurs to support. As Bornstein interviewed these and many other Ashoka fellows, he saw patterns in the ways they fought to solve their specifically local problems. To demonstrate the commonality among experiences as diverse as a Hungarian mother striving to provide a fuller life for her handicapped son and a South African nurse starting a home-care system for AIDS patients, he presents useful unifying summaries of four practices of innovative organizations and six qualities of successful social entrepreneurs.

#### **The four practices of innovative organizations**

Bornstein details four practices that he identifies in innovative organizations. He argues that managers must implement the following four practices to stimulate organizational entrepreneurship:

### *1. Institutionalize listening*

The best, most constructive input for both social and traditional entrepreneurs is from the people they serve and their employees. Create a system and guidelines that makes listening to people part of the core function of the organization.

### *2. Pay attention to the exceptional*

The most important insights gained from listening come from exceptional or surprising information, especially unexpected successes.

### *3. Design real solutions for real people*

Organizations need to be realistic. You can't cause major social change unless you really understand what's going on.

### *4. Focus on the human qualities*

Often the most innovative, creative social entrepreneurs are not the people with the most degrees listed after their name. There are other qualities such as ethics, flexibility, empathy, etc. that are just as important.

## **The six qualities of successful social entrepreneurs**

Social entrepreneurs possess confidence, persistence, and knowledge; however, probably the most important thing they have going for them is motivation. The most successful entrepreneurs are the ones most determined to achieve a long-term goal that is deeply meaningful to them. Additionally, they tend to be more systematic in the way they search for opportunities, anticipate obstacles, monitor results and plan ahead. Furthermore, they are concerned with quality and efficiency and very committed to people and the long-term over the short-term gain.

### *1. Willingness to Self-Correct*

Because of their motivation, successful entrepreneurs are highly self-correcting. The entrepreneurs' inclination to self-correct stems from the attachment to a goal rather than to a particular approach or plan. The entrepreneur's willingness to self-correct is vital to this continuous adaptive process.

### *2. Willingness to Share Credit*

It's been said that "there is no limit to what you can achieve if you don't care who gets the credit." For entrepreneurs, a willingness to share credit lies along the "critical path" to success, simply because the more credit they share, the more people typically will want to help them. If an entrepreneur's true intention is to make change happen, then sharing credit will come naturally.

### *3. Willingness to Break Free of Established Structures*

Social entrepreneurs occasionally can be found in government and academia, although the incentive structures and institutional constraints act as deterrents. Those who initiate their ideas while teaching in universities usually step outside the academy to build their organizations. More typically social entrepreneurs come from the citizen sector where they have a little more freedom to act and the distance to

see beyond the orthodoxy in their fields. This is critical because all innovation entails the ability to separate from the past.

#### *4. Willingness to Cross Disciplinary Boundaries*

Think of this as “creative combining” or the process of creating new social compounds- gathering together people’s ideas, experiences, skills, and resources in configuration that society is not naturally aligned to produce. Independence from established structures not only helps social entrepreneurs move away from prevailing assumptions, it gives them the opportunity to combine resources in a new way. Faced with whole problems, social entrepreneurs readily cross disciplinary boundaries, pulling together people from different spheres, with different kinds of experience and expertise, who can, together, build workable solutions that are novel.

#### *5. Willingness to Work Quietly*

Jean Monnet, the architect of European Unification said, “People of ambition fall into two groups: those who want to do something and those who want to be someone.” Many social entrepreneurs spend decades quietly, steadily and unremittingly advancing their ideas, influencing people in small groups or one-on-one. Often they become recognized only after years working in relative obscurity. A person must have a very pure motivation to push an idea so steadily for so long with so little fanfare.

#### *6. Strong Ethical Impetus*

It is meaningless to talk about social entrepreneurs without considering the ethical quality of their motivation: the why. Bornstein comes to the conclusion that these people simply must do the work they do, they have no other choice. For instance, James Grant was described as having “boundless energy” and “limitless optimism” in addition to “complete lack of self-importance” and “absolute refusal to accept that something could not be done.”

### **Main lessons learned/ applications to work in the international maternal and child health sector (list no more than 8):**

1. A good idea needs a good promoter- it must be skillfully marketed before it shifts people’s perceptions and behavior.
2. Social entrepreneurship is about using whatever toolkit you have available to you, whether it’s largely technical, social, business-like, etc. and applying that to improving the lives of the general public.
3. Although it is probably impossible to fully explain why people become social entrepreneurs, it is certainly possible to identify them. And society stands to benefit by finding these people, encouraging them, and helping them to do what they need to do.
4. If you don’t have a social entrepreneurial personality, you might want to consider working for a social entrepreneur rather than trying to be one. Regardless of the role you take in helping to change the world your contribution can be significant and is much-needed.

5. "[T]here is nothing more difficult to carryout, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all those who profits by the old order and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new order."  
*The Prince* by Niccolò Machiavelli

**Reader's professional opinion on the author's argument (perspective) [i.e. Was his/her point valid? How does the author's view compare to the opinions of CORE and its member organizations?]**

I find Bornstein's hypotheses valid and found this book helpful from a practitioner standpoint because it was filled with case history data and learning curves. The most useful thing about it however was its focus on people as makers of history and changers of communities. Most the attention on social entrepreneurship focuses on how business and management skills can be applied to achieve social ends (i.e., how ideas move people rather than on how people move ideas). Too often we are tempted to believe that money changes things, or policies or governments or large institutions. Bornstein however looks at social entrepreneurs as transformative forces - people with new ideas to address major problems who are relentless in the pursuit of their visions, people who will not take "no" for an answer and don't give up until they have spread their ideas as far as they may possibly can. This is about passion and discipline and tenacity in people who care enough to sacrifice until the change takes root. In a very meaningful way it demonstrated the real life pitfalls and vistas available to those who embark on change efforts. Furthermore, in terms of NGOs I think the book provides a tale of caution, that is that there has been a worldwide explosion of development organizations and that it is getting riskier by the day to remain static or to coast on reputation. The arrival of entrepreneurialism and competition represents an early but fundamental change in the dynamics of the citizen sector one that history has shown is highly conducive to innovation.

**On a scale of 1(not recommend to others in SBC) to 10 (highly recommended for others in SBC) – how would you rate this book? .....**

1 2 3 4 5 **6** 7 8 9 10

The New York Times has described this book as "must reading" for "anyone who cares about building a more equitable and stable world" and a "bible" in its field. It has been published (or is in the process of being published) in 20 languages. Overall, it is well-written and based on the insight of the social entrepreneurs showcased in this book. It is not too pie-eyed idealistic or overly self-righteous and does contain valuable insight (e.g., lessons learned and practical advice) for anyone working towards social change. Nevertheless, even given all that I don't think it is critical read for SBC members- inspirational yes, but not critical. Rather, I would recommend the book to anyone interested in the social sector, but who doesn't know a whole ton about it. Unfortunately, it doesn't truly answer the question "how to change the world." If you do read it however, be prepared for an emotional

rollercoaster experience as you go from "I could never achieve anything like that." to being buoyed with near manic can-do optimism as you spot kindred spirits and reason to yourself, "If they can do, so can I! Overall, anyone who has ever dreamt of solving a problem or making a positive change in his or her environment will find encouraging stories here.