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How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs

How to Change the World, by David Bornstein is about large scale social problems, and the masterminds who solve them. Most of the people who were mentioned are not famous, some are doctors, lawyers, engineers. What unites these great minded people is their role as social entrepreneurs. They have a profound effect on society, yet their corrective function remains poorly understood and under-appreciated. People tend to measure success of an entrepreneur by the amount of profit he/she has gained, but Bernstein looks at them differently: he sees them as transformative forces: people with new ideas to address major problems who are relentless in the pursuit of their visions, people who simply will not take "no" for an answer. This book shows that it takes creative individuals with determination and indomitable will to propel the innovation that society needs to tackle its toughest problems.

Rowland Hill implemented his entrepreneurial spirit to develop a new method of mailing in Great Britain. In the early 1800s, the average price to mail a letter in England was 12 cents, which put the service out of reach for most of the population. Each letter had to be studied individually because postal clerks priced letters according to their weight, origin, and destination. Hill eventually simplified the system and came up with the idea of charging a uniform price for all mail in Great Britain (a penny for half an ounce), and a prepayment system; a postage stamp.

Anil Chitrakar, an engineer from Nepal devised a scalable program to train 11-14 year old children in rural areas to maintain solar electric pumps. He soon found that the youngest were not only quick studies, they were eager to help older villagers adopt new technologies to improve rural life. Eventually, he found a way to put children in charge of problem solving and decision making. It was mutually beneficial: Not only did this strategy create enthusiasm and help the youths develop skills and confidence, it solved a major resource problem for the entrepreneurs. They wanted to reduce the student teacher ratio, but he had no money to hire more teachers, he discovered a teaching resource: the students themselves.

Later in the book, Bernstein provided extremely important practices in innovative organizations that I highly suggest everyone apply to their business plan. Organizations institute systems and guidelines for listening to their clients. Being open-minded can bring more ideas to the project. This section helped me reflect on our Peace Corps presentation, getting insight from the entire community can improve the quality and quantity of our overall environmental goals.

These extraordinary stories highlight a massive transformation that is going largely unreported by the media: Around the world, the fastest-growing segment of society is the nonprofit sector, as millions of ordinary people—social entrepreneurs—are increasingly stepping in to solve the problems where governments and bureaucracies have failed. How to Change the World shows, as its title suggests, that with determination and innovation, even a single person can make a surprising difference.

