



社會創業論壇

Hong Kong Social Entrepreneurship Forum

Issue 140, January 10, 2013

Social Entrepreneurs Newsletter

edited by KK Tse

www.hksef.org

kakuitse@gmail.com

Not Everyone Should Be a Social Entrepreneur

Lara Galinsky, Senior Vice President, Echoing Green

"I want to be a social entrepreneur." I hear it nearly every day.

Not just from those applying for Echoing Green's social entrepreneurship fellowship, but from high school students, college students, and young professionals. They excitedly tell me that they want to launch organizations to improve education in Africa, to better the livelihood of women in inner city Chicago, or solve any number of other big problems.



It's clear that this field has captured the imagination of the Millennial generation. From Babson to Berkeley, students today can take a variety of courses on social entrepreneurship, minor in the subject, and will soon be able to major in it. Today, more than 30 business schools offer substantive programs at the graduate level, when just a few years ago such a thing was unheard of.

The Promise and the Dangers

You would think as someone who works in an organization that promotes the social entrepreneurship movement, I would be happy about this explosion in popularity. And I am. But, it is not without its dangers.

There is something alluring about being a social entrepreneur. [Echoing Green's fellowship](#), along with other similar programs, shines a bright light on social entrepreneurs, often making them stars. At Echoing Green, we pull about 20-30 of these stars from 3,500 applications each year.

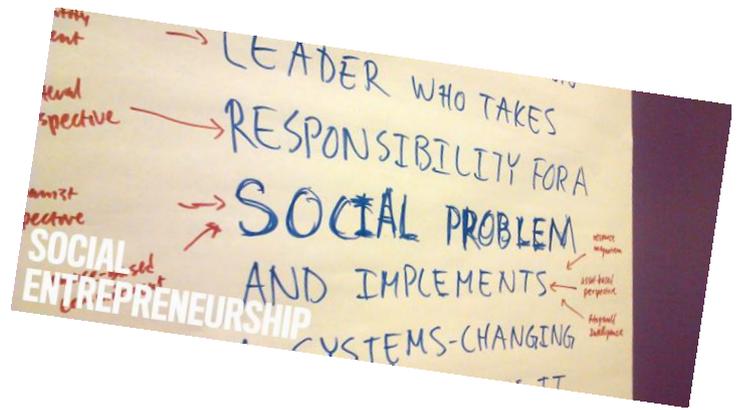
But social entrepreneurs alone cannot change the world. They need artists, volunteers, development directors, communications specialists, donors, and advocates across all sectors to turn their groundbreaking ideas into reality. They need fundraisers, supporters who can change policies, someone to create a brochure describing their work. If everyone wants to start a new organization, who is going to do all the work?

It's time for those of us in this field to help young people see the variety of ways and venues in which they can have a social impact. This is precisely why Echoing Green, an organization that has been exclusively focused on social entrepreneurs for the past 25 years, is now cutting the spotlight and raising the house lights to expose [the entire ecosystem it takes to solve the world's biggest problems](#).

But I am getting ahead of myself.

I want to go back to the not-so-distant past — to eight years ago, the first time I heard someone tell me that they wanted to be a social entrepreneur.

Her name was Ripa. She was a young, energetic college freshman at NYU who knew just what she wanted. She approached me after I spoke on a panel about social enterprise and said those magic words: "I want to be a social entrepreneur."



I was shocked. I had been in the field for nearly a decade, and had never heard social entrepreneurship referred to as an occupation, let alone a desirable one. Even Echoing Green's Fellows resisted the title.

Ripa told me that she had read about social entrepreneurship on NYU's business school's website, and the unique combination of business and social change moved her. Something clicked. She said to herself, *This is why I am studying business! This is what I am supposed to do with my life!*

I thought Ripa was an anomaly and I took her under my wing. We formed a close relationship. When the [NYU Reynolds Fellowship for Social Entrepreneurship](#) was launched in 2006, I helped her prepare her application and she became a member of the fellowship's inaugural class. It was a transformative experience for her.

Echoing Green's definition:

“Social entrepreneurs are those exceptional individuals who dream up and take responsibility for an innovative and untested idea for positive social change, and usher that idea from dream to reality.

<http://www.echoinggreen.org/about/what-is-social-entrepreneurship>

And yet, Ripa isn't a social entrepreneur. At least, not by Echoing Green's [definition](#). She hasn't launched a ground-breaking new social business, nonprofit or hybrid. Instead, she is thinking like a social entrepreneur and applying that lens to everything she does, turning that which moves her most deeply into opportunities to serve others.

She is organizing the San Francisco leg of the [Ekatva tour](#), a dance drama about Gandhi and King's non-violence ideals that features sixteen children from the slums of India. She is also studying Ayurvedic medicine and yoga, exploring the possibility of launching a program that uses those

principles to help children trapped in the juvenile justice system.

Watching Ripa's life unfold, I, too, felt something click. I realized that most members of this generation will not be social entrepreneurs, and they shouldn't be. But if we can channel their altruistic energy and give them the tools, methodologies, and frameworks from the most successful social entrepreneurs, they will be changemakers, champions, and supporters of the work. They will make meaningful contributions to the world not by founding organizations but by bringing their best selves — their heart and head — to their work. And they will do this in all sectors, not just in nonprofit organizations but also in government agencies, family businesses, and major corporations.

What may happen in two or three generations is even brighter. When these employees become employers, they will naturally strengthen the social change axis in the majority of our institutions so community impact is imbedded into their missions.

This may sound idealistic but we are already on the way. According to Net Impact's recent [*Talent Report: What Workers Want in 2012*](#), the Millennial generation wants, and expects, to do good and do well in their paid work. In fact, a majority of students (65 percent) expect to make a difference in the world through their work, and 53 percent would take a 15 percent pay cut to work for an organization whose values matched their own.

However, in my experience, too few of these students know the kind of difference they want to make, and how to make it. And that is the real opportunity.

In order to harness this generation's desire to create change, we must move away from the antiquated concept of **vocation**, which emphasizes what's in it for the individual: whether it will sustain their interest or bring them fame or fortune.

Instead, we need to help young people start their professional lives by asking questions. What issues, ideas, people, and projects move them deeply? What problems are theirs to own? How can they combine their heads and hearts to address those problems? What is their unique genius and how can it be of use to the world beyond themselves?

They needn't be founders of new organizations to have an impact on the world. But they should be founders of their careers.

Lara Galinsky is the senior vice president of Echoing Green, a global nonprofit that provides seed funding and technical assistance to emerging social entrepreneurs with ideas for social change. She is the co-author of [Work on Purpose](#) (2011) and [Be Bold: Create a Career with Impact](#) (2007).

This article, which first appeared in the Harvard Business Review Blog Network, July 19, 2012, was recommended by Prof. Po Chi Wu of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology.

Core beliefs of Hong Kong Social Entrepreneurship Forum:

- *Social change is inevitable, but positive social change is more desirable*
- *A dynamic and powerful citizen sector (as distinct from, but in collaboration with, business and government sectors) can produce more positive social change*
- *An ever-growing number of social entrepreneurs will constitute a major force in changing our society for the better*
- *Not everyone could become a social entrepreneur, but everyone could support the social entrepreneurship movement.*