



社會創業論壇

Hong Kong Social Entrepreneurship Forum

Social Entrepreneurs Newsletter

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Jeff Skoll on Learning, Earning and Dreaming

On this Father Day, you might want to share this issue of the Newsletter with your children. Jeff Skoll is a New Hero of our generation. He has a simple story to tell. Please try to share it with one or two members of the younger generation and see if you can make them appreciate what lies ahead of them.



Jeff Skoll received an honorary degree and delivered the commencement speech for the graduate school at Santa Clara University on June 12, 2009.

In the speech, Jeff urges the graduates to turn the traditional "learn, earn and return" model of, first, education, then career, then "giving back," on its head. He encouraged them to focus their energies instead on pursuing careers that address the big problems the world faces today.

Jeff Skoll was the founding President of eBay and founder of Skoll Foundation, one of the most impressive organizations investing, supporting and celebrating social entrepreneurship worldwide. www.skollfoundation.org

Below is the abridged speech:

Two Pieces of Practical Advice

There are two pieces of practical advice that I would like to offer you today.

The first piece of advice was given to me by a teacher when I was in high school. It has helped me to find my way in life, time and time again.

The advice is this. Write your epitaph, then work backwards. Imagine the words that you want written about you on your tombstone. Do they say that you were a good mother, father, son or daughter? That you were a teacher, an engineer or a counselor? Do they say that you did something special to make the world a better place? The words are up to you.

But once you know what you want written on that stone, then you will have created the lens from which you can make every decision in your life. If a decision that you are about to make gets you further away from the words on that stone, then maybe it isn't the best decision!

So my first piece of advice is to write your epitaph, then work backwards!

Live Your Dream

My second piece of advice is about dreams. Everyone has a dream. It is what inspires us and keeps us going. But it is easy to be thrown off course.

When I was in school, it saddened me to see so many of my classmates clamoring to go to work for the highest paying jobs, regardless of whether these jobs brought them any closer to their life's fulfillment or not.

They felt they could put off their dreams in the hopes of pursuing them tomorrow. Sadly, for many of them, that tomorrow will never come.

So live your dream, no one can live it but you!

In my case, my dream was to be a writer. As a kid, my family used to go camping in upstate New York. There wasn't much to do except fight with my sister or read books. By the time I was a teenager, I had developed a view that the world of the future might not be a very pleasant place, and I resolved to tell stories that would get people involved in the issues that affect us all.

Around that time, my father came home one day and announced that he had cancer and that it looked pretty bad. Then he said something that has stuck with me to this day. He said that he wasn't so much afraid that he might die, but that he hadn't done the things that he wanted to with his life.

Fortunately, my father is still alive today, but for me that was a wakeup call and it set me on a mission.

I didn't think that writing stories about issues would be the best way to make a living, so I decided to go down an entrepreneurial path so that I could afford to write these stories.

Along the way, I started several companies, including the unfortunately named "Micros on the Move", a computer rental company that didn't do too well because people kept stealing the computers.

But I kept my eye firmly on the path that I had set for myself, and when my friend Pierre Omidyar approached me with his idea for eBay, I was very sure of what to do. With my newly minted Stanford degree in hand, I said "Pierre, what a stupid idea!" Fortunately, I soon realized that Pierre was onto something and we then left our jobs to pursue eBay as a fulltime company.

Being part of the creation of eBay was a fantastic experience and eBay gave me the resources to live my dream on a scale I had never imagined. But, throughout, I knew that telling stories that made a difference was what I wanted to do.

That dream has now taken form as Participant Media, a company I created five years ago to tell stories that inspire and compel social change. We have released twenty films to date, including An Inconvenient Truth, Good Night and Good Luck, Charlie Wilson's War, The Kite Runner and Syriana. We even have two films in theaters right now – The Soloist, a film about homelessness, and Food Inc, a documentary about the industrialization of food and its effect on society, a film that in fact just opened today.

But it all started because I had a vision of how I wanted my epitaph to read and a dream of how to get there. And if a middle class kid from Canada can do that, so too can you.

Learning, Earning and Returning

Over the past decade, I have been privileged to meet young men and women, much like you, who are finding new ways to solve the world's oldest problems.

One thing they have taught me is that the collective wisdom that we have been taught for years is no longer true. For generations, we have been told that there is a formula to apply to our lives, built around three simple words: learn . . . earn . . . return.

The idea was that you learn as much as possible in school; earn a decent living at a good job; and then, as you near the end of your career, you return something to society. This formula is changing. **Today, one can learn, earn and return all at the same time.**

One person who exemplifies this is a young man named Craig Kielburger — who also happens to be Canadian.

In 1995, when he was 12 years old, Craig came across an article about the murder of a 12 year old boy in Pakistan. This boy had been a slave in a rug factory since the age of four. It shocked Craig that this boy of the same age would have such a life. Craig then started an after-school program to speak out on child labor abuses.

Fourteen years later, Free the Children has built more than 500 schools throughout Asia, Africa and Latin America, providing education to more than 50,000 children. It has also inspired more than a million young people across North America to take action to help their less privileged peers overseas.

Along the way, Craig earned a bachelor's degree and he is studying today to earn an MBA. He even makes a decent living doing this work.

So here is someone, a fellow Canadian, who also began reading about the world at a young age and who wanted to tell stories. But rather than sticking to the "learn, earn, return" formula like I did, he turned it on its head. Now, at the same age that I began earning *my* MBA, he is earning *his* MBA—already having made a difference in the lives of millions of people.

There are a number of different classes graduating here today. Whether you go into business, work as an engineer, or focus your career on improving lives, schools, or communities. – you might ask this question. What would happen if all of you applied the full range of your skills to solving the world's biggest problems?

Your Generation's Moon Shot

Next month, America will celebrate the 40th anniversary of the first lunar landing. The Kennedy Library just opened a new exhibit called "moon shot." As we think about where to focus our energy today, it is worth asking the question: what is this generation's moon shot?

Maybe it is to reverse climate change and bring the snows back to Kilimanjaro.

Maybe it is to replace conflict with cooperation in the Middle East.

Maybe it is to create a world free of nuclear weapons.

Maybe it is to cure malaria and AIDS.

Maybe it is to put clean drinking water within reach of every person in the world.

As you leave Santa Clara, remember the lessons you learned here—but also remember the lesson of St. Clare herself. Born into wealth and privilege, she chose instead a life of service, to make things better for others. Each of you has the opportunity to follow the example of St. Clare ... and to be the leader of your generation's moon shot.

So tonight, go party like it's 1999, you deserve it. Be proud of what you have accomplished.

And when you wake up tomorrow, begin to live your dreams.

Thank you.