



社會創業論壇

Hong Kong Social Entrepreneurship Forum

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Social Entrepreneurs Newsletter

edited by KK Tse

kakuitse@gmail.com

What It Takes To Be Social Entrepreneur – Learning from Timothy Ma of 平安鐘

Timothy Ma has been the General Manager of the Hong Kong Senior Citizen Home Safety Association (SCHSA) since its inception in 1996. On more than one occasion, the HKSAR Chief Executive Donald Tsang has referred to SCHSA as the most successful social enterprise in Hong Kong. Timothy is well known in the social service sector as well as the emerging social enterprise field. He was also a founding Co-convenor of the Hong Kong Social Entrepreneurship Forum and now its Honorary Secretary.

Unfortunately, not too many people have had the chance to really appreciate the personal journey Timothy has taken to become a social entrepreneur which is full of struggles, pain, joy, setback, breakthroughs and above all, insights for anyone interested to learn about or become a social entrepreneur. For this reason, HKSEF has invited Timothy to give an up close and personal sharing in the coming dinner gathering with details as below.

HKSEF Dinner Gathering

Sharing by

Timothy Ma:

The Struggles of a Social Entrepreneur

Date: March 9, 2009 (Monday)

Time: 6.00 – 9.30pm

Venue: HK Medical Association Dining Hall,
5/F Duke of Windsor Social Service Building,
15, Hennessy Road, Wanchai

Cost: HK\$200, payable at venue

Registration and enquiries: Oscar Tam at
oscar@genesismarketing.com.hk

The 8 Dimensions of a Social Entrepreneur

After studying numerous cases of social entrepreneurs all over the world, I wrote an article in Chinese two years ago on the 8 dimensions of a social entrepreneur -- I called it 社會創業者八面玲瓏. Let us use it to throw a few lights on Timothy's case.

Passion for Life

Most social entrepreneurs are optimistic, positive and pro-active individuals. They also see the world as far from perfect; indeed they are often touched and saddened by human sufferings and deprivations of many forms. But instead of turning a blind eye to all these, they consider themselves as the fortunate ones and are keen to do whatever they can to make the world a better to live.

You will be amazed by Timothy's passion for life. I have had the opportunity of listening to his sharing before and was most impressed and inspired by him.

Passion for a Specific Cause

Social entrepreneurs know that they cannot change the world overnight. So they focus their effort and energy on a single issue they are particularly passionate about. They know it could take years, sometimes decades, to really make a difference. The implication is that if you want to be a social entrepreneur, be sure you have identified a cause that you are ready to commit at least a decade of your life to it.

Timothy has devoted 13 years to focus on one area: home safety for elderly people. Do you want to know what makes him so passionate about this issue?

A Vision of Impact

'Vision' is a picture of the ideal state of the future you want to create. Social entrepreneurs are visionaries. There is a practical test of the power of a vision: I.C.A.C., meaning that a vision needs to be Inspirational, Challenging, Achievable and Concise. A vision needs to be shared by a whole spectrum of stakeholders; it provides meaning and focus and inspires people to act and collaborate.

SCHSA has a compelling vision: 獨居無懼, 老有所依. It sounds simple and obvious. But how did it come about? What makes it stick? If you want to formulate a vision for your social enterprise, how would you go about it?

Designing an Innovative Product

The greatest challenge for any social entrepreneur is to design and deliver a product that meets the dual objectives of a) serving the target beneficiary, and b) generating a profit at the same time. This is by no means an easy task and requires imagination, innovativeness and thinking out of the box. Many social enterprises fail precisely on this count.

SCHSA's product of 平安鐘 appears to be simple and straightforward. But at the time of its inception, it was neither. Timothy has a revealing story to tell about the struggles he has gone through developing the product and the business model.

Resourcefulness – No Money, No Problem

The English word 'resourceful' is a wonder. When you say someone is beautiful, you mean that this person has beauty. But when you say someone is resourceful, it means that this person has no resources but is good at finding resources. Social entrepreneurs are very resourceful persons. They usually have little to start with, but they manage to secure the required resources to do the job.

SCHSA had practically no money to start with. It did not have any financial assistance from the government. But the directors and general manager were extremely resourceful people. Timothy's account will be a shock to many people who are accustomed to relying on 'safe' capital.

Leveraging Social Marketing and Guerrilla Marketing

Marketing is critically for all social entrepreneurs. But the cost of conventional marketing could be prohibitive. Resourceful social entrepreneurs are experts in leveraging social marketing and guerrilla marketing, both involve low or no cost activities with significant marketing payoffs.

SCHSA has been a master social marketer and guerrilla marketer. Timothy has a lot to share on this.

Building a Winning Team

This is of course a must. But social entrepreneurs usually encounter an interesting problem once their organizations reach a certain size: should volunteers be used alongside paid staff? The answer is actually quite simple: yes, use as many volunteers as you can find. The challenge then becomes: how to integrate the paid staff and the volunteers so that they all become part of the winning team? Some social entrepreneurs do a good job at this; others do not.

Unlike many social enterprises, SCHSA has a large number of volunteers despite the fact that it has a sizable team of salaried staff. Timothy would tell you why and how to make it work.

Creating an Entrepreneurial Board

Most business enterprises might not have a functioning board when they are start-up and small. Social enterprises can be different because of their social mission. It is up to the social entrepreneur concerned to identify the board members and build an entrepreneurial board. In some cases, it is the board which hires the social entrepreneur to run the business.

Timothy was recruited by the board to be its first General Manager and he grew himself into a social entrepreneur with the support of an entrepreneurial board. What can you learn from his experience?