Youth CITIES (Creating Impact Through Innovation, Entrepreneurship, and Sustainability)

Kickoff Reception

Keynote delivered by Chad Green
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Wednesday, September 16, 2009

“Good evening. It’s a real honor to be able to spend time with you all this evening. I am especially excited to be able to address the youth participants of Youth CITIES and to be a part of the beginning of what I am confident will be an experience that will change your lives, and perhaps mine as well. We are fortunate, too, that we have with us tonight two current student colleagues of mine, Celia Lewis and Michael Scognamiglio, who will share with you some of what they have learned about social entrepreneurship, as well as its impact on their current and future pursuits.

Many of you may have read the recent article in the Boston Globe that covered the trend on college campuses of renaming courses to attract students. For example, a course formerly known as “German Literature of the High Middle Ages” at Boston College is now being called “Knights, Castles, and Dragons.” The result? Enrollment has tripled.

So, when I was thinking of how to title my remarks tonight, I decided I better get with the times. Hence, I have decided to talk to you tonight about “Blackfeet, Giant Rats & the Real Experts.” This title serves a couple of purposes—it gives a certain air of mystery to what it is about, and it allows me to pretty much talk about whatever I want!

Let me first state that I am not an entrepreneur, nor do I have a background in business. I, too, am a neophyte in this rapidly expanding, and increasingly impressive, world of social entrepreneurship. My own professional experience is that of an educator who has had, and continues to have, the wonderful opportunity to work with young people committed to making a positive impact in our world. As Vicky stated, for the past 15 years, I have served as the director of a high school community service program. In that role, my work puts me in the position of connecting young people from all over the world to the local community that surrounds our school. Many of these connections occur in the
context of traditional community service initiatives. Now these are not quite what most folks think of when they hear the words “community service”—often, in my experience, people think of inmates in fluorescent jumpsuits collecting trash on the side of the road—but many of the programs that I help to facilitate do fall into the category of what I can accurately characterize as more “introductory” experiences—serving a meal at a local meal center, caring for preschoolers at an after-school program, or spending time with elders at a nursing home. Let me be clear—I do not mean to belittle this type of civic engagement. In an age when all of our lives are increasingly fragmented and the gap between those who “have” and those who “have not” is expanding at a frightening rate, ANY initiative that connects individuals and communities—particularly those that connect individuals and communities across lines of difference, whether it be race, or income, or age—is deeply valuable and should be honored as such.

But today we are witnessing the expansion and the explicit articulation of a form of civic engagement that is decidedly different from traditional community service activities. Even more exciting is that this expansion is being driven in no small part by young people—here in the U.S. and across the globe. Tonight, on the eve of the first ever Youth CITIES program, it is a distinct privilege for the adults in the room to meet and, over the course of the next several weeks, get to know a small segment of the next generation of changemakers who call home many of the communities where we also live or about which we care deeply.

What exactly is a social entrepreneur anyway? I’m going to attempt to answer this question by profiling three examples of successful social ventures.

As you listen to these examples I am about to share, I invite you to put yourself in the shoes of the people I describe. Think about how they achieve their successes and what you would do in the same situation. Think about the connections between the problems they faced and the solutions they created. I’d like you to follow along with your own community in mind.

**The Blackfeet Youth Initiative**

Almost 15 years ago to the day, I found myself a new member of the Andover faculty, where I had just begun a one-year position as a Teaching Fellow in Community Service. I was lucky enough to find myself paired with a coworker in the community service office—another Teaching Fellow there for one year—named Susie Margolin. Amidst the hectic preparations that are characteristic of the start of the school year, Susie and I decided to grab lunch at the local Bertucci’s. I remember this conversation well, because as Susie and I shared our personal and educational backgrounds, she rather pointedly asked what I wanted to do once the year was done. Now, I was feeling quite content with myself at the
time, having landed the job at Andover in the first place, so when confronted with
the question of what I wanted to do when I left Andover, I was a bit taken aback.
June seemed like ages away, and I frankly had no idea what the future might
hold beyond vague notions of graduate school or a few years spent as a fly-fishing
guide—nor had I considered that I needed to start thinking about this in
September!

Susie, on the other hand, had a plan. She had just completed a year with City
Year, the national youth service corps program founded on the very simple but
powerful premise that young people can change the world. In the summers that
preceded and followed her time in Columbia, South Carolina, Susie had led a
group of middle-class kids from the Northeast on extended community service
trips to the community of Browning, Montana, located on the Blackfeet Indian
Reservation.

Not surprisingly, these trips had a huge impact on Susie herself, and the growth
and transformation that she witnessed in the kids that she was charged with
leading on these trips was significant. But the trips also left her with troubling
thoughts. She worried that her work in Browning, while well-received and very
much needed—they had worked to refurbish buildings and provide summer
programming for children—was, at best, not enough and, at worst, more
beneficial for the volunteers than for those being “served.”

The philosopher, priest, and social critic Ivan Illich once gave an address to a
group of Americans preparing to do service and mission work in Mexico. The year
was 1968. The title of his talk, “To Hell With Good Intentions,” is a play on the
proverb that many of us are familiar with—“The road to hell is paved with good
intentions.” Illich employs this provocative title to drive home his very pointed
critique of the paternalism and cultural hegemony that can often characterize
community service, and especially international community service trips. The
legacy of “do-gooders” (often outsiders equipped with relatively greater resources
at their disposal, but sometimes lacking knowledge of and genuine empathy
toward the local community) coming in to “fix” a community that is not their own
is a rather dubious one.

In these scenarios, the recipients of the “service” may find themselves
temporarily enriched, but eventually the summer ends, the volunteers leave, and
the challenges of life on the reservation remain. The lack of sustainability of
these kinds of initiatives can then feed into feelings of illegitimacy and
inadequacy on the part of those who call the community home, and this can lead
to resentment of future visitors and a spirit of defeatism that can be dangerously
debilitating.
Illich, in his talk, goes even further—he ends by telling his audience, all of whom are in Mexico for the summer to do service work, that they and Mexico would be better served if they went back home to the United States and attempted to address the poverty in their own communities, in their own country.

Susie was very sensitive to key elements of Illich’s argument, and she needed to find a way to engage in work that she knew needed to be done, in an empathetic way that would empower the community of Browning and provide a means for “outsiders” to contribute in authentic and meaningful ways. She decided early in our year together that she specifically wanted to help empower the young people of Browning to take on the task of identifying the problems in their own community and then assist them in the process of creating viable, sustainable solutions.

The result? After a year of grant writing and preparations, Susie moved to Browning, Montana, on a permanent basis, and together with local Blackfeet Youth she co-founded the Blackfeet Youth Initiative. The mission of BYI was to provide “a cross-cultural youth program that brings together Native American and other youth to provide service to the Blackfeet Indian Reservation.” BYI accomplished this by enlisting high school students from on and off of the reservation to work with AmeriCorps members to create and deliver a curriculum—with a community service focus—for middle school youth in an afterschool and a summer program. The goals were to teach leadership skills, improve academic and social capacity, and create a diverse, vibrant community of youth who would learn to appreciate and interact with people from different cultures.

BYI has since merged with another youth program on the reservation, but its legacy is truly impressive. Susie herself was inducted into the Blackfeet Nation as an honorary member, and though she now lives in Singapore, she remains in close touch with many of her original campers and counselors. One camper, Shannon Augare, a 4th-grader when the program began, has continued a lifetime of service to his community. He is an elected representative to the House of Representatives in Montana, has worked for Senator Baucus in the Senate, served on advisory boards for all the tribes in Montana, and is currently working in the Economic Development Department of the Blackfeet Tribe. After working in the state government in Montana and the federal government in D.C., he has now returned to the reservation.

The non-Blackfeet high school counselors identify their summers on the reservation and their work on the Youth Board as critical influences in their commitment to service. One such student is Tim Fitzpatrick from New Jersey, who was a high school counselor. In college he focused his studies on human rights, specifically on indigenous communities in Latin America. He just earned a
double master’s degree in Law and International Human Rights from Georgetown University. He is passionate about the human rights of indigenous people and cites his work with BYI as the catalyst for this interest.

**HERO Rats**

Before I move onto my second example of social entrepreneurship, I have a quick request. Quick. Think of your favorite animal.

Now please share this information with the person sitting next to you.

Now, did anyone in the room happen to say that their favorite animal was a rodent? How about the rat?!

No, hmmm, I know you’re really beginning to wonder...why is this guy asking us about rats and what could they possibly have to do with social entrepreneurship? When you think of rats, what comes to mind? The fabled giant rats of New York City sewers or Boston Harbor? The lovable chef of *Ratatouille*? I did a little sniffing around (bad pun intended), and there are actually many types of rats: kangaroo rats, Norway rats, cotton rats, pack rats, wood rats, greater stick-nest rats, roof rats, naked mole rats (my personal favorite), and lots of other species like the (at least initially) terrifyingly huge Giant African Pouched Rat.

Now, I don’t know for sure, but I’m fairly confident that Bart Weetjens considers rats to be very high on his list of favorite animals. Last spring Mr. Weetjens visited our school, and I had the opportunity to learn not only about his true love for rodents, but the remarkable work that he is doing with rats in Mozambique and elsewhere in Africa.

It turns out that these creatures, which are nearly universally deplored, are actually lifesavers!

All over Africa and unfortunately the globe, landmines are responsible for the maiming and deaths of thousands of people. According to the International Campaign to Ban Landmines, approximately 55 million landmines and unexpected ordinance in over 84 countries cause between 10,000 and 20,000 casualties each year. Aside from this devastating loss of life, landmines pose huge challenges that reach far beyond their obvious danger to humans. They hamper reconstruction and the delivery of aid; hold up the repatriation of refugees and displaced people; and deprive some of the poorest people of land and infrastructure, therefore hindering access to social and economic development. Africa is more afflicted by the landmine legacy than any other place on the planet. We in the United States are fortunate to not have to worry about this danger, but we are all increasingly aware of the effect of landmines, as we have
read on a near daily basis of the deaths of our own armed forces now serving in Iraq and Afghanistan due to IEDs.

Mr. Weetjans, a Belgian-born product development engineer, trains Giant Pouched Rats to effectively detect explosives in minute amounts. Working in teams of three trained human de-miners and one trained rat, Hero Rats has developed a cheaper, quicker, more scalable and efficient technology that relies on the acute olfactory sense of the African Giant Pouched Rat, a species that is endemic to sub-Saharan Africa. This program creates jobs for economically disadvantaged local populations, reduces the risk of death associated with demining, and eliminates the need for outside expertise that is more expensive and harder to come by. Perhaps most impressive is that a trained rat can clear 100 square meters in 30 minutes, equivalent to two days work for a manual de-miner.

These same Hero Rats have also now been found to be able to reliably detect pulmonary tuberculosis (TB) in humans. Tuberculosis kills more youth and adults than any other single infectious disease in the world today. Currently, in 7 minutes, one rat can evaluate 40 samples, which is the equivalent of 2 days of microscopy work for a lab technician.

Makes you think twice about our seemingly natural disdain for this species!

So those are two examples of individual social entrepreneurs who have and continue to make real and sustainable change in their communities and beyond.

*Niswarth*

To illustrate what a group of young people can accomplish, I’d like to share with you about six minutes of a student-produced video that documented a Phillips Academy service-learning program called Niswarth. Roughly translated from Hindi, Niswarth means “not for self,” which is one of the mottos of Phillips Academy.

The program involves a group of Phillips Academy students who travel to Mumbai, India, for a period of three weeks. Organized each year around a particular theme, students engage in volunteer work with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), meet with government officials, and examine serious social problems through a variety of lenses. The students live and work alongside peer students from the Udayachal School, a secondary school in Mumbai.

During the 2008 trip, which focused on urban development, a remarkable thing occurred in a very short amount of time. What you will see is perhaps not social entrepreneurship explicitly; but the spirit with which these students identified a
problem and the execution of their multifaceted solution are illustrative of the tangible changes that result when young people are empowered to act. In a few minutes, Celia Lewis will speak directly about her experience as one of the participants in this trip, and Michael Scognamiglio will highlight some of the subsequent community work that they are now pursuing.

Characteristics of Successful Social Entrepreneurs

Let’s think for a minute about some of the key characteristics that Susie, Bart, and the Niswarth gang, and, by extension, all social entrepreneurs share.

(I must acknowledge that my understanding of social entrepreneurship is heavily indebted to Mr. Bill Drayton, the founder of the Ashoka Foundation—a leading network and incubator of social entrepreneurship. Unknown to me until about two years ago, Mr. Drayton is an alum of Phillips Academy, and I had the distinct privilege of hearing him speak on the topic last spring when he visited our campus.)

1. Social entrepreneurs are agitators:

Like more traditional entrepreneurs, they are ambitious, persistent, and creative, but as Mr. Drayton says, “social entrepreneurs give themselves permission to ask the difficult questions.” Rather than leave societal needs to the government or business sectors, they strive to upset the status quo. These are individuals who tackle problems methodically, in ways that aim to revolutionize entire systems. They are game changers.

2. Social Entrepreneurs have a vision:

These are folks who have a very clear sense of where they are going—they know deep down that “this is how it should be!” What is more, they work to articulate this vision in explicit and clear language so it can be conveyed to others.

3. Social entrepreneurs are empathy experts:

They are single-minded in their efforts to attempt to really understand others. And they do this so well that when people begin to feel understood, they become empowered to join in the work of making positive change in their community. Social entrepreneurs lead by being truly empathetic.

The beauty of empathy is that it leads to trust and commitment on the part of others, which are key elements in almost any venture. There is a reason (well,
there is more than one), for example, why one of the finest empathy experts I
know is treated like a rock star among a certain segment of talented youth in
Lawrence, Massachusetts. Howard Sticklor, the executive director of the Youth
Development Organization, is a master of authentic empathy, and he has the cell
phone bill to prove it.

4. Finally, social entrepreneurs are team players:

One conventional notion of the “entrepreneur” is that of the extraordinary
individual who accomplishes great things (and sometimes fails miserably),
completely in isolation. In the U.S. in particular this is often tied to our national
mythos of the “self-made man or woman.” In fact, successful entrepreneurs—and
especially those of the social variety—are the product of good mentorship and a
dynamic network of relationships and resources.

In whole, this is an impressive list of qualities, knowledge, and skills. It’s the
kind of list that, at least for me, is quite inspiring...the kind of tally that makes
me say to myself, “I want to be one of those!” Of course, it’s also an intimidating
list...one that could understandably lead us to the conclusion that only after
years of dogged pursuit can an individual meet these criteria.

Young people are critical to the future of social entrepreneurship, precisely
because you are well equipped to tackle challenges that many adults would find
overwhelming.

I believe strongly that young people can accomplish amazing things. You have
great vision, energy, and ideas, and you are, to some extent, unburdened by a
history of experience in the world that can gradually dull our natural yearning
for positive transformation—not just in ourselves, but in those we care about
around us, in our larger communities and across the globe.

In his book Outliers: The Story of Success, author Malcolm Gladwell deconstructs
the key components of success. Much of what makes us successful, he contends,
turns out to be well out of our control—for example, in the case of Canadian
hockey players, when you are born in the calendar year, or, in the case of Bill Joy,
the cofounder of Sun Microsystems, or Microsoft founder Bill Gates, one’s
proximity to cutting edge computer technology at just the right time in the
history of computing. In one chapter, the 10,000 hour rule, Gladwell profiles
scientific research that asserts that true expertise is more the result of persistent
practice than innate talent in a given area. The basic conclusion of this research
is that, no matter the field of interest, 10,000 hours (roughly equivalent to 10
years) of practice is required to become a true world-class expert.
Whether or not you agree with this premise, I think it's instructive for all of us in the room to think about the areas in which the young people present tonight might be on their way to expertise.

My hunch is that while you may need a few thousand more hours under your belts before you attain mastery in the music or dance studio, in the lab, or perhaps on the court, you are far closer—whether you know it or not—to being experts in the terrain of your own communities. As young people interested in bettering your own lives and the lives of those around you, you are well aware of the needs of your peers, those of your families and the communities of which you are a part. This knowledge and expertise is not to be underestimated. The challenge before you now is to identify that which you are most determined to change and then to leverage your knowledge—with the help and guidance from an amazing group of adults, and your fellow participants—into ventures that will tackle real problems that you know instinctively can be solved with some creativity, passion, and old-fashioned elbow grease.

I hope that I have succeeded in conveying why a one-year job in 1995 has morphed into 15 years at the same school! The chance to work with young people like Celia and Michael—and the participants sitting in the audience tonight—is truly a gift. And the great thing is that every community is blessed with an abundance of young people who are yearning to follow in Celia's and your footsteps, to challenge the conventional wisdom of those of us now set in our ways, and to take the mantle of positive social change further than we might even imagine.

I wish you all well as you leap into the crucial work of making change. Don’t be shy...think BIG, even think CRAZY BIG. Figure out how things are connected...how you are all connected...and be creative.

You have a unique opportunity in front of you to practice both dreaming and *doing!* I thank you for allowing me to be a part of its beginning.”