

## Social Entrepreneurship Clinic

### Skills Mastery for Change Agents

- Take sides. A story from the sixties anti-war movement tells about the pacifist minister A.J. Muste who was challenged about standing quietly, night after night, in front of the White House, holding a lone candle. Asked, "Would that really change anything?" Muste replied, "Oh, you've got it all wrong. I'm not doing this to change the country. I do it so the country won't change me."<sup>1</sup> You cannot be a successful change agent without being fierce. Sure, collaborate and cooperate, but be a warrior for social and economic justice. Make some enemies.
- Pick something and focus your talents *today*. "A good plan, violently executed now, is better than a perfect plan next week."<sup>2</sup> When starting (or growing) your social change career, raising money or managing your personal life, avoid over-planning. The warning signs are conjuring up grand schemes, making lists of potential financial backers, endlessly re-writing your business plan or making a list of the perfect attributes for your future life partner. A business plan, idling in neutral, is a creative work of fiction.<sup>3</sup> Get started.
- What we think, we become. Develop good habits of mind. If you arise every morning thinking to yourself "Today I'm looking for a social sector job," then you are an unemployed change agent-in-*waiting*. If you pop out of bed every morning thinking "Today I'm fighting against injustice," then you are a change agent-in-*action* finding large and small ways to make a difference right now. Can't think of something useful? Pick up a piece of litter, post a blog comment, send a provocative article to a potential colleague or put a campaign poster in your street-facing window. Doing almost anything will make you stronger.
- Don't pretend to be what you're not. It never works out. Figure out what you like to do (it's that simple); then fire up those aptitudes and attributes for something you believe in. Linguistic intelligence, mathematical intelligence, interpersonal intelligence, emotional intelligence, financial intelligence, etc. are just a few categories. Social change work is not about you being perfect. It's about you making a difference.
- "Move slowly. Mend things."<sup>4</sup> Social change work happens in the trenches, not on the ramparts. A conversation here, a fund-raising call there. "Great work is often built on the mundane. Great cathedrals start with bricks, great paintings begin with paint, and great novels start with words."<sup>5</sup> Minimize execution risk by being well-organized,

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<sup>1</sup> Reported in 100 Greatest Americans of the 20th Century, Peter Drier, Nation Books, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> George Patton, American World War II Army general.

<sup>3</sup> Steve Blank @ The Lean Startup Conference, December, 2013:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zjvEanpktEo>.

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Hong, faculty member, Lick-Wilmerding High School graduation speech, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Michael Bungay Stanier, End Malaria, The Domino Project, 2011.

learning hard skills and following through on the boring details. Write concisely, proof read carefully and file properly.

### **Only Three Non-Negotiable Skills!**

*Social change demands communicating a vision of justice and a path forward.  
Being the “voice of the voiceless” starts with finding your own voice!  
You cannot succeed without piercing clarity.*

Talk with one person (no more, no less!) each day about your passion. Keep it real.  
Translate yourself into a framework *until* the other person understands.  
Be unambiguously specific about what your cause needs.

Listening is the industrial spying of social change. Listen, *really* listen.  
Learn how every person learns so you know how to follow-up.  
Learn what they care about and how you can help.

Write daily. A journal about your journey for justice. A letter to the editor.  
A thank you note to a donor or impact investor. A blog post.  
Get friends, family and fans to edit your words.

- Take a risk on yourself. If your inner voices are in an uproar about your negative insecurities, tell them to shut up. You are not alone. At some level and in some way, we are all imposters. Social entrepreneurs are imperfect beings — with imperfect answers — acting on imperfect information — for causes with imperfect results. “You can only be as good as you dare to be bad.”<sup>6</sup>
- Never fail by never failing yourself. “The only highly sustainable source of self-confidence comes from deep self-knowledge and blatant self-honesty. I think of it as understanding two important modes: my failure mode and my recovery mode. If I can understand...how I fail, I will also know *when* I will not fail. Then I can have...self-confidence, despite knowing I am not perfect.”<sup>7</sup> Failing sucks, but you are bigger and better than a single idea or project. Salvage what you can from the experience. Be the badass individual your unique life story justifies. Don’t fail to give value to your life.
- To innovate, don’t self-censor. “I am constantly asked by students how I get good ideas. My answer is simple: First, have a lot of ideas. Then, throw away the bad ones.”<sup>8</sup> There was a moment in time for every — take your pick — Nobel Prize winner, great writer, risk-taking statesman, entrepreneur, inventor and social change pioneer *before* he or she had yet to imagine their invention, uncover their creative spark or envision a new paradigm of societal justice. Tomorrow could be *your* day.

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<sup>6</sup> John Barrymore, American stage and screen actor.

<sup>7</sup> Chade-Meng Tan, Google engineer and author of [Search Inside Yourself](#).

<sup>8</sup> Linus Pauling, Nobel Laureate for chemistry and peace (only person to win two undivided Nobel Prizes).

- “Perpetual optimism is a force multiplier.”<sup>9</sup> An optimist responds to rejection by creating self-learning opportunities and by figuring out how to do it better the next time. A pessimist quits. If you are fighting to upend the status quo (and you should be), disappointment is in your future. So, ditch the excuses and down-in-the-mouth demeanor. Do better next time.

### Practice Daily, Starting Today!

*Personal mastery of a skill requires 10,000 hours of focused practice  
(5 years, assuming a 40-hour week)\**

Learn just three non-negotiable change agent skills (prior box).  
Each day do less than you can, but start *today*.  
Don't let it become a burden or chore.  
Plan to do it the rest of your life.  
Maintain momentum.  
Stay playful.

\*thanks, Malcolm Gladwell, Guy Kawasaki & Chade-Meng Tan

- “Survive long enough to get lucky.”<sup>10</sup> Social change is propelled, and thwarted, by hundreds of complex, nuanced factors, most of which are totally outside your control. What you can master is your own toughness, tenacity and resiliency. Quitting is not an option for you any more than for an impoverished woman struggling against 10,000 years of economic and gender discrimination to feed her children.
- Distinguish between anger and indignation.<sup>11</sup> We know “indifference is a paralysis of the soul, a premature death,”<sup>12</sup> but anger is not the opposite of indifference. Negative feelings can easily spin out of control; anger makes you weaker and unproductive. Blind anger blinds you too. Social and economic justice and INjustice is about power – who has it and who doesn't. “When you reach the top [when one level of justice nears], keep climbing.”<sup>13</sup> Indignation is righteous fury.
- Take care of yourself. Being kind to yourself is the empowering thing to do. “Always look out for Number One and be careful not to step in Number Two.”<sup>14</sup> Martyrs, misfits and the personally miserable make lousy change agents. Everyone has bad days, so cut yourself some slack. Tend to your economic needs, relationships, emotional health and physical safety *first*. Laugh. Have a modicum of control over your own life. Be joyful in your work. Changing the world is heady stuff. It's fun. Really.

<sup>9</sup> Colin Powell, American Secretary of State and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

<sup>10</sup> Kevin Lynch and Julius Walls, social entrepreneurs and authors of Mission, Inc.

<sup>11</sup> Chade-Meng Tan, Google engineer and author of Search Inside Yourself.

<sup>12</sup> Anton Chekhov, Russian playwright and short story writer.

<sup>13</sup> Zen proverb.

<sup>14</sup> Rodney Dangerfield, American comedian and actor.