

BOOK REVIEW

## To make the world a better place

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**David Bornstein *How to change the world: social entrepreneurs and the power of new ideas* Oxford University Press, 2004 320pp. with Index. 2004. ISBN 0-19-513805-8 (hardcover). \$28.00.**

This inspirational and fascinating book is about social entrepreneurs. The term "entrepreneur" comes from a French word which means "one who takes into hand". This is mentioned in the foreword written by Infosys founder Narayana Murthy.

The book is about stories of remarkable people from different countries, from different backgrounds, in different times; about people who have achieved extraordinary things in life and who have taken up major social issues and pursued them. Surely, the inspiration for Bornstein was Bill Drayton, who was a lawyer and management consultant before he founded Ashoka. Ashoka works like a social venture capital firm. From 1990 till 2003, it has funded 1,400 social entrepreneurs, providing them with about US\$40 million in direct funding. Bornstein took four years to write this book. After painstaking interviews, corresponding documentation and follow-up, he concentrated on the stories of nine remarkable people. Amongst them, Vera Cordeiro, a physician from Brazil, James P Grant who headed UNICEF, Veronica Khosa, a nurse from South Africa, and Florence Nightingale, the lady with the lamp, can inspire people from the medical profession. Also of interest are the stories of Javid Abidi, who single-handedly fought for the rights of the disabled, and Jeroo Billimoria who established Childline.

Vera Cordeiro, a physician from a well-to-do background, founded Renascer, an association for children's health, after a great struggle. Her experience as a junior doctor in a developing country is not very different from ours. The difference is in what she has done about it. James P Grant headed UNICEF in the 1980s and 1990s and revolutionised its functioning. Grant orchestrated Global Health Changes that saved the lives of more than 25 million children with immunisation and ORS therapy. Also, iodation of salt which saved millions of people from brain damage.

Veronica Khosa worked as a nurse in an AIDS testing centre in Pretoria. She was so affected by the plight of the patients and their families that, under apartheid and with no resources,

she started a home care centre for AIDS patients and their families. This courageous woman even put in her retirement benefit money into the centre. Everyone knows about Florence Nightingale, but most of us don't know about the opposition she faced during Victorian times in pursuing her ambition of becoming a nurse. Thanks to her, the lives of thousands of British soldiers were saved during the Crimean war, at the cost of her health and personal life.

Bornstein makes a very striking observation about the qualities or the personality of a social entrepreneur. The qualities of James Grant describe all of them: boundless energy, optimism, complete lack of self importance and an absolute refusal to accept failure. These are the qualities that one constantly observes in social entrepreneurs, whether medical professionals or engineers, whether environmentalists, child welfare activists or disabled people's advocates.

Bornstein states that social entrepreneurs are not motivated by altruism but enjoy and love their work and the day-to-day challenges and crises. Positive journalism, publicity and marketing by the media (television, newspapers, magazines and books) will certainly make people aware of all these unsung heroes. Bornstein says that less emphasis on violence and wars and more importance to the "citizens' sector" will make people aware of the seeds of change taking root around the world and will make people less fearful and unhappy and more hopeful and optimistic about the world.

School and college students may even think differently about their career choices. Bornstein feels that the examples and stories of social entrepreneurs should be incorporated in school and college curricula. Students should be encouraged to volunteer in such organisations, whether they are in medicine, engineering, agriculture, law or social work.

The author says that the capacity to cause change grows in an individual over time as small efforts gradually lead to larger ones. But the process needs a story... The person who fits the bill is Mahatma Gandhi, the greatest social entrepreneur of all time.

After reading this inspiring and fascinating book, many people may be inspired to take up social entrepreneurship as a career and believe that it is possible to make the world a better place.