WHAT IS SOCIAL CHANGE?

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> *How wonderful it is that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world.*
> Anne Frank

College students across the country are finding many ways to make a positive difference on their campuses, in their communities, and even in the world. Consider the experiences of these students:

- Monica Cevallos coordinated a project to improve the literacy rates in the struggling elementary schools near her campus. Working with local teachers, she and other students presented workshops for parents on activities to do at home to help their children learn to read.
- Altmann Pannell and other members of the Black Student Union coordinated a student response to a threatening hate crime that occurred near the student union. More than 250 students attended their speak-out rally, voicing concerns and considering creative ways to convey a message of

campus unity against acts of race-based hatred (Hernandez, 2007).

- Kim Singleton, an architecture major, working with students majoring in engineering, construction management, and other fields, was able to raise awareness of environmentally friendly housing options by designing and constructing a house powered entirely by the sun. Participating in the U.S. Department of Energy's annual Solar Decathlon, Kim acted as one of the Team Leaders, seeing the project from hypothetical ideas to the built product. The house was showcased on Washington, D.C.'s National Mall for one week; the students provided tours to thousands of people. Kim particularly enjoyed the opportunity to research and implement solar and sustainable technologies that made the solar-powered house possible, as well as the chance to share those aspects of the house with the public.
- Students Against Sweatshops is a group operating through local chapters at hundreds of college campuses. These students have influenced their college administrators to approve policies that require clothing bearing the official college logos to be manufactured under fair and ethical conditions for the workers.

These are true stories of students who are acting to create positive changes in their community—through service, community building, raising awareness, educating the public about issues, or advocating for policy change. Some of these students identified themselves as "leaders" and found worthwhile places

to invest their time and skills. Others had a passion about a certain issue but would not necessarily have thought, "I am a leader."

Regardless of whether one comes to social change through leadership, or whether one comes to leadership through an interest in social change, the Social Change Model of Leadership Development (SCM), the leadership model on which this book is based, identifies the two as having a powerful influence on each other.

The ensemble that developed the Social Change Model wrote:

> "Leadership is ultimately about change, and . . . effective leaders are those who are able to effect positive change on behalf of others and society." (Higher Education Research Institute [HERI], 1996, p. 10)

> "Change . . . is the ultimate goal of the creative process of leadership—to make a better world and a better society for self and others." (HERI, p. 21)

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

While many of the leadership concepts in this book can be applied to a variety of contexts, such as leadership in corporate business, politics, team sports, a worksite, a student organization, or even a small group class assignment, this book was

written for college students who want to work with others to create social change. Chapter One explores issues related to the concept of social change itself. These include motivations to get involved in social change, faith in one person's ability to make a real impact, and potential pitfalls of doing work that is intended for the public good. Additionally, socially responsible leadership is discussed as an application of the SCM in contexts other than social change.

WHAT IS MEANT BY SOCIAL CHANGE?

Every society in history has had public problems. Today, U.S. citizens in the early 21st century face a widening gap between the rich and poor, an education system that is failing children who live in less than affluent school districts, concerns about whether the planet can continue to sustain our modern lifestyle, deep divisions within governing bodies at all levels, and many other public challenges. Sometimes, these kinds of social problems appear to affect only the well-being of "other people," but upon closer study, they reveal themselves to have direct or indirect affects on us all. Working for social change is one approach to solving these problems. Social change addresses each person's sense of responsibility to others and the realization that making things better for one pocket of society makes things better for the society as a whole.

One way to describe the concept of social change has been to contrast it with charity and sporadic volunteerism

(Morton, 1995). While these latter approaches often provide needed services and create opportunities for members of communities to engage with each other at a personal level, they run the risk of creating dependencies, and ultimately the community problem continues. The two criteria that distinguish social change from charity are giving attention to the root causes of problems and collaboration with others (Morton; Strain, 2006).

Social Change Addresses the Root Causes of Problems

An important aspect of working for social change is focusing one's attention on the *root causes* of problems rather than the *surface-level* issues they create. When a person gets recurrent headaches, an aspirin can be relied upon to dull the pain. However, since the cause of the headaches goes unaddressed, the person will continue to get them. By thinking about the problem more thoroughly, one might realize that by reducing stress, getting enough sleep, and eating more healthfully, the underlying causes of the headaches would be addressed, and they would go away, as would the dependency on aspirins. What differentiates social change from charity is the examination of social problems to determine what their root causes are and how to address them (Morton, 1995).

Many students have experienced volunteering at a homeless shelter by serving food or handing out warm clothing. This service, which many would call charity, addresses two symptoms of the problem of homelessness: the needs for food and for warmth. While it cannot be stressed enough that this

work is invaluable and critical for meeting people's immediate needs, acts like these will not eliminate homelessness. Social change efforts, in contrast, involve becoming educated about *why* people are homeless. How do our economic, political, and social systems and cultural values allow the problem to continue? Through volunteering, participants can get to know homeless individuals and shelter staff personally. They might learn more about the complex web of circumstances that result in homelessness. Maybe the community has unreasonable eviction laws, a minimum wage that does not cover the increasing cost of housing, or a lack of resources for individuals struggling with substance abuse. It is likely all three issues, and others, contribute to the problem. Working for social change could include writing to politicians about raising the minimum wage, circulating a petition to change eviction laws, participating in "Walk for the Homeless" events aimed at both fundraising and raising public awareness of the issues, and ongoing volunteering to provide regularly scheduled substance abuse support groups through the shelter.

Social Change Is Collaborative

Western movies portray the heroic cowboy: the stranger who comes to town, fixes all the problems, and then leaves with the admiration of the townsfolk (Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, & Tipton, 1985). Unfortunately, some people doing volunteerism or community improvement projects approach their work in the same way. These individuals do service *to* others rather than *with* them. Social change, in sharp contrast

to the "cowboy" approach, requires building relationships with others and taking action together. Social change agents see themselves not as outsiders who help or fix others, but as fellow members of a community working to make it better.

An important issue related to social change is the question of how "positive" change is defined. Who decides whether the change being sought is a good thing or not? When working for the common good, who retains the power to decide what "good" is? What if the community does not want the change? Consider the historical example of the mandate to convert American Indian children to Christianity in 1609. The governor of the Virginia colony was instructed to take children from their parents, if necessary, in order to save them from the misery of their parents' "ignorance" (Takaki, 1993; quotation marks added). The mandate stemmed from the assumption that the colonists' faith was more legitimate than that of the American Indians they encountered. Surely many volunteers at the time thought they were making a positive change, helping people they perceived to be "uncivilized" become more like themselves. But forcing one's own belief system, be it religious, political, or ideological, onto others is clearly not an acceptable way to achieve social change.

Building relationships in the community and collaborating with others is the key to avoiding the imposition of one person's point of view onto others. Working *with* others and not *unto* others ensures that those most affected by the change have a say in what the change should be. Collaboration means the people in a community decide on a vision for

change together and then work together to devise the means to achieve it.

Social Change Is Not Simple

Working for the common good is a concept that is immediately appealing to many people. Stories of people giving their time to help others, finding ways to contribute their expertise or skills to benefit their communities can be quite inspirational. However, sometimes stories and quotes about making a difference imply that because these ideas are so appealing at such a basic level, the efforts themselves must also be fairly basic, simple, and uncomplicated. They imply that the right action to take will be clear, and as long as people have good intentions the community will experience good results.

Charles Strain, a professor at DePaul University, illustrates the complexity of social change by examining the well-known proverb, "Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish and you feed him for a lifetime." This proverb makes a nice point about the importance of building capacity and not just providing handouts. However, working for social change in real situations is rarely that straightforward. As Strain (2006) points out, if people are starving, they will need to have something to eat while they try to learn to fish. Going even further, he argues that "teaching someone to fish presumes that the person a) has access to a lake, b) that a corporate conglomerate has not fished out that lake and c) that our industrial waste has not poisoned all of the fish" (p. 6).

Efforts for social change involve coordinated work with many people on many fronts and often a sustained effort before any tangible results are achieved. Maintaining hope and commitment can be hard when visible signs of success are not immediate and when the role one plays in the greater effort seems small in comparison to the problem. This is a very real challenge of leadership for social change and is addressed in several later chapters of this book. Despite these challenges, many students choose to be involved, continually finding opportunities to work with others to make life better for people in their neighborhoods, on their campuses, or on their residence hall floors.

Think of a time when you were involved in creating change for common good. How did you and others decide the change needed to be made? Did you collaborate with others involved with the issue or community? What were the root causes of the issue? Did your efforts address them?

WHY GET INVOLVED IN SOCIAL CHANGE?

In 1996, a study of social change agents identified several reasons people did not get involved in their communities (Parks Daloz, Keen, Keen, & Daloz Parks, 1996). People were busier than ever, not taking time to engage with neighbors long

enough to identify ways in which coming together might benefit them all. Cynicism and a general belief in the futility of trying to make things better was prevalent, as was an individualistic outlook, a belief that each person should just look out for his or her own needs (Parks Daloz et al.). Many public problems just seemed so complex and far-reaching that it seemed like a waste of time even to try to solve them.

A recent study highlights the contrasts between college students in the 1990s and students today (Kiesa, Orlowski, Levine, Both, Kirby, Lopez, & Marcelo, 2007). While students in the 1990s volunteered, they did so individually rather than with an organized effort or with a larger institution. They were generally cynical about the usefulness of political institutions or the relevance of politics in their lives. In 2000, only 28 percent of college freshmen thought it was important to keep up with public affairs. Voter turnout among college students from 1997 to 2001 was the lowest in decades (Kiesa et al.).

In contrast, current college students, for the most part, believe it is important to be informed and engaged in politics and policymaking, and they are optimistic about the impact that collective action can have for the public good. In fact, 92 percent of current college students said they believed that people working together as a group can make some or a lot of difference in solving the problems they see in their community (Kiesa et al., 2007).

College students' specific reasons for getting involved in efforts for social change represent many motivations. A few explored here include:

- Having a personal connection to the social issue or problem being addressed
- Enjoying a connection with others that emerges from working together on social problems
- Having a sense of the interconnectedness of community issues
- Recognizing that helping others ultimately helps oneself
- Experiencing a deep satisfaction from being involved in making a difference for something that truly matters

People may get involved in social change work for several of these reasons. Sometimes one's reasons change over time or from project to project.

A Personal Connection to the Problem

Motivations about what social change one is called to engage in often have very personal connections.

Being Directly Affected by the Problem

Some people find themselves involved in making a difference around issues with which they have a personal connection. Perhaps they, a family member, or friend have experienced challenges for which they seek solutions that would make things better not just for them, but for everyone who faces that challenge. The ranks of those who raise funding and public awareness by walking for breast cancer are full of people with personal connections to the disease. Fraternity and

sorority members who work together to create campuswide policies against hazing are often students who have seen firsthand how destructive the practice is to individual members and chapter unity. Newscaster Katie Couric worked publicly for colon cancer awareness following the untimely death of her husband to the disease.

Marginality

Some social change efforts, such as working for equal opportunity based on gender, race, sexual orientation, or disability, may come from a personal connection to feelings of marginality and a desire for equity, justice, and fairness. *Marginality* is a term used to describe the sense that one's presence in a group or community is not valued or that one's experiences or perspectives are not normal. The term refers to existing on the margins of one's community. The benefits of belonging, like being included, being heard, and having one's opinions given serious consideration, do not apply to the marginalized. While feeling marginal to one's community is painful, the experience builds personal strength and character. Marginal people often benefit from having "greater self-knowledge, greater awareness of others, and a kind of comfort with life at the edge" (Parks Daloz et al., 1996, p. 76). Having had feelings of marginality develops the awareness that everyone should count, not just those in the "in" crowd. It can be a powerful motivator to becoming an agent of social change.

A Connection to Others

From an outsider's perspective, acts to help others rather than attending to one's own needs are often seen as being "selfless." However, for many who get involved to benefit others, this kind of involvement actually feeds their need to matter to others. ". . . [W]e do not sacrifice for others at the expense of the self, but we give to others because love and compassion are essential to the self" (Rhoads, 1997, p. 87). Particularly when acts to benefit others involve building strong relationships with others, those involved discover that the roles they play in these relationships become a deeply important aspect of how they see themselves.

Non-Western cultures have long recognized that one finds the self through connections with others. Archbishop Desmond Tutu (2000) describes a South African concept, *ubuntu*, that illustrates this belief:

> Ubuntu is very difficult to render in a Western language. It speaks of the very essence of being human. . . . It is to say, "My humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours." We belong in a bundle of life. We say, "A person is a person through other persons." A person with ubuntu . . . has a proper self-assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole and is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished. (p. 31)

Historically, mainstream American culture highly values individualism, each person's freedom to live how he or she

chooses. We admire self-reliance and the ability to take care of one's own problems without burdening others. How is the value of individualism to be reconciled with having a sense of responsibility to the community and the welfare of those around us? The answer lies in reframing the issue. Rather than being competing opposites, the individual and the community reinforce each other. While it seems paradoxical, each person's ability to be a self-reliant individual is bolstered by having a strong, supportive community. Likewise, communities are strong when the individuals in them are free to think for themselves and act on their consciences.

Juana Bordas (2007), founder and chief executive officer of Mestiza and author of several leadership books, observes:

> I and we are not a dichotomy. The *I* is intrinsic to the *We* orientation—individuals must be strong for the collective to thrive. . . . The challenge is to balance communal good with individual gain—to reach the higher ground of interdependence. This implies a social imperative whereby personal gain cannot be shouldered at the expense of the common good. (p. 54)

This concept of interdependence with others is frequently reflected in nature. For example, while California redwood trees are the tallest living things in the world, reaching as high as 300 feet, they have astonishingly shallow root systems. Redwoods are able to survive strong winds and storms without toppling over because they always grow together in

groves, with their roots intertwining together in a way that supports each tree.

Interconnectedness of Community Problems

Some people are involved in social change because they have come to realize that issues that seem like "somebody else's problem" do come back to affect them in the long run. The environment provides many clear examples of how other people's decisions affect everyone. For example, it may not be readily apparent why the workers in the Chesapeake Bay crab industry would be interested in the state of Maryland's farming policies. But when economic realities push farmers to increase their annual yields by using chemical fertilizers and pesticides, those toxins eventually run off into the bay, devastating the quantity of blue crabs (Stanford University, 2005).

Interconnections like these are found in social issues as well. Quality education is one example. A good education clearly benefits individuals, but it benefits the whole community as well. Individuals learn to read, calculate, and solve problems, all fundamental life and workplace skills. The whole community also benefits from having an educated populace. Economists have shown links between education disparity and increased crime, ethnic divisions, and income inequality (Fajnzylber, Lederman, & Loayza, 2000). Quality schools are also generally known to increase the value of homes. Although keeping real estate taxes low is an important consideration for individual families, in the long term, even people without children benefit from investing in quality

schools. In his *I Have a Dream* speech, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. conveyed his understanding of the connectedness of social issues this way:

> For many of our white brothers, as evidenced by their presence here today, have come to realize that their destiny is tied up with our destiny. And they have come to realize that their freedom is inextricably bound to our freedom.

Many community problems on campus have interconnections that may not be apparent at first glance. Consider a campus that has a moderately popular men's rugby team, but no women's rugby. Some of the players on the men's team may not see this lack of opportunity for female players as any of their concern. Why should they care? In fact, they might be hostile to women who approach them about playing on the men's team since they don't have a women's team to play on. Other members of the men's team might see the situation differently. They might see the opportunity to help their sport gain more visibility and popularity by the addition of a women's league. Having two campus rugby teams might eventually convince the institution to provide more space for practice fields. The men might even push for a coed league as well, which would increase the opportunity to play on a team for both men and women. By joining with interested women players to pressure the athletic department to give women the opportunity to play, the men's rugby team benefits as well.

While some are satisfied with only looking out for their own interests, activist and commentator Paul Loeb (1999) contrasts that sentiment with what he calls "a more hopeful way to live"(p. 2):

> The walls we're building around ourselves . . . may provide a temporary feeling of security. But they can't prevent the world from affecting us. Quite the opposite. The more we construct such barriers, the more private life, for most of us, will grow steadily more insecure. (p. 7)

Satisfaction Derived from Making a Difference

In the late 1990s, a team of researchers interviewed 100 individuals who were identified as committed to working on behalf of the common good. Although many of these individuals had given significant time and energy to help others, there was "very little sense of sacrifice. . . . On the contrary most spoke of the 'deep gladness' they felt in their work" (Parks Daloz et al., 1996, p. 196). One interviewee commented, "This is what I love, what my purpose is, what drives me, and makes me happy" (p. 197). Participants reported that their efforts made their lives feel purposeful, and they enjoyed the process of meeting challenges and working with others to find solutions (Parks Daloz et al.). For a similar study during the civil rights movement, Robert Coles (1993) met an African American college student who was in prison for protesting

segregation by attempting to have lunch in a "white restaurant." Coles asked the student why he was involved in the civil rights movement, considering the risks and obstacles to success. The student answered, "The satisfaction, man" (p. 69). He described meeting inspiring people and feeling part of something important: "There may be a sheriff out there waiting for me with a gun, but if he gets me, I'll die thinking: Dion, you actually *did* something" (p. 69).

What drives you to work for social change? How can you expand on this drive to move you from beliefs to action?

BUT I'M NOT A HERO, I'M JUST A REGULAR PERSON

There are many people whose efforts to make a positive difference led to their being well-known historical figures (for example, Harriet Tubman, Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony, Martin Luther King Jr., Mother Teresa). However, there is a danger that one might imagine that the kind of people who get involved to make a difference must be fundamentally different from "normal" people. Being committed to the common good does not mean becoming a saint, nor does it mean sacrificing one's other life goals. In his years of observing people doing community work, Loeb (1999) recognized:

> The main distinction between those who participate fully in their communities and those who withdraw in private life doesn't rest in the active citizens' grasp of complex issues, or their innate moral strength. . . . They have learned specific lessons about approaching social change: that they don't need to wait for the perfect circumstances, the perfect cause, or the perfect level of knowledge to take a stand; that they can proceed step by step, so that they don't get overwhelmed before they start. They savor the journey of engagement and draw strength from its challenges. Taking the long view, they come to trust that the fruits of their efforts will ripple outward, in ways they can rarely anticipate. (pp. 8–9)

History is full of examples of tentative first steps leading to lives of commitment. The people we now see as heroes were once just getting started, learning as they went, just like everyone else does.

- While she was still in college, Marion Wright Edelman joined her professor Howard Zinn and other black students to challenge segregation by sitting in the "Whites only" section of the state legislature. This and other early experiences through which she observed how the legal and political systems favored whites motivated her to become a civil rights attorney (the first black woman admitted to the Mississippi bar). She eventually became a critical figure in the civil rights movement and later went on to form the Children's Defense Fund (Edelman, 1999).

- Eleanor Roosevelt's family hoped only for her to marry well. However, she did not find meaning in the lifestyle of the wealthy socialite and instead decided to join a group of women who were activists for women's equality and rights for the working poor (Gerber, 2002). Despite her concerns about having no experience or qualifications for this kind of work, she decided to accept a position on the board of directors of the New York League of Women Voters. She would later call this period "the intensive education of Eleanor Roosevelt" (Roosevelt as cited in Gerber, p. 87).
- César Chávez, well-known activist for farm workers and labor unions, also began his journey with simple small steps. He accepting a job with a Latino civil rights group in which he traveled across California, encouraging Mexican Americans to register and vote (Ross, 1989).

For Chávez, just like for anyone else, the courage to get out there and try opened the doors to the opportunities that followed. "Each step, no matter how awkward or hesitant, prepares us for the next" (Loeb, p. 62).

The lesson from these stories is that one does not become an expert on social issues before getting involved; one becomes an expert through involvement and learning from experience. Of course a person should try to be informed about the issues, but the need to be informed should not forever serve as a barrier to action. Social change agents must be willing to learn as they go; to listen to those around them and those most directly affected, and be open to learning where they were wrong. Community service experiences can be a great place

to start out on the hesitant and awkward first steps to which Loeb refers. Service provides opportunities to learn firsthand about social problems and possible solutions (HERI, 1996).

When people begin to feel that the world's problems are too big for them as individuals to make a difference, Beverly Tatum (1997), former dean of the college at Wellesley and president of Spelman College, responds this way: "While many people experience themselves as powerless, everyone has some sphere of influence in which they can work for change, even if it is just in their own personal network of family and friends" (p. 204). The more a person gets involved in the ways that they can, the more experience they will gain and the more influential relationships they will form. One's sphere of influence grows as one uses it.

Eli Winkelman was a student at Scripps College with a popular recipe for challah bread. Her friends could not get enough of it and even asked her to teach them how to make it for themselves. She recognized the demand for a product and wondered if she could take advantage of it for a good cause. Meanwhile, her friend Melinda Koster at nearby Pomona College was deeply concerned about the genocide in the Darfur region of Sudan. Although unsure of what she could do from her residence hall in Claremont, California, she was determined to get involved somehow. One day, Melinda's concern met Eli's fundraising idea and they decided to give it a try. With some initial success, Eli began asking questions of people within her sphere of influence. Would other students help her with the baking to have more to sell? Yes. Would the college dining hall let them use the kitchen equipment after

hours in order to produce even more? Yes. Would the on-campus café sell them in the shop for her? No, but she kept asking questions. If they could not sell through the campus café, could they set up a sales table every week? Yes, and after a year of success, the campus café came around and began featuring challah in its pastry case every day. Today, Challah for Hunger is a quickly growing nonprofit organization. Eli has managed to help students at ten additional colleges around the country start chapters, and she is working with students at many more. She uses the project not only to raise money for hunger and disaster relief (more than $55,000 at the time of this writing) but to also raise awareness about these problems and about her beliefs regarding each person's responsibility to address them (personal communication, 2008).

Who is in your sphere of influence? In what arenas do you have the power to make something better? How could you use it? In what arenas would you like things to be better? How could you utilize your current sphere of influence to create change there?

POSSIBLE PITFALLS IN SOCIAL CHANGE

Even with the best of intentions of working to benefit others, sometimes, without meaning to, it is possible to act in ways

that are hurtful or insulting. The following is a short list of pitfalls to avoid when working for social change.

Paternalism

This pitfall is considered to be the underlying cause of many problems in community service (Morton, 1995). The term implies a "father knows best" analogy, reducing recipients of service to a childlike status, not having input on what service will be done to them because they do not know what is best for them. Paternalism maintains unequal relationships between the "helpers" and the "helped" (Rhoads, 1997).When "helpers" assume they have expertise that the "helped" do not, they keep decision-making power to themselves rather than empowering people to create their own solutions.

Assimilation

This approach assumes that the way one's own community or culture addresses an issue is the best way. In this pitfall, people attempt to "fix" another community by helping it become more like their own. This ignores the differences among communities and the expertise that exists outside of one's own. Efforts to build relationships with others should not assume that commonality is the only way to find a sense of connection (Rhoads, 1997).

A Deficit-Based Perspective of the Community

A deficit-based perspective sees only the problems in a community: poverty, poor schools, teen pregnancy. Deficit-based

models tend to focus on how others can solve problems for a community, rather than on how the community can use its assets to create its own solutions (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). An asset-based view of the community starts by identifying all the resources the community has to build upon to make it stronger, and then think creatively about how these assets can be applied in new ways. For example, imagine a student organization that is seeking a community service project; it identifies a community neighborhood to work in based on its identified deficits: poor schools and an aging population that needs some assistance with household tasks and opportunities to socialize. The organization might decide either to offer a tutoring program in the schools or visit aging shut-ins to rake leaves and shovel snowy sidewalks. But consider how differently the student organization would approach their service project if the neighborhood was identified by its assets: the aging population has lived in this neighborhood for decades, they all know each other, and there is a strong sense of community history and pride. All of the sudden, the aging population is perceived as an asset, not a service recipient. Many of the seniors are likely to be proud alumni of the same neighborhood schools that are now struggling. If they could be provided rides, they might enjoy volunteering in these schools themselves. Likewise, in communities where neighbors have known each other for years, creating incentives for local school children to rake leaves and shovel snow for their aging neighbors might be a more sustainable service project than for the university students to do these things themselves.

Seeking a Magic Bullet

Social problems involve a complex web of issues. Poverty, illiteracy, poor schools, and racism are all interwoven problems. Complex problems require multiple solutions, not just one quick fix. More funding is often considered a solution, but it is rarely all that is needed. Other solutions are often needed to work along with funding, such as building stronger community relationships, changing policies, providing education or training, and changing public attitudes about the issue. Very often, those most affected by the problem will have the best idea of the systems and structures to be addressed.

Ignoring Cultural Differences

When Malcolm X was a child, a neighbor provided a butchered pig to his family so they would not go hungry. Because of religious-based diet restrictions, his mother would not serve it to the children. (If it is hard to imagine choosing hunger over a religious dietary restriction, imagine an American food bank serving dog meat to the poor, claiming that it is acceptable in other cultures.) His mother's decision was among a chain of events that led to the state taking the children out of her custody, claiming she was not taking proper care of them (Haley & Malcolm X, 1964). It is important not to let attempts to form a connection with others be confused with thinking everyone is the same.

Avoiding the Potential Pitfalls

One key to avoiding many of these pitfalls is to replace notions of "helping others" or "fixing others" with a sense of being *in community*

with others. Rather than serving others, we work together toward solutions to problems we hold in common (Kendall in Jacoby, 1996, p. 13). The very act of distinguishing between "helper" and "recipient" can lead to many of the pitfalls noted.

> It is dangerous to our conception of democracy for us to think of service as the rich helping the poor or students paying a debt to their society in exchange for tuition breaks, as if the community building aspect of "community" service only applies to those "doing" service. . . . The language of charity drives a wedge between self-interest and altruism, leading students to believe that service is a matter of sacrificing private interests to moral virtue. The language of citizenship suggests that self-interests are always embedded in communities of action and that in serving neighbors one also serves oneself. (Barber, as quoted in Rhoads, 1997, p. 171)

Can you think of a time when you were involved in a community effort that experienced one of these potential pitfalls? What might the project have looked like in order to avoid that pitfall?

SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP

The Social Change Model of Leadership Development was created for those who want to learn how to work effectively with

others for the public good. However, its values are useful even for an organization whose mission is not related to serving the public good. It is an approach to leadership that is collaborative rather than coercive, civil and respectful rather than defensive, open to different perspectives rather than controlling and single-minded, and clear and consistent about values rather than hypocritical. While the primary mission of a group may not relate to social change, leaders in a wide variety of contexts, such as business, sports, theater groups, or a group classroom assignment, can benefit from these approaches to working with others.

Regardless of whether social change is a major aspect of a group's mission, an approach to leadership that maintains a sense of responsibility for the welfare of others as the group goes about its business is called *socially responsible leadership*. Socially responsible leadership means operating with an awareness of the ways in which the group's decisions and actions affect others. Socially responsible leaders are concerned about the well-being of group members and about the impact of the group's decisions on the community. A socially responsible outdoor adventure club will always make sure it leaves campsites as clean as it found them. A sorority would make sure that its traditions and ways of socializing are welcoming to students from a diversity of social classes, ethnicities, and religious backgrounds. A socially responsible approach to leadership will influence the group's purposes, decision making, and how members work together.

There are many examples of socially responsible leadership in the corporate business field. While the primary goal of any business is to make a profit in order to continue to

exist, many companies are able to do so while also adhering to other shared values. Companies such as Timberland and The Body Shop have published values statements that make clear their awareness of their impact on the community and their desire to have a positive influence through their ways of doing business. These companies and others like them have operating procedures as well as standards for their suppliers and business partners concerning values such as protecting the environment, defending against animal cruelty, and supporting suppliers from disadvantaged communities (www.timberland.com, www.thebodyshop.com). Organizations like these are not sacrificing profits in order to be "do-gooders." Rather, they are future oriented, recognizing their interdependence with their communities. "Organizations with a social imperative that links their survival to the well-being of society may be better positioned in the long run to maintain their human and economic viability" (Hickman, 1998, p. 561).

SOCIAL CHANGE AND LEADERSHIP

By their very definitions, working for social change and doing leadership both imply collaborative effort, or people working together toward shared goals. Leadership is clearly not an act done in isolation from others. Similarly, one person acting alone cannot solve problems that members of a society hold in common. Paul Loeb (1999) asserts, "Our most serious problems, both the public ones and those that seem most

personal, are in the large part common problems, which can be solved only through common efforts"(p. 7). If both social change and leadership are group efforts, then being able to do them requires effective approaches to working in groups. The SCM addresses these approaches.

Julie Owen, Leadership Studies Professor at George Mason University, often asks an important question: "Do leaders create social movements or do the movements create leaders?" (personal communication, 2008). The Social Change Model of Leadership Development calls attention to the strong connection between getting involved in social change and learning to do leadership. The chapters that follow address the values that are explored and refined as a person gets involved with others to solve common problems.

Juana Bordas often describes the day she was sitting outside her residence hall in 1963 when she saw her political science professor and a long line of people walking toward the administration building. When she asked what was happening, she was invited to join them on a protest march to racially integrate the University of Florida. Juana says, "I stood up and said, 'Yes I'll go.' On that day, I became a leader" (personal communication, 2008). It is in this spirit that social change and leadership are connected here. It is through working with others for common benefit that people learn just how much they are capable of. "We regard a leader as one who is able to effect positive change for the betterment of others, the community, and society. All people, in other words, are potential leaders"(HERI, 1996, p. 16).

CONCLUSION

Working for social change means working to make a positive difference for the common good in ways that are collaborative and that address the root causes of problems. People are inspired to do social change for a variety of reasons and are able to get involved at the campus, community, national, and global levels.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways have you been involved in social change efforts? What social issues or what communities are you drawn to?
2. Can you think of an example of an organization (that you have been involved with or not) that did a particularly good job of collaborating with others and addressing the root causes of problems?
3. What is your motivation for being involved in social change efforts? What holds you back?
4. Describe someone you would consider a hero in terms of their commitment to making a positive difference for others. In what ways can you see yourself being like them? In what ways does their achievement intimidate you?
5. Unfortunately, many early volunteer experiences involve one of the potential pitfalls described in this chapter. Do

you have any personal experiences with one or more of the pitfalls that you are willing to share? What did you learn from that experience?

6. Think of a group you belong to that is not defined by its goal to do social change, such as a residence hall community, sports team, or academic club. How does that organization affect its members? How does it affect others in its community? How could that organization practice socially responsible leadership?

7. Do you think leaders create social movements or do social movements create leaders? How have your experiences with leadership shaped your motivation to work for the common good? How have your experiences trying to make a difference for the common good affected how you approach leadership?

JOURNAL PROBES

On Becoming

Preeminent psychologist Carl Rogers (1961) said that people are always in a process of *becoming*. The first two journal probes are intended to help you reflect on how you see yourself becoming a leader for social change.

1. In what ways can you see how you are becoming aware of your motivations to work for social change and how those experiences are shaping you as a leader?

2. Can you remember a time when you thought about social change differently than you do now? How is your current approach different from your approach then?

Learning Through Experience

The ensemble that created the Social Change Model believed the best way to learn to do leadership was through experience and reflection. This involves challenging yourself to have new experiences that test your ability and awareness **and** to spend time thinking about what you have learned from that experience. The remaining journal probes are designed to maximize learning through experience by guiding your reflective journal writing through Kolb's (1981) four processes of experiential learning.

1. **Concrete Experience.** Describe a specific situation when you had an experience that relates to social change as it has been described here. What was the social issue or community problem involved? What happened? What details stand out to you? Describe briefly the situation, what you did and how you felt. What was the outcome?
2. **Reflective Observation.** Why were you motivated to be involved with that experience? Did any of the potential pitfalls of social change emerge? What responses from yourself and others worked in this situation? Why was that effective? What did not work? Why?
3. **Abstract Conceptualization.** What lessons about working for social change can you draw from this specific experience

that could apply more generally? Given both your reflections and the information in this chapter, what would you do if a similar situation presented itself? What general guidelines would you create for handling future situations like this?

4. **Active Experimentation.** What opportunities might you seek out that would give you the chance to apply what you have learned here? How might you test the lessons or guidelines you created in #3 to see if they work?

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