

# *Experience Making a Difference: Uncovering the Secrets to Effectively Engaging and Working in the Social Sector \**

by Jay C. Bloom

“This is the true joy in life, that being used for a purpose recognized by yourself as a mighty one, that being a force of nature instead of a feverish, selfish little clod of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy. I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community, and as long as I live it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die. For the harder I work, the more I live. I rejoice in life for its own sake. Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch, which I’ve got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.”

– George Bernard Shaw

**Returnment** – n.

- 1) The act of giving back or returning in some small way what the world has given you.
- 2) Especially as an alternative to retirement.

– Jay C. Bloom

## **“I Just Want to Help”**

There is no greater satisfaction than the experience of making a difference in the world, whether it is for one child, one

family, an organization, or for the community as a whole. It is a very special feeling. Let me begin with a brief story.

A physician retired to a beautiful home in a gated community on Hilton Head, an island off the Carolinas. He golfed, played tennis, swam, took vacations elsewhere in the world with his wife. But one day he realized that if he went out the front gate of his community, all he saw were other similarly gated communities. If he went out the back gate, he saw the poverty of the people who serviced the big homes and staffed the shops on the island. He compared his

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\* Based on my working for almost four decades in this sector, I can testify there is no agreement or common description of the sector itself. Nonprofit organizations, not-for-profit associations, civic sector, third sector, non-governmental organizations (NGO's) are all frequently used to describe that they are not private or governmental organizations. However, Peter Drucker referred to it as the social sector, and recently Jim Collins, the co-author of *Built to Last* and *From Good to Great* also uses the title social sector. I have chosen it for purposes of expediency.

life to theirs. He also compared his life before retirement to the life he had now with all its privileges. He concluded his life was boring and even if he stayed in good physical shape, his mind would atrophy because he no longer saw patients, no longer headed medical departments, no longer had a life of meaning.

So he recruited other doctors, nurses and dentists who lived on the Island and began a free nonprofit health clinic for the poor. He was so successful at recruiting retirees, showing them how they could lead a really rich life while giving back to others just part-time, that the clinic attracted money for equipment and supplies, becoming a great success. So successful in fact, that he was asked to help other communities around the country set up similar clinics.

I hope the following pages will help you feel the joy of **experience making a difference**—making the world better—through successful engagement in the social sector.

Welcome to the world of nonprofits. For many of you, this may be the wildest ride in the park. I want to encourage you to buy your ticket but I want you to know the ticket price. And, once on the ride, I want to make sure you've got your seat belt fastened. Too often folks think it's a free ride with no seatbelt required and this can lead to frustration and disappointment rather than the thrill of making a real difference.

You may have already discovered, like thousands of other individuals, that just wanting to help or work in the social

sector is not enough. There are many subtle cultural barriers to effectively working in this arena. Albert Einstein said "All theories are wrong but some are useful." I don't maintain that all my theories are right but I do hope they will be useful.

I want to pull back the curtain on some of the hidden secrets and the not so obvious critical cultural characteristics of how to successfully engage and work in the social sector. (I use the word "work" throughout to include work performed for regular part- or full-time compensation, stipends, some other benefit, and/or volunteering at the direct, management, or board levels.)

Right now the potential to bring about lasting change is greater than ever before and so is the need. Bill Shore, founder and executive director Share our Strength, makes the observation that "many boomers want to give something back, to find a way to contribute that will be meaningful and make a difference. What they want to know is *how*."

You may have worked for years in business or in some other profession or maybe you have worked in local, state or federal government, but now feel drawn to making a better world through working in the social sector.

If you are a part of the boomer generation many of you have been blessed with better health, less physical labor in your work lives, and better education than previous generations. Now as you enter your later years, Social Security and Medicare, along with other assets, may allow you the freedom to follow the inner call for service and/or the desire to still work for good that often comes in the second half of life.

A number of books and resources describe the technical details of the social

sector, including how to research types of jobs, write a resume, network, and interview and present yourself. You may want to check out *Change Your Career: Transitioning to the Nonprofit Sector* by Laura Gassner Otting; *The Nonprofit Career Guide: How to Land a Job that Makes a Difference* by Shelly Cryer; *The Idealist's Guide to Nonprofit Careers for Sector Switchers* by Steven Joiner and Meg Busse, and the websites [Bridgespan.org](http://Bridgespan.org) and [Encore.org](http://Encore.org) among others.

However it is not the technical aspects of social sector organizations that will likely frustrate or trip up your efforts to contribute your time and expertise for a worthy cause. Most often it is the hidden cultural processes that create barriers to successful engagement. These obstacles include the not-so-obvious aspects of how decisions are made, the seemingly endless meetings, the limited financial resources, and the irrationality of how capital is allocated in the social sector.

If you previously worked in the private sector, you may project your own bias, thinking you have superior knowledge, tools or processes, which can offend individuals already working in the social sector. Your naïveté of what personal work is required can also trip you up. Choosing to work in the social sector is not a risk free endeavor but it can be very rewarding. The sector can speak to your heart and soul but it often requires courage and a willingness to reflect, grow, and personally change, all easier for most of us to say than to do.

The social sector, although populated by thousands of organizations is comprised mainly of small "mom and pop" organizations, under-resourced, under-

managed with limited infrastructure, and with confusing and/or little rational incentives for securing capital. Only 18% have annual budgets above \$1 million.

Non-profits are notoriously inadequate at utilizing the talent and expertise of older adults. The leadership often limits its view to seeking monetary contributions or assigning low-level or relatively meaningless jobs equivalent to "licking stamps" or "stuffing envelopes." The fundamental challenges of the social sector can be overwhelming to people working in it for the first time. Even veterans of the social sector can find it daunting.

Some of the challenges include:

- The sheer variety of relationships and stakeholders,
- Defining who the customer is,
- Defining true success,
- The irrationality of how capital is allocated,
- The limited amount of resources available,
- The limited amount of infrastructure,
- Growing workforce shortages,
- Limited compensation for staff.

Defining and measuring success for a social sector organization is no small achievement. It is an ongoing challenge to balance financial considerations with other aspects of the organization's mission. People coming from the private sector who may be used to quantitative metrics for measuring success may have

trouble with the social sector belief that “just because you can measure it doesn’t mean it is important.” Albert Einstein said, “Not everything that counts can be measured. Not everything that can be measured counts.” Qualitative measures are equally important to evaluating outcomes in the social sector.

One example of an often-irrelevant metric is overhead. There is no agreement as to what defines acceptable overhead for the social sector organization. It’s possible that fifty percent overhead for an organization with excellent outcomes is preferable to five percent overhead for an organization that produces little or no impact. The same measure could be true for a social sector organization with a healthy bottom line versus one that may just break even.

Unlike the private sector measuring financial components alone gives no indication as to whether an organization is making a difference. Social sector CEO’s with previous experience leading organizations in the private sector often admit that measuring success is more difficult in the social sector than in the private sector. Minimizing overhead is a worthy goal, but it is counterproductive when taken so far that it stifles critical investments in the organization’s infrastructure.

How capital is allocated is one of the more frustrating challenges in the social sector. Jim Collins author of the book *Good to Great in the Social Sector* observes: “In the social sector, by contrast, there is no guaranteed relationship between results and sustained access to resources.”

Too few dollars are directed toward developing the organizational capacity of social sector organizations, which can inhibit moving even the most successful programs to scale. Too many people

contribute money to causes out of emotion rather than clearly evaluating the success of the organization they are giving to. They may also give to a cause primarily because of someone they know asks them or they know individuals who are involved or support the organization.

This can also be true of government funding as well as foundation funding. Most foundations take a project-based rather than an organization-building approach to philanthropy. Government usually contracts for a service and seldom invests in the organizational capacity of the social sector provider.

Attracting and retaining workers based on financial compensation in the social sector is almost an oxymoron. You may already assume the social sector underpays individuals; the reality of compensation normally paid for line, middle management and even top management positions in the social sector will undoubtedly shock you.

The cost of living in most communities has significantly outpaced social sector organizations’ ability to increase financial compensation for employees. There are exceptions, but as a rule in the past 20 years the vast majority of social sector organizations have not kept up with yearly inflation increases, and this is not likely to change in the future.

So if you are still interested in working in the social sector here are some of tips as you approach an organization.

- Approach any job or project as real work, regardless of how it is compensated, whether through salary, stipend, some other benefit such as

health insurance and/or psychic satisfaction.

- Be clear that you don't want to be stuffing envelopes, licking stamps, or just making a financial contribution.
- Insist on a written job or project description with clear expectations.
- Ask for an orientation and training if needed, as well as ongoing support and supervision.
- Ask for periodic feedback. The social sector is notorious for giving little feedback -- ask for it.
- Ask for a written evaluation. Show you are willing, responsible and wanting to be held accountable.

### **How decisions are made or, please not another meeting!**

How decisions are made or the difference in authority may be one of the more challenging, crucial differences you will experience in the social sector.

In *Good to Great in the Social Sector*, Jim Collins calls this the difference between executive and legislative leadership. He notes, "In executive leadership, the individual leader has enough concentrated power to simply make the right decisions. In legislative leadership, on the other hand, no individual leader – not even a nominal chief executive – has enough structural power to make the most important decisions by him or herself. Legislative leadership relies more upon persuasion, political currency, and shared interest to create the

conditions for the right decisions to happen."

The stakeholders involved in the social sector can include: many different funders and donors, advisory boards, employees, other social sector organizations, politicians, governing boards, regulators, volunteers, as well as the clients the organization serves. Because of the number and wide variety of stakeholders and the preferred use of influential or legislative leadership style, decisions take much longer.

An article in Bridgestar, titled "Bridging the Non-Profit and For-Profit Sectors: Reflections from the Field" pointed out, "A democratic, consensus-based workplace can be a positive cultural attribute, but in a multi-stakeholder environment in which most non-profits operate, it can make the pace of decision-making excruciatingly slow."

Meetings are probably the number one tool that managers and leaders in the social sector use for making decisions. Clearly the private sector uses meetings as a tool as well. However, if you have worked primarily in the private sector you will undoubtedly become convinced that social sector organizations have too many meetings and take far too long to make decisions. While both private and social sector meetings focus on identifying and creating action and bottom line results, social sector meetings include other subtle and not-so subtle important objectives.

In addition to sharing information, social sector leaders use meetings for personal disclosure and to clarify values. Leaders solicit and encourage different opinions, which will ultimately help root out any passive opposition and get overall buy-in. Meetings are also opportunities for power sharing as well as finding support for each other in absorbing and res-

ponding to the very difficult work.

The social sector authority structure is based more on influence than command and control. A leader who pushes too hard will find very quickly they are all alone and individuals just won't go with them "over the mountain." Individuals in the social sector lack financial incentives and often the fear of termination. Employees in the social sector feel like they can quickly work for another organization at equal or more pay, particularly if they seek work in the governmental or private sector. Ultimately, a leader or manager's power is much more about persuasion.

Clearly, individuals in the social sector are vulnerable to process over product and services and can often talk problems to death without doing something about them. Nevertheless effective meetings are an essential tool for social sector leaders, allowing them to meet many visible and not-so-visible objectives.

And just because you work in the social sector for a just cause, doesn't mean you can't be as petty and political as the other sectors. Passion is displayed in every workplace, but it is especially encouraged and tolerated in the social sector. The old maxim "Heal Thyself" is never truer than in the social sector. It can be particularly discouraging for those who want to do well and serve others to observe human service workers who may appear to need as much help as the clients that they treat.

Individuals in the social sector are vulnerable to focusing on what they can't influence rather than what they can affect. Some social sector employees may seem to spend too much time complaining about circumstances that are beyond the organization's capacity to impact and fail to focus on circum-

stances the organization or individual could impact. John Wooden the famous college basketball coach used to say to his players "Don't let what you cannot do interfere with what you can do." All of these issues lead to the challenges of how decisions are made, the pace of decisions, and the importance of meetings.

**"We must reject the idea-well intentioned, but dead wrong- that the primary path to greatness in the social sectors is to become 'more like a business.' "** Jim Collins, author of *Built to Last*

For profit executives who engage the social sector often think that the sector is not efficient or well managed. They may assume they know best how it can be improved. If you expect to be always received with open arms and your expertise automatically embraced, you will likely be greatly disappointed as Will Rogers said, "Everyone is ignorant, only on different subjects." Both parties should come to this work with humility and a willingness to learn from each other. Each party is ignorant to some degree of the other's world, but each party has unique strengths to bring to the relationship.

If you have not worked previously in the social sector, you will likely be viewed with some skepticism or mistrust by individuals from the social sector. Any hint of arrogance on your part will be magnified and become a major barrier to being considered for work, let alone for acceptance.

Too often individuals in the social sector have experienced a paternalistic or superior attitude by those from the business sector. The business sector also has its limitations; command and control only goes so far in the social sector. There have been some spectacular

blunders and missteps by those in business sector—just look at Enron, BP, General Motors, Bernie Madoff, Lehman Brothers.

It takes patience and a willingness to learn to effectively work in the social sector. Even if you have a track record of significant achievement and demonstrated skills, managers in the social sector are often reluctant to bring someone in who may disrupt the overall culture.

If this is the first time you have considered working in the social sector, in addition to informational interviews and actual applying for job openings, here's another strategy to consider. Identify organizations that work in areas you are passionate about. These may include working with at-risk children, the environment, poverty or the arts. Once you have identified two or three organizations that fit your interests, find a key decision-maker in each organization and offer to take on a project *pro bono* for a certain amount of hours a week for up to a month or so.

In return, ask that the organization do two things: first, be willing to be a reference for you, should you do a good job, and second, actively consider you for openings that may occur. If accepted, you will have the opportunity to look inside the organization and see whether the culture fits for you. You also will be exposed to individuals in the organization who will get to know you and build up a level of trust.

Other benefits are you will be able to add this work to your resume, and you will be exposed to a network of other organizations

and services in that same area. Identify how much time and how long you may want to make your initial offer.

Once you are inside the social sector organization, find an ally or allies to help you navigate both the spoken and unspoken rules and culture. Be willing to start at a lower level or at the bottom. Be explicit in stating your objectives, although realize that there will be in all likelihood an initial testing period.

Bridgespan, a Boston group that places individuals from the private sector into the social sector, indicates that having experience in influencing peers without authority or being the boss is most similar to what it will be like working in the social sector.

Moving effectively from private sector into the social sector is more of an adaptive than a technical challenge. Martin Linsky and Ron Heifetz in their book *Leadership on the Line*, make this observation, "Every day people have problems for which they do, in fact, have the necessary know-how and procedures. We call these technical problems. But there is a whole host of problems that are not amenable to authoritative expertise or standard operating procedures. They cannot be solved by someone who provides answers from on high. We call these adaptive challenges because they require new experiments, new discoveries, and adjustments from numerous places in the organization or community."

It is similar to learning a new culture. You will certainly need to assimilate technical information, but paying attention to the nuances of verbal or non-

**"This is not work for the tentative heart. The benefits of it are immeasurable. Yet it requires personal struggle. Only when you change internally will you see those benefits reflected in the outside world. You have to go through a process, and it is painful. You have to show up fearlessly."**

– Author Richard Barrett, interviewed in "Fast Company" *Sectors*

verbal communication is equally important. Willingness to learn, as well as displaying of a humble attitude, will take you far.

### **How do I get personally ready?**

The journey to work and engage in the social sector often gets harder as you experience issues of personal loss, the need for self awareness, and self disclosure. William Bridges in his book *Transitions* emphasizes that every transition begins with loss and every loss includes some grieving. It can be exciting to change work, re-careering, or even volunteer for an important cause, but it is important to acknowledge the losses of your former life. These may include loss of familiar people, structures, politics, language, compensation, and routines, to name just a few.

Taking the time to reflect and feel these losses is a crucial part of the process of getting ready for the next stage of your life. Yes, there are intellectual exercises of taking inventory of your skills, talents, and interests, but there is also emotional or heart work. The risk of ignoring this work is that you will numb yourself and dull your passions. There is also the potential of bringing anger or even depression into your new work in the social sector.

Prematurely engaging the social sector will increase the odds of an unsatisfying experience and lead to frustration and wondering what's next. Marc Freedman in his book *Encore* suggests many people need a pause or a period of rest and reflection before considering "encore" work. He notes, "What at first may look like, and even feel like, retirement, often turns out to be a sabbatical, a rest

stop, the chance to travel, to spend time with friends and family, to take a break before moving on to a next phase of engagement."

Robert Atchley refers to the need for some people to be "naked" for a while. This can create the space and time to get in touch with who they are after a period of raising a family, building a career, establishing a place in the world.

It is very easy to get into an automatic pilot posture in your life. Trying to keep up with the relentless pace of emails, work, home chores, getting your children ready for independence and/or other family responsibilities, and finding time to be with your partner or spouse leave little time to reflect on what your life has become and who you are now at this time in life. So self-awareness -- of your feelings and losses as well as identifying unanswered questions that are still important to you -- is your first task.

Getting in touch with your mortality can be an important catalyst to clarifying what kind of legacy you want to leave. Being aware of how finite your life is can be a unique ally for clarifying one's values and priorities. I have wondered why it often takes a terminal illness diagnosis to help individuals discover what is important to them and how they want to really spend their remaining time.

Obviously none of us has a blank check of time. It is one of the great ironies of this period that you may have 30 or 40 more healthy years in front of you, or you may discover tomorrow that you have a terminal disease or some chronic disability may emerge. No doubt you know people who are examples of this. Denial of these possibilities is an

**"Everyone thinks of changing the world,  
but no one thinks of changing himself."**

– Leo Tolstoy



option, but it won't help you discover and plan thoughtfully for the next chapters of your life.

**“From the perspective of mentors such as (Albert) Einstein, (Ernest) Becker, (Jean) Houston, and (Joseph) Campbell, aging and death do not undermine life’s meaning; they actually give life meaning. Like artists, we are compelled to make choices within limits. Just as a painter has a canvas of defined size and a sculptor has a limited amount of clay, we human beings have a limited amount of time. With it, we can create beauty, love and meaning, if we dare!” - Mark Gerzon in *Listening to Mid-life: Turning Your Crisis Into a Quest***

Jeri Sedlar and Rich Miners in their book *Don't Retire, Rewire* list the top ten reasons why people flunk retirement:

1. Retired for the wrong reasons
2. Didn't realize the emotional side of retiring
3. Didn't know myself as well as I thought I did
4. Didn't have a plan
5. Expected retirement to evolve on its own
6. Thought rest, leisure, and recreation would be enough
7. Didn't stay connected with society
8. Expected my partner to be my social life
9. Didn't know what I was leaving behind
10. Was overcome with boredom.

Which of the ones above are you most vulnerable to? Assuming your goal is to work and engage the social sector, I would strongly recommend getting in

touch with your passions – and the more specific the better.

For example “I just want to work with children” is not very specific. The range of work with children is very broad, ranging from early childhood to teenagers, from prevention to working with abused children in very structured settings.

More than any other distinguishing factor the social sector is about using your heart and soul first, and your mind third. In the private sector you are rewarded first for using your mind and maybe if you're lucky your heart, and seldom your soul.

A number of articles, books and websites are available to help you identify and discover your passions. The more you can narrow and prioritize your passions, the better you will be able to decide the best organizations to approach for possible engagement.

Once you have taken adequate time for self-awareness and to identify your passions, you will be ready for the next challenge: self-disclosure. Many individuals from the private sector make the mistake of assuming that individuals in the social sector are most interested in capabilities, skills and track record, which is generally what the private sector looks at.

But the social sector first wants to know who you are and what you care about before wanting to hear what you've done or what you are capable of. This is beautifully portrayed by the following words from the story-teller Oriah Mountain Dreamer,

**It doesn't interest me what you do for a living. I want to know what you ache for, and if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing. It doesn't interest me how old you are. I want to know if you would risk**

looking like a fool for love, for your dreams, for the adventures of being alive. It doesn't interest me which planets are squaring your moon. I want to know if you have touched the center of your own sorrow, if you have been opened by life's betrayals or have become shriveled and closed from fear of further pain. I want to know if you can sit with pain – mine or your own – without moving to hide it, or fade it, or fix it. I want to know if you can be with joy, mine or your own; if you can dance with wildness and let ecstasy fill you to the tips of your fingers and toes without cautioning us to be careful, to be realistic, or to remember the limitations of being human. It doesn't interest me if the story you are telling me is true. I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself; if you can bear the causation of betrayal and not betray your own soul. I want to know if you can see the beauty even if it's not pretty every day, and if you can source your life from its presence. I want to know if you can live with failure, yours and mine, and still stand on the edge of the glade and shout to the silver of the full moon, 'Yes!' It doesn't interest me where you live or how much money you have. I want to know if you can get up after the night of grief and despair, weary and bruised to the bone, and do what needs to be done for the children. It doesn't interest me where or what or with whom you have studied. I want to know what sustains you from the inside when all else falls away. I want to know if you can be alone with yourself, and if you truly like the company you keep in the empty moments.

Most of the time sharing what you care

about or some of your own vulnerability will make you uncomfortable, but it will be a theme as you enter deeper into the social sector, whether it is in the initial interviews, working with other employees, or outside colleagues. It is a fundamental requirement for establishing respect and trust between individuals who work in the social sector.

There is no recipe or formula for how to do this, but in the end it must be authentic, real and sincere. As Ernest Hemmingway said, "Life breaks all of us but some of us are stronger in the broken places."

Sharing how you have coped and transcended some adversity or pain in your life will go far in establishing your humanity with an individual or group in the social sector. This can be a very frustrating process when you are only interested in making a direct contribution, but unless you are willing to be patient and committed to this process your chances of successfully engaging will be greatly diminished.

### **Who are these people and how do I work with them?**

Dealing with the losses of aging and transition, developing your self-awareness and risking self disclosure are all major challenges, but the challenges increase as you encounter the diversity of people in the social sector and the inevitable conflict and tensions that result. Regardless of one's experience with diverse individuals, the social sector is notorious for putting its diversity up front in meetings and individual encounters.

This is the arena where strengthening your empathy skills becomes critical. Stephen Covey touches on this skill

when he says, "Seek to understand before being understood," or as Saint Francis of Assisi put it, "grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood, as to understand."

The golden rule with its emphasis on treating your neighbor as you wish to be treated is limiting. If you take this literally, it still comes from an egocentric point of view based on how you want to be treated. It is much harder to practice the platinum rule, which states "treat thy neighbor as they would want to be treated."

To meet this high standard requires you to get out of your own point of view and to truly try to understand how the other person wants to be treated. If you are not sure, ask that person. With flattened hierarchies, diverse power bases and the need for more individual buy-in, having empathy and understanding for others are premium skills in the social sector and ones well worth strengthening if you are to survive let alone thrive working in this arena.

Nevertheless, conflict does occur. People feel strongly in the social sector. Respecting and honoring these feelings is important, even if you do not agree with someone's opinion. Remember, what is important is how people perceive what you say, not what you think you said.

It can help to separate the individual from the issue that you disagree on. Never underestimate the importance of a sense of humor; and the value of a simple, humble apology can make a big difference. A real strength of the sector is the diversity of the people in it and the opportunity to explore at a deeper

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level communication and understanding.

Another challenge may be having a younger supervisor than you, possibly as young as your son, daughter, niece or nephew. This may not be a new experience for you. However, it is natural to feel some awkwardness about this age difference. It is important to draw on your empathy skills here, as well, and to acknowledge what you know and don't know. This relationship can be an excellent opportunity for mutual mentoring, where both parties learn from each other.

### How Do I Keep Going?

If you aren't discouraged or scared off yet, there is another significant challenge for you to consider as you approach the social sector: presence.

In the social sector it is very helpful to be present. What does being present mean? We all know when someone is present with us or not. Think of when you have had a teacher in your life, when they were paying attention to you, aware of you, you knew it. Think about the nurse taking your blood pressure. Does he treat you as a human being or like an object. The experience is clearly different.

If you are not present in the social sector, whether with clients, staff, or the larger issues the organization faces, you will experience frustration, helplessness and even emotional pain. Often our expectations for change are too high and our goals for making a difference too large and elusive.

Embedded in the social sector is deep complexity. Whether you are interested in global warming, parenting, improving

No. 1 – March 2011

**"No ray of sunlight is ever lost, but the grain which it awakes into existence needs time to grow; and it is not always granted to the sower to see the harvest. All work that is worth anything is done in faith."**

– Albert Schweitzer

educational issues, health care, affordable housing, or responding to abused children, these issues are all full of complexities that are not easily solved. Engaging in organizations that work on these issues is important and can be rewarding.

But your expectations need to be realistic and you must prepare yourself for frustration and disappointment, and even occasional emotional pain.

The statement "ignorance is bliss" is never more applicable than here. As your ignorance in these matters decreases, you will no longer be easily contented. All individuals who work in the field need to devote time to self-care. It is important to give yourself oxygen first before trying to give it to others.

I mentioned earlier the importance of paying attention to the grief of transition, but you will likely experience additional grief, as well as anger, if you are truly present to the people you work with in the social sector, and begin to grasp the larger issues your organization faces every day.

Engaging and working effectively in the social sector is very hard work. Change is slow and often elusive. Too many individuals approach this sector for quick and easy emotional rewards and payoffs. You will risk disappointment if that is your expectation.

One of the tools you may find helpful is the book *The Power of Full Engagement - Managing Your Energy Not Your Time*, by Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz. The authors emphasize managing your

energy in four domains: the physical, the mental, the emotional, and the spiritual. Although written primarily for CEOs, it offers excellent strategies for all who work in the social sector. Please don't minimize the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual toll that working and engaging in the social sector will be.

Your initiation and ongoing success will depend a great deal on your realistic expectations and then pursuing self-care strategies to deal with the emotional difficulties and energy losses of working in this field.

### **Now Why Am I Doing This Again?**

We have covered quite a bit of ground on some of the not-so-obvious challenges of working and engaging in the social sector. Now why would you want to still go forward? I submit it can be for both selfish and altruistic reasons.

The Peace Corps motto says, "It is the hardest job you will ever love." The opportunity for self-knowledge is great and the satisfaction of making a difference, however small, is a very special feeling. The need to be needed is a powerful motivation.

Nadine Gordimer, a South African novelist, observed that a life devoid of any sense of social responsibility is a lonely life. In the book

*Soul Work, Finding the Work You Love, Loving the Work You Have*, the authors note, "It is through work that human beings express who and what they are all about."

**"To have a great purpose to work for, a purpose larger than ourselves, is one of the secrets of making life significant, for then the meaning and the worth of the individual overflow his personal borders and will survive his death."**

– Will Durant

Phyllis Moen, a University of Minnesota sociologist who has spent her career studying retirement, notes, "Either paid or unpaid work promotes all kinds of indicators of well being: life satisfaction, more energy, more physical health, less depression."

Psychiatrists, philosophers and spiritual leaders have addressed the human drive to leave a legacy, to pass something of you on to the next generation.

In the end, whether for altruistic reasons of working to make a better world, feeling the drive of being a grandmother or grandfather, wanting to use your experience and expertise, learning and meeting new people, or the simple reason of just wanting to live longer, or all of these motivations, the opportunity of working and engaging in the social sector is a very smart choice.

**"When you cease to make a contribution you begin to die."**

– Eleanor Roosevelt

**"When people are serving, life is no longer meaningless. The cure for boredom is not diversion, it is finding some work to do, something to care about."**

– John Gardner

## **Your journey continues**

I hope I have given you some insights into working and engaging effectively in the social sector. Marty Linsky and Ron Heifetz in their book *Leadership on the Line* make the statement that "effective leadership is the capacity to disturb people at a rate they can absorb."

So my fondest wish is that I have not only disturbed you at a rate you have absorbed, but have armed you and encouraged you to go forward.

Yes, there are barriers. But I can think of no greater purpose for your extra gift of healthy years. The world needs you, and yes, you need it too. Please be a part of the **returnment** movement.

I have served as an interim President/CEO of a metropolitan United Way and President/CEO of a large social sector children's organization, both in Portland, Oregon. Earlier I served as President/ CEO of a family service organization in New London, Connecticut and prior to that worked in two other social sector organizations in Massachusetts. I have recently consulted with organizations in Hawaii and have participated in over 60 accreditation studies of social sector organizations throughout the United States and Canada.

All in all I have had a total of almost 40 years working in the social sector, at the line, middle management and CEO levels. In addition, I have served as a volunteer board member for a number of organizations, including two different United Ways, a Rotary Club, a State Association, and as a board member on a number of start-up and new social sector organizations. I have also been an executive and personal coach for over 25 years working with hundreds of individuals who have been in a career or work transition. ([www.bloomanew.com](http://www.bloomanew.com)). I do my best to live each moment as authentically as I can, striving to be open to both the pain and joy in the world.