
Pass out the Hammers!

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Bang! That's the sound of Michael Edwards hitting the nail on the head. And what a welcome sound it is, given the hype over "using business means to achieve philanthropic ends." Just as Karl Marx brilliantly critiqued capitalism, Michael Edwards insightfully notes that philanthropiccapitalism achieves modest goals for the poor and the public while achieving personal fulfillment goals for the wealthy entrepreneurs themselves (and yes, in the US where to be officially poor a family of four cannot have a total income of greater than \$20,200, they are wealthy). But perhaps philanthrocapitalism is a natural outgrowth of the emphasis on having nonprofits act like for-profit businesses that determine their own goals (strategic planning), focus on only part of their impacts (metrics), and adopt the Great Leader(ship) Theory of History.

Unfortunately, Marx' ideas for what to do with capitalism are not as successful as his critique, and Edwards' call for restraint, modesty and learning on the part of foundations may not do the job. I fear that the legislation he suggests--such as legislating 50% of funds going to social justice--would only increase the problem of the Philanthropic Beltway: where funds are spent on consultants, research, and "dialogue" which still counts as social justice as long as poverty and racism are what's being discussed thoughtfully in air-conditioned conference rooms.

I despair the lack of connection between social movements and the philanthrocapitalists. But perhaps the worst is that community nonprofits and the public have bought into this hype. Instead of following the great entrepreneur model, community nonprofits should be asking themselves what their constituencies need them to be doing now. Instead of measuring just what can be measured, community nonprofits need to claim their whole impacts, including the strengthening of communities and civic pride and culture. Such approaches are alive--especially in organizations of color--and they are characteristic of community based--rather than entrepreneur-based--nonprofit action for social justice.

Thank you, Michael Edwards, for getting us started. Let's pass out some hammers!

Jan Masaoka is Editor-in-Chief of Blue Avocado, an online magazine launching in April: by and for the people working and volunteering in community nonprofits. She can be reached at jan@blueavocado.org.

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