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Conflict of Ethics: What Does Genocide Have To Do With Business?

Posted on November 17th, 2010

by *Kimberly Hollingsworth, Student, BA Program & Founder of Humanity Is Us*

Unspeakable Truths

Genocide. Are you cringing yet? How about rape camps? Whenever I start a discussion about either atrocity, it's usually the immediate physical reaction that I observe from the person sitting before me.

On December 9, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the  Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, which defines genocide as a crime under international law to be prevented and to be punished. On April 21, 2000, Chris Bird wrote about crimes against humanity in his article, "UN Tribunal Told of Bosnian Rape Camp Horror," which contains witness testimony before the international court tribunal from survivors of rape camps during the Bosnian War. You might be asking yourself what genocide or rape camps have to do with business, social entrepreneurship or ethics. In my case they have everything to do with it.



George Segal's "The Holocaust" - Legion of Honor Park, San Francisco (photo by Kimberly Hollingsworth)

The first time that I heard about the Holocaust, I couldn't grasp the global irresponsibility that allowed it to happen. I thought, "If I was around during that time, I would have done something." I was wrong. Recently, I discovered that at least *three* genocides have occurred during my lifetime and I did nothing to stop them. This was a rude awakening. I talked about Bosnia and Darfur with anyone who would listen, but every time I asked someone if he or she knew about the rape camps, I found myself having to say the words again, slowly, because it was hard to believe that these camps really existed for repeatedly raping women and young girls, sometimes for years. It happened. The intent to destroy and eradicate is still happening.

This left me searching for a long-term action instead of a short-term pacification (such as a one-time donation to a charity). I decided to become a social entrepreneur.

Changemakers

In David Bornstein's book, *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas*, he focused on *changemakers* – they moved the world forward. A friend of mine asked me to define a social entrepreneur. My response: "A business person who is motivated not by money, but by solving social issues through business. A social entrepreneur has the option of setting up a for-profit enterprise in order to avoid the limitations of a non-profit organization."

The Antidote



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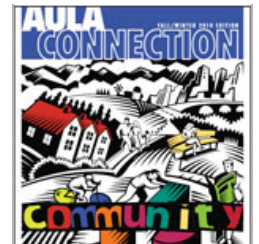
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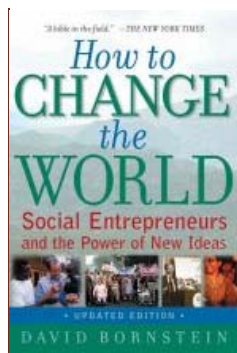
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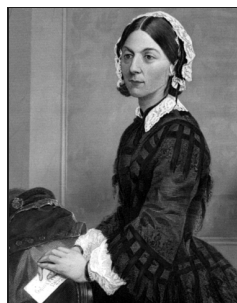


On Guy Kawasaki's blog, I discovered "Social Entrepreneurship: Ten Questions with David Bornstein." Bornstein goes directly to the core: "Social entrepreneurs are primarily motivated by an ethical imperative. They seek to respond to urgent needs." A true social entrepreneur must have core values and the stamina to fight for what's needed to make the world a better place. She gathers her resources, which includes qualified persons with the same purpose, to reach her goal.

The media is a major reason reactionary people cringe when they hear something horrific. Bornstein criticized the media for inundating the news and internet with problem-driven headlines and issues, rarely with solutions or opportunities to help. It is easier to focus on our issues by saying, "What can we do? We live in difficult times: high unemployment, numerous foreclosures, and a failing economy. What can we do about a civil war in a foreign country?" At first I wanted to put these people on a plane to Darfur so they couldn't just shrug it off. It was one thing not to know about it, another to say, "Icky...I don't want to hear this. It's too gruesome." Why is there a conflict of ethics when atrocities are exposed? I decided to take a step back and assess the situation. I had to accept my responsibility for my lack of actions before I deported media-conditioned beings.

Florence Nightingale

I didn't realize that Florence Nightingale was a real person until I read Bornstein's book. She was not her image: the gentle, angelic nurse that comes to mind when her name is mentioned. Instead, she was stubborn, feisty, relentless, meticulous, purpose-driven, and a hard worker. She was focused on her mission, understood the issues on multiple levels, utilized her resources, and fought for solutions. It wasn't a choice - these things had to be done. She had a higher purpose and persevered past every obstacle. Playing nice and being liked was not a priority: getting the job done and fixing the problems mattered the most to her. She's the reason that hospitals are sanitized today. She's the reason that thousands of soldiers survived the Crimean War. She's the reason that nurses were finally taken seriously. She's the reason that hospitals reorganized their administrative policies. She helped me realize that I share a lot of the same characteristics as other social entrepreneurs: a relentless need for justice. I can be useful with my determination.



Why didn't I know?

After taking a social media class, where I was compelled to engage in Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn and a blog, I made the decision to embrace it. Social media can help stop genocide, help survivors of the rape camps, and help me to communicate with people who are ready to help. Currently, I am working on a platform where I can do the work, invest the time and offer solutions. I want to help the busy adult who has a full-time job or is looking for a job, with kids to feed and bills to pay, who wants to do some good, but only has five minutes to spare. I want to inspire the young person who wants to be proactive in today's social issues. I want to be the conduit for the person who is overwhelmed with negative headlines and isn't sure where to start to make a difference. I want to be useful in today's world where there are no excuses for not knowing what's going on in the rest of the world. I don't want to find myself in the same situation saying, "Why didn't I know?"

Back to Business

After seeing how greed affected the global economy on so many levels, it is difficult not to relate to the person who is trying to deal with her own problems, before having the energy and means to deal with global issues. In the last couple of years, we have seen the effects of selfishness: subprime lenders, home foreclosures, bankrupt financial institutions, credit card interest rates up to 79.9%, corporate bailouts, the Ponzi schemes, unemployment, depletion of retirement funds, and the list goes on. *Selfish behavior lacks consideration for the welfare of others.* It is enough to make anyone, who is struggling, not interested in hearing about more problems. There's only so much bad news that someone can take.

Here's the issue: someone else has it worse than we do. We have options. Our lives

can get better. Someone else's father is being slaughtered. Someone else's mother is being tortured. Someone else's daughter is being raped. Someone else's son is being murdered. When it is time to stand up for someone else and shout, "Stop it!" there can be no separation of ethics from business. There can be no separation of responsibility from humanity. With separation, a conflict of interest forms; we all pay the price. We already have. A lack of action speaks just as loudly as an action. How many times have we wished that someone would have stopped these businesses from stealing from us? How many times have the victims of genocide wished someone cared enough to protect them? The realization that business can exist with ethics has helped me to believe, as a formidable group, we can make a difference in protecting humanity.

Humanity Is Us

I went back and forth with the name of the project:

1. It must not be limited to only women.
2. It must be flexible to deal with other humanitarian issues.
3. It must invite.
4. It must be easy to remember.

At first I thought of the name, "We are Humanity." It didn't do it for me. Then I thought, humanity is what makes us. Without it, we are nothing. Humanity defines us. Therefore, **HUMANITY IS US**.

The **HUMANITY IS US website** goes up November 29. In the meantime, feel free to [e-mail me](#) with any questions, comments, suggestions, or resources. You can also follow [@humanityisus](#) on Twitter and [be a friend on Facebook](#). HUMANITY IS US gathers reliable resources to help you help us protect humanity. Together, our actions matter.

"To conceal ignorance is to increase it." – Mahatma Gandhi



Kimberly Hollingsworth is in the BA Business & Social Entrepreneurship program and Creative Writing program at AULA. She holds an associate's degree from The American Academy of Dramatic Arts in New York and an ABA-approved certificate from UCLA Extension as a legal assistant in litigation. She is a senior legal assistant at an international law firm, a member of SAG, voting member of LAPA, and has milked a cow and flown a plane on the same day. You can [connect with Kimberly on LinkedIn](#).

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Submitted by lou (not verified) on November 18, 2010 - 2:09pm.

It takes courage and strength to open our eyes to the realities of the world. Not an easy thing to do. But there really is no place to hide from the horrors released by the avariciousness and profanity of evil.

Opening our eyes is step one. Ms. Hollingsworth's passionate article and new website looks to offer a path to step two.

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Submitted by grant (not verified) on November 18, 2010 - 8:35am.

Beautiful and enlightening piece. Thank you, and good luck on the project.

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