



Stanford eCorner

Pulling the Game Back to Center

Bill Drayton, *Ashoka*

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According to Ashoka Founder Bill Drayton, social entrepreneurs serve to "pull the game back to center" in an changing world where many act out of self-interest and accidentally end up doing evil. Drayton illustrates his case with the example of Google in the arena of privacy.



Transcript

But there is a second and more modern definition of social entrepreneurship that is actually becoming more important. And so let me explain that. First of all, the word entrepreneur. Entrepreneur means pattern change. It doesn't mean direct service. So that means still a relevantly small number of people. And social means that from deep within that person is committed to the good of all. And therefore their work is. Now I have said nothing - nothing in what I have just said defines sector. Every type of person is in education: businesses, government, religions, people of this or that ideology, and people who care about the good of all.

And as we go - especially as we go through this transition and we enter a world that everything is bumping everything faster and faster. All the systems we used to assume were steady are not steady; they are bumping one another just as much as anything else. Well, it's very important to have a group of entrepreneurs on the playing field who are constantly pulling the game back to the center because there are lots of entrepreneurs there who are there for self interest, or the shareholder's interest or some religious or ideological point of view. And it's not that they intend to do evil, it's just that they accidentally do it. So I use a very concrete example: privacy. We are losing privacy really fast and I think privacy is really important for a freedom and creativity. Why are we losing? Well, first of all we need preventive surveillance because a few people can do a lot of damage with the technology we have today. I don't see how we avoid that. Second, you all know about Moore's Law, it all invented here. Well that means you can connect all the dots for almost nothing and more and more people can do that.

And that's not good for privacy. And then third, the dominant business model in the digital realm is you give people something they want, you get information, and you sell it. Now our friends at Google and we really have enormous respect for them they are caught in that system. They are not helping privacy. You need the social entrepreneurs who were really focused on the good of all who will notice a trend like this. And for - just because inside them they have this commitment to the good of all, they are going to step up and you can see that happen. You can see the antidotes of the social entrepreneurs beginning to deal with this problem of our loss of privacy. So I hope - and I expect actually but who knows for sure - but I expect we are moving to a world, where everyone is going to be driven by empathy-based ethics and that will be the norm. But we are still in this unhappy transition period where the dominant systems are rules and enforcement and fear which works less and less well because it's too complicated, too many moving pieces and so corruption is getting worse, and that's no surprise. And we're not quite there where everyone in every institution is being encouraged and helped to live a life that is guided by empathy-based ethics.

We probably have to change some of the goals and measures of success to do that for example.