

# Motivating Social Innovators

Liz Dow 31 January 2010

Social innovators, those creative entrepreneurs who make things happen in the community, tend to be a different breed of leader. Take Jane Golden, head of Philadelphia's nationally acclaimed Mural Arts Program, responsible for creating over 3,000 murals and educating over 20,000 underserved youth. While more traditional leaders may be motivated by power, this social innovator is driven both to get the job done and to build community as she does it. She's not looking for recognition; she's looking for results, social justice, and civic transformation.

When the Editorial Page Editor Chris Satullo worked for the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, he defined his job as connecting with people and the ideas that would help them. While others may focus on the power of the press, he focused on increasing the interconnectedness of networks in the community. He convened hundreds of citizens to give voice to their priorities and to create an agenda for Philadelphia's future. Chris is all about doing the work to build the community.

Understanding the motivation of social innovators like Jane and Chris is critical to the advancement of innovative ideas inside and outside our institutions. Social innovators share a similar profile. They are goal-oriented achievers who focus on a mission, measure success based upon

internal standards (as opposed to looking left or right to see how others are doing), and cultivate relationships as a means to get things done.

Many of our institutions are led by social innovators — but too often their performance is inhibited rather than enhanced. In order to promote peak performance for this type of leader and play to their strengths, it's important for the board of directors to:

1. **Give positive feedback for specific progress:** Let them know that you see and value their forward momentum and commitment to meeting goals on time.
2. **Allow them the freedom to act to get things done:** Do not micromanage them, but rather trust that their drive and discipline will deliver results. Give them the freedom to think and to stretch their intellect and talent to solve problems in creative ways. If you pay attention to their thinking and propensity to take action, you'll learn something.
3. **Avoid cluttering their calendar with meetings:** Social innovators have great clarity about their missions. Their focus and sense of urgency enable them to move quickly and productively. Do not slow them down by demanding too many meetings.
4. **Look beyond compensation as the sole measure of success:** A social innovator is about the work. They want to be the best at it. They want it to mean something. They want it to count. Freedom to think

and act is of great value to them. Access to your best thinking and your support for their ideas is valued. Achieving bottom line results is an end in and of itself. This is not to say that financial compensation is not important (compensation is another measure of success); it's just less important to these innovators than it is to senior executives who are more focused on power and influence. Motivate these innovators by understanding their good works, sharing in their enthusiasm, and being willing to spread the word about the great work they are doing. This sort of support and recognition is of great value to social entrepreneurs, and can provide the motivation that propels them to even greater success.

These motivation issues seem so simple and obvious to senior-level social entrepreneurs, but often they find themselves fighting for intellectual and operating freedom. Board members may assume that social innovators want to be included in golf outings or recognized with awards. While some might, what social entrepreneurs want is to do the work, which is so often for them a calling. If you are a board member, bear this in mind.

Their work and your role in it will be more productive if motives are understood, acknowledged, and addressed.

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**executes to serve the community for fifty years. Former Senior Vice President for Human Resources with First USA (now JP Morgan), she has also worked for the Hay Group and PricewaterhouseCoopers, and served as a Wharton Public Policy Fellow in The White House. Liz holds an MBA from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania and a master's degree in Counseling from Cornell University. She has served on several nonprofit boards, a corporate board, and a university board. Her organization places alumni fellows on nonprofit boards. She recently published *Six Degrees of Connection*, which takes the abstract ideas about Connectors from *The Tipping Point* and makes them real.**