

« Everybody can be a *changemaker* » :
Which levers to use in order to encourage Youth to take action?

Since the beginning of time, our society has benefitted from the work of changemaker. These men and women, many who will remain anonymous, developed their capacity to positively influence other individuals and entire organizations, communities and their own society, and thus contributed to a better future.

Given the reality of our times and the important changes that have been occurring along the years, it is crucial to create real change amongst Youth. It is crucial to offer them new life perspectives, to reinforce their motivation to respect their natural and human environment and to encourage their entrepreneurial spirit and their capacity to act as agents of change.

As a young entrepreneur myself and with basis on the experience I have acquired with Entrepreneurs Without Borders and various other projects in France I have engaged in, I will try to address the following questions :

How is our youth evolving today? How to pass on to Youth the spirit of initiative and the taste for commitment? How to go from the actions a few committed individuals to a societal phenomenon?

I do not claim to have a global view on the subject. Although I do have relationships with social entrepreneurs in Europe, Brazil and Senegal, my ideas are largely influenced by my own experiences, findings and learnings in France. What really matters is not so much what I write, but rather how these thoughts resonate with you. Enjoy your reading.

THE FINDINGS

1. Our youth are aware...

As many researchers point out, as do I in my entourage, today's youth, called Generation Y, grows up as never before in history, with a global conscience. They are sensitive to the persistent gap between rich and poor and are aware of climate change. They also realize the need to change the existing society model.

...but feel powerless...

They are aware and willing to engage themselves but often they do not know how to go about it, and have difficulty taking action. This feeling of powerlessness is reinforced by the fact that young people are seldom included in public debates and are rarely given the opportunity to voice their opinions and be heard. They have a sense of uselessness in society and feel excluded from decisions that are taken, especially concerning themselves. We do not ask them what they think and they are usually told what to do..

« Young people aren't tomorrow's social, economic and political decision makers, they are today's changemakers ».
Raphael Jerónimo Calderón

... In a society that has an unfavorable image of its youth

Young people are growing up in a society that has a negative perception of today's youth, and thus, suffer from this image. Adults and the media often associate young people with deviant behavior. In England, according to a survey (Young People and the Media, Mori / Young People Now, 2005), 71% of articles written about young people are negative and one third of them concern crimes. In France, according to a study (conducted by Audirep for AFEV in April 2009), 51% of the French have a negative image of the youth and 70% consider them individualistic.

2. A multifaceted youth...

On the other hand, we tend to categorize the youth in three groups, according to their status concerning employment: the ones who study and are getting an education, the ones who work, and the ones in-between. This separation is an illusion: many students work; many young people who are employed are also getting training; being neither employed nor in school may be represent to certain young people a stable condition, yet a temporary situation.

The youth are also changing in several aspects, such as age, cultural background, place of origin, family environment, etc.. Therefore, it is difficult to talk about a generic *youth*. But for simplicity reasons, I will make reference in this document, to young people in general.

That has trouble finding itself...

Many Western countries have become multicultural societies following the emigration wave of the mid-twentieth century. The opportunities to meet and exchange with individuals of different social and cultural backgrounds have increased enormously. Globalization, new technologies of communication, the willingness of governments to offer everyone access to education are all factors that should tend to make it easier for young people to meet amongst themselves. However, it can be affirmed that young people do not meet or discuss much amongst each other. They often stay amongst people of their own group (social, cultural, place of residence, field studies, etc..). There is a juxtaposition of groups but no real encounters or exchanges amongst individuals. It must be noted that in France, the abolition of mandatory military service, which indirectly promoted the meeting of young men from all backgrounds during a year, has further exacerbated this phenomenon.

"Life is like cooking, variety gives it its taste"

3. A multitude of choices without clear « instructions » make it difficult to orient oneself and often generate a sense of failure.

In France, as in many other countries, the education system is still quite linear - the more one advances in his schooling, the more one tends to close doors, while society on the contrary, offers many opportunities to choose from. However, under the influence of adults who represent the concept of "reality" and who transmit to young people their fears, young people force themselves to

« To succeed in life has always been a challenge among young people; what has changed is the feeling that success does not depend only on them (...) This notion of 'everything is possible' may be conducive to failure». Serge Hefez

think only in terms of “reality”. They end up leaving behind their aspirations and dreams; faced with a multitude of possibilities but also with the principle of “reality”, young people often feel disarmed and unable to choose.

4. Nevertheless, tens of thousands of young people are already fully engaged in the change

Amongst the hundreds of people I have encountered in recent years, I have been specially impacted by young people who have decided to fully commit themselves to the fulfillment of their dreams of a better world.

Raphael Jerónimo Calderón who at 26 decided, after a brilliant academic career, to leave his position in a multinational company in order to fully devote himself to the association he founded Switzerland: EUforiA (Europeans United for Informed Action) to generate awareness of global issues amongst young people and to encourage them to take action within their community.

Olivier Gaillard through teaching realized his students wanted to engage action but did not know where to start. At 27, he developed Trans-mission in order to educate and equip the youth to become active citizens. Having been accepted as an Ashoka Fellow, he has founded the Platform for Citizen Services and created the “social entrepreneurship day” at the Entrepreneurship Exhibition in Brussels. Following these different experiences, he is now developing a global social entrepreneurship program of for young people.

I was also marked in 2008 by my meetings in Senegal during the recruitment process of Senegalese social entrepreneurs for the Senegal Promise program hosted by Cire Kan, director of the Synapse Center. I was struck by the fact that all young Senegalese I met were deeply motivated to contribute to the sustainable development of their country. Every one of them wanted to generate employment for young people through their projects, thus limiting illegal migration to European countries, which often have tragic outcomes.

These are just a few examples. As presented on Ashoka’s website dedicated to the youth, www.youthventure.org, thousands of young people are actively engaged in the four corners of the globe to make their contribution towards building a better world.

It seems to me that the challenge today is to go from the actions of a few committed individuals to a societal phenomenon. In order to do so, we must pass on to this youth the spirit of initiative and the taste for commitment allowing each person to become involved in his own life and within his community. This global change can be achieved only with the contribution of each one of us. Following this non-exhaustive findings-report, all points being open to discussion, I would like to share some thoughts on the levers which would, in my opinion, encourage young people to take concrete action:

1. Helping each young person to identify his life-purpose, while diversifying the models of success
2. Encouraging leadership and initiative, and promoting self-confidence through education
3. Supporting young people in their projects: the example of Entrepreneurs Without Borders
4. Creating a strong identity by encouraging young "changemakers" and promoting the creation of communities of social entrepreneurs
5. Creating « meeting places » that regroup thousands of young people, inciting them to be active in their own lives and within their community

AMONGST THE IDENTIFIED LEVERS

1. Helping each young person to identify his life-purpose...

I have noted that once social entrepreneurs and actors of change are truly passionate about their projects and rely on what they know how to do best, their chances of success are immense. They are then able to muster great energy and a strong power of persuasiveness; alas, their ability to innovate is multiplied and they are in perfect harmony with their purpose in life.

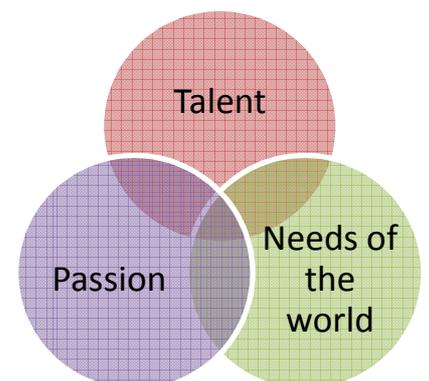
It is by becoming oneself that one becomes a changemaker».

One's life-purpose represents his mission on earth, his life goal. It is fundamental that each person identify his life-purpose. When young people do not identify their purpose, they search for alternative answers. They may choose careers that have no real meaning to them. They may become depressed and isolated. They may also turn to negative influences, such as drugs or violence. In all cases, a young person will not achieve his or her full potential unless they do not identify their goal in life. Society then deprives itself of their talent and their ability to change things.

... Allowing one to match his talents and his passions with the needs of the world...

One's purpose in life is unique to each individual and there are certainly many ways to define and identify it according to one's culture and experiences. From my reading and my experiences, I believe it may be identified by the convergence of three factors:

- **Talent** that each person has. It is a specific ability we naturally have or that we have acquired through experience. Every human being has talents.
- **Passion** is the fire that drives us. It comes from the heart. Passion provides us with optimism, enthusiasm and determination. "When life, work, play and love all revolve around the same thing, it's passion!" Stephen Covey.
- **Needs of the world** correspond to the social, environmental, cultural and economic issues of our world and humanity. Each person feels more directly affected by a specific issue in the community.



When our talents, our passions and the needs of the world converge, that is when we identify our life-purpose. Allowing each person, from an early age, to identify his or her goal in life provides satisfaction and a deep sense from chooses and experiences. It is also the path to becoming a Changemaker.

History shows that when one's life-purpose transforms itself into a vision of the future, objectives and an action plan, and that this vision is governed by conscience, then he or she can actively improve the world. Mohandas K. Gandhi Neson Mandela or Muhammad Yunus, just to name a few, have shown us the strength that a vision can have, and how it can bring meaning to one's life, how it can unite, guide and give one the courage to take action.

"All things are created twice: first mentally, then physically"

... While diversifying the model of success

In order to enable everyone, especially the youth, to find their path, it is necessary to change our model of success.

In France, as in many countries, the current system associates success with wealth, consumption and social status. In this model of success, young people's role models are the stars, and they want to make lots of money to buy the latest gadgets.

How can we envision changing the world if we do not first change our model of success?

Fortunately, this model is not unanimous; some communities offer other value systems. I particularly like the example of Bhutan and the pursuit of happiness through the improvement of its GNH (Gross National Happiness). While the majority of governments are based on the value of gross national product to measure the wealth of citizens, Bhutan has substituted it for the GNH to measure the level of happiness of its inhabitants.

*74% of youth affirm they are confident in their abilities to succeed, but many question the definition of success imposed by adults. **

It appears to be vital and urgent to value other forms of success encouraging for example, self-development, respect for the environment, equality and commitment to one's community.

2. Valuing a sense of initiative...

Identifying one's life-purpose and basing oneself on a more balanced model of success means little unless one converts these ideas into actions. One must find the courage to take action, to believe in his or her ability to change things and take initiative.

Sens of initiative is the common point among all the actors of change I encountered. It is the ability to achieve something without needing to be pushed by someone else. Taking initiative helps one become the leader of his or her project but also to become the leader of his own life. It converts desires and ideas into actions. It also allows one to mobilize others.

"Everything seems impossible until we take action, then we realize that it was possible."
Evelyn Underhill

This is especially true when this initiative is connected to one's vision and life-purpose.

Yet too often adults bully young people's budding initiatives. As a child, adults often require us to ask permission before doing something. When one has an idea or wants to do something different from the ordinary, adults may say that it is unrealistic or impossible. The initiative is far too often "killed" before even being born.

... And promote self-confidence ...

Often, one's initiative is also the victim of one's own censorship and lack of confidence in his or her ability to create change. Self-confidence means believing in yourself and your resources, knowing your limits, rating yourself at fair value, accepting your weaknesses and improving yourself. Although a lot has already been written on this subject, I find there is insufficient space to promote self-awareness and self-confidence, especially amongst our youth.

...through education

According to UNESCO, "Education must be a means to give children and adults the opportunity to become active participants in the transformation of the societies of which they are a part. The learning process should also take into account the values, attitudes and behaviors that enable individuals to live together in a world characterized by diversity and pluralism".

However, this is far from being the case. In France, for example, schools and universities value mainly cognitive learning and the acquisition of professional know-how. Often, what we define as "social learning*" (notions of teamwork, communications skills, solidarity and tolerance) and as "entrepreneurial learning"* (taking initiative, creative expression, the implementation of personal projects and self-development) is undervalued.

*From Burno Tilliete & Bob Aubrey - *L'Après-Mamouth*

It is therefore necessary to develop pedagogic programs based not only on the acquisition of knowledge and skills but above all on the development of teamwork, interpersonal communication, leadership, creativity, initiative-taking and the implementation of projects. There are already a number of initiatives that go in this direction. Team Academy in Finland, for example, has developed an entrepreneurship training program without teachers, which values learning through action, and is coordinated by coaches.

I dream that during their academic career, each young person has the opportunity to undertake a project which he or she initiated, and which directly impacts his or her own community. I also dream that each young person may experience personal and collective success.

"We are not preparing students for the world of today, or the world that teachers have grown up in; we are preparing students for a world that we can barely imagine."
Gordon Brown,
MIT School of Engineering

« You tell me something, I forget it. You teach me something, I remember it. You get me involved, and learn. » Benjamin Franklin

3. Supporting our youth in their projects: the example of Entrepreneurs Without Borders

Once a young person is committed to undertake an entrepreneurial project and seeks change within his or her community, it is necessary to support this person by mobilizing human, financial and technical support. Supporting these young actors of change increases tenfold their chances of success.

There is no single way to support young social entrepreneurs, especially since this is a very new area. There are a number of mentoring programs destined to support young social entrepreneurs in their projects, such as the Youth Venture Ashoka program. As an example, I will present here, the program we developed for Entrepreneurs Without Borders.

- The Entrepreneurs Without Borders (EWB) program in a few words

It is a four-month incubation program, aiming to mentor a group of 6 to 10 young social entrepreneurs in the implementation of their projects. The program is composed by lectures and workshops, group discussions, retreats and study-trips. Participants are encouraged to work closely with business management students as well as with other experienced entrepreneurs, to benefit from expert advice and to network with potential financiers. Since 2006 this programs has accompanied 40 young people in the elaboration and implementation of their projects.

- Striving to promote the autonomy of young people

One of the principles we strived to apply in our programs is the autonomy of the young people. The challenge of coaching is to walk alongside the social entrepreneur, at an ideal distance, which is neither too close – to avoid stifling him or her – nor too far – to be present when he or she may need support. The challenge is finding the right balance.

- A community of peers

One of the goals of our monitoring program is to remove the young entrepreneur from isolation by connecting him or her to a community of peers. Sometimes, his or her direct entourage is against the project, deemed unrealistic. When interacting with other young social entrepreneurs like him or herself, who have also decided to become agents of change, one can feel he or she belongs to a living movement. This provides him or her with courage, energy and inspiration. Often, young entrepreneurs are collaborative amongst each other and are willing to share experiences, contacts and ideas which are key resources for the project leaders.

- Access to skills

One of the innovative aspects of the mentoring program offered by EWB is the recruitment of a business management student, who acts as the young entrepreneur's "right arm" throughout the entire program. The pairs work together to development and implement the project. However, experience has shown us that the entrepreneur's skills and those of the business student are not sufficient. We have thus developed throughout the past 3 years, a network of professionals working various fields, such as business, management, communication and law, who volunteer their time to support the pairs. The impact is twofold: it gives the young entrepreneurs access to solid skills,

while at the same time, generating awareness about social entrepreneurship amongst the volunteers.

- **Develop one's interpersonal skills**

Entrepreneurs Without Borders has aimed to develop a methodology that develops one's entrepreneurial spirit, creativity, leadership and teamwork skills. Beyond the know-how one acquires, I strongly believe the difference social entrepreneurs can make relies on their interpersonal skills, their empathy toward others, their ability to bounce back when confronted with obstacles and in their ability to mobilize others with respect.

- **Acquire the basic entrepreneurship skills and know-how**

While the social entrepreneur's social skills are vital to his success, some concrete knowledge and know-how are also essential. Through workshops and homework, we have tried to train young people in project management and in the basic principles of accounting and the management of human resources. It is also vital for the young entrepreneur to develop a commercial sense in order to successfully persuade individuals who may challenge the advantages of his or her social endeavor.

- **Allow the social entrepreneur to mobilize a team around him**

Among the social entrepreneurs that we mentored, yet another essential aspect of their projects is the team. An entrepreneur cannot succeed if he or she does not manage to mobilize others around his or her vision. The role of the coach is also to help the entrepreneur mobilize a team. In the case of a group project, it is important for the coach to accompany the entire team of young entrepreneurs and not only appointed team-leader, in order to maintain equilibrium. There are many examples of conflicts, sometimes even leading to the abandonment of a project, when a group is not supported in its entirety.

- **Facilitating access to the first financial grants**

Although there are examples of impacting projects that have been launched without funding, the access to financial resources remains the first essential step to launch a project. For this reason, the EWB program aims to connect the young entrepreneurs with potential financiers (investors, foundations, communities). They are given the opportunity to network during the closing event of the program, during which they will also present their business plans. This networking exercise, although interesting, does not suffice. A successful connection between a potential financier and a young entrepreneur relies mainly on the relationship that is established between the organization, in this case EWB, or the entrepreneur himself and the financier.

I also note that young entrepreneurs have difficulty accessing potential financiers, while on their side, financiers have difficulty finding interesting projects to support. It is therefore crucial to promote concrete opportunities for these parties to meet and interact.

4. Create a strong identity...

Young people feel a great need to identify with and belong to a group. This need carries on into adulthood. Often one defines oneself by his profession. The agents of change, however, do not fit into the traditional definitions as do doctors, lawyers, engineers or shopkeepers. By promoting the terms “agents of change” and “social entrepreneur”, we are adding value, encouraging and democratizing the path followed by tens of thousands of people.

In 2006, when I first started Entrepreneurs Without Borders, the term social entrepreneur was not commonly used in France. At that time, during meetings with potential partners, I spent half of the time explaining what a social entrepreneur is and the other half trying to convince them that it was possible. I had little time left to present the rest of my approach. Today, in 2010, thanks to Ashoka France, the term has been democratized, and more importantly, the concept is no longer rejected. Nowadays, people identify social entrepreneurship with a powerful opportunity to create change in society.

By promoting social entrepreneurship and creating a strong identity around it, young people may find in social entrepreneurship an opportunity to fulfill their life goals and a means to successfully act on their desire to improve society.

... by encouraging young agents of change...

Young people, as everybody else, are inspired by role models. Within young people, the notion of peers is also very important. How many of us decided to play a sport or a musical instrument because one of our friends did? Or to be like one's idol?

By nationally and locally promoting the initiatives of young social entrepreneurs, we help diversify the models of success and give young people new positive role models, as well as confidence in their ability to change things.

...And by promoting the creation of a community of social entrepreneurs

Online communities

The web and social networks are a powerful tool used to bring together an online community, for it facilitates making contacts, exchanging messages, accessing data, resources and interesting information. Several initiatives already exist, resembling the model of Ashoka's www.youthventure.org and www.wearechangemakers.org.uk of the Changemakers Foundation. The challenge is then to manage and develop these online communities.

Physical hubs

The hubs also have their physical advantage. They help forge stronger personal links between their members, facilitating the exchange of best practices and even giving rise to new projects.

These communities can come together around a common space. La Ruche, for example (www.la-ruche.net), which is a 550m² shared workspace in Paris, brings together over 80 agents of change and about 20 organizations. (See also the movement started by the Hub www.the-hub.net). When they

“ Never underestimate the power of a few committed people to change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.” Margaret Mead

congregate, these communities can also act as important levers of change. In France for example, MOUVES (A social entrepreneurs movement - www.mouves.org), was created in order to lobby with political powers, in favor of social entrepreneurship.

5. Create opportunities for thousands of young people to meet and encourage them to be active in their lives and their community

Today, I dream of creating concrete opportunities and “meeting places” for real encounters between young people, which will serve as a catalyst to the unification a diverse youth into a united, active and committed group of people, striving to construct a better world.

These places would take the form a living lab that would allow young people to experiment with the implementation of concrete solutions to societal issues that affect their communities. These labs would allow thousands of young people to meet beyond their social and cultural barriers, to become aware of societal issues in their communities, to debate, to discuss about possible solutions with the existing players and especially to test the implementation of such solutions.

This lab would be designed as rite of passage, a step into adulthood. It would stimulate the entrepreneurial spirit and give young people the taste for action by giving them the opportunity to be in touch with various individuals already involved in projects for a better society.

By participating in hands-on workshops, networking events with inspiring personalities, and experimenting with real social projects and their implementation, young people would finally see a convergence between their own passions and talents and the needs of their communities. These labs would be designed to promote confidence amongst young people and in their ability play an active role in their lives and in the development of their community.

My current and future involvement moves towards ideal.

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