

SESSION SUMMARY

Conference: Social Capital Markets, Sept 8, 2011

Panel Topic: Spirituality and Social Enterprise: What's your motivation?

Panel Description: Wisdom. Spirituality. Faith. Religion. Whatever words you choose, these principles can be strong motivation for social entrepreneurs and impact investors to amplify their action at the intersection of money and meaning. In this conversation, we will explore – from a range of perspectives and faith traditions – how spirituality guides, empowers, and unites but may also throw up barriers and create divisions between people of goodwill who are inspired to change the world.

Moderator & Panelists:

- Alex Hofman, Changents (moderator)
- Sal Giambanco, Omidyar Network
- Lisa Lepson, Joshua Venture Group
- Matt Flannery, Kiva
- Ashwini Narayanan, Microplace
- Firas Ahmad, Emergence BioEnergy

Design, Methodology, Approach: Reports and expert opinions from panelists.

Main Panel Discussion Points:

This panel focused on the spiritual backgrounds of the participants, and how different spiritual experiences have affected their work and motivation behind it. Many of the panelists shared personal anecdotes of what meaning spirituality has in their lives. Some notable ones were:

- Matt Flannery discussed meditation and mindfulness – a daily practice he has to hold back judgment. He discussed that the enemy of compassion is pity and pity sets up separation between oneself and others. Compassion, on the other hand, recognizes the suffering of another as the reflection of one's own pain. This human understanding and breaking down of the pity complex is at the core of Kiva, and drives its work.
- Lisa Lepson discussed values in different Jewish beliefs. One referred to repairing the world, and she stated that speaks closely to the work of their social entrepreneurs. She then discussed how to live out values in true way, through enterprise.
- Firas Ahmad shared his own experience in Pakistan and how lucky he was to move to U.S. Helping him realize how much opportunity was given to him, that experience informed his professional career, and led him to this work. He proceeded to share that people are afraid to talk about faith, because the ones that are most vocal are generally most radical and most don't want to associate themselves with it, though he believes faith has huge potential to impact this world.
- Ashwini Narayanan shared idea of not living an illusion, and a Zen story that affects her. She joined Microplace because for years she watched problems without taking action, but due to her faith decided to do something. She emphasized that there is an illusion of her

being separate from something, but that what harms someone else, harms her. The only thing she can do is wholeheartedly take care of issue because it truly does affect her.

- Sal Giambanco discussed the challenge of finding a possible investment that's very meaningful, but that just doesn't fit into their focus, and how Omidyar Network has been able to reconcile those challenges.

Outcomes & Analysis: This session helped bring out some of the underlying motivations behind key social entrepreneurs and the ways their spirituality affects their work. As Ahmad pointed out, people often don't talk about faith because of its potential polarizing effect, but that it's crucial to do so because of its power to change the world, as demonstrated by the motivations of the panelists. It demonstrated how key a role faith can play in the motivations of successful social entrepreneurs, and how individual faith plays out in the work of different organizations.

The session also arose some of the tensions between business strategy and faith, and the challenges that can put on the involved actors.

Keywords: spirituality, motivation, faith

Paper type: Review of conference panel.

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