

Reckoning with Uncertainty

For those of us who work in economic and community development especially as it pertains to job creation, I have always felt that we don't spend enough time talking about job destruction. There are so many numbers posted about success with this many jobs or that many jobs, but never in context with what we are up against; and this is the number of jobs lost or destroyed. This is not to say that job creation strategies are not good; they are, but are we being shortsighted when we don't explore and learn, make adjustments, and strategize net job creation solutions?

I like to apply this as best we can to all areas in the community; have we considered what is being destroyed in our communities while measuring our value creation so that we can be better and strive for solutions that will beg more innovation and systems approaches? The context for this blog series is Jewish Poverty, and we must better explore how to strive for net results. How many lives are being destroyed by poverty each year versus how many lives agencies are growing out of poverty? Sometimes we find ourselves in a never-ending battle with no idea where the light at the end of the tunnel lies. As we know Jewish poverty is increasing; something that most of the country is not paying attention to; those who don't have a vested interest, I mean.

The COVID-19 Pandemic has exacerbated social and civic destruction; and for those who have not yet seen the effects of this, you will, depending on where you are positioned in the value chain of your field. As discussed on last week's webinar series, the level of uncertainty is very high during this time, and it is critical to reckon with this uncertainty by getting organized, better knowing who we are and what we do, and lean in on innovation as best we can.

The book *The Power of Social Innovation* by Stephen Goldsmith talks about 4 roles of creating and maintaining change; who are the agitators and disruptors who can get people to listen and be open; who can then introduce reform principles and solutions; who has the ability to execute and organize the tactics needed for the reform to be successful; and who can manage and administrate to keep momentum going and hopefully scale efforts. You must ask yourself what role does your agency play; some, all, and should it be that way. You don't have to be everything, but efforts will need all four areas, so partner and resource alignment is critical.

At the same time, we must know where we fall in the greater system of change; some of us had never thought about this before, and it is really needed today. There is an interesting read called "Making a Difference: Strategies for Scaling Social Innovation for Greater Impact." by Frances Westley and Nino Antadze. It talks about where we fit in the greater social change environment. Are we social entrepreneurs helping the few as individuals or are we building interpersonal relationships with other social entrepreneurs to begin shifting towards greater impact? Are we part of a social enterprise or organization who works in a silo but does good or are we building interorganizational relationships to begin shifting towards a system of change? It is this and only this when we can truly have a conversation about true social innovation.

The Pandemic should be forcing us to ask all these questions and most importantly of all; what are we going to do about it? We are burning through time, money, and resources, but are we working towards solutions that work. In the work that we do at Start Co. with partners, clients, and organizations we always begin with taking a human-centered approach through talking to clients and partners in a discovery process to get real feedback on our strategies to make sure we are addressing the right problem for the right client; the solution is something that people want; there is value because someone has to fund or pay for it; and most importantly does it fit into the behavior of the client or partner. Without discovery we will never know the extent of the situation or the other solutions that must get built in addition to our own. It helps prevent the number one reason for failure, and that is premature execution. When you take the time to talk to clients and partners it will influence and improve what you design and deliver, and the business case you make to the funder or the adopter.

In the end striving for net solution metrics, knowing your role in the industry and what you do best, and knowing where you fit in the greater social system will help you be more defined in your quest to deal with the state of uncertainty and designing solutions that work.

I look forward to more conversations through a time of difficulty creating our greatest need to innovate so that it becomes a way of our professional lives and not a strategy that sits on a shelf.