

The 4 Characteristics of Great Social Capitalists

DAVID LANGNESS



...where there is One, that One is me; where there are many, all are me; they see my face everywhere. – The Bhagavad Gita

I offer you peace. I offer you love. I offer you friendship. I see your beauty. I hear your need. I feel your feelings. My wisdom flows from the Highest Source. I salute that Source in you. Let us work together for unity and love. – Mahatma Gandhi

Men are free when they are obeying some deep, inward voice of religious belief. Obeying from within. Men are free when they belong to a living, organic, believing community, active in fulfilling some unfulfilled, perhaps unrealized purpose. – D.H. Lawrence

...a religious individual must disregard his personal desires and seek in whatever way he can wholeheartedly to serve the public interest; and it is impossible for a human being to turn aside from his own selfish advantages and sacrifice his own good for the good of the community except through true religious faith. – Abdu'l-Baha, *The Secret of Divine Civilization*, p. 96.

Do you know anyone willing to “sacrifice his own good for the good of the community,” someone who functions as a great builder, collector and unifier of social capital? Actually, if you think about it, you probably do. Just look around any healthy, thriving community—a village, a town, a volunteer civic organization, a charitable enterprise, a faith group, a country—and you’ll begin to notice the people who selflessly give of themselves to help that greater community. They’re the social capitalists, the ones who encourage and bring people together in the service of all.

In my experience, those kinds of loving, giving, sacrificial people have a few qualities in common:

First, they believe in something larger than themselves. They have an abiding faith in the basic idea of community, and they know that a rising tide lifts all boats. They're activists and altruists, people who express their love for humanity through their actions.

Second, they have enthusiasm. You don't typically find many dour cynics actually doing and accomplishing things for the benefit of others. They think things can and will get better if only we apply ourselves as a cooperative community. They believe that effort equals outcome.

Third, they're unity-builders. They tend to naturally want to bring everyone together and unite them in a common goal. They're good at resolving competing agendas, negotiating consensus and inspiring action. They focus on people's good qualities, not their negative ones.

Fourth, and most important, they have a distinctly identifiable spiritual outlook on life—which is where their enthusiasm originates. As Abdu'l-Baha says in the quote above, they have "true religious faith." That doesn't always mean that they identify with any particular denomination or system, but it does mean that they have an abiding belief in the existence and the benevolence and the love of a Creator.

From a Baha'i perspective, these kinds of enthusiastic, loving and altruistic people derive their inspiration and their motivation, whether they know it or not, from the prophets and founders of the world's great Faiths:

The Prophets and Messengers of God have been sent down for the sole purpose of guiding mankind to the straight Path of Truth. The purpose underlying Their revelation hath been to educate all men, that they may, at the hour of death, ascend, in the utmost purity and sanctity and with absolute detachment, to the throne of the Most High. The light which these souls radiate is responsible for the progress of the world and the advancement of its peoples. They are like unto leaven which leaveneth the world of being, and constitute the animating force through which the arts and wonders of the world are made manifest. Through them the clouds rain their bounty upon men, and the earth bringeth forth its fruits. All things must needs have a cause, a motive power, an animating principle. These souls and symbols of detachment have provided, and will continue to provide, the supreme moving impulse in the world of being. – Baha'u'llah, *Gleanings from the Writings of Baha'u'llah*, p. 156.

When we take our cue for action from those original sources of inspiration and faith, we can accomplish the divine miracle of unity:

Note ye how easily, where unity existeth in a given family, the affairs of that family are conducted; what progress the members of that family make, how they prosper in the world. Their concerns are in order, they enjoy comfort and tranquillity, they are secure, their position is assured, they come to be envied by all. Such a family but addeth to its stature and its lasting honour, as day succeedeth day. And if we widen out the sphere of unity a little to include the inhabitants of a village who seek to be loving and united, who associate with and are kind to one another, what great advances they will be seen to make, how

secure and protected they will be. Then let us widen out the sphere a little more, let us take the inhabitants of a city, all of them together: if they establish the strongest bonds of unity among themselves, how far they will progress, even in a brief period and what power they will exert. And if the sphere of unity be still further widened out, that is, if the inhabitants of a whole country develop peaceable hearts, and if with all their hearts and souls they yearn to cooperate with one another and to live in unity, and if they become kind and loving to one another, that country will achieve undying joy and lasting glory. Peace will it have, and plenty, and vast wealth.

Note then: if every clan, tribe, community, every nation, country, territory on earth should come together under the single-hued pavilion of the oneness of mankind, and by the dazzling rays of the Sun of Truth should proclaim the universality of man; if they should cause all nations and all creeds to open wide their arms to one another, establish a World Council, and proceed to bind the members of society one to another by strong mutual ties, what would happen then? There is no doubt whatsoever that the divine Beloved, in all His endearing beauty, and with Him a massive host of heavenly confirmations and human blessings and bestowals, would appear in His full glory before the assemblage of the world.
– Abdu'l-Baha, *Selections from the Writings of Abdu'l-Baha*, pp. 278-280.