

Video Transcript

What is Social Innovation? How do you actually DO it (and change the world)?

[Amber Melanie Smith] Welcome.

We're going to need some serious social innovation to solve some of the communities and the world's biggest problems. As individuals or aspiring or current leaders of non-profits, or leaders of socially conscious businesses, learning how to tap into and effectively use social innovation is going to be the difference between launching those ideas that change the world and those that flop. But that's a lot of words isn't it? How do you actually DO social innovation? That's what I'm going to talk about in this video.

Hi! Welcome back. My name is Amber Melanie Smith. If we haven't met before, welcome to my channel, and if you're back, thanks for joining me again! I'm a non-profit founder and executive director who makes these videos here on YouTube to help people on their journeys to make a social impact, whether that's through starting a non-profit or socially conscious business, or leadership and service in other ways. I'm here to help be your guide to make a change. I hope that as always you find this video useful and helpful and educational and don't forget to give it a like and subscribe to my channel for more content all about stuff like this I also have a website FounderToFullTime.com, where I am sharing trainings and resources for people who are on the journey of specifically starting a non-profit so be sure to check those out. I also want to say this is slightly different from some of my usual videos though this topic social innovation is definitely near and dear to my heart. I'd love to hear your feedback share in the comments below what you thought of this topic if you'd like to see more content like this or on topics like this please definitely share what you're thinking.

So, as I kind of joked before social innovation is one of those phrases that's been kind of trendy and thrown around a bit over the past couple of years but you know me I'm all about translating big concepts into real life action. What does social innovation really mean and what does it have to do with the various ways we make an impact in the world, starting a non-profit socially conscious business, operating as an individual out there, trying to create change, what does it really mean?

So, in this video I'm going to cover those three things:

1. What social innovation actually means.
2. Some concrete real life examples of social innovation at work making an impact.
3. The most important one in my opinion. How you can specifically harness social innovation thinking to come up with the best ideas possible for your individual efforts, non-profit efforts, or business efforts to make an impact in the world.

Let's start with number one, what does social innovation actually mean? Social innovation is the process of thinking about and developing elegant, efficient, effective solutions to complex social problems. Things like hunger and poverty. Social innovation usually results in one of three things: One, a new and improved product, two, a new and improved process for an

existing system, or three, a new and improved program. Whether your social innovation results in a product, process or program, they all have one thing in common and that is that the outcome is the same, they all dramatically improve lives or change the system or status quo for the people impacted by the problem at hand.

Now, to make this concept a little bit more tangible I'm going to share some real life examples of social innovation at work making an impact.

1. Combating the affordable housing crisis through 3d printing of houses just like this neighborhood in Mexico designed with 3d printing for families living under three dollars a day
2. Coming up with new processes to recycle coffee grounds so they don't go to waste and recycling them into usable products like this company and others.
3. Building a food forest in a city park where residents living below the poverty line can forage for fruit and nuts and herbs themselves, like this example in Atlanta.
4. Even coming up with new processes to solve other problems and tap into the social innovation of the whole country like challenge.gov where people all around the U.S. can look at the government's challenges and submit their own ideas for solutions.
5. Combating urban blight by planting flower beds by employing youth who are part of the youth juvenile court system like this example, The Flower Factory - how cool is that?

I want you to think about all of these social innovation examples. What do they have in common? [Cricket Sound] I'll give you a hint, they all happened by combining several often unexpected different angles. They happened at the intersections of different hobbies and industries and sectors and walks of life. Someone once described creativity to me in a way that really stuck with me and that is that creativity is the process of finding patterns and connecting things that are seemingly unrelated. It's bringing together things that are different from one another to form one original thing. I think that definitely rings true with these examples.

Let's get into how to put these steps to social innovation into action in your journey though. How do you come up with the next great social innovation idea? Well, it doesn't require you to be a genius or have an Ivy League education or tons and tons of resources. It's not magic. In fact, we can draw inspiration from a process known as design thinking in order to come up with a step-by-step process to develop social innovation ideas. So, let's get into that now.

In the context of social impact, we can define design thinking like this, it's a process for coming up with solutions to problems that prioritizes the needs of the people who are most impacted by the problem above all else. That makes sense right because when you're in the social impact and social change world it's all about creating a better life for those who are impacted by the problems at hand. It's less about thinking about what you want to do or what would make the most money. It's all about creating that impact for those folks. So, using design thinking as our inspiration let's talk through six steps towards coming up with socially innovative ideas.

1. Identify the problem. We need to really get some clarity on what you're trying to solve here and not just in a large sense but in a pretty specific sense, understanding the scope and the scale of the problem at hand. So, let's say you want to tackle food insecurity.

You wouldn't stop at saying I want to tackle food insecurity, no, you would stop after you assess the scale and the scope of the problem. For example, I want to tackle food insecurity for kids in elementary school in my city. Now I've narrowed it down a bit. I know the scale of the problem, it's the kids impacted in my city, so I could probably find some good data on how many kids that entails and where they might be going to school and the locations, etc. where the food insecurity might be the most prevalent. Since every community is unique and is going to have its own needs and assets to lend to solving the problem. It's important to think in these specific terms once you have really identified, with some specificity, the problem.

2. Empathize. Empathize means pretty much what it sounds like, you want to be gathering direct information and feedback and input from the people and the communities impacted by the problem you've identified. You don't want to guess what their problems are. You want to hear from them directly because sometimes their answers might surprise you and spark some creative thoughts or maybe they've already identified what they need for themselves and they just need some extra help getting it. Your goal in the empathize phase is to conduct surveys and interviews and anything that you can do to get the feedback from the people impacted directly. You're going to be kind of putting together stories of what their lives look like and the challenges and the pain points surrounding the problem at hand. It's all about understanding their mindset, their day-to-day needs and how they view the problem that is the one being tackled. So, in the example we've been using of food and security in a city for elementary school kids maybe you would interview teachers who are serving at those elementary schools or the parents of these kids or maybe even some of the kids themselves. It's all about giving them a chance to define the situation in their own terms.
3. Define. In this step you're compiling all that feedback, all that information you got from the previous step, empathize, and starting to narrow down some of the top pain points or challenges that have been identified. You're looking for common threads and patterns here. For example, in using food insecurity, again, let's say you surveyed the parents and the teachers and the kids and you identified that it's quite simply a lack of a living wage from the parents in affording the food to combat food insecurity, or you might discover instead that there are grocery stores that they could get to but they don't have any cars, there's no transportation, there's no public transportation options, and so there's nothing in their vicinity that they can actually get to resulting in some kind of food desert, because through the empathize process you will have heard probably a broad range of perspectives on the issue you might have unexpected problems and pain points emerge from the conversations that you've had which will allow you to be truly innovative in designing a solution in partnership with those impacted.
4. Ideate. This is the fun brainstorming phase, at least it's fun for me. In this phase now that you've identified maybe some of the top challenges and pain points that are preventing those impacted from overcoming the problem. You're going to be working probably with a team of other creative folks to just brainstorm all the possible solutions for the problems at hand, and the critical part here, is that there's no bad idea. You're just going throw everything out there and see what comes out.

5. Prototype. In this phase you're going to create a simple model or example or pilot test of an actual product process or program that could reasonably overcome the challenges that you identified as being the most important. At this phase you might be thinking about some of the actual implementation of the product, process or program, how you would actually do it, what tools and equipment and resources and skill sets you need to pull it off, but you don't want to get too deep in here because this stage is all about just coming up with a quick simple design so that you can do the next phase.
6. Testing. So, let's talk about that step six, test and assess. In this test and assess phase you're going to take that prototype, that simple not too complicated model or example or pilot test of a program, you're going to take it back to the people that you interviewed earlier. You're going to show it to them and you're going to get their honest feedback, is it working the way that you all imagined, is it genuinely meeting the needs of the people impacted, what parts of the product or process or program need to be refined or honed further in order to make it even better? The goal here is once you get some feedback, is to continuously improve and update it until it is working at peak effectiveness. One final thought, once you've designed a great product or process or program that you know is going to very effectively, and to the satisfaction of those impacted, meet their needs, you've got to figure out a way to make it sustainable and viable. That is the true marker of an effective social innovation. If you come up with the best idea in the world but you can't figure out a way to sustain it or cover its costs it might not get very far in the real world. So, that's just something you're going to need to keep in mind as you go through the social innovation thinking process. You're going to want to be thinking, how can you cover the cost of this amazing idea that you've just had. Many social innovation products or processes or programs charge a nominal fee, nothing that would harm those being served just to cover its basic costs. Some find other stakeholders in the community, like other nonprofits or other businesses or even the government, such as the example with the food forest in Atlanta that I mentioned earlier who can help subsidize those costs to keep it going.

I'd love to hear from you at this point what about social innovation and what we talked about here today really stood out to you? what are some of the questions that you still have that remain? I'd love to see those comments below, and we'll have a great conversation. Like I said before, this is a little bit of a different topic from my usual, so I'd really love your honest feedback on what you thought. As I mentioned before, if you are on the journey to start a non-profit check out some of my resources at FounderToFullTime.com, I also have a newsletter that I send out regularly to changemakers and leaders of nonprofits and socially conscious businesses. The link to subscribe to that is in the description below. I invite you to join me for my newsletters there. Finally, if you are on Facebook I have a group called "Change the World or Bust" where thousands of people from all around the world are joining in to share what they're working on to make the world a better place, and I hope that you can join us there. Once again, I'm Amber Melanie Smith and I hope that this was interesting and helpful to you and I hope to see you next time, goodbye.