“If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves”
Thomas Edison

Edison’s quote is found on the opening pages of David Bornstein’s 2004 book titled *How to Change the World, Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas*. David Bornstein specializes in writing about social innovations. The book is the result of five years of travel and interviewing by Bornstein in Bangladesh, Brazil, Hungary, India, Poland, South Africa and the United States. *How to Change the World* focuses on the vision and decision made by Bill Drayton to establish an organization to support social entrepreneurs around the world.

Bornstein defines social entrepreneurs as people with new ideas to address major problems. His book tells stories of individuals around the world who have been working to change behavior patterns and perceptions. The book looks at organizational characteristics, personal qualities, and strategies to make change happen portraying real people doing real things well. The entrepreneurial person sees a problem, envisions a new solution, and takes the initiative to act on that vision. He or she gathers resources and builds an organization to market the vision.

For the person interested in getting a quick overview of the book, scanning the opening chapters on Restless People and From Little Acorns Do Great Trees Grow and the concluding chapter titled Emergence of the Citizen Sector will provide a good overview of the book. Drayton was an assistant administrator with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in 1978 and conceived of building an organization to support talented change makers. Today Drayton’s organization, Ashoka, operates in 46 countries and has assisted 1400 social entrepreneurs, and the book tells some of their stories.

The book truly has a global focus and the stories told about people and the lessons learned appear well documented. Interviews with the social entrepreneur and those who have benefited are presented. For example, you will read about Veronica Khosa, a 54 year old nurse working in Pretoria’s AIDS testing center, who formed an organization focusing on dignity and care of AIDS patients and strengthening capacities of families and communities. Although the term “extension” is not applied to the work being done by these social entrepreneurs, I would challenge any of you reading the book to think about the best practices of extension professionals or best programs you’ve encountered and consider—could I be telling a similar story about them? Bornstein has the ability to describe the problem, outline the actions which were taken and share the accomplishments and hopes for the future.

I appreciate the optimistic tone Bornstein chose in telling the story, but at times found myself wondering what was...
tried and didn’t work? Could the reader also benefit from hearing “the other side of the story”? He addressed this briefly in the epilogue as he talked about being in the process of writing the book and living in New York in September of 2001. The book clearly presents the premise that the antithesis of the terrorist’s impulse is the social entrepreneur. “Social entrepreneurs demonstrate the power of building things instead of destroying them. And they are addressing the underlying causes of today’s global instability: lack of education, lack of women’s rights, the destruction of the environment, poverty” (p. 281).

In rereading How to Change the World and thinking about applications for extension, I found myself turning back to the chapters on Practices of Innovative Organizations and Six Qualities of Successful Social Entrepreneurs. If change is to occur, an extension organization and its structure must be open to innovation and the people who work as a part of it must believe themselves to be innovative and able to turn a vision into reality. Entrepreneurship and innovation are terms extension professionals will be hearing more about in the future and this book provides one of the best introductions I have found to a complex topic. A national U.S. Extension conference on innovation sponsored by CSREES in October of 2004 featured Bornstein as the keynote presenter.

Bornstein describes the four qualities innovative organizations need to put in place to foster entrepreneurship: Institutional listening which is enhanced by having in place systems and guidelines for how we listen to our clientele. Chance discussions or “knowing what people think” are not sufficient. Paying attention to the exceptional means being particularly observant of unexpected successes and expediting ways for them to become routine while listening and watching. Designing real solutions for real people reminds us to be realistic about human behavior and how to get clients to accept the “new product” or change being offered. Finally, focusing on human qualities stresses the importance of the people we recruit, hire, and manage. We must find people who demonstrate empathy, flexible thinking and a “strong inner core.”

Bornstein’s research points to six qualities of successful social entrepreneurs. You’ll need to read the book to find out the specifics, but a key factor appears to be the quality of motivation and determination to achieve a long-term goal that had meaning to them personally. Some of the most successful social entrepreneurs are working quietly, in small groups and in relative obscurity. At some point each decided: “I had to do this.” Their quiet, steady and unremitting pressure is the force causing change.

Extension is a part of what Bornstein calls the citizen sector and he describes the change it is going through as comparable to those that occurred in the business sector over the past three centuries. He notes, “the citizen sector….is beginning to resemble a market economy of social ideas characterized by a rich diversity of grassroots institutions and energetic entrepreneurs crafting solutions that no one could have anticipated, let alone planned for” (p. 269). The citizen sector may want to turn to law rather than business for guidance in developing performance metrics. Consider the jury system. It is a structured process using decision rules and analytic tools such as the conceptual test of “reasonable doubt.” Everyday citizens serving on criminal juries weigh the evidence and make life and death decisions that don’t employ quantitative data; instead it is the application of courageous judgment (p. 273).

This book would be a good tool for Extension leaders and university professors teaching courses on extension or educational change to consider using. A colleague at Ohio State, has done just that, organizing the course content around the book and four key questions: (I) What makes us who we are – understanding ourselves and others; (II)
What makes systems work – understanding systems thinking; (III) What makes a particular situation work – understanding strategic design; (IV) What innovation is needed – understanding social innovation. Can extension, as it becomes more entrepreneurial, design new decision making processes and better feedback mechanisms so that quality endeavors are not underfunded? How to Change the World provides insights and guideposts and will cause you to ask questions and look differently at what you do and how you do it.