

Christa Preston

Friday, November 4, 2016 - 14:27

If You Feel Alone, You Might be Doing it Wrong



Christa Preston, an alum of the 2016 Bootcamp in Nairobi, reflects on the importance of partnerships in social entrepreneurship and knowing your place on the value chain.

As social entrepreneurs, we take on the world's biggest challenges and all too often we try to do it alone. Perhaps we have been brainwashed by the "super hero" culture. We are Batman, building our technical gizmos to fight corruption, discrimination, disease, etc.

But think for a moment. What happens after Batman catches the bad guy? Isn't it the commissioner who steps in to do the arrest? The jail to hold the criminal? The justice system to prosecute? Is Batman even trying to save the world? Because he seems to spend a lot of time in Gotham if he is.

The heroes get all the glory, but they definitely don't do all the work.

"That Feeling of Loneliness"

Too often, social entrepreneurs try to provide an end-to-end solution, and they want to scale it to everywhere. Sorry, but even Genghis Kahn couldn't do that. When we spread ourselves thin, we are bound to fail. Instead we need to focus on one piece of the puzzle and form partnerships to do the rest.

This is what I learned at the Ashoka Changemakers Bootcamp in Nairobi. Abubaker Musuuza, founder of [Energy Village](#) [1], laid out a simple depiction of the value chain from design to post-sales, and challenged us to find our place. Sure big business can try for vertical integration, but as entrepreneurs we need to focus in order to create our advantage. We need to find where we fit in the value chain and work from there.

If only I'd met Adbubaker a couple of years ago. I would have realized that feeling of loneliness was a sign I was doing something wrong.

After several years of research, I developed the "ekulture solution." I was ecstatic because I thought it was just that: a complete solution that addressed all the issues we have faced in the disability movement. It saved time and money and had the potential for farther reach than anything available.

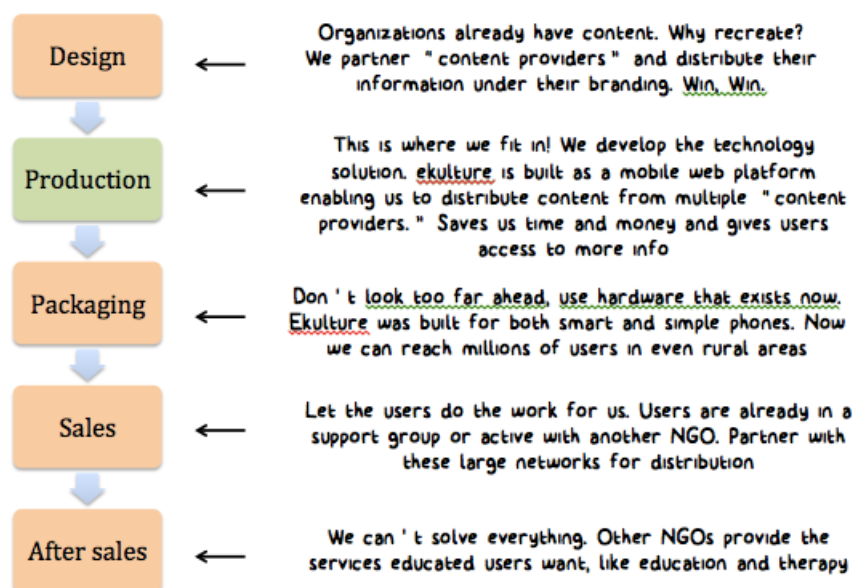
For a year, I tried to develop the content and product and sell it, all alone. As it turns out I wasted resources, time, and energy for little results. Users were limited and money was running out.

Out of necessity I was forced to rethink my strategy, define my spot on the value chain, and stick to it! Then I identified partners to do the rest. In one month, I had more users than I had in one year trying to do everything myself.

EmbraceKulture

Vision: Create a world where all children with intellectual disabilities are embraced and accepted

Mission: Empower members of the community to become the agents of change through access to information



Value Chain design by ~~Ashoka-Moussa~~, Ashoka Fellow, Founder and CEO of Village Energy Ltd and presented at ~~Ashoka~~ Bootcamp Nairobi 2016

My doodle following the Ashoka Bootcamp in Nairobi defining my place on the value chain.

Partner Up!

I learned this lesson the hard way, and I relearn it everyday. Whether it's tackling the entire value chain or not delegating enough to my team, I often try to go it alone. In the end, I slow my organization down, limit our resources and impede our impact, all because I lose focus trying to do it all myself.

Partners are critical yet intimidating. We are all weary of the partner that will steal our credit or our property. However, by approaching partnership strategically and identifying where partners fit on our value chain, we mitigate these risks.

Partnerships require research and due diligence. Do not sit and wait for a partner to stumble upon you. I spend one day a month, every month, pulling research articles — not just from Uganda, but all developing countries — to learn what is working and identify potential partners. I turn to partners to share not just resources but also knowledge. My most critical partners often feel more like advisors and colleagues.

Your Vision is Not Your Mission

As I drew the above diagram I had an epiphany. My mission is not my vision. My vision is broad and idealistic. It's a world I want to see. But my mission is just a small piece of the solution, a small step towards this vision.

By identifying partners with similar vision, I stand a chance at being part of change, instead of demanding that I lead it.

I will use one final superhero analogy, this one from the slightly lesser known Captain Planet. The Planetegers — a rag-tag group of teenagers from all corners of the world — must work together and combine their powers to summon Captain Planet and save Earth from it's greatest disaster. It was a show well before it's time but I'd highly recommend Ashoka introduce it at the start of every Bootcamp. It's a great reminder of what works best.

Your mission is your mantra, your prayer. Say it every morning, reflect on it every night and once more before making any decision. And stick to it. But not alone.

Christa Preston is the founder of [embraceKulture](http://www.embracekulture.org) [2], an organization based in Uganda that is helping to develop a movement for children affected with intellectual disabilities by empowering members of the community to become agents of change. She participated in the 2016 Emerging Innovators Bootcamp in Nairobi.

[3] [3] [3] [3] [3] [3]

Source URL: <https://www.changemakers.com/amex-bootcamps/blog/if-you-feel-alone-you-might-be-doing-it-wrong-0>

Links

[1] <http://www.villageenergyuganda.com>

[2] <http://www.embracekulture.org/about-us>

[3] <http://www.addthis.com/bookmark.php?v=300>