

Preface

Social marketing has been around a surprisingly long time; its origins are in the 1960s. It had only modest growth in the next two and one half decades but blossomed in the 1990s as it focused more carefully on behavior and gained acceptance and support from heavyweight institutions such as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. However, today, it is in danger of being pigeonholed as a *downstream approach*. Most observers and many practitioners see social marketing as an approach to influencing people with “bad behaviors”—smoking, neglecting prenatal care, not recycling. However, this narrow view hugely underestimates social marketing’s real potential. Social marketing is simply about influencing the behavior of target audiences. There are many more target audiences who need to act besides “problem people” if we are to solve major social problems.

Take drunk driving. For a society to achieve fewer drunk driving fatalities, many people have to do many things. Of course, potential drunk drivers have to refrain from drinking and driving. However, police also need to increase enforcement. TV news directors have to carry stories about fatalities and enforcement efforts. School boards need to add curricular materials on drinking and driving. Beer and liquor distributors need to speak to tavern owners and high school students about the problem—and alcohol packagers need to pay them to do this. Bartenders need to stop serving potential drunk drivers and arrange for alternative transportation for them. Community leaders, such as ministers, rabbis, union bosses, and politicians, need to speak out to change community norms. Taxi company executives have to offer free rides home. Friends need to encourage potential drunk drivers not to imbibe or at least not to drink and drive. Foundation program officers need to fund intervention programs. Legislators need to pass laws fining establishments that permit—or even encourage—excessive drinking by drivers and laws offering incentives to transportation firms that offer free rides.

All of these are instances in which target audiences have to do something to make a social problem go away. That is precisely where social marketing is potentially most valuable; it is what social marketing is all about. *We are the behavior-influencing people!* Some may argue that expanding social marketing’s

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domain to these new applications would be overstepping its bounds. Influencing the media is the “proper” domain of communications specialists. Influencing religious leaders is the province of experts in community mobilization. Legislators are best approached by lobbyists and political scientists.

I do not deny that these other paradigms have much to offer, and in the pages to follow I borrow from all of them. However, I am making three points. First, social marketing has a very powerful set of concepts and tools that can approach a very wide range of instances of behavioral influence, in a unique way. Second, because we draw extensively from the private sector, which has a long history of bringing about mammoth social changes—some wonderful (PCs, Polartec, Jiffy Lube) and some not so wonderful (fill in the blank!)—we have the benefit of a constantly innovative knowledge base. Third, relying on social marketing concepts and tools means that change agents can rely primarily on a *single* approach to social change. They need not become deeply involved in learning community mobilization skills or political theory or hire consultants with such capabilities. Social marketing can serve as the change agent’s basic platform and can carry a good deal of the intellectual and practical burden.

In an earlier book, *Marketing Social Change*, I focused on influencing the behavior of downstream targets: those who are exhibiting or might exhibit problem behaviors. I have come to believe that this is too narrow a perspective. In the past, social marketing has been maligned as “merely communications” or as advertising or as selling social products, such as condoms and insecticide-treated bed nets for malaria, at below-market prices. It must not suffer new misunderstandings about its range of applicability as we move through the 21st century.

The goal of this book, then, is to reposition social marketing as an approach to social change that reaches both upstream and downstream, so that foundations, government agencies, and various nonprofits will use it in an ever-widening range of applications. The book will outline potential roles, restate fundamental principles, and then suggest how social marketing might be applied to a sample of nontraditional (for social marketing) challenges. To accomplish the latter, I will rely on my own particular set of social marketing frameworks (as outlined in the earlier book) and show how they might be applied to influence such diverse audiences as legislators, community leaders, media executives, corporate managers, and health professionals.

I intend for the reader to see that social marketing offers an extremely robust set of concepts and tools that are “intellectually portable” across contexts. One can apply a relatively small set of simple frameworks to any target audience and set of behaviors one wishes to influence. (Indeed, one could argue that the principles can be used by the reader just as readily to get a date, achieve a pay raise at work, or induce his or her children to clean up their rooms.)

Objectives and Target Audience

By this point, my objectives and assumptions here should be transparent. I believe that social marketing has great potential to drive social change and has a very wide range of uses, both upstream and downstream. We have barely touched the upstream potential. I am hopeful that this book will spur wider and deeper usage of social marketing—for more problems, at more points in the process, by more people, by more types of organizations, and with greater impact.

I invite a wide target audience to consider these propositions, including social marketing scholars, students, and practitioners who are looking to understand social marketing's broader potential and how its concepts and tools might be applied to their own issues. An important secondary audience comprises those executives, managers, foundation officers, and other gatekeepers and program specialists who might use social marketing approaches if only they better understood the field's potential and relevance to their work.

Structure of the Book

The book is divided into three parts plus a concluding chapter. The first section comprises two chapters that frame the context in which social marketing concepts and tools may be applied. It begins by asking, in chapter 1: Where do social problems come from? What brings some issues onto the radar screen, and why are some issues addressed by a society? The second chapter recognizes that not all social problems make it to the front burner, or are even addressed, at any point in time. It looks at how issues rise on three types of agendas: the media agenda, the public agenda, and the political agenda.

The second section considers social problems and the role of social marketing. Chapter 3 asks: How are social problems structured so that alternative and complementary solutions may be applied? How do social change agents view the current "hot topic" of childhood obesity (a problem that I return to at various points in later chapters)? Chapter 4 offers a brief historical perspective on social marketing and describes the set of relatively straightforward concepts and tools that I use in my own consulting and teaching. Chapter 5 completes the section by considering how priorities for social change are set and how social marketing can help in this process.

The third section takes the reader into four domains where social marketing has not traditionally been used to show how the frameworks introduced in chapter 4 have very broad applicability in upstream settings. Chapter 6 focuses on the specific behavioral challenges of influencing communities. Chapter 7

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considers lawmakers and regulators. Chapter 8 asks how one applies social marketing to the challenge of recruiting potential business allies; chapter 9 focuses on ways to influence media and health-care professionals.

The final chapter returns to the central objective of the book—repositioning social marketing for the 21st century—proposing challenges for individuals and organizations who wish to build the field's intellectual capital to make this happen. The chapter (and the book) ends by considering some of the ethical issues that those thinking of using social marketing in these new ways ought to keep in mind as they move forward.

What This Book Is Not

This book does not purport to be exhaustive in the application areas it considers. It is not a comprehensive treatment of the nature of social problems and the agenda-setting process. Although it focuses on one specific social problem—childhood obesity—it is neither exhaustive in its consideration of all of this problem's nuances and challenges, nor does it expand on how other social problems might differ. The chapters on various upstream social applications are necessarily cursory, and the examples are hypothetical, for the most part. The objective is simply to show how social marketing *might* be used, not to present specific examples of applications. Part of the reason for this is that such applications are very hard to come upon.

On the other hand, an extensive bibliography is provided for those seeking to delve more deeply into the topics presented. Indeed, I will consider this publication a considerable success if others are motivated to deepen and expand on the topics I have considered here. Social marketing has so much more to offer. I will be delighted if the future finds others joining the crusade to reposition and broaden social marketing's application to the critical social problems that affect our world.

Acknowledgments

A book that is at once speculative and prescriptive has its provenance in years of work trying to apply social marketing concepts and tools while at the same time broadening and deepening those same concepts and tools. For this reason, the present volume is the outgrowth of interactions with a wide array of thinkers and practitioners—too many to list here—over the course of many years. Over many years—too many to list here.

I have had much assistance in preparing material for various chapters and creating the set of references. Of particular help was Andy Furrow of the McDonough School of Business at Georgetown University. Editors at Sage Publications, especially Catherine Chilton, performed exceptional service in improving and simplifying both the language and the structure of the book.

Finally, any author has personal support from many people. I have particularly benefited over the years from the encouragement of Paul Bloom, Gerard Hastings, Philip Kotler, William Novelli, Michael Rothschild, and Bill Smith. However, the most profound support—both emotional and intellectual—has come, as always, from my wife, Jean Manning. Jean has given matchless inspiration for all my work and has been a very frequent source of new frameworks, new wrinkles on old frameworks, and innumerable improvements in the way I articulate what I think I have to say. It need hardly be said that, without her, this book would have been very different and, indeed, might not have seen the light of day at all.

