

LESSON FOUR: The Role of the Individual and Non-Profits in Influencing Social Policy



The GOALS of this lesson are to:

- learn about recent social, political and cultural changes that have created opportunities for individuals to have a greater impact on shaping their community (HISTORY, POLITICAL SCIENCE, SOCIAL STUDIES)
- inspire students to get involved in improving their communities

This lesson has two components: a **READING** assignment to be completed during class; and a **DISCUSSION** of the lessons learned from the reading.



READING

During class, provide students with a copy of an excerpt from the article “The Age of Social Transformation” by Peter Drucker (see Appendix F).



DISCUSSION

To put the article in context, summarize the following key points from the larger article by Peter Drucker.

- The 20th century has been “the age of social transformation,” experiencing rapid and radical change.
- Prior to this century, the two largest groups in the population were farmers and domestic servants. The shift from a society of predominantly farmers and domestic servants to blue-collar industrial workers happened with minimal societal disruption, because it did not require a lot of training to become an industrial worker. Further, these positions were desirable because blue-collar workers generally worked fewer hours and had a better living standard.
- By the beginning of the century, blue-collar workers had emerged as the predominant population group. Rapidly thereafter, blue-collar workers declined in both numbers and political power.
- The new dominant group in society is “knowledge workers,” who hold jobs which require formal education and specialized skills. Drucker estimates, “By the end of this century, knowledge workers will make up a third of the workforce in the U.S.”
- Unlike the shift from farmers to industrial workers, however, industrial workers cannot easily make the shift to becoming “knowledge workers” for two reasons. First, “knowledge worker” positions often require both education and technical skills which are not easily attainable by all. Second, there simply are not as many of these positions available. As a result, this century has been and will continue to be characterized by significant dislocation of blue-collar workers. It is in this context that society’s social sector can best be understood.

NOTES

Once you have discussed these points, use the following questions as a springboard for discussion about the Drucker article:

- Who takes care of social tasks in the knowledge sector? What are the two different answers which have been offered in the past century to this question? How is this question answered differently in the United States? (Drucker notes that in Bismarck's Germany the answer was government, and in Japan, the answer has been the big corporations. In the United States, the third sector, the "nonprofit sector," has taken on increasing responsibility for addressing our society's social needs.)
- What are the recent social, political, and cultural changes discussed by Drucker that have created opportunities for individuals to have a greater impact on shaping their community through volunteering in nonprofit organizations?
- Drucker estimates that almost half of all adults are volunteering three to five hours a week. How many people do you know who are volunteering? What kinds of work are they doing? How is their work making a difference?