



Evolution – The Nature of Things

We are hard-wired to be in community. This sense of connection is the foundation for success of a wide range of businesses from Amazon to Zappos. It also lies beneath the broad and continuously replicated success of Delancey Street, a San Francisco-based organization that understands the power of community. Belonging to something bigger than oneself is at the center of their success in working with ex-convicts and others along the disenfranchised. In the words of Delancey Street:

“We’re considered the country’s leading residential self-help organization for substance abusers, ex-convicts, homeless and others who have hit bottom. Our average resident has been a hard-core drug addict for sixteen years, abusing alcohol and multiple drugs and has dropped out of school at the 7th grade and has been institutionalized several times. Many have been gang members; most have been trapped in poverty for several generations. Rather than hire experts to help the people with problems, we decided to run Delancey Street with no staff and no funding. Like a large family, our residents must learn to develop their strengths and help each other. It’s an approach to changing lives that is ‘against all odds’.

We said we were going to take ex-convicts and ex-addicts and teach them to be teachers, general contractors, and truck drivers. They said it couldn’t

be done. We said we were going to take 250 people who had never worked and had no skills and teach them to build a 400,000 square foot complex as our new home on the waterfront. They said it couldn’t be done. We said we were going to partner with colleges and get people who started out functionally illiterate to achieve Bachelor of Arts degrees. They said it couldn’t be done. We said we were going to run successful restaurants, moving companies, furniture making, and cafes and bookstores without any professional help. They said it couldn’t be done. We said we were going to do all this with no staff, no government funding, and no professionals. They laughed and said it couldn’t be done.

We struggle a lot but we’ve been doing it. For over 35 years we’ve been developing a model of social entrepreneurship, of education, of rehabilitation and change that is exciting and full of hope.”