**One for One Global Ethics Exercise**

**Abstract**

The buy-one give-one or one-for-one social entrepreneurship model was first envisioned by TOMS’ founder in 2006. There are many viewpoints about the ethics, societal value and costs of such ‘socially responsible’ practices. Students often adopt the viewpoint provided by advertising campaigns rather than critically evaluating the practices.

The purpose of this exercise is to provide a brief classroom exercise/activity along with discussion questions to cause students to think more deeply about the connections and effects of socially responsible business decisions. Discussion can easily be adapted to the needs of a variety of disciplines.

**Keywords: Critical thinking, social entrepreneurship, ethics**

**Introduction**

This submission is a classroom exercise/activity which focuses on helping students evaluate business practices which claim to create positive change in the social environment. Specifically, the game helps students evaluate the one-for-one social entrepreneurship model (e.g., Toms). The buy-one give-one or one-for-one social entrepreneurship model was first envisioned by Blake Mycoskie, founder of TOMS shoes in 2006. Since then, many businesses have adopted this model either locally or globally. Because students often adopt the viewpoint provided by advertising campaigns rather than critically evaluating the practices, this simple, brief, high-impact exercise helps students think beyond feel-good advertising hype. The exercise can be used with both traditional and non-traditional undergraduate and graduate students.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**

There is no question that the buy-one give-one model provides a conduit for those with ‘more’ to help those with ‘less’. Each of the social entrepreneurs who founded companies that employ this model have stories, sometimes very personal stories, about how they realized the societal need. For example, Smiles Squared provides toothbrushes (Juergen, p 86) a need they discovered after adopting a Guatemalan child and volunteering in a dental clinic in Guatemala (Smiles Squared). The London Business School also recognized the importance of this business model and published a case study on TOMS which asks students to consider why TOMS is successful and what other firms might learn from TOMS (Nacini, etc. al, 2015). While case studies are very useful pedagogically, often students react to and remember classroom exercises more clearly. This exercise also provides more opportunity for critical thinking. Many times, cases imply viewpoints, ways of thinking and solutions. This exercise allows students to think critically, make comparisons and draw their own conclusions without influence from a case study. Thus, this exercise is an alternative or supplement to a case study on the topic.

The existing literature related to the one for one model within the academic realm is fairly limited. However, the model has been successful for more than a decade and even larger corporations, such as Sketchers, General Mills and Ikea, have utilized this model in a limited way. Marquis and Park (2014) focused on the long-term sustainability of the buy-one give-one model. They conclude that the model is sustainable. Yet since the publication of their research, TOMS was listed by Money as one of 22 retailers at serious risk of bankruptcy (Tuttle, 2017). The reactions to the research of Marquis and Park were harsh at best with responses claiming the model is a marketing tactic and that it serves only to create dependency (Rothstein, 2014). Within the non-profit realm, there is considerable discussion about the need and efficacy of aid distribution as well as the source of the aid (e.g.,Nancy & Yontcheva, 2006). I do not review that literature here. Suffice to say that this exercise would be appropriate for use in the humanities (e.g., political science), in non-profit programs, in leadership programs and most business disciplines.

**Learning Objectives**

* **Apply** information about Toms shoes and the one for one model to other settings in the for profit and not for profit sectors
* **Analyze** business and non-profit practices and explain their effects on the populations they are trying to serve
* **Evaluate** whether business practices and non-profit practices are effective and ethical
* **Evaluate** the role of business in solving social problems

**Exercise Overview**

The exercise has a high level of impact for a number of reasons. First, it requires about 15 minutes of preparation before class. Second, it requires a small amount of class time, typically about 10 minutes. Because it is quick to prepare and use, even in a 50 minute class period, significant time can be devoted immediately after the exercise to discussion and debrief. The simplicity of the exercise is also powerful because it leaves all of the interpretation to the students.

The purpose of this critical thinking exercise is to provide a brief classroom exercise which will cause students to think more deeply. Depending on the course in which the exercise is used, discussion may address any of, but not limited to, the following:

* the connection of global and local marketplaces,
* the role of business,
* ethics,
* the supply chain,
* the triple bottom line,
* social entrepreneurship,
* actions of non-governmental organizations,
* etc.

I strongly recommend that students read a small amount of material before they come to class to participate in the exercise. The reading can be tailored by the instructor to meet the needs of the course. The exercise is intended to address higher levels of thinking in Bloom’s taxonomy. Therefore, I usually do not assign any readings that are highly critical of the one-for-one model before using the exercise in class. I want the students to apply, analyze and evaluate after the exercise rather than stating an opinion to which they were exposed via an assigned reading.

This experiential exercise has been effective in several settings including general education introductory leadership, junior level principles of management and junior level supply chain courses. In each of the settings, the participants have shown through the debrief that the exercise helps them understand the actual effects of practices like the one for one model on those that need assistance. For example, each time this exercise has been used, there is an ‘aha’ moment where a student says something similar to, “I think I’m a third world country” or “I think I represent Tom’s”, etc.

**Exercise Information**

**Time needed for exercise:** 10-15 minutes

**Number of participants:** Minimum is probably 10 participants, there is no maximum

**Classroom Style:** Appropriate for traditional face to face classroom

**Course Level:** Appropriate for undergraduate and graduate level students

**Supplies:** One container per participant (e.g., disposable cup, paper bag, etc.). Two different styles of containers are required. Two types of candy (i.e., desirable and undesirable), individually wrapped. The class will be divided into three groups. Group “A” will consist of approximately 20% of the class. You will need 14 pieces of desirable wrapped candy for each of them. The balance of the class will be divided into two more groups (“B” and “C”) you will need approximately 5 pieces of undesirable wrapped candy for each of them.

**Exercise:** The complete step by step directions for the exercise exceed the word limit for OBTC submissions. They will be provided to session participants at OBTC. The exercise is completed in silence and without electronic devices. Each student receives a container with a slip of paper that provides the directions. Group A receives the following directions: “*Each time you receive two items you will do the following: You must either consume one of the items or save it for yourself for later by depositing it in your assigned container. If you eat your item, put the wrapper in the container. You should give the second item to someone with a cup with flowers on it.”* Groups B and C receive the following instructions: *“Each time you receive an item you will either consume it or save it for yourself for later by depositing it in your assigned container. If you eat your item, put the wrapper in the container.”*

The instructor allocates desirable and undesirable candy in several rounds to groups A, B and C according to a specific set of instructions. In each round, group A receives 2 pieces of desirable candy and in that round must distribute one of the two to someone from group B or C. In an alternating fashion, groups B and C receive less desirable candy in each round. There are several variations possible for the distribution to B and C which will be discussed during the OBTC session. After all allocation rounds are completed, a tally sheet of the results is created on the board at the front of the room for everyone to see. The exercise is completed in about 10 minutes. The balance of the class period can be allocated to discussion and debrief.

**Session Description**

The OBTS session will include:

* the exercise (about 10 minutes),
* exercise debrief (about 25 minutes)
* discussion of various settings in which this exercise can be used (about 20 minutes)
* participants will also receive step by step directions, example debrief questions and a suggested reading list for students which may be modified depending on the course and instructor’s preferences.

**References**

Juergen, Michelle. (2012). Smile Squared Donates Toothbrushes to Children in Need. Entrepreneur. October, 2012. https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/224444.

Marquis, Christopher; Park, Andrew (2014). Inside the buy-one give-one model. Stanford Social Innovation Review, Winter.

Nacini, A., Dutt, A., Angus, J., Mardirossian, S., Bonfanti, S. (2015). A Shoe for a Shoe, and a Smile. Aditya Birla India Centre of London Business School, June, pp. 90-93.

Nancy, G. & Yontcheva, B. (2006). Does NGO Aid Go to the Poor? Empirical Evidence from Europe. IMF Working Paper IMF Institute. <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2006/wp0639.pdf>

Smiles Squared. <https://smilesquared.com/sharing-smiles/>

Rothstein, Nathan. (2014). The Limits of Buy-One Give-One: Most socially responsible businesses won’t succeed by giving away something for free. Stanford Social Innovation Review. Jan. 28.

Tuttle, Brad. (2017). 22 Retailers That Are at Serious risk of Bankruptcy. Money. June 13. http://time.com/money/4812870/retailers-bankruptcy-risk-sears-amazon/