

Do you have what it takes?

Sometimes the problems that grab the headlines just seem so far out of our reach.

There is a global food imbalance; on one side of the planet, starving millions, on the other side obese kids.

We see evidence of pollution on a global scale, resources dug up out of the ground then discarded into the ocean, rivers, and landfills, despoiling water resources and the countryside, not to mention the air.

We read of health problems in developing countries killing babies and children by the thousands.

Here in Europe we read of youth unemployment but also an ageing population often in need of special care: a demographic imbalance.

These are just some of the problems that beset our world. Sometimes these problems seem insurmountable. “What can I do?” you might ask yourself. “How can I solve the world’s food problem? How can I save the planet from pollution, or solve these health problems, or energy shortages, or youth unemployment?”

One answer might be to start using your creativity, your ingenuity, and build on what others have developed. Stand on their shoulders and use your entrepreneurial spirit to come up with your own solution. Here are a few examples of individuals who have developed innovative solutions to some of the world’s social and environmental problems. Why not follow their lead?

Food

At the age of just 15, living in Sussex, England, **Tristram Stuart**¹ started feeding his pigs with food waste from his school kitchen. Sale of the delicious pork that resulted augmented his pocket money. He supplemented school food scraps with waste from local stores and nearby farmers. Then he noticed that what was being dumped appeared highly nutritious. He wondered, “Could I survive on this?” and set himself a challenge to eat only food waste for a month. This he did, successfully. Thus started his interest in food waste and a global campaign to reduce food waste. While campaigning across the world he organised a number of “Feed the 5,000” events where local chefs would provide free food to the public made from food that had been discarded. Today, major supermarkets are starting to promote “ugly fruit”.

What could you do in your community?

Pollution

Nature has its own solutions to waste. Humans often shy away from maggots and cockroaches but these humble creatures near the bottom of the food chain eat up natural waste and then become food for others.

¹ http://www.ted.com/talks/tristram_stuart_the_global_food_waste_scandal

Vetiver is a remarkable grass that has been found to have multiple benefits, particularly in combating soil erosion, while providing useful products from its leaves and roots. The leaves are used to make thatching material for roofs and rope and an essential oil distilled from its roots is used in making perfume. Its roots also absorb substances potentially harmful to humans.

A cosmetic company realised it could generate a source of the essential oil for its own use and at the same time make use of its absorbent properties to clean polluted canals in Manila².

What natural solution can you apply to clean up the environment in your home?

Low-tech - Health

Charities donate expensive medical equipment to developing countries. Often these end up either not being used or broken after a few months because advanced technology can not be repaired: the skills needed to do it are not available within remote, rural communities. **Jonathan Rosen** pondered this question. He noticed that everywhere he went there seemed to be mechanics who could fix a utility vehicle – so why not make an incubator solely out of vehicle parts!³

Low-tech - Education

Another challenge faced by communities in less developed parts of the world is the lack of electricity. It's hard for people in remote areas to keep up with news - with limited access to electricity. And schools and teachers can be far away. So - develop a wind-up digital radio and cassette player⁴. Now remote schools can be given cassettes with educational material and people can listen to radio stations providing news - and more educational content⁵.

Is there a low-tech, low-cost solution that you can apply to address a problem?

Youth involvement

Rockcorps gathers together young people and offers them tickets to an upcoming popular concert – in return for four hours of community work. The principle they have uncovered is simple:

- If you give away something for nothing – it has little value.
- If you buy something – your enjoyment increases.
- But if you work to earn – the pleasure derived is highest.

Now, thousands of young people have worked on community projects and earned a great experience.⁶

²http://www.sustainablebrands.com/digital_learning/event_video/marketing_comms/new_standard_clean_messaging_case_hana_water_billboard

³ <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/12/16/health/16incubators.html>

⁴ <http://www.freeplayenergy.com>

⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pqE9vheaGZk>

⁶ <http://www.rockcorps.com>

Do you have a creative idea to tackle the unemployment problem in your community?

Love shoes - Life shoes? No Lyf shoes!

ALY KHALIFA was getting a headache visiting a shoe factory – heat and volatile chemicals. He wondered: “Why do we need to make shoes this way - harming the health of the workers and polluting the environment?”

He then put together:

- **Very old** technology: Japanese gateways built with interlocking wooden joints
- **Very new** technology: 3D printing

... and came up with LYF shoes: design your own look, 3D print components, all components made from recycled and recyclable materials.⁷

What great ideas could you combine in an innovative way to tackle an environmental or social problem?

You don't have to be a giant corporation to change the world

The technology revolution is here - you can build on knowledge in a way that previous generations couldn't. The power of the internet gives you access to the latest technologies such as Green chemistry, Biotechnology, Alternative energy, and Nanotechnology - to name a few.

There are plenty of resources available to assist the budding entrepreneur such as Angel clubs; Incubators; Charitable grants; government and university subsidies - and Crowd funding. Investors are just looking for the next smart idea.

There is no shortage of problems in today's world – what we need are solutions. What the world needs now is your creativity, your imagination, and your ingenuity. So – which challenge will you take? The world is waiting for your smart idea!

⁷ <http://lyfshoes.com>