



Step in and act where the government won't

Courage is contagious and there is work to be done.

By Ed Mitzen

It's been made clear in the past few months that the uncertainty we're facing as a country has impacted almost every level of society. And it's not lost on me that there is an overwhelming amount of pressure on our state leaders in the current political and economic environment. Unfortunately, I'm not confident that these leaders are using their power to tackle the deep-rooted issues that our country continues to face—like the growing wealth gap.

In my home base of Albany, New York there are over 1,000 abandoned properties with the number of unhoused people rising 38% since 2022. Governor Hochul claims to have plans to reinvent New York City, the Finger Lakes and the Hudson Valley—recently announcing a \$412 million proposal—but despite budget approvals, we've yet to see a concrete plan and timeline that will move the investment forward.

Take it a step further. The wealth gap in America isn't just growing, it's accelerating. And the reality is, we can do something about this. According to the Peter G. Peterson Foundation, from 1981 to 2021, income for the top 20% of earners in the U.S. jumped 165%. For the middle and lowest earners? Just 33% and 38%.

WHY LEADERS SHOULD BE FRUSTRATED

I've grown tired of waiting for government leaders to step up and fight. I no longer expect sweeping reform from the top. So, I've focused on what I can do from the ground up. Four years ago, my wife Lisa and I started Business for Good in New York's Capital Region. Our mission is to close the wealth gap. We invest directly in communities: supporting small businesses, affordable housing, offering marketing and HR resources, mentoring entrepreneurs, and creating ecosystems that allow people to rise—and stay—out of poverty.

It's working. But it's not enough. Not unless more of us get off the sidelines. That's why I'm calling on other leaders to join me in replicating the model that we've used for Business for Good. All it takes is simple, powerful steps that any business leader can follow to use their privilege for good. These are not theoretical—they work. And they're built on a belief that I hold deeply: Privilege can be shared, but only by those who have it. The courage to act is contagious.

HERE'S WHERE WE START

Change starts with one simple but powerful action: listening. We must be willing to actively hear from those who are directly impacted by the growing rise of uncertainty and inequity.

Next, do your homework. Deepen your understanding of inequities and the impacts of rising uncertainty and systemic exclusion. Be courageous, as individual learning and growth is required to drive real change.

Then, confront—and speak up. Acknowledge your own biases as well as share information and resources. If you have a platform, use it—your voice, your company, your community, social media, etc. Remember that if words matter, actions speak louder.

We also need to partner with local government leaders and policy makers who are committed to dismantling barriers and fighting for each and every member of our communities. For us, at Business for Good, we work with local leaders in the Albany/New York Capital Region as part of our pilot program.

Showing up matters. Leverage your privilege for good by sharing your opinion, engaging in activities that support belonging, starting a conversation, and connecting within your local community.

Engagement is key. That means having hard conversations with colleagues, friends, and family. Be brave enough to speak up. We each have a role to play in breaking the silence and building awareness.

Finally, invest. Real impact takes resources.

ACTIONABLE WAYS TO DRIVE CHANGE

At Business for Good, we've put our money where our mission is, fighting for our neighbors and communities. We've invested over \$1 million to help create the Albany Black Chamber of Commerce—a hub for community leaders, entrepreneurs, and small businesses to thrive. We've supported a local community center focused on improving the lives of those in need from youngest to oldest. We're working with like-minded leaders in the private sector to tackle issues that our local government is not: housing and employment to name a few.

Other leaders and cities can and should take this approach to replicate the progress we've seen in our community.

I recently read a set of community values posted in Dubai. And while this was halfway across the world and it wasn't my own community, one message struck me: A successful society is one that lifts everyone up. Let's bring that idea home.



Ed Mitzen

Co-Founder, Business for Good Foundation

bfg.org