



Christer Söderberg is a global citizen who has lived in many far flung parts of the globe; he's had an extremely successful career in business, and he's a very caring and passionate individual, with strong ideas about the planet, about people and about change for the better. Two years ago, he founded The Open World Foundation, his inspirational project to actively create change.

Christine: *Christer, what prompted you to begin The Open World Foundation?*

Christer: The Open World Foundation is the fruition of many years thinking; it was by no means an overnight revelation. It's something that has been growing slowly for a long time. I've had the privilege of living in many countries; I've experienced different cultures and have been able to communicate with different peoples around the world, bringing me to a

Stop, Reflect and Listen

view of the world that I would like to share with other people through this structure that is The Open World Foundation.

As you know, Christer, I share your desire to further active, beneficial change in the world. What would you most like to see The Open World Foundation achieve?

I have the privilege of working intensely with leadership, communication and sustainability questions in my work as a facilitator and coach, and what I notice is that there is a deep and genuine desire

for people to become involved in these things - but at the same time, very little happens. So I'm confronted with this realisation that human beings truly desire change for the better, while at the same time their actions don't lead them in that direction.

I'm of the opinion that this has to do with our thinking, and our thinking is of course the root of what we say; and what we say is at the root of what we do. And if what we do is not what, in times of reflection, we want to do, as a result of our perceptive thoughts, then there is a gap - and this gap needs to be addressed.

Christer Söderberg talks to **Christine Miller**
about creating change

I feel that in our modern society, we have so many distractions and there are so many wonderful activities that we can become involved in, that this leads to a fragmentation, a division. It's out of this fragmentation and division that we experience much of the conflict, not only in the world around us, but within ourselves, not being able to address this deeply felt desire for change and convert it into action.

To do this, I believe we need places; places where we can stop, reflect and listen. Stop in the sense, get off the train, get off the wheel, get off the full activity and 'to do' task list that we have in our daily lives, reflect on what things are genuinely important for us and listen to the world around us. Look, observe and see what's going on; and feel, how does that affect us, and are we truly doing what we want to do. So The Open World Foundation is about creating places where people can stop, reflect and listen, so that they may more easily find what they truly want and what I truly believe will be contributing towards a better planet and a better society, and a more stable economic situation.

I know you've already created at least two places: you've created an on-line community for The Foundation and you've also created a physical place, The Open World Café in Sweden. How long have they been in existence, what kinds of things do you do there and how would you like to see them develop?

The online community has almost 100 members and is represented by people in more than 20 countries. This is after about 6 months of presence, so that's a wonderful thing in itself. We've come to the point where we appreciate the power of the Internet, while at the same time recognising the need for physical

meetings, and that's where The Open World Café in Stockholm, Sweden, comes in. We've received tremendous support and very positive reactions to the café, which has now been open since September 2008. The Foundation was registered on the same day as the 4th IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) report came out in 2007. So on February 1st 2009, The Foundation will have been active for two years.

I know you hold gatherings at the café to give people that place to go, and these are proving to be popular events.

We offer three types of activities. The first, and least demanding, is what we call dialogues, which are meant to cover a specific subject, book or video presentation which we look at and discuss afterwards.

The second activity is the seminars, where we go somewhat deeper into a specific subject and give a short introduction; and this can also be an author, a book, a video or any type of personal development tool or philosophy. Both dialogues and seminars take place in the evenings, from 5 pm to 8 pm, so that people can come there after work, before they go home.

The third activity is the workshops which are more intense and go even deeper, with more scope of activity. They can be anywhere from a half day to several days. Those are the activities we offer, but we are also very interested in finding other groups, individuals and companies who would like to use our space to develop their own programme within the framework of leadership, sustainability and awareness. We've had considerable interest and we also have a corporate member who is offering part of their corporate leadership development programme through The Open World Café.

I think it this shows the timeliness of what you're offering. What do you see as the next step for The Open World Foundation?

From the very beginning we defined a specific project, called "Re-planting a Rainforest", which stems from the desire to create an Open World Lodge. This could be any where in the world, but in our case we've chosen the inland area of Central Brazil, within the triangle of Brazil's three major cities - Sao Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Belo Horizonte. We would like to see these projects realise themselves, and we're very interested in finding members - individual members, corporate members but also corporate sponsors or strategic sponsors who would like to develop this with us. We will be creating more Open World Cafes in cities, in capital urban centres where people have easy access to the resources of learning, leadership and sustainability, but also in the further development of that to have access to a place in the countryside.

I agree with many others that it's through the environment and nature that we can truly connect with ourselves. Creating these places in nature will also foster communication between cultures. Sweden and Brazil have a very close economic, cultural and historical connection but we're also in touch with individuals in India, and different capitals in Europe, London, Madrid, Berlin and Frankfurt and others. We are interested in finding fellow human beings that feel drawn to these issues and who would like to offer similar programmes for leadership, sustainable development and awareness locally.

I'm sure that there must be many people who would love the opportunity to be involved with such an inspiring project



- is there any particular type of person or organisation that you would like to attract?

I think people will come from several different walks of life. I'm constantly impressed with all the wonderful initiatives that are taking place already. It's not really a question of what you do or how you do it, it's really tremendously important that you just do it; that it actually gets done, that these good thoughts are converted into actions. My particular interest is reaching human beings in leadership positions because I believe that is where change can have a big impact; so of course corporate sponsors and individuals in multi national corporate entities are very much called upon to look at their policies, to look at their agendas, to look at what they call the bottom line, and perhaps reconsider a triple

Open World Café & Gallery (Photo)
Sätträångsvägen 134,
182 37 Danderyd
Stockholm
Sweden
t: café: +46 8 622 6703
w: www.openworldcafe.com

bottom line which builds not only on the economic profits, but on the profits that can be created for environmental, social and economic results. Individuals in companies, in business, social entrepreneurs would be my preference and I think that is again where the greatest impact is possible.

At the same time I'm aware that our present system does not encourage these things; but I ask individuals to stop, reflect and listen to what they truly feel to be the important issues of our world today and to act on that.

Thank you Christer, it's been illuminating for me to find out more about your vision. I believe that this is a vital project to take out into the world and see genuine progress, creating places for people to do exactly what you describe - to stop, reflect and listen, and take action to create beneficial change.

Thank you, Christine, for this opportunity to talk to you and to reach your readers through your wonderful magazine.

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Christer Söderberg:

As an entrepreneur **Christer** has developed an intimate relationship with the multiple aspects and interdependency of international business. Christer started and managed a NGO coordinating humanitarian aid during the war in Bosnia, managed a telecom product design company based in Hong Kong and as Director of a Swedish multinational in Brazil, established the industrial products company in six South American countries. Christer has lived in nine countries and speaks the languages of seven, experiencing first hand the differences in culture and working conditions on four continents.

After returning from Brazil in 2002 Christer started Zero Aeons AB, a Stockholm based Business Leadership and Communications consultancy. In 2006 he introduced Brazilian art, furniture, and design to Sweden and helped develop a business based on a triple bottom line. Open World Foundation builds on the spirit of these two businesses, and with the Open World Café & Gallery creates meeting places to inspire leadership, learning, and environmental awareness.

Contact:

e: christer@openworldfoundation.org
w: www.zeroaeons.com
w: www.openworldfoundation.org
mobile: +46 70 880 3672,