

# How Boston can “B the Change” We Need

Drew Bonfiglio 04 December 2017

## Summary

Over the last ten years, thousands of companies have been using “Business as a Force for Good” and creating both a movement and a community under the B Corp umbrella. However, in Boston and around the globe not enough companies and individuals know about B Corps, why the movement is important to cities trying to be progressive and inclusive, and how B Corps are innovating to improve their communities, employees’ lives, and the environment.

## Article

Do you remember what was happening 10 years ago? 2007 was an eventful year. But we don’t often talk about - - or even realize -- that there were two opposite and powerful forces at play a decade ago, both of which have had a hand in shaping the future of business. The one that everyone knows about is, of course, the Global Financial Crisis. The Crisis shook our trust in institutions and forced many of us to question the role of business in society. At the same time, the B Corp movement (short for Benefit Corporation) was launched to answer that question. And

its answer was that business is not bad. We shouldn't demonize it. We should use business as a force for good. And that is exactly what thousands of companies are doing across the world. Why and how they are doing that is the interesting part and it is happening right here in Boston.

In 2007, as the Global Financial Crisis reared its ugly head, the subprime mortgage crisis developed into a full blown international banking crisis and included bailouts to banks, manufacturers and insurers deemed "Too Big to Fail." People across the U.S. and the globe lost their homes, jobs, retirement funds, and faith in a number of our institutions.

While this was taking place, three college friends and businessmen decided enough was enough and that the world needed a movement (and legal structure) that would help people use business as a force for good. These men founded B Lab -- the non-profit that oversees the B Corp certification and has worked to lobby states to create a Benefit Corporation legal designation, which now exists in 33 U.S. states and a handful of other countries. The former scores a company's performance in terms of governance, employee practices, environmental impact, and community impact. The latter is an incorporating structure just like an LLC, sole proprietorship, or C-Corp that intends to add a layer of legal protection for companies that want the option to hold social and environmental value over shareholder value in some

cases.

[Ten years in](#), there are more than 2,300 certified B Corps in more than 50 countries. The challenge, however, is that B Lab and the certified companies that are part of the “B” community are not necessarily household names. People have heard of Patagonia, Ben & Jerry’s, Seventh Generation, and others, but the average citizen isn’t aware that these and many other lesser known companies are certified B Corps. Additionally, other businesses and entrepreneurs may not be aware of the resources and models being used by B Corps that can help them in their own organizations.

In this article, we’d like to briefly share **why** we, the board members of the Boston Local B Corps group, believe that the Boston business and social innovation communities need to be familiar with B Corps, and **how** the local, certified companies are innovating to run successful businesses that meet a strict environmental, governance, employee, and community impact criteria.

To answer the question of why we think it is important we first turn to Boston’s history. All it takes is a walk through Terminal C at Logan Airport to see all of the amazing “firsts” and other major achievements and milestones of our great city. From the first public park to the first public school to the first organ transplant Boston has a history of innovation and a progressive agenda. It is only natural that the city should embrace the B Corp movement that is

“one of 20 Moments That Mattered Over the Last 20 Years,” [according to Fast Company](#).

Secondly, when we look at what is happening today, Boston’s innovation scene is strong and growing. People think biotech. Or GE. Or setting our sites on being Silicon Valley of the east. What many leave out of this conversation is the list of organizations that are innovating with a social or environmental purpose. TUGG (Technology Underwriting the Greater Good), Net Impact Boston, Conscious Capitalism, City Awake, the social impact track of Mass Challenge, and others are already creating a positive impact and engaging citizens. B Corps and the movement behind them are a natural fit in our city and a complement to these other innovative organizations.

Additionally, companies that are not B Corps can benefit by using the resources provided by the B Lab to amplify their impact. Things like the [B Impact Assessment](#), which evaluates companies’ performance in four key areas; environmental, governance, community, and employee. There also webinars, articles, and case studies that can move businesses towards a purpose-driven, more impactful future.

Lastly, my final comment on **why** the B Corp movement is important to Boston is because, despite all of the great work being done, we have a [long way to go](#) for our city to be equal, fair, and just. As a certified B Corp, I can say first

hand that going through the certification process and being part of the B Corp community has made Emzingo a better organization, more thoughtful in how we support and engage all of our stakeholders, and a more caring employer. An army of local businesses doing the same has the power to move the needle on the social issues we often look to government or non-profits to solve.

The next question is then, **how** are the certified companies in Boston innovating and making a difference? Below are a few examples of how the Boston B Corp community is creatively building impact. And they're doing so in many facets of our lives:

- How you travel -- [TripZero](#) helps individuals and conference organizers get great hotels deals while also measuring your carbon footprint and offsetting it to help you travel responsibly.
- How you shop -- [DoneGood](#) makes it nice and easy to find mission-driven brands for the goods and services you're looking for from within your browser using a Chrome extension.
- How you eat -- Boloco, everyone's favorite burrito joint, is pushing itself to remain ahead of the [minimum wage](#) and of competitors when it comes to employee pay.
- How you brush your teeth -- Preserve is the maker of those toothbrushes (among other sustainable consumer goods) at Trader Joe's made from recycled plastic.

- How you invest -- Keene Advisors, Boston Common Asset Management, and Trillium Asset Management are all in the financial sector and showing that you can provide a good return to investors while still acting and investing responsibly.

In addition to the high level "hows" these B Corps showcase, there are many practices behind the scenes that non-certified companies can learn from. For example, Greyston Bakery has pioneered an [Open Hiring](#) model that gives people who might otherwise never even get through the initial application filter employment. And Rhino Foods' "[Income Advance Program](#)," offers a short-term loan/savings/credit-building initiative.

We hope the social innovation community will continue to push the limits on how business can have a positive impact and the Boston-based certified B Corps can play a growing role in making our city a more prosperous community for all its residents.

## **Author Bio**

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Drew Bonfiglio is the co-founder of [Emzingo](#), a social enterprise and certified B Corp focused on creating the next generation of responsible leaders. He and his colleagues work with businesses and universities to design experiences and workshops that instill the mindset of responsible leadership and prepare individuals to take

on today's biggest challenges. Drew co-leads the Boston local B Corp group, is a member of Conscious Capitalism New England, and is on the events team for Net Impact Boston professional chapter. Drew holds an M.S. in Engineering from Cornell University and an MBA from IE Business School in Madrid. He lives in Somerville, MA with his wife, daughter and puppy.