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# Getting To Maybe: How The World Is Changed



**GETTING TO MAYBE:** THIS BOOK IS FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT HAPPY WITH THE WAY THINGS ARE AND WOULD LIKE TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE. THIS BOOK IS FOR ORDINARY PEOPLE WHO WANT TO MAKE CONNECTIONS THAT WILL CREATE EXTRAORDINARY OUTCOMES. THIS IS A BOOK ABOUT MAKING THE IMPOSSIBLE HAPPEN  
**HOW THE WORLD IS CHANGED.**



## Synopsis

A practical, inspirational, revolutionary guide to social innovation Many of us have a deep desire to make the world around us a better place. But often our good intentions are undermined by the fear that we are so insignificant in the big scheme of things that nothing we can do will actually help feed the world. We can't fix the damage of a Hurricane Katrina or even get a healthy lunch program up and running in the local school. We tend to think that great social change is the province of heroes. But this is an intimidating view of reality that keeps ordinary people on the couch. But extraordinary leaders such as Gandhi and even unlikely social activists such as Bob Geldof most often see themselves as harnessing the forces around them, rather than singlehandedly setting those forces in motion. The trick in any great social project is to go from the global fight against AIDS to working to eradicate poverty in a single Canadian city. It is to stop looking at the discrete elements and start trying to understand the complex relationships between them. By studying fascinating real-life examples of social change through this systems-and-relationships lens, the authors of *Getting to Maybe* tease out the rules of engagement between volunteers, leaders, organizations and circumstance between individuals and what Shakespeare called "the tide in the affairs of men." *Getting to Maybe* applies the insights of complexity theory and harvests the experiences of a wide range of people and organizations including the ministers behind the Boston Miracle (and its aftermath); the Grameen Bank, in which one man's dream of micro-credit sparked a financial revolution for the world's poor; the efforts of a Canadian clothing designer to help transform the lives of aboriginal women and children; and many more to lay out a brand new way of thinking about making change in communities, in business, and in the world. From the Hardcover edition.

## Book Information

File Size: 1610 KB

Print Length: 272 pages

Publisher: Vintage Canada; Reprint edition (March 19, 2009)

Publication Date: March 19, 2009

Sold by: Amazon.com Random House LLC

Language: English

ASIN: B000UZNRYQ

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Screen Reader: Supported

Enhanced Typesetting: Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #501,908 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #44

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## Customer Reviews

I heard about this book at the 10th Regenstrief Biennial conference on system transformation of healthcare in the United States. It was mentioned particularly by Paul Biondich and Burke Mamlin with regards to their work to create effective treatment for people with HIV/AIDS in Africa through an open source electronic medical record. (See more at [...]) The book essentially describes a Zen-Canadian approach to social change. Although loosely based on complexity theory (the one where a butterfly creates a hurricane), complexity theory is very complex, so I would have to say that it is very loosely based. Reading its stories of how profound changes had occurred in social systems such as Muhammad Yunus' Grameen Bank and anti-poverty and anti-racist activists in Canada, it makes a case the change proceeds from a number of phenomena: A deep and human level understanding of social ills nurtured over time which leads to tentative hypothesized solutions rather than a one-size-fits-all quick fix or a certain recipe. A sense of being called to action in a way that almost makes taking action a non-decision for the change agent. An openness to feedback in the problem solving work (a fair amount of time is spent pointing out the ultimate futility of structured plans given the complexity of the world.) A willingness to confront the powerful - be that oneself, one's fears or other social stakeholders who may oppose change. Of interest to me as program staff person at a medium sized US foundation, there is a fairly extensive discussion of the sins of philanthropy with regards to social change. We tend to require more specific objectives and reporting than is realistic given this model of change. We tend to over-evaluate our grantees in terms of these foolish metrics and quantifiable outputs rather than using methods of appreciative inquiry or developmental evaluation to understand the process. I get the sense that at least one of the authors is an evaluator and is tired of being hired to do the wrong thing. Most moving to me were the observations that change is so very hard. Most social innovations fail in important ways. Even

when they do succeed, that success is only temporary or limited - it can be reversed by changed circumstances or become a new baseline from which to aspire very quickly. Social innovators in this view face enormous challenges - they are fundamentally alone, necessarily always questioning everything, and doomed by the complexity of the world and human limitation. Is there such a thing as Zen-Existentialism? There seems to me to be a lot of truth in these views. However, I have to say that these change agents' program officers are lousy. In addition to handing out checks and demanding unreasonable reports and evaluations, our major job is to support the grantees. No grantee should ever feel alone, if their program staff person knows what he or she is doing. I still don't know what to make of this book. I look forward to seeing more reviews from others.

In the movie Jerry Maguire, Renee Zellweger's character tells Tom Cruise that he had her at the first hello. Well, this warning to the book "Getting To Maybe: How the World is Changed" had to be at the first page: Warning: this book is not for heroes or saints or perfectionists. This book is for ordinary people who want to make connections that create extraordinary outcomes. What riveted me to this book on social innovation were seven key things: 1. The authors' fascinating yet easy to understand application of scientific complexity science as a way to understand social innovation. 2. The book's thorough research and presentation of patterns of social innovation. 3. The compelling stories of diverse social innovators - what triggered them to start, how they navigated their journeys, and the shared patterns of those diverse journeys. 4. The use of poetry to ground each chapter, counterbalancing the art of change with the science of systems change. 5. More thoughtful, original, and thought provoking insights than I usually find in a professional book. 6. Many, many practical ideas that I can see how to apply both to my professional organizational change management work and my responsibilities as a trustee on non-profit organizations. 7. How relevant it is in today's world with nations in the Middle East transforming and our school systems, unions, health care institutions and governments undergoing complex, profound and needed change. I'm a voracious reader, and highly recommend this book for those involved in innovation, organizational change and social transformation, or for those who wonder and perhaps worry about how we can solve today's seemingly insolvable social issues.

I love stories and this book provides a framework for engaging in what they call social innovation through the stories of people's successes and failures in trying to do the same. Some people everyone knows, others not. I'm still seeking to determine how this book is applicable to the big problems of racism, for instance, that span local or even national contexts. But I think the authors

would say that is probably the wrong way to think about it. Hmm. Just finished reading so perhaps I'll have more to say after, as the authors suggest, I've "sat still" with it for a while.

Overall the book showcases some inspiring stories about social change, so if that is what you are looking for, this book will definitely satisfy you. From a change standpoint, the book recites some pretty obvious steps: create a vision, communicate the vision, find collaborators etc. The book also does a nice job depicting the change cycle. Also, the parallels the authors attempt to draw to 'flow' are way off the mark in my view. To me, the authors are stretching to find some sort of parallel between a social change and the idea of 'flow', but none really exist because I believe 'flow' is essentially a personal experience not a movement. So it's a nice compilation of inspiring social movements along with some pretty basic steps to bring about change. From that standpoint, the book is a success. However, if you are looking for something unique about how change occurs in the social movement world, you will be disappointed I think.

This book is a very helpful presentation applying complexity theory to social innovation. One of those rare books that have a solid theoretical foundation but are full of practical examples, insightful conceptual tools, and good process insights. Not difficult to read but often need some reflective pauses to benefit from the wisdom shared. A very hopeful book

Excellent overview. Well documented case study evidence in a very easy to understand writing style This book will appeal to wide range of social innovators, not just academics. Sorry to learn of Ms Zimmerman, one of the co-authors recent tragic death. She had much promise on the lecture circuit.

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