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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's hungry, 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 — 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 — from the global fight against AIDS to working to eradicate poverty in a single Canadian city — 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

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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.

I'm a little surprised that all the reviews of this book *Getting to Maybe* are so overwhelmingly positive. To be sure, I thought it was a fun book to read--used it a couple of times in a grad program. The authors provide great examples and the book is overall well-written and designed. Working for an NGO I find it helpful to get different perspectives on change-thinking and social innovation. In the context of my organizational work I regularly advise people to read this book. That's the good part. What I'm not so happy with is the dogmatic philosophical stance of the authors on Complexity Science. It permeates everything they write. Life is completely unpredictable it seems. (If you believe this, please, don't board a plane again. The science behind flying is based on predictability.) Admitted, there is some truth to that--life is at times hard to predict--but to absolutize that observation is what bothers me about the book. It undermines the credibility of this otherwise wonderful

contribution to social change. (Took one star off for that.)What bothers me most about the book is that the authors in their convictions of complexity science have a chip on their shoulder about funders and logic frameworks for planning (read: results-based management). I bet you they have had some bad experiences with funders... and obviously are having difficulty dealing with it a little more maturely. Here is an example (from page 170):Social innovators offer visions and dreams. Funders and the evaluators they often hire want concrete, clear, specific and measurable goals. They also want to know step by step, in advance, how the goals will be attained, an approach doomed to failure in the complex and rapidly changing world in which social innovators attempt to work.

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