



# Finding Creative Ways to Work Together

Anyone interested in using culture, art, imagination, and storytelling to achieve a better society will find wisdom in these pages.

By Terrence Fernsler

## Creative Community Organizing: A Guide for Rabble Rousers, Activists and Quiet Lovers of Justice.

By Si Kahn. 228 pages. Softcover. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, [www.bkconnections.com](http://www.bkconnections.com).

More than just a memoir (although that alone would be enticing), this book weaves true tales of community change with sage advice about achieving social goals. Si Kahn, the founder of Grassroots Leadership ([www.grassrootsleadership.org](http://www.grassrootsleadership.org)), has worked for 45 years as a community organizer and is a wonderful storyteller. His tales demonstrate the power of collaboration and are inspirational as well as engrossing.

Perhaps what Kahn does best is clarify the importance of art to social change. By using both left-brain and right-brain thinking, activists can attract diversity into their campaigns and accomplish much more. Drawing on our creative side can help achieve goals that at first appear unattainable.

Kahn encourages us to frame questions in ways that require people to think deeply and creatively. As he writes, "We can never truly predict what human beings working together can accomplish."

As nonprofits struggle to respond to inequities, Kahn,

### How to Change the World

Si Kahn has inspiring tips not only for community organizers but for anyone with a vision for a better future.

**Unite the divided.** Compensate for divisions among people by reinforcing unity and commonality.

**Check your stereotypes at the door.** Believe that all people can find a connection.

**Lift every voice.** When asking a large number of people to participate, ask most of them to do one thing, and only one.

**Strengthen the story.** Use culture—music, art, poetry, theater—to help people shape stories about themselves and your cause.

**Start at the finish line.** Begin the process by imagining the moment just before victory. Then, working backwards, figure out the steps that will lead to that moment.

**Expect the impossible** when people believe in a vision and join together to work for it.

**Go not only with what you know but whom you know.** Personal relationships count most of all.

This book weaves true tales of social change with sage advice.

with his long history of doing just that, can guide us. Organizing for social change requires hard work, much thought, and the willingness to learn new ways of connecting with people unfamiliar to us. But, as Kahn's work shows, persistence leads to outcomes that are well worth the struggle. ■

## The Circle Way: A Leader in Every Chair

By Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea. 211 pages. Softcover. Berrett-Koehler Publishers [www.bkconnections.com](http://www.bkconnections.com).

Since time immemorial, even before we evolved into our present species, we've been meeting in circles. This ancient way of meeting has great value today. It's egalitarian and respectful of all participants. It has proven to be a better way to elicit creative responses and consensus than hierarchical formats, such as rows of people facing a speaker.

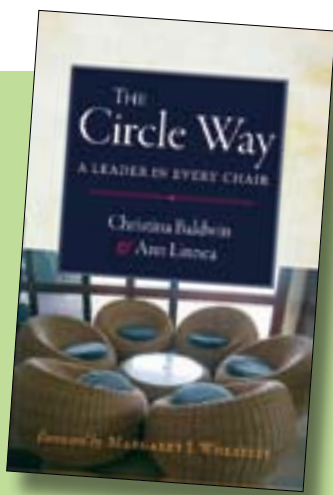
Intuitively, we know that meeting in circles is the best way to be fair to all and elicit participation. But we've become so familiar with hierarchical settings that we often need guidelines to steer us through circle meetings. Christina Baldwin and Ann Linnea divulge methods they've learned from years of circle practice to keep focused, avoid abuse of time, and keep communications open.

Circles elicit some unexplored parts of ourselves.

Gathering in circles is a superb way to hear people's stories and accept their differences. Other meeting formats are sometimes appropriate, but circles elicit some unexplored parts of ourselves that have a profound effect on outcomes. Baldwin and Linnea explain why, and offer tools and examples to help us experience the circle's astounding power.

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### Questions for the Circle

Once you've brought people together in a circle for a shared purpose, the next step is to choose a check-in question for everyone to answer. For example, if you're meeting to address a tense situation, you might ask a question designed to help people see the problem in new ways, such as:

- **What about this situation** can you imagine being grateful for in the future?
- **What one change in attitude** could you make that might improve the situation?
- **How is this situation** developing your leadership capacities?

As people discuss the situation at hand, it's good to remind them to attend to the group's well-being by asking themselves self-monitoring questions such as these:

- **Am I receptive** to what's being said?
- **What is my body** telling me?
- **How will what I say** benefit the group?
- **Am I speaking** from a place of competition or collaboration?

Close the meeting by asking everyone in the circle to answer a check-out question. Examples:

- **What is the most important thing** you learned today?
- **How has this discussion** changed your mind?
- **What will you do differently tomorrow** as a result of our meeting today?

Answering the check-out question can sometimes be the most important conversation of all. ■



### How Unreasonable Are You?

Successful social entrepreneurs change the world by being "unreasonable"—refusing to accept the status quo. Here's how to become one of these pioneers:

- **Shrug off** the constraints of hierarchy, tradition, and bureaucracy. Never do something just because that's the way it's always been done.
- **Focus** on social value creation. In that spirit, be willing to share your innovations and insights so others can replicate them.
- **Apply** practical solutions to social problems, combining innovation, resourcefulness, and opportunity.
- **Innovate** by finding a new product, service, or approach to a social problem.
- **Have an unwavering belief** in everyone's innate capacity to contribute meaningfully to economic and social development.
- **Show** a dogged determination that pushes you to take risks that others wouldn't dare.
- **Balance** your passion for change with a zeal to measure and monitor your impact.
- **Collaborate** with change makers in other sectors.
- **Display** a healthy impatience. Understand that it's sometimes necessary to jump into change before all your ducks are in a row. If it's clear to you that it's time to act, don't hesitate. ■

—adapted from *The Power of Unreasonable People: How Social Entrepreneurs Create Markets that Change the World* (Harvard Business Press, [www.hbsp.harvard.edu](http://www.hbsp.harvard.edu)) by John Elkington and Pamela Hartigan

### Sell Your Organization's Value

In *The End of Fundraising* (Jossey-Bass, [www.josseybass.com](http://www.josseybass.com)), Jason Saul isn't really advocating for an end to raising funds. What he suggests, however, is presenting your organization in a different way by expressing its economic value, especially to for-profit entities. This approach may supplement your fundraising or, perhaps more accurately, fundraising would supplement selling your impact. Or you may even be able to raise enough resources with this method to make traditional fundraising unnecessary.

The size of the social capital market is about 20 times the philanthropic market. That fact presents great opportunity for nonprofits. As Saul points out, most donors behave like consumers, so promoting your value is necessary. It will benefit your approach to all target audiences.

Whether you agree with Saul's premise or not, it's worth noting his takeaways. For example:

- Organizations will be more productive by measuring outcomes rather than activities.
- Supporters want to see organizations contribute to solutions, not be concerned about who receives credit.
- Higher-value outcomes, an ability to articulate economic impact, and stronger selling skills will strengthen appeals to donors and business people.
- To take advantage of the opportunity the social capital market offers, organizations need to know what businesses want, speak their language, and behave in ways that for-profit organizations understand. Organizations that build these things into their strategy and marketing will attain the resources they need to grow. ■

—reviewed by Terrence Fernsler