

In Search of a More Generous World

It's not easy to change our values. But it can and must be done.

Reviewed by Terrence Fernsler

This Could Be Our Future: A Manifesto for a More Generous World. By Yancey Strickler. Viking Press (penguinrandomhouse.com).

The idea of profit-before-people has taken control of the decision-making in much of society. How has this happened?

Yancey Strickler, co-founder of Kickstarter, explains how we got here in his bold, inspiring book, *This Could Be Our Future*. He highlights key inflection points such as Milton Friedman's pronouncement that the only purpose of business is profit. Today we simply accept this as a way of life, as "that's just how it is."

Even nonprofit organizations are lured into focusing on financial resources as their primary value, to the point of believing "no money no mission" without question. But it wasn't always that way, and there are more rewarding and sustainable ways of expressing values.

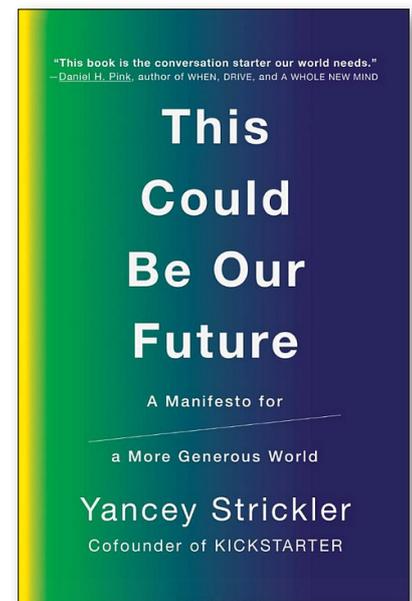
Financial growth in itself isn't harmful, but the drumbeat of profit has caused incredible damage. It has led to increased inequality, plutocracy, the alienation of most of the world's population, and environmental harm on a global scale.

The mentality of perpetually seeking money traps us into believing it's the point of life. We can feel powerless to change it. But there is something we can do about it. Many things besides finances are valuable, and we can learn (or re-learn) that having ever more money isn't sustainable. Profit is simply one value; the drive to maximize it comes at the cost of other values and has become excessive.

Strickler understands that it takes time to change our values. He argues, based on history, that it will take roughly 30 years for us to shift to a more balanced consideration of values. People will increasingly realize that the drive for more profit can never satisfy us.

However, we can't just wait for this change to happen. We must fight against the forces that established the dominance of profit-before-people. We must bring additional values

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into decision-making. We can begin by identifying all values important to us, using a model that considers our current needs, the future, and the community.

Strickler paints a vision of the future that frankly arises from a place of personal privilege, especially with its reliance on patience and persistence. Yet his book does guide us through a useful way of changing our responses to values.

Nonprofit organizations are mission-driven collectives of individuals already primed to lead the way in advocating for additional values. The key is to examine values of importance on an ongoing basis, and do it honestly, not just post platitudes to enrich an organization's image. We can balance our organizations' current and future needs, and our constituents' current and future needs, using the methods suggested by Strickler. 

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