



# The World We Want

A reception to formally launch the national tour for *The World We Want:  
New Dimensions of Philanthropy and Social Change* by Peter Karoff

The Boston Foundation - September 19, 2007

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Thank you Paul for those good words. Ellen Remmer, TPI's Acting President, and all of our colleagues are enormously appreciative of The Boston Foundation for hosting this evening. It is hard to conceive of a better place to consider the 'world we want' than a community foundation which has as its mission, exactly that. This is a very special evening for me because of who is in this room – 50 years of history and memory in a kind of surround sound. Thank you all for being here.

The World We Want book is about three big things. The first is a vision for better world. The second is doing the work. And the third, is what this means - for you, for me, and for the people we love.

These lines are from a Wallace Stevens poem about another kind of special evening, and it sets the tone for the book called *The World We Want* -

**Light the first light of evening, as in a room  
In which we rest, and for small reason think  
The world imagined is the ultimate good.**

**Is there such a room? Perhaps this is one. And if it is, why are you here?**

**I think we are drawn to be part of community - however one chooses to define that word - because it is a safe place with kindred spirits who share similar values.**

**Community makes you feel part of a whole. Community, along with love, is the major antidote to the 'loneliness of being. I think the work that I do, and that most of you in this room do, is because we do not want to be alone.**

**Martin Buber wrote – “The fragile life between birth and death can nevertheless be a fulfillment – if it is a dialogue. ....It is what we term responsibility.”<sup>i</sup>**

**When I went on the journey that became the book, I was looking for 'kindred spirits,' for those with what Buber calls the 'spark,' the 'blazing up,' of soul, I was looking for those who have taken on responsibility.**

These were the questions my eclectic group of heroes were asked to consider:

**What is your vision of a better world?  
What are the obstacles that need to be overcome to realize it?  
What parts of the vision are realistic, and what ideas, strategies, and plans,  
can make it so?**

**How much fun it would be to go around this room, and hear your answers to these tricky questions.** It would be a great conversation, and as my gifted editor and collaborator Jane Maddox knows, without a doubt there would be material for another chapter or two. Do you agree Jane? TPI has been asking those questions, or variations of

them, for almost two-decades. The amazing answers are part of a flow, a flow that is not finished.

**The end result is a book of stories from an extraordinary group of practical visionaries.** Some are dreamers, others realists, entrepreneurs, activists, spiritualists, secularists, ethicists, critics, cynics, and reluctant seers. What do they look like? Well we are in luck!

Would the following people stand to be recognized, but I will not ask you to respond as to which of these characteristics you might identify with – we could be here all night!

**Melinda Marble, Henry Becton, Dr. Jono Quick..... thank you for permission to tell your story, and thank you for what you do!**

**While all different, these actors have a common persona. Call it that of a seeker, someone who balances a deep belief in the human capacity for caring and for improving world conditions, with a healthy skepticism of oversimplified solutions. These are all people who –“put their shoulder to the stone - some days it moves forward, and some days it rolls back.”<sup>ii</sup>**

**I have this naïve idea that the Tipping Point for the fate of the world depends on how many do just that.**

**Does the book have an overriding goal? Yes – it is to awaken the citizen within, to wake those who are sleepwalkers, those who choose to walk by the infinite collage of a world that is hurting.**

I grew up in what might be called the **Walt Whitman America** – the romantic post World War Two period when patriotism and the pursuit of America’s manifest destiny seemed unlimited. The opening lines to *Leaves of Grass* said it all to me.

*One’s-Self I sing, the simple separate person  
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En-Masse*

**As a kid, there didn’t seem to me be any greater aspiration than being that kind of an American person.**

Soon after graduating from college, I became deeply involved in a small community development effort in Roxbury. That project failed for many reasons, but mostly because my well-meaning colleagues, all of us certifiably “smart” and white as well, were rightly perceived as condescending and arrogant. **We were rehabbing houses and apartments, but acted as though while we were at it, we would fix up the people who lived there.** We never said exactly that, but our actions did, and it led to a memorable night not far from here in the office of the Boston NAACP when the discussion became so heated **I literally had a chair thrown at me!**

**Perhaps the only way we learn is the hard way and in retrospect, my hubris, and that of my friends, was unconscionable.** How we talk to one another, how we listen, how we relate, may be the most important thing of all. The first question for everyone who wants to help someone else, for every donor and volunteer, is – **“Who am I, to come to a place that is not my own and presume to do good works?”**

**The issues then, and now, are about equity, social justice and race, and leadership,** but I mention this history because it was the beginning of the journey that led to The Philanthropic Initiative and to this book. **The difference between now and 40 years ago it seems to me, is that we are running out of time, we are running out of time, because –**

**The world today is precariously balanced between a disastrous downward spiral and the real potential for the resolution of social dilemmas.**

Do you believe that is so? Let me ask it another way – **raise your hand if on most days, are more hopeful than pessimistic?**

Here are some of the themes in the book that add to the possibility of hope:

They begin with a **spectrum of visions for what a better world could be.**

**At one end of the spectrum is the struggle of the individual to be heard - the giving of voice to the disenfranchised, a good job, the empowerment of citizens and greatly expanded democratization** “where public policies are considered with love and independence,”<sup>iii</sup> and “where everyone has access to the basic commodities of life.”<sup>iv</sup>

**At the other end of the spectrum is a world where silos are broken down – where all the sectors, Civil Society, government, and the market economy, work together to harness and integrate their resources,** and “are involved in defining problems, creating solutions, and implementing strategies.”<sup>v</sup>

**Running across the entire spectrum is the notion of connectivity – the realization that “whatever happens here happens to us all”<sup>vi</sup> and “whatever happens to one happens to us all.”<sup>vii</sup>** No greater evidence of that truth is what came out of the Human Genome project that showed a 99% commonality across the human race. All of our differences come down to a lowly 1%! This is a **vision of the world where we make bridges and go across them, where we find the alignment between self-interest and the common good,**

**Some people advocate big transformational system change because so many systems are broken, but many believe change only comes one person at a time and anything else is a wasted effort.**

**What wraps many of these ambitions are Social Movements. The evidence is building that we have entered an era of broad-based social movements around some**

of the ‘wicked issues’<sup>viii</sup> like making poverty history, or global climate change issues, or the eradication of diseases like malaria. Can this momentum self-aggregate into solutions of major social problems? Perhaps, but one reality is that “social change is incremental at best!”<sup>ix</sup> For good reason, we are wary of exaggerated claims and clarion calls.

But **the sands are shifting**, and there are new forces that have **the potential to make this era one of monumental social change**.

Perhaps the biggest take-away from the book is the growing impact of what is called the **Open Source phenomenon**.

**The term Open Source is characterized by a flow of ideas, data, services, products, and markets that move more seamlessly across an ever-widening and inclusive landscape of participants. Open Source and Open Society resonate, and when applied to the social sector, user and consumer adaptation and fabrication translates to engaged and involved citizens active on all levels, and whose voice is everywhere. In essence, everyone a changemaker!**<sup>x</sup>

**The Open Source world becomes “flat” through a “creative destruction” process that among other things, tears down silos between all the sectors.**

**One radical proposition is this** – that we can’t get ‘there’ – ‘there’ being a better place – with government and philanthropy alone. **We need the scale, drive and capacity of the market economy.**

**Advocates like Steve Case, co-founder of AOL, and Pierre Omidyar, founder of eBay, are calling for a new creating a “new paradigm that bridges business and the social sector.”**<sup>xi</sup> Others social investors, like Google with its new \$1 billion for-profit social investment fund, are espousing the same theme.

The concept of social investing is hardly new. **What is new is the flat-out attempt to bridge the traditional divides between the business and the social sector.** Meanwhile Civil Society organizations have become a source of innovation and creativity, and the power and influence of the sector is growing. **Nonprofit Social Entrepreneurs have become increasingly entrepreneurial, competitive, and businesslike**

And then there is philanthropy -

**There is far more philanthropy and more thought about how to use its total resources wisely, including its influence and convening powers – witness what happens in this room on a regular basis.** Philanthropy has become front page news. New aggregations of individual wealth continue to astound the imagination, and rather than the exception, the culture of giving has expanded. TPI was essentially alone when it started its work in 1989. Now there is a growing cottage industry of advisors to donors.

**The concept of strategic philanthropy was little known or understood when TPI began to promote the concept and the practice.** Variations on these themes, like Venture and High-Impact philanthropy, have energized the field, and continue to raise the bar to what constitutes best practice. **In the process, philanthropy has been evolving its own approach to the Open Source phenomenon.**

**From these perspectives, philanthropy's role becomes integrative to all of these trends.** Its very flexibility allows it to seed, stimulate, support, model, evaluate and encourage important ideas, and new innovations and innovators. **Philanthropy is in fact the risk capital that operates at the intersection of all three sectors.**

Here is my bet for the future.

**The number of formal and informal collaborative social investment efforts, and the intermediary organizations established to support them, will dramatically increase.** Some will be internet based, but despite the hype I think more will be locally and community-based. They will become **a hybrid of for-profit and nonprofit endeavors, and will increasingly look and feel like social movements.**

**Now there's an idea for those of you in this room – why not start a social movement!**

**Taken as a whole, these are gigantic ideas** – and represent a revolutionary approach to social dilemmas.

**What I have been thinking about more and more is the centrality of legacy.** Certainly philanthropy is in the legacy business. It is not the only actor in that business, but it is a very important one, and not just for the money.

**Your legacy is the articulation in word and deed of what you believed, what you felt was right and wrong, what you did and didn't do. The legacy you leave is actually the life you have led.** You can't be a terrible person and expect to leave a great legacy – the parable that a rich man cannot buy his way into heaven is as true for foundations as it is for individuals. **The real legacy, however, and this is what I have been pondering, is the moral dimension. The moral of the story is whether we have stood up and been counted when it was important to do so.**

**Where does the moral conscience of the community lie – if it does not lie with us?** Who are the storytellers, the historians who transmit the social and cultural morays of our age to the next? Who determines what is just and unjust?

**I wonder if the 'tipping point' on the fate of our world has as much to do with lack of integrity, as it does with new ideas. Whether a foundation, a nonprofit organization, a corporation, a church or a football team - the first responsibility is to set standards of excellence and honesty.**

**Integrity of process begins when we become a listener, a learner, or a learning organization,** about others who are different, about the issues, about what works and what doesn't, and about new ideas.

**Do you hear the echo of an Open Source way of thinking? I do.**

**Integrity of purpose** for any social action is based on one simple condition - **“if it isn't good for the community, and only good for the donor, it isn't worth doing.”**<sup>xii</sup>

What about integrity of self? Try this - **“One of the first questions that must be asked of leaders and participants in any movement is: Does everybody understand that we are coming to the table to work on our own stuff.”**<sup>xiii</sup>

**Anyone who doesn't understand that runs the risk of having a chair thrown at them someday. Sometimes that chair is literal, sometimes it is mud on your face, and sometimes you have broken the golden rule, which is “to do no harm.”**

And the last element of integrity is this. **“The work has called for growing our souls while we seek to transform society or “The only real transformation is the transformation of the human heart.”**<sup>xiv</sup>

This not about taking the high road - it is far more than that. **Action is hard in a society where trust is in short supply, where too many people are overwhelmed by negative cultural norms.** If the goal - not only of this book - but of society, is to 'awaken the citizen within,' **we need to reintroduce the moral dimension in our dialogue and in how we go about the work.**

The practical visionaries in *The World We Want* got it right. Here is what they said:

**Listen to the stories of others before you tell your own** – serious listening yields big dividends –

**Acknowledge that people know what they need.** Help individuals find their own power and take control of their own destiny –

**Those at the center of problems need to be at the center of their solutions**<sup>xv</sup> -

**Seek out the assets that every community has, build on them and celebrate.**

Make heroes of those who do this work -

**Go downstream** – transformational and top-down change only works when they become concrete and aligned with individual and community needs and aspirations –

**Break out of the box.** Use all available resources and innovation from every sector – business, citizen, government, nonprofit – to get the work down –

**Abandon comfort.** Raise the bar. Put your whole self in, and **hold the moral conscience of your community dear** –

**And lastly, open it up: open yourself up.** Provide building blocks for others to make their own dreams come true –

All of these put together make up the tone of voice of the ethical and moral relationship we seek.

And on that note I cannot think of a better way to introduce John Abele.

I don't think we have reached Nirvana in this discussion, much less a 'world imagined as the ultimate good' but we did not do badly John. Here the poem that begins *The World We Want* book:

### **Conscience**

“..caught in the dangerous traffic between self and universe.”  
Stanley Kunitz

I carve out a small space, a nest  
Of sorts and lie my conscience down to rest.  
As a gift it bears little resemblance to  
The madness around me, those who think  
They know everything, those who despair.

My own absurd, hesitant, presumption is hope.

I watch the Osprey hunt the harbor at dusk,  
It soars and glides to a frantic wing-beat  
And like an acrobat hangs in mid-air  
As flashes of silver scales below  
Signal time to make a precision dive.

My own hesitant presumption is hope.

As an infant flails, wails, loss of womb,  
Its wet, loud, pronouncement – I am here!  
My conscience, not newborn, nor single-  
Minded like the Fish Hawk, hears the cry  
Of the wounded heart.

My own presumption is hope,

Even as deadly fog shrouds the backstage  
It is no match, these awakenings are legion,  
New dimensions of spirit and soul  
Rise from sweet hearth and beloved earth,  
Feminine and Divine.

My own hope  
Lies in Mahler's 1<sup>st</sup>, from minor to major,  
From darkness to Frère Jacques. So rise  
Tired traveler, renew, seek secret places,  
The great percussion of possibilities within.

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<sup>i</sup> Martin Buber in *The Way of Response*

<sup>ii</sup> Governor Cuomo used these terms when he described what he missed most after stepping down from being Governor of New York state

<sup>iii</sup> From a conversation with Melinda Marble – *The World We Want*, Chapter 2, *Listen to the Voices*

<sup>iv</sup> Ibid - From a conversation with Alan Broadbent in Chapter 3, *Listening Post: Reflection and Radical Change*

<sup>v</sup> Ibid – from a conversation with Lucy Bernholtz in Chapter 6, *Open Sesame: Networks and Open Source Solutions*

<sup>vi</sup> Proverb of the Tongan people of Malawi

<sup>vii</sup> Ibid – from a conversation with Rory Francisco-Tolentino in Chapter 8, *The Global Challenge*

<sup>viii</sup> Wicked Issues is a term that Melinda Marble and others use to describe the intractable issues like persistent poverty.

<sup>ix</sup> Wise words from Mike Sviridoff, the legendary Vice President of the Ford Foundation, and founder of LISC (Local Initiatives Support Corporation)

<sup>x</sup> Ibid - Changemaker is a term used by Bill Drayton, founder of Ashoka – see Chapter 2, *Paradigms of Change*

<sup>xi</sup> Ibid – from a conversation with Steve Case in Chapter 3, *Paradigms of Change*

<sup>xii</sup> Alan Broadbent, of the Maytree Foundation in Chapter 4, *The Listening Post: Reflection and Radical Change*, of *The World We Want*

<sup>xiii</sup> Ibid – from a conversation with Shirley Strong in Chapter 11, *Building Beloved Community: Spirit and Activism*

<sup>xiv</sup> Ibid – Chapter 4 – *The Listening Post: Reflection and Radical Change*

<sup>xv</sup> From the conversation with Melinda Marble