

A Manifesto for Reinventing Yourself and Saving the World

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NEW
R A D I C A L S

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Chapter 1

Are You a New Radical?

The latest source of global warming worry? Funeral pyres in India. Each year, 8.5 million Hindus are cremated. An adult body requires as much as 500 kg [kilograms, about 1,100 pounds] of wood and as long as six hours to burn. Estimates peg the annual contribution to global warming of this ancient tradition at 7 million tonnes [7,716,179 tons] of carbon dioxide.

—*The Economist*, June 2007

“**T**hat our world is in trouble is not news. This morning, I flipped through the two dailies that appear on my doorstep before dawn.

- More bloodshed in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- A week of brutal warfare has isolated the Palestinian territories.
- New horrors in Zimbabwe, Somalia, and the Sudan.
- Children taken from their homes to work as sex slaves and laborers.
- A corporate corruption trial is underway in Chicago.
- A team of researchers that is traversing the Arctic is getting a sobering look at how global warming is changing the landscape.

But wait. There is also the story about a man in Florida who has developed a portable water-filtration system that is powered by a small wind turbine and foldout solar panels. Such a machine would be a real boon for refugee camps, remote medical clinics, and anywhere that safe drinking water is in short supply. “It’s water in a box,” Ecosphere Technologies founder Dennis McGuire says simply.

He doesn’t know it yet, but Dennis is part of an emerging movement of people who are reinventing their work to help save the world. It’s a movement based on a powerful new idea: that doing good can mean more than volunteering and philanthropy. How we *earn our living* can actually become the way we give back. I call these men and women *New Radicals*.

Where did this idea come from, and how did this movement get started? It all began with the largest and most successful generation the world has ever known: the baby boomers. There are

80 million boomers in North America alone, and that generation has been busy lately: pursuing careers, raising families, putting down roots. Now, at midlife, boomers like me are lifting our heads, looking around, and wondering what comes next. We know we'll live longer than any previous generation, and we're simply not interested in retirement. In fact, we're feeling at the top of our game. But now we want something more from our work. We want it to reflect our values and to help us make a difference in the world. Probe a little, and we'll share what's closest to our hearts: we believe that our greatest contribution is yet to come. And we may be right—we now have the expertise, knowledge, and resources to do what we once only dreamed of.

All around us, the rich and powerful are doing good works. The names are familiar to everyone, and each new gesture is more astonishing than the last. But does that mean that you have to be worth billions in order to become a New Radical? No. Can ordinary people like you and I transform how we earn our daily bread? Absolutely.

I say this with confidence because I did. After 20 years as a self-employed speechwriter—work I enjoyed immensely, and for which I was well paid—I was feeling restless. I didn't want to do the same thing for the next two decades, but I had no idea what might come next. I scarcely acknowledged it at first, but I found myself thinking about my youth, when school friends and I would talk late at night about how we would change the world. What happened to that young woman? And could I somehow combine her ideals and dreams with the mature, experienced professional I'd become? Gradually, I realized that I was not alone, that many of my peers were having similar thoughts and also longing for

more meaning. And if I couldn't find resources to help me transform myself, well, neither could they. Suddenly it became clear. My journey could be combined with my expertise (a lifetime of listening to others and helping them turn their vision into words) to create the core of a new practice. Today, I'm a midlife coach helping boomers make the transition to the second half of their working lives.

Over the last several years, I have talked and worked with scores of men and women who are reinventing what they do and have discovered that there is a fantastic variety of ways to become a New Radical—think of it as a continuum between “mildly” and “wildly” radical. New Radicals are appearing in every sector and in countries around the world. While the possibilities are endless, the roles that New Radicals are choosing fall into three categories: Activists, Entrepreneurs, and Innovators.

Activists are those who actively serve the less fortunate. For example, they may move from the corporate to nonprofit sector, or carve significant time out of their busy schedules to take on a second, helping role. They are people like Kye Marshall, who left a comfortable seat playing cello for a major orchestra to become a music psychotherapist. Kye now works with women with special needs, such as those with eating disorders. Another Activist is Aditya Jha, who developed a program pairing aboriginal youth with corporate executives to foster entrepreneurship and the development of business skills in native communities.

In contrast, *Entrepreneurs* start new enterprises where making a difference is an integral part of their work. They are people like Suzanne Seggerman of Games for Change, an organization that is a key player in the social games industry—that is, digital games

that help people learn about social issues while entertaining them at the same time. Another is Ayisi Makatiani. Educated at the best U.S. schools, he moved to Africa to help launch the continent's first Internet service provider. Today, he is on a mission to promote development on the continent, one small business at a time.

And then there are the *Innovators*, people who change their current role or influence their field or organization from within. Innovators are people like Don Raymond, senior vice president and head of public market investments for the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board (CPPIB), which manages a fund that will help sustain the pension contributions of 16 million Canadians. At Don's suggestion, CPPIB joined a global coalition of investors seeking to incorporate environmental, social, and governance issues into their financial decision making. Willard (Dub) Hay, a senior vice president at Starbucks, is another Innovator who drove a corporate program to pay coffee producers a premium beyond the going rate. He's also behind another initiative that helps farmers through a combination of technical support and micro-finance loans.

The bottom line is that, whether Activist, Entrepreneur, or Innovator, we can choose—or create—a role that works for us. This book tells the stories of the first wave of New Radicals: you'll read about the work they are doing and how they have transformed themselves. And while this movement was launched by North American boomers, you'll discover that it embraces people of all ages and from every part of the world.

How did I choose which men and women to include? I looked first for imaginative, creative, and compassionate people. Some-

times, I chose them for their work (was it constructive?) and sometimes for their approaches (were they positive and hopeful?). And I made sure to include examples that range from profound, life-altering transformations (the wild end of the spectrum) to more modest roles that are within reach of everyone, with stories from a variety of sectors and from different corners of the globe.

How did I find them? The first came from my own network. Others found me as word of what I was doing began to spread. And I discovered many of them through the media. (Now that you're aware of the New Radicals movement, don't be surprised if you start discovering examples in your favorite news source on a regular basis.) You won't have heard of most of these people, and that's just how they like it. The majority of New Radicals I interviewed began our conversation with the deeply humble question: "But why have you chosen me?" They wanted me—and you—to know instead about the work they are doing, the wonderful people they have come to know, and how each of us can make a difference.

The question I hear most often from people like you is, "How can I become a New Radical?" It was immediately clear to me that New Radicals have different motivations, take different journeys, and reach different destinations. But, as I spoke with them, a pattern began to emerge. I realized that they had asked themselves a similar series of questions: "What's going on inside me?" "What is it I have to offer the world?" "What might my new role be?" and "How am I going to get there from here?" Each chapter tackles one of the questions New Radicals ask and shares the answers that helped them move forward. In this New Radical manifesto, I outline how to join the movement that is sweeping the world.

If you're wondering whether (or hoping that) becoming a New Radical is easy, I have to break it to you: it's not. While some made quick, relatively stress-free transitions, for most people the process was long and difficult. They worked hard, took considerable risks, and often faced substantial hurdles. But the rewards were equally profound. Seeing firsthand the fruits of their labor comes at the top of everyone's list. They also spoke about a sense of personal renewal—a feeling of exhilaration that comes with learning new things and exploring unfamiliar terrain.

One unanticipated but nearly universal benefit: new friendships. Tony Leighton, a freelance business writer and wildly successful community activist, said it best: "I now have a group of friends with whom I've shared a deep experience. They say that in war conditions are lousy, but when it's over, you miss it. When you do this work, you meet people who've been in those trenches, and they're the ones you want to spend time with."

The most common age, by the way? Fifty. I decided to include everyone's age in this book and so, as a gesture when asking for this information, would offer my own first. "I'm 50," I'd say. "How old are you?" "I'm 50, too!" was a frequent reply. And many then mentally calculated the ages of others in their organization or circle, and 50 came up time and again. Perhaps the saying "don't trust anyone over 30" has evolved into the boomer-friendly "your new life begins at 50."

Here are some other numbers to contemplate. Just how large might this movement be? Let's take North American baby boomers as our starting point—leaving aside, just for a moment, New Radicals who are older and younger than this generation, as well as New Radicals from other countries. As I said, there are about

80 million in North America. Studies such as the Merrill Lynch New Retirement Survey show that as much as 75 percent of this generation intends to keep working. And of this group, more than 60 percent say they want to do good works now. A conservative estimate of the number of New Radicals-in-the-making? Thirty million.

Somehow, without conferring with one another, but guided by the same experiences and influences, New Radicals have collectively chosen a new occupation: saving the world. What will happen as this movement develops self-awareness and picks up speed? We are already seeing the difference individual New Radicals can make. It only makes sense that our collective and cumulative impact will be unprecedented. In the next few decades, we have a remarkable opportunity—as individual human beings and as an international family—to realize our full potential and, in doing so, to solve many of the problems that face us.

This chapter poses the first question: “Are you a New Radical?” By now you know enough about the New Radical profile and the kinds of things they are doing to answer the question. If you shouted “yes!” or even if you’re just a little bit curious, I invite you to read on. You’re embarking on a voyage that will certainly influence the way you see the world, and it may just change your life.

Chart Your Course

While reading this book—or when you’re ready to begin your own New Radical journey—you might find the check-ins and reflections beginning on page 223 helpful.