

# **Lessons for Individuals and Organizations Who Wish to Contribute to a More Peaceful and Inclusive World**

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Review of

John Marks (2024). *From Vision to Action: Remaking the World through Social Entrepreneurship*. New York: Columbia University Press.

## **Introduction**

*From Vision to Action* by John Marks provides unique practical tools and guidance for those involved in negotiation and conflict resolution. Individuals and organizations who wish to contribute to a more peaceful and inclusive world will benefit highly from the lessons offered in this book.

As the founder of Search for Common Ground, John Marks draws from extensive experience. His firsthand knowledge of peacebuilding and conflict resolution provides the book with a depth and credibility that lets it stand out in its field.

## **Key Takeaways**

### ***Understanding Differences and Acting on Commonalities:***

Marks emphasizes the importance of first understanding differences and then finding and acting on common ground. Social entrepreneurs, who aim to promote positive change, can benefit from this core strategy. By recognizing shared interests and values, they can overcome barriers and build bridges toward meaningful solutions.

### ***Adapting to Unexpected Outcomes:***

The book highlights the need for flexibility and adaptability. Marks shares real-life examples where initial plans did not go as expected, yet positive change was still achieved. For negotiators and conflict resolution practitioners, this is an important reminder to remain open-minded and responsive to changing circumstances.

### ***The Power of Persuasive Storytelling:***

Effective communication is crucial in negotiation and conflict resolution. Marks encourages negotiators to craft compelling narratives that resonate with different participants. By doing so, they can create a shared understanding and inspire action toward common goals.

### ***Incremental Transformation:***

Rather than relying on grand, revolutionary gestures, Marks advocates for incremental change. Small victories and gradual momentum can transform conflicts over time. Negotiation and conflict resolution are ongoing processes that require patience and persistence.

### ***Compelling Narratives and Real-Life Examples:***

Marks presents captivating narratives, from promoting cooperation between the CIA and the KGB to preventing genocide in Burundi. These stories demonstrate the effectiveness of negotiation and conflict resolution techniques in diverse contexts.

### ***Innovative Approaches:***

The book showcases innovative methods, such as using children's television to reduce ethnic tensions in Macedonia or creating a culture of mediation in Morocco. These examples highlight the versatility and adaptability of conflict resolution strategies.

### Analysis

Marks' writing style, together with his use of evidence and logic, are highly compelling. The book thoroughly succeeds in its purpose to inspire and enlighten individuals and organizations who wish to nurture positive change.

For the global organization called Human Dignity and Humiliation Studies, which I lead together with my colleagues, one of the most important confirmations I draw from this book is the one provided in Chapter 13, which is titled "Moving On." In this chapter, Marks introduces Allen Grossman, one of his oldest friends and a former chair of Search's board, as well as a professor at Harvard Business School, who has conceptualized two principal management styles. The first style is *management by rule*, meaning that employees of an organization are required to follow regulations and procedures defined by the organization. The second management style is *adaptive management*, which "calls for problem-solving and decision-making in response to exceptions, new information, and changed circumstances." (page 182)

Marks explains further:

All organizations must have rules, but I was usually much more interested in being adaptive than in following previously established plans and procedures. Although I lacked the vocabulary to describe my management style as adaptive during the years I headed Search, I was by nature an adaptive manager, as most social entrepreneurs are. I loved to improvise and break new ground, and I resisted being hemmed in by bureaucratic restrictions. A new problem or fact often triggered a revised way of proceeding. Agility and speed were important because the window of opportunity for effective action usually remained open for only a short period of time. (page 182)

### Evaluation

Through my work with issues related to dignity, I have learned that, indeed, too strict rules have the potential to undermine the dignity of all involved. Too strict rules turn people into cogs in cogwheels rather than treating them as fellow human beings of equal dignity, and this can have deeply humiliating effects. I thus highly recommend this book particularly to leaders tasked with organizational design. They will greatly benefit from this book.

### Conclusion

*From Vision to Action* by John Marks is a refreshing and highly important contribution to the field of negotiation and conflict resolution. All individuals and organizations who wish to contribute to a more peaceful and inclusive world, all social entrepreneurs who launch ventures aimed at promoting change in their community for the common good rather than for financial profit, will find invaluable support in this book. I very much resonate with anthropologist William Ury's recommendation of the book:

Hats off to John Marks who epitomizes what it means to be a social entrepreneur for peace. In this lively and lucid book, part manual, part memoir, Marks presents eleven savvy principles for success, illustrated with gripping stories from his pioneering work. May it inspire and inform a new generation of peace entrepreneurs!