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**The Pollyanna Principles**  
by Hildy Gottlieb  
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# The Pollyanna Principles

Reinventing  
“Nonprofit Organizations”  
to Create the Future  
of Our World

by  
Hildy Gottlieb

“The Twentieth Century will be chiefly remembered by future generations not as an era of political conflicts or technical inventions, but as an age in which human society dared to think of the welfare of the whole human race as a practical objective.”

*Arnold J. Toynbee*

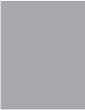
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## **Part 1**

# The Path So Far



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## **Chapter 1:** Future, Present and Past

We are creating the future, right now, with every action we take.

Today's reality is the result of thousands of actions and decisions and occurrences that happened in the unchangeable past.

We cannot change the past, and we cannot change the present. The present - this very moment - is gone the minute we take a breath in and out. That in-breath is in the past, and soon the out-breath will join it.

As organizations and as individuals, however, we can indeed change the future.

In my own life, I can change what will happen five minutes from now by taking a different route to the office, by writing a different word on this page.

I can create the future. We can all create the future.

And we are doing so, right now, whether we do so consciously or not.

The future I want to create:

A future where my home, this planet earth, is at peace. Where all peoples share this global home, perhaps first in an awkward truce, and then in true harmony.

A future where our planet is physically healthy, where rivers run clear and clean, where air is pure, where the animals that inhabit this planet (including we human animals) and the physical environment are living in balance.

A future where we value our collective potential and responsibility as much as we value our individual potential and responsibility. A future where the true meaning of humanity, in all its ability, is present.

The list runs on and on. It is not much different from the list of what most people want for the future of our planet, our country, our community, our family.

To those who say, "Get real," there is nothing more real than this:

We are creating the future, right now, with every decision we make, with every word we speak, with every action we take.

To date, as a global people, we have based our decisions on what we could see - what we knew from the past, and what we knew (and usually, what we did not like) about the present. We have made our decisions as if the only possible future was the one we could envision based on what we already know about the past and the present.

What if it were instead possible to create the future we want, for our kids, our grandkids, and their grandkids? What if our decisions and actions were all aimed at that future? What if we had tools and systems that helped us bring that future about?

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Assuming we can use today's actions and decisions to create the extraordinary future we all want for our communities, what will it take for the work of individuals and organizations to accomplish that?

First it will require that we understand the path that has led us to today - not just seeing the path for what it is, but also understanding the assumptions and expectations that created that path.

From there, creating a different future will require that we consciously create a different path - a path that will lead us to the future we want for ourselves and for generations to come.

That is what this book is about.

It is first about identifying the assumptions we have come to accept as "reality," to see how those assumptions have led to the systems we currently use to do community work. Before we can create effective systems change, we must understand those systems.

The book will then share a new set of assumptions and expectations, aligned behind the goal of creating a healthy, vibrant, humane world - The Pollyanna Principles.

And from there, the book will share practical systems built upon those principles, showing how a new set of assumptions and expectations can not only transform the path we have been walking, but can indeed create the future we want.

By changing the assumptions at the root of planning, program development, funding, governance, resource development and other systems, and by developing new systems to align behind the future we want to create for our world, we will be taking the first steps along that new path.

Simply by creating and using those new systems, we will begin consciously creating the future of our communities and our world.

## **Chapter 2:** The Path We've Trod

Our present was created by the multiple layers of our past - a past that includes yesterday, last year, and a millennium ago. The actions taken today by those who are working to improve our communities and our world are therefore based on assumptions and expectations we have inherited from that past.

If we are to consciously create a future that looks different from the path we have already trod, we need to be conscious about which twists and turns in the old path have created our present situation. Only then will we have any chance of creating a path better suited to our intentions.

In considering the occurrences and conditions that have led to the way community organizations commonly do their work - especially in the developed world - some of the most meaningful explanations appear at first to have little to do with that work. Yet, they are at the root of why these organizations that were supposed to change the world have not yet accomplished that goal.

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## The World that Created the Present

The continuum of history provides thousands of years to look back upon - the years that created the path we are currently walking.

In the earliest of those years, our survival relied on the natural resources surrounding us. Over time, we learned to enhance those resources. We developed agriculture. We developed tools and weapons, giving us control over not only our own natural resources, but over the resources of others.

We continued to evolve. We developed commerce. We developed religion. We developed charity, to help those who could not help themselves, or who were not as fortunate. Those who had more than plenty also developed systems for ensuring they would be entertained - the arts in their various forms.

These institutions have been around, in some form or another, for thousands of years. The world's civilizations are experienced at working inside those systems. We almost instinctively know what to do there.

These days, however, a significant percentage of the world's population does not worry about meeting the basic needs of food and shelter. From that very new reality comes another new reality: items formerly considered a luxury are now seen as simply a part of life - owning a television or a car.

One of those luxuries is the ability and desire to invest in the greater good of our communities, helping those who are less fortunate, supporting arts, science, education.

This is indeed a new reality. It was not the reality 100 years ago, and was barely so even 60 years ago. As historian Arnold Toynbee observed, the world has, for the first time, evolved to the point where we have the ability "to think of the welfare of the whole human race as a practical objective."

The continuum of time we are on - the path we have been walking from the dawn of civilization to today - includes thousands of years of conditioning, thousands of years of habits. The centuries have taught us how, as a global people, to take care of our own in order to survive. The centuries have taught us to govern to protect our countries against those who would cause us harm.

The centuries taught us to run businesses that provide goods and services for profit. The centuries taught us to run institutions of worship for spiritual comfort, and taught us to provide one-on-one charity to help improve individual lives. And the centuries have taught us that only those of considerable means had the luxury to partake in the arts.

All this history has created our cultural norms. It is that history that informs what we think is possible. When we look back over those thousands of years, working to enhance the welfare of the whole human race simply has no precedent, no deeply ingrained cultural norms to fall back on.

The work being done by Community Benefit Organizations<sup>1</sup> is brand new.

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1 We encourage using the term "Community Benefit Organization" over the more commonly used "nonprofit" or "nongovernmental organization, as it states precisely what organizations are expected to accomplish. For more detailed reasoning behind the term, see Chapter 11

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## Independence from Natural Forces

The path we are walking began when life was slow, when we relied upon the seasons for our survival, and we had to plan for that survival based on what the earth dictated.

For the past few centuries, however, our technologies have conquered the seasons. We no longer must rely on the earth's rhythms for our material needs to be met. Multiple generations have now grown up with the assumption that technology can provide whatever humankind might need or want.

That expectation has become another part of the history and culture that informs our view of the present and the future.

We can do anything, we can do it fast, and we have become impatient with any effort that fails to do so.

In 1961, when John F. Kennedy said he would put a man on the moon in ten years, the world was impressed with his audacity and his vision. The world was more impressed when it took not ten years, but eight.

These days, less than 50 years later, we think of eight or ten years as a ridiculously long time. We want a SHORT war, a FAST solution, a QUICK and SPEEDY economic recovery. In the words of Jim Morrison of The Doors, "We want the world, and we want it NOW!"

But we are still part of this planet. Our intentions and our technology cannot turn summer into winter, cannot make a human learn lessons any faster than he/she is going to learn them, or create immediate human understanding between long-term enemies.

Some changes, regardless of our intentions or our technology, simply take time. Because that goes directly counter to the accelerated expectations we have learned to see as "the norm," it is not unusual to hear the following when it comes to the work Community Benefit Organizations are trying to do:

“We can only fund what we can accomplish and measure quickly. We therefore have neither the luxury to consider, nor the dollars to implement programs for such long-term results. We must keep our focus on what we can accomplish and measure in the short term.”

Our colleague Joel J. Orosz, Distinguished Professor of Philanthropic Studies at Grand Valley State University’s Dorothy Johnson Center for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Leadership, speaks of the need for short-term immediate gratification.

“If we were to provide the typical one-year funding for a project to teach an infant to walk, after that year, we would measure our work, and we would declare the results marginal at best. The kid falls down. He can’t walk a straight line. The project had some success, but overall, we would likely not fund such work again. Does it matter that by the time he is sixteen, he is running marathons? Not when all we measure is the immediate effects, so we can move on to the next short-term project.”

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## The Culture of Can't

The path of our history is certainly filled with contradiction. We have thousands of years of training in what is not possible, and then hundreds of years of training that says, "We can have anything!"

Much of that contradiction relates to skepticism about anything we cannot see or feel. We know we can have material comforts because we can see them and use them.

But the intangible comforts - peace, compassion, joy - are another story entirely. If I do not already have the material comforts of a house or an ice cream cone, I still know they exist. But a global spirit of living together harmoniously? Our lack of experience with such a life tells us it is not likely to happen.

Our culture therefore believes that physical change is boundless - a Culture of Possibility. That same culture, however, reinforces that global spiritual / social change is impossible - a Culture of Can't.

The Culture of Can't is the culture that says, "get real!" It is the culture that gives the litany of seemingly reasonable reasons why something cannot be done. Coming as it does from the thousands of years of "reality" that have come before us, the Culture of Can't pervades our world view.

Logically, we know that much of what we assume to be impossible is merely unproven. Columbus proved the world was not flat. The Wright Brothers proved people could indeed fly. The Apollo missions proved we could not only go to the moon, but play golf there!

We know in our material world that what is unproven is not impossible. It is, in fact, where all our potential lies.

But we have not yet translated that to the world of the intangible.

We have direct experience with making payroll or feeding one person at a time.

We have no experience, however, with living joyfully in peace with everyone else on the planet. We have no experience with living in a community that is healthy in all ways - materially, intellectually, spiritually.

Because such a world is not part of our past or our present, we assume it will not be part of our future.

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## Visionaries and the Culture of Can't

Because we see a compassionate, healthy world as highly unlikely if not downright impossible, our culture and our history do not show much regard for those who assert the unwavering belief that such a condition is not only possible, but likely.

At best, we discount such individuals as unrealistic naive souls with their heads-in-the-clouds. Bleeding hearts. We mock them as Utopians who tilt at windmills. We call them Pollyannas.

At worst, we crucify them, assassinate them. (See Jesus. See Gandhi. See Martin Luther King.)

Mostly, though, we patronize and pacify them, and then get on with "dealing with reality" as defined by the path of our history. There has always been war, poverty, hatred, abuse. To imagine a world that is significantly different from that may be a nice dream, but it is not something we would waste time discussing as an attainable goal.

Knowing the best they can hope for is to be patronized or ridiculed, visionaries take one of two approaches. The strongest stand up for what they believe, fighting to build the world they envision.

Most of the rest, however, have learned that it is simply not culturally acceptable to talk about such things. This anti-visionary Culture of Can't affects the boards of Community Benefit Organizations every day.

"Yes, it would be nice if we could eliminate poverty. But let's get real. There will always be poor people, and we could go broke as an organization if we try to help everyone. Our job is to do what we can for those people who walk through our doors, and to make sure we can pay the bills. To consider anything else is simply unrealistic. And we can't waste our donors' dollars on 'unrealistic.'"

While the visionary tries to get the group to see BEYOND what is right in front of them - beyond the payroll and the rent, to lead the

group to what they can imagine - the Culture of Can't is the safe bet. The cause of creating an equitable society is considered the cause of the dreamer; the cause of providing a meal at a time to those of limited means is considered noble. The cause of creating true peace is considered childish; the cause of war, while admittedly painful, still far more "adult and realistic."

As a result, year after year, despite frustrations of visionary board members and visionary staff, leaders of Community Benefit Organizations create the future in the exact image of the past and present they so badly want to change.

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## Our Animal Nature

Consider the phrase “Human Nature.” Do we invoke that phrase when we are talking glowingly about our brethren? Hardly. We use the phrase to focus on our greed, our fear, our selfishness - all the things we dislike about being members of this species.

In reality, though, virtually every one of the traits we “chalk up to human nature” is not what distinguishes us as humans at all. Those “human nature” traits are those we share with many, if not most or all, of our animal brethren.

Animals other than humans steal, kill, cheat, and deceive. Animals other than humans are greedy, fearful, thinking of their own survival above all else. Animals compete, they are violent.

When animals feel threatened, their immediate choices are either to run away or to fight back. As humans, our history suggests one of those approaches evidences valor and courage, while the other is evidence of cowardice. But in truth, either of those reactions is one my dog might also show. If threatened, she might run away, or she might bare her teeth. No valor, no cowardice; just being a dog.

That is not human nature. That is our animal nature.<sup>1</sup>

Neuroscientists have found physiological / chemical sources for many of the reactions we have come to call “human nature.” The rush of adrenaline, the virtually immediate reactions that allow us to respond physically to danger without having to think about it first - those fight-or-flee response mechanisms are part of the physical composition of our species, the organs and chemicals that are our

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1 In addition to the “human nature” traits we would just as soon blame on the animal world, we have also inherited some terrific animal traits. Many animals aside from humans use language, express love, loyalty, compassion, sharing, a sense of family. While those traits may not exist in all animals, at least some animals other than humans exhibit many of our positive traits. That begs this question: When we anthropomorphize animal behavior, noting how human-like a particular behavior seems (and often punctuating those observations with a long “Awwww, how cute!”), were these traits in those other animals before they were in us? Are they acting like us, or do we act like them?

physical being. We do not have to learn that; it is in us from before the time we were born.

Our species' long history of the survival reactions we call "human nature," therefore, are not just cultural. They are physiologically and chemically hard-wired into our being from a time before we were even human. That means overriding those physical reactions - aiming at something beyond our fears - requires something special; it requires that we make a concerted effort to use logic, and to exercise free will.

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## Our Human Nature is Our Potential

If our “negative” traits are not what set us apart as humans, what exactly *is* our human nature? What do we have that other animals do not?

Our “humanity” is a bundle of traits that combine to create our unique potential. While some other species may exhibit one or more of these behaviors, there is no other species that has all this and then some.

- A sense that we are part of something bigger than just our own selves and our own families / tribes
- The ability to comprehend that each of us is one life among a vast whole of billions of people we cannot see, but whom we acknowledge and understand are there
- The capacity to consciously de-program our instincts and re-program new instincts - free will
- An almost tangible sense of connectedness to something we cannot see or touch
- The ability to imagine things that do not currently exist - to invent, to create something from nothing but our imaginations
- The ability to express all these more ethereal capacities through language, through art, through music, through various means that allow us to transmit to other humans that which one cannot touch / taste / smell / see / hear
- The ability to envision the future, to envision what is possible
- The capacity for self-awareness, to strive for self-betterment. The ability to be conscious that we are conscious!
- The combined capacity for empathy, compassion, logic and reason, imagination - and joy at experiencing any or all of those

The human part of our nature provides a choice beyond fight-or-flee - a choice my dog cannot make. My dog is incapable of facing her attacker and choosing to neither run nor fight back, but to instead engage. Sweet as she is, she cannot appeal to her attacker’s higher

faculties, to learn why he is attacking, and to try to find a better way.

That is the *human* part of our nature. That is what defines our humanity. Our *human* nature is all about our potential. Through that uniquely human nature, we have the power to create the future of our world.

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## **Chapter 3:** The Origins and Effects of “Nonprofit” Systems

Moving forward from the path of human history, we begin to see what has led to the path of the current systems in the “nonprofit” world. It has been a relatively short time - a matter of decades, not centuries - that the work once associated with churches and perhaps a few handfuls of private charities and community benefactors has become a multi-billion-dollar economic force with millions of employees and an even larger volunteer force. Just a few short decades ago, this massive force for community and global change did not exist.

Instead, as the quality of life in the developed world grew beyond survival needs, one by one, individuals and small groups who cared took action.

Had the “nonprofit sector” begun with intent, someone might have looked up and said, “Hey, we’ll need some tools to do X or Y - let’s craft those!” But, of course, what happened instead is that individuals used whatever tools were available.

Folks doing Community Benefit work did their best to adapt those systems to their own needs and goals. So what tools and systems has the path of our history led us to use? What were the origins of those systems and approaches? From those origins, what assumptions and expectations were built into those approaches, and what effect do those historic assumptions have on the work we are trying to do today?

A brief look at the two most common sources of the systems used within Community Benefit Organizations - Old-World Charity and the Business World - will help clarify the past that has led to our present. From there, it will help us see more clearly what the path ahead must be, as we look to create an extraordinary future.

## The Old-World Charitable Model

Charity has been around since there have been people who care about each other. There is not a holy book of any faith that does not mention charity in some form. The habits formed from this part of our history have been long-held indeed.

The origins of the current charitable model lie in several places. First and most obviously, there is religious charity. In addition, the current model stems from private philanthropy, which grew dramatically during the Industrial Revolution, when certain individuals gained enormous wealth and wanted to provide some of that wealth for the greater good.

Both religious charity and private philanthropy helped the less fortunate, and both have also traditionally been significant patrons / supporters of artistic and educational endeavors.

The assumptions in the Old-World Charitable Model hold true whether the work originates from religious or private philanthropy. Those assumptions include the following:

**Assumptions re: The Role of Assistance:** The Old-World Charitable Model assumes the role of assistance is to help one individual or one family at a time. Even in circumstances where many thousands of people are helped, they are helped one person or one family or (usually in crisis circumstances) one village at a time.

**Assumptions re: The Role of All-Knowing Benefactor:** Private philanthropy generated by the successes of the Industrial Revolution expanded upon another assumption of the Charitable Model - that the benefactor knows what is best for the party receiving the gift, choosing what to give and how to give that gift. Whether the benefactor was granting his/her gift to a direct-service organization who then provided service to individuals, or the benefactor was delivering that service him/herself, it has been assumed that the party doing the giving (whether that party is giving money or direct services) has wisdom and knowledge the recipient does

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not have. After all, if the recipient were as wise as the grantor, the recipient would be in the same position as that grantor; he/she would have wealth and power (or in the case of religious philanthropy, divine wisdom)!

**Assumptions re: Limited Resources:** The Charitable Model assumes there are only a few individuals and institutions with the financial wherewithal to assist those in need. This not only leads to the assumption that their own philanthropy is a scarce resource, but also reinforces the assumption that resources overall are scarce. This reinforces the social distance between the grantor and the recipient, between service provider and client. From there, the scarcity assumption reinforces a sense of dependency, as the many who need such resources clamber around those “few” who will share what they have.

From these assumptions, tools and approaches rooted in the Charitable Model will measure results against questions such as:

How many people will it help?

How much will it help them?

Are some recipients more deserving than others?

Are we being accountable to our benefactors’s wishes?

Is it better to help a lot of people with a little bit of help, or a few people more intensively?

How can we prove to our funders that our programs work?

Where can we find professional expertise to deliver our services?

How can we get our share of the scarce resources being offered?

What will we do when the money runs out?

## The Business Model

Over the past decade or more, “nonprofits” have overwhelmingly been encouraged to “run more like a business.”

As we look at the path of our human history, such emphasis is not surprising. While commerce has been part of that continuum since the early days of humanity, the industrial revolution brought to the fore a global emphasis on the making of money that has only strengthened with time.

Just as there are assumptions inherent in the approaches that come from the Old-World Charitable Model, there are assumptions and expectations inherent in the business approaches organizations are encouraged to use.

**Assumptions re: The Bottom Line:** The last line of a Profit & Loss statement shows whether a company has profits or losses - are they making or losing money? That literal “bottom line” is also the metaphorical bottom line in a business... profit.

Yes, there are businesses who care about the planet, about doing the right thing, about giving back. There are small, privately owned firms that make decisions based not only on profits, but on what is fair and just, sometimes to the detriment of profit. There are even the rare publicly held firms that make clear to their investors that they operate by a code of values that may place “doing the right thing” above profits.

But even for businesses with socially conscious investors, if the business is not making money, the investors will eventually find other places to invest. Profit is the bottom line.

**Assumptions re: Organizational Strength:** Planning for and ensuring that the business survives and thrives is imperative if there is to be an ongoing mechanism for generating profits.

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**Assumptions re: Market Demand:** In a business that relies on revenues to create profits, market demand is opportunity. Without demand, there are no sales, no profits. Marketing, advertising, and other promotional activities therefore exist to create demand, to ensure ongoing sales and profits. And the more demand, the better.

The purpose of a business is to create a customer.

*Peter Drucker*

**Assumptions re: Profit Centers:** If the goal of a business is to make money, then to make the very most money, every aspect of the company will generate a profit. “Profit Center” thinking assumes each effort of a company will pay for itself and make money.

**Assumptions re: Investors’ Short-term Focus:** Investors are a major source of capital for public corporations. The benchmark for investors used to be annual earnings. But just as the rest of life has sped up, the fast pace of the industrial age has become the “now” pace of the information age. Annual earnings have become quarterly earnings have become daily announcements on the Internet.

Investors may be patient for a little while as something is promised to develop. Some savvy investors actually seek out big-picture investments such as research and development or venture funds, that naturally take more time. But for the average investor, the most attractive project will be the one that consistently proves itself in the day-to-day of the short term.

**Assumptions re: Scarcity of Revenues and Investment**

**Resources:** Revenues (and the customers who provide them) are not believed to be limitless, but finite. Therefore, the only way one company can gain as much revenue / customers as possible is if others in that same industry gain fewer customers, less revenue. Indus-

try leaders work hard to be the #1 soft drink, the #1 selling car, or the #1 business automation system.

In addition to finite revenues and profits, it is also believed that investment resources are finite. If an investor invests heavily in one company, it is assumed she will have less to invest elsewhere.

**Assumptions re: Competition:** If revenues and profits are limited, and investment capital is limited, then logic tells us we must compete for those scarce resources, to ensure the business can survive and to ensure the profits will continue to roll in. Cola wars. Burger wars. Network TV wars. We are used to hearing such military terms when it comes to business, as we assume the aggressive, competitive stance of warfare is the only way to survive and thrive - to be #1.

From these assumptions, then, the systems rooted in the Business Model will measure results against questions such as these:

Will it bring in money?

Will it bring it in fast?

Will it generate more demand for our products?

Will it make our company strong, durable for the long haul?

Will it make investors move away from our competitors and instead invest with us?

Will it sell more product?

Will it leave our competition in the dust?

Will it result in profits both in the short term and the long run?

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## Chapter 4:

# The Present Created by Our Past

### The Results of Our Past

The past has created the present. What, then, has the path of our history meant for all these groups who have wanted to change their part of the world?

### The Path of Human History

As a planet, we have thousands of years of “that’s the way it’s always been,” with a long history of increasing ability to conquer our natural world. But because we have not seen such evolution on the social side, we believe the Culture of Can’t to be fact - that humans will always be greedy, selfish, competitive, violent; that that is simply human nature. Visionaries who try to lead us toward our potential, while revered after their deaths, are often treated with the opposite of such respect and honor while they are alive.

### The Result

As a result of the Culture of Can’t, community organizations do not aim their efforts at the vision of a compassionate, vibrant, resilient planet. Instead, we react to what is troubling us, rather than aiming to create something extraordinary. We seek to end what we do not like about today, rather than seeking to attain what we do want for tomorrow and the next tomorrow.

The greater danger for most of us lies not in setting our aim too high and falling short; but in setting our aim too low, and achieving our mark.

*Michelangelo*

## The Path of Old World Charity

Along the path of our history, Old-World Charity provided systems for helping one individual at a time. It assumed that scarce resources are provided by a relatively few benevolent parties of significant means, creating competitive systems for acquiring those scarce resources. Approaches developed under the Old-World Charity Model assume the people doing the helping are wiser than the person who needs the help - whether that recipient is an individual poor person, an artist in need of a stipend, or an organization asking for the dollars with which to serve others.

### The Result

Programs (from the arts to human services and everything in between) focus on helping one individual life at a time. Evidence of this one-at-a-time approach is apparent in the recent surge in “Blueprints to End” this or that, whose provisions include ensuring all food banks have enough supplies to feed all individuals in need (“ending” hunger), or that every individual homeless person would have a roof over his/her head (“ending” homelessness).

Such programs are typically developed by the staff of social change organizations, with little to no participation from the individuals who will avail themselves of the services, rooted in the assumption that the organization’s staff knows best. (In one case, a board member was incredulous at the suggestion that the staff ask community members about the issues that affect their community. “What if we ask them and they’re wrong?”)

Communities are seen as places of abundant need, with few who have the wherewithal to assist. That sense of need is confirmed by Needs Assessments that assume “need as reality” in their very line of questioning, and then, not surprisingly, find the need they are seeking.

From that sense of need, positive forces such as the arts are seen as a luxury for those of means. Arts groups work to re-

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focus their message and their work on the power of the arts to build upon the strengths of people otherwise seen as needy. Yet even the language of the arts continues to reflect a history of elitism, where a supporter is called a “patron,” with all the history that word implies.

Programs rooted in Old-World Charity are not funded upon a model of equal partnership between funder and grantee. They are funded by “benevolent benefactors,” leading to a sense among grantees that funders create hoops through which organizations reluctantly jump, to be able to compete with others who also wish to qualify for those scarce resources.

## The Path of Commerce

Business Model systems weigh decisions against a financial bottom line, with a strong focus on organizational strength. Systems built upon the Business Model see demand as opportunity. Such systems assume both resources and investors are scarce and that we must therefore compete for them.

### The Result

Results of the Business Model are seen primarily in an organization’s infrastructure, with a strong emphasis on organizational capacity and survival, and significant attention to a bottom line of financial viability. Decisions at such organizations often favor organizational and financial viability to the “bottom line” of community results.

Business-focused discussions often reflect “profit center” thinking, asking questions such as, “How long will that program take to pay for itself?” A program that does not pay for itself is often said to be “subsidized” (i.e. supported by general operating revenues). Regardless of its value to the community, a “subsidized” program in a business-focused organization is less likely to be supported than one that carries its own financial weight.

Under the Business Model, organizations lament the need to compete aggressively with others who want the same end results for their community, as they assume competition for scarce resources (funding, clients) is the only reality.

The Business Model has strong influence in organizational board rooms, where volunteer board members are often business people in their “real” lives. Boards spend considerable time addressing financial matters, as they are encouraged to hold themselves primarily accountable for the organization’s fiscal well-being.

Business assumptions influence “strategic” planning, with short-term goals and a strong emphasis on organizational capacity as the end goal of many such plans. As organizations examine opportunities and threats in a situational analysis, demand is an “opportunity” (despite the fact that increased demand for child abuse services may not be a good thing), while increased numbers of organizations addressing that demand is a “threat” (despite the fact that more people addressing that need may indeed be a good thing).

Organizations who are most adept at using business tools are often exalted with awards for “excellence” and a local reputation for being “the best” - the best fundraisers, the highest profile, the “best” boards (defined by the participation of powerful community leaders, many of whom enjoy raising money).

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## The Present as the Gateway to the Future

The work of Community Benefit groups is about nothing less than our humanity - the elements that combine to create the uniquely human potential that sets our species apart from all other animals.

No animal but a human animal can envision a future different from the present and the past. And no animal but a human animal can create a path to that healthy, vibrant, compassionate future.

Community Benefit work is about what it means to be fully human. It is why so many of us, knowing the rolled eyes we will get when we make those Pollyanna-like statements, make those statements anyway.

Humans have huge stores of untapped potential. That human potential is what Community Benefit work is all about.

If we assume it is a pipe dream to think our communities could be amazing places to live, we will have no expectations that our work could achieve such monumentally significant results. Those low expectations will inform our actions and decisions. They will inform the systems and tools we use and the way resources are provided for those efforts. From there, our work will have no chance of achieving the visionary result of building resilient, vibrant, compassionate, healthy communities.

What if the systems most commonly used by Community Benefit Organizations helped us reach for and accomplish that uniquely human potential?

What if the most commonly used tools provided practical means for accomplishing visionary ends?

What if the tools we used were rooted *not* in the expectations and assumptions of what is not possible, but the expectation and assumption of what *is* possible?

## Changing the Work that will Change the World

The definition of insanity, as the saying goes, is doing the same thing over and over, within the same conditions and in the same way, and expecting different results.

The path we have been walking has led us to the point where we are ready, as a species, to do what Arnold Toynbee suggests in the opening quote to this book: “To think of the welfare of the whole human race as a practical objective.”

We humans can indeed change the world. Such change is possible, simply because it is not *impossible*. We can create whatever future we can imagine.

Creating such change is at the heart of what Community Benefit Organizations are all about.

To accomplish such change, the work of those groups must be defined not by those who believe such dreams are utopian fantasies, but by those who believe that aiming at creating a healthy, compassionate, vibrant, resilient future is the ***only realistic, practical and effective context for doing our work.***

To accomplish such change, Community Benefit Organizations will need to transform the way they do their own work, to ensure their means are not working at cross-purposes with the end goal. That will require more than a piecemeal change here or there. It will instead require true, systemic transformation. Clearly, no one party to this work can make this happen on its own.

In the words of a funder we met in Grand Rapids, Michigan, “If we are going to aim our work at creating extraordinary communities, we are all going to be uncomfortable for a while. We all need to decide whether those results are worth stepping outside the comfort zone.”

That is what the rest of this book is about.

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## What's Next?

The path from here is ours to create.

In the first part of this book, we have disassembled the work Community Benefit Organizations are currently engaged in, to determine what has brought those groups to the way they do their work today.

From here, we will reassemble that work in the image of the future we want to create.

First, if our historic assumptions and expectations have not led to the sorts of change we want to create, we must identify sets of assumptions and expectations that would create such change - The Pollyanna Principles.

With those changed expectations guiding us, we must replace the tools, systems, and approaches that have not created the results we want, with tools, systems, and approaches that are aimed at those results.

And then, quite simply, we need to get to work.

