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THE ANSWER TO HOW IS YES



The Answer To How Is Yes

March 2007

Sneak Peek

This book is about exchanging what we know how to do for what means most to us. It shows how our obsession with tools and techniques actually prevents us from doing things we believe in. It confronts our passivity and argues for a life in which we choose accountability and demand more compelling purpose from our work. It identifies what is required of us to not only know what matters but to act on

that knowledge. The book also raises the question What are we waiting for? If we are waiting for more knowledge, more skills, more support from the world around us, we are waiting too long. It shows the importance of personal purpose and meaning and the dangers to ourselves and our world of the instrumental world to which we are subjecting ourselves.



Special points of interest:

“Choosing to act on “what matters” is the choice to live a passionate existence, which is anything but controlled and predictable.”

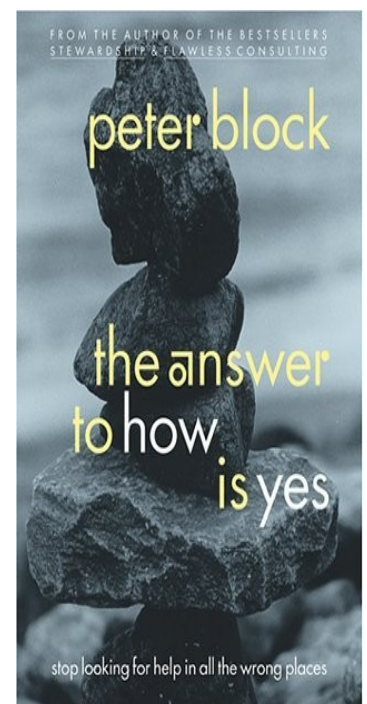
“Real commitment is a choice I make regardless of what is offered in return”.

“My freedom is expressed by my commitments and not by my bargained agreements.”

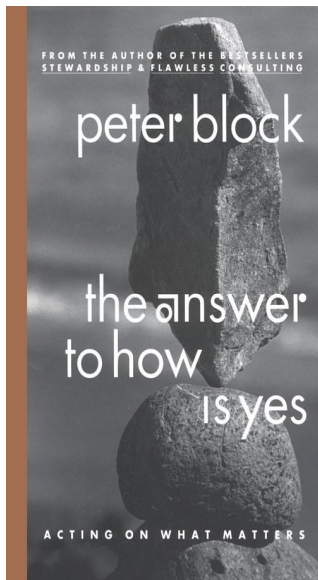
Personal Challenge

If you're searching for the courage to swim against the stream, the reading will nourish your soul; you'll also learn why the battle is ultimately without end. The message

should resonate in a society where the concept of individual rights has run amok. Extreme caution: Individual freedom may cost you more than you're willing to pay.



The Answer To How Is Yes



~One hundred word summary

This book is about what it takes to live a life in pursuit of what matters. By raising awareness of the trade-offs we make for the sake of work and practicality, Peter Block offers hope for those who want more of what matters in life from the workplace, like idealism, intimacy, depth and engagement. The book

confronts the role of leaders and managers and redefines the purpose of work. It is a useful guide to take what is of personal value into an indifferent and often hostile corporate and cultural world. Block offers a new way of thinking about our actions that helps free us from being controlled by

the bombardment of messages about how we should live and act. He inspires us to say yes to our ideals and aspirations.

~ Two hundred word critique

What is useful: According to Peter Block, people keep asking "how?" as a defense against living their life. Asking how focuses on all the obstacles, while saying yes focuses on the goal one wants to achieve. It's not that asking how is

necessarily wrong, it's just that over-focusing on questions like "How long will it take", can foster a state of mind in which no change is possible. These questions assume that no project can be started unless we know all the answers in

advance. But once we know what we want we must get started and we can make up the "How?" as we go along.

Caution: Since this book flies in the face of values such as efficiency and conformity of our current instrumental



Culture experience resistance to the ideas presented in this book. For example when things are not working we tend to go at the solutions with a greater zeal and speed, while Block's recommendation is to slow

down and go deeper. The book is about a fundamental shift in our thinking asking us to not succumb to the current culture and seek true purpose in life. The implementation of the ideas will be difficult in practi-

cal work settings unless one is truly committed to an believes in what this book offers, because applying most of what is recommended in this book will be viewed with skepticism and even some contempt.

The Answer To How Is Yes

Introduction

People often avoid the question of whether something is worth doing by going straight to the question "How do we do it?"

This book picks up where the author's book "Stewardship" had left off in 1993. How? is a symbol of our caution and reinforces the belief

that, no matter what the question, there is an answer out there that is needed to make the difference.

The author's premise is that we (enforced by our current culture), have yielded too easily to what is doable and practical and popular. In the process we have sacri-

ficed the pursuit of what is in our hearts.

The author suggests that we can look at **what is worth doing** at many different levels:

As an individual: whether I can be myself and do what I want and still make a living.

For an organization: whose sake does this organization exist and does it exist for any larger purpose than to survive and be economically successful?

As a society: have we replaced a sense of community and civic engage-

ment for economic well-being and the pursuit of our private ambition?

It would force us to engage in conversations about why we do what we do, as individuals and as institutions. It would create the space for

longer discussions about purpose, about what is worth doing. It would refocus our attention on deciding what is the right question, rather than what is the right answer. It would also force us to act as if we already knew how-we just have to

figure out what is worth doing. It would give priority to aim over speed. We might put aside our wish for safety and instead view our life as a purpose-filled experiment whose intention is more for learning than

for achieving and more for relationship than for power, speed, or efficiency.

"This might elevate the state of not knowing to being an acceptable condition of our existence

rather than a problem to be solved, and we might realize that real service and contribution come more from the choice of a worthy destination than from limiting ourselves to engaging in what we know will work."



"Choosing to act on "what matters" is the choice to live a passionate existence, which is anything but controlled and predictable."

The Answer To How Is Yes



“The question declares that we, as a culture, and I, as a human being, are fundamentally about getting things done.”



In the face of the struggle to know what matters to us, and to act on it, we have to be gentle with ourselves. Our culture seems to value what works (i.e. practical, concrete and measurable) more than it values what matters (i.e. our capacity to dream, to reclaim our freedom, to be idealistic, and to give our

The book is not really an argument against the question How? Rather it is an argument that there are more important questions, and How? should be asked later rather than sooner. Each time we try to act on an answer to the question How?, we

Although risky, it needs to be pursued to transform the institutions and culture into a fuller expression of our own desires. We have the potential to reclaim and experience our freedom and put our helplessness

lives to those things which are vague, hard to measure, and invisible).

How focusing too quickly and exclusively on what works can have the effect of distracting us from our deeper purpose and sense of fully living the life we have in mind.

will fail because, first, the question wasn't the right question, and second, the answer comes out of someone else's experience, not our own. It is difficult to live another's answer, regardless of the amount of goodwill with which it is

behind us. We have the capacity to experience an intimate connection with other people and with all we come in contact with, rather than feeling that we exist in relationships born of barter and instrumentality. We also have

By focusing on How? And asking this question too quickly, we are focusing on the process and tools and run the risk of defining ourselves by the question, “what works?”. Also, in our search for tools, we become what we seek: a tool. We reduce ourselves to being primarily pragmatic and utilitarian.

offered. The appeal of the question How? is in its expression of our wish for control and predictability. If this is indeed the case, then we may have to sacrifice these to pursue what matters.

the capacity and maturity to live a life of service and engagement, rather than the primary pursuit of entitlement and interests that focus on ourselves.

The Answer To How Is Yes

The obsession with ‘How?’ has profound and far-reaching implications into the domain of the quality of our own experience and of our institutions and our communities.

The primary concern here is the world that we create collectively, for when we commit to

bringing our deepest selves to the table, we are transformed by the act of creating something together that we cannot create alone. Therefore any discussion of acting on what matters has to include a discussion of our organizations and our communities. It is in these settings where we will find out who we are.

If we can create alternative ways of being when we are organized for a purpose, this will impact the way we manage ourselves in all other aspects of our lives.

Each of us has developed a model of what will make for a better world, or at least a better organization.

These models have all been popular in recent years and are all true. What does matter is the way that we pursue any of these models. Living our values in the pursuit of our preferred organizational model is what matters most.

The challenge of values is not to negotiate the importance of one over another, but to act on them.

Part 1: The Question

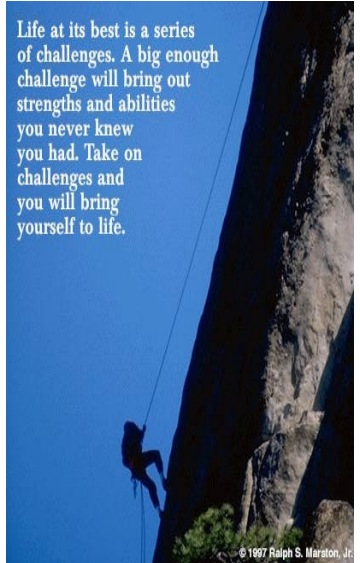
This is about the importance of getting the question right. A major obstacle to acting on what matters is asking questions of methodology too quickly. Although How? questions are valid, it is when they define the de-

bate that we are deflected from considering our deeper value. Further, asking How? is a favorite defense against taking action.

Simply knowing what matters is NOT enough

and just holding on to the dreams will NOT make them come true. What is needed is a profoundly different way of seeing and acting on the possibilities.

Getting the question right is the first step.



The Answer To How Is Yes

1. How Is the Wrong Question



Although there is value in each management “style/ goal / principle”, the fact that these they eventually “go” is evidence of flaws. The problem is not the variety of answers we get to our management problems—the real problem is the questions being asked. Spe-

cifically, we too quickly ask “how” questions. How do you do it? How much will it cost? How long will it take? How are we going to get those people to change? How do we measure it? How have other people done it? The questions are all valid at one level,

but we frequently jump to these questions as an excuse to not take action. We focus our attention on what works (what might work, what won’t work), when we should start by asking about what matters.

“The value of another’s experience is give us hope, not to tell us how or whether to proceed?”



2. Yes Is the Right Question

You get at what matters by asking what he calls “yes” questions. Why are we doing this in the first place? What commitment am I willing to make? What is the price I am willing to pay? What is my contribution to the problem I am con-

cerned with? What do we want to create together? Answering these questions first will help us to ask our “how” questions more strategically. Starting from a place of clarity, commitment, and personal responsibility will get you

where you want to go more effectively and efficiently. In this section, the how questions are translated into yes questions. “What will matter most to us, upon deeper reflection, is the quality of experience we create in the world.”

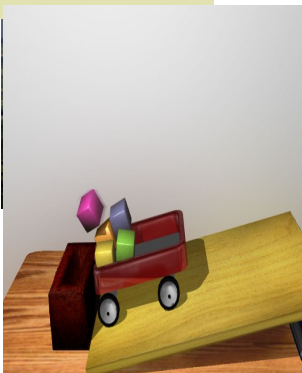
3. Defenses Against Acting

Acting upon what matters and what we value means that we have to accept that we are free and therefore responsible for our actions and their consequences, regardless of our environment and its messages. We use

many defenses against our freedom including, a) paying attention to people in power, and b) looking for more information to gain a better understanding. **The How? questions become suspect when no**

answer will satisfy. “As long as we wish for safety, we will have difficulty pursuing what matters?”

“If we can not say no, our yes means nothing.”



The Answer To How Is Yes

Part 2: Three Qualities

This is about the three aspects of the human condition that support our pursuit of what matters: idealism, intimacy, and depth. These are pre-conditions for acting on our values, intentions, desires. They represent a shift in our mindset and are the groundwork from which action is possible.

“The underlying themes here are the power of the culture and the choice to reclaim our idealism in a materialistic environment, to reestablish an intimacy with what surrounds us, and to find depth in a world that is happy with a quick makeover”

4. Recapturing The Idealism of Youth

Idealism – a state of innocence- has the potential to bring together our larger purpose with our day to day doing and is required to reclaim our freedom. In our current culture, idealism is often considered a sign of immaturity, People act in

self interest, “what’s in it for me” and expect a payoff. “**Real commitment is a choice I make regardless of what is offered in return**”. Our economic model affirms instrumental relationships held together by what is exchanged. This

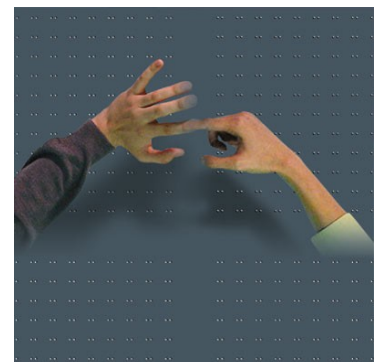
barter mindset treats every act as if it were driven by the exchange value. Once we stop thinking in terms of barter, we are ready to experience the freedom again.



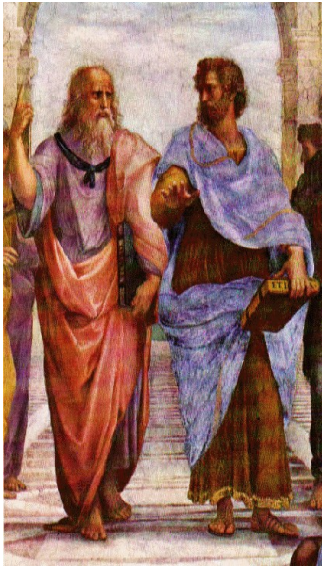
5. Sustaining The Touch of Intimacy

Intimacy is about the quality of contact we make. It involves direct over electronic contact, immersion into the world of feelings and vulnerability – traits that are considered liabilities in modern organizations.

Sustaining intimacy in an increasingly progressive instrumental world is challenging since organizations tend to rely on consistency and reducing variation while intimacy is about variation and surprise.



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6. Enduring The Depth of Philosophy

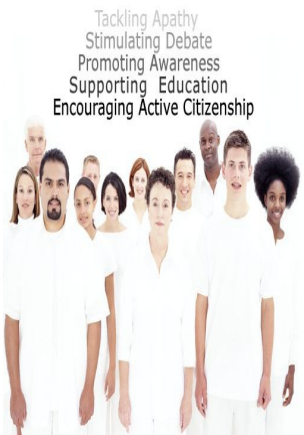
We need to value inward journey and spend time on reflecting on what we care about, since without it there is practically no chance of authentic change. The time required for thinking and understanding is considered a liability in our culture. There is always time to do what really matters.

“If we do not have time for something, it is a sign that it does not matter”.

Part 3: The Requirements

Since our culture is not organized to support idealistic, intimate, and deeper desires (but to reinforce instrumental behavior), understanding the nature of the culture will give us some choice over it. This section is about acting on what

matters at the workplace. It broadens the perspective from what matters to an individual (i.e. me) to more collective concerns (i.e. us).



7. Claiming Full Citizenship

The struggle for freedom does not get any easier as you move the ladder of hierarchy in the organizations, everyone struggles to find their voice, purpose and value. Once we decide to be citizens at workplace,

we become the cause and not the effect of our environment. Bringing the idealism into the consciousness of an adult involves; a) articulating our intentions and dreams, b) trusting our own eyes and intuition,

c) becoming the subject (and not the object), d) searching for intimacy, e) choosing activism and f) expecting our values to be embodied in all that we do.

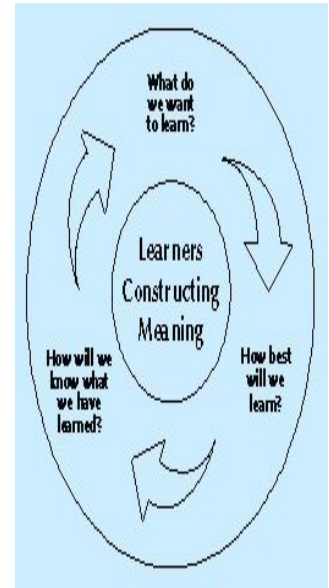
The Answer To How Is Yes

8. Home School Yourself

Humanities, in this book, refers to education committed to developing the whole person instead of just the working person. The ideas needed today are in the fields of arts, drama, literature, religion and political theory. The objective of the prescribed home school curriculum is to act on what matters and its goals are:

- 1) hold on to set of personal ideals,
- 2) accept that one is free, a good standing citizen,
- 3) become intimate with what one comes in contact with,
- 4) when in doubt choose to go deeper rather than faster and
- 5) make the world better through activism and engagement. This chap-

ter has a suggested reading list of books on humanities.

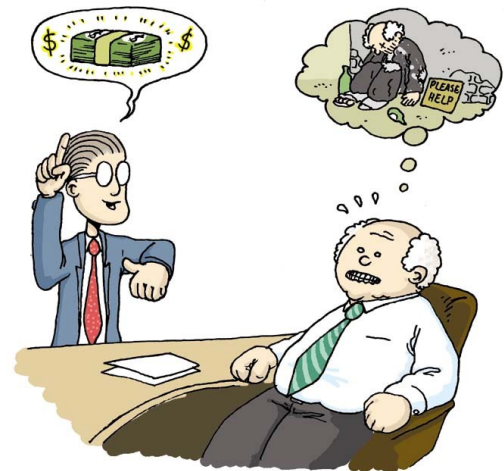


9. Your Boss Doesn't Have What You Want

Dependency is at the root of our relationships with our leaders and bosses. We affirm our own freedom and commitment to an institution when we look past the behavior of a boss and respond to their intent. There is no such thing as

a reality based optimism or pessimism, it is simply a projection of our own vitality.

“Most people in organizations are afraid of their boss”.



10. Oh, By the Way...You Have to Give Up Your Ambition

To pursue what matters may seem to have a high price, but consider the price of choosing safety, i.e. membership, economic security and a good life. It includes unquestioned loyalty to our organization's goals and

cultures, respect for leadership, a belief that technology, speed and efficiency are the keys to prosperity and trust that the cream will rise to the top if we remain patient. Ambition means seeking recognition from our in-

stitutions and their leaders and it tends to imprison us; we trade ambition for choices about what matters.

...contd....



The Answer To How Is Yes

“My freedom is expressed by my commitments and not by my bargained agreements.”

10 contd.. Giving up ambition

Three questions asked repeatedly will lead us closer to living and experiencing our deepest values.

These questions are;

- 1) “If I got what I want, what would it give me?,
- 2) Is it something that I really want? And

- 3) Would I take it right now?

interfere with genuine change.

A word of caution here, ambition can sneak back quietly just when you begin to experience freedom.

The trick here is not to start claiming credit for the changes since thee



11. Care for the Whole (Whether It Deserves It or Not)

Once we know our intentions and values and what matters to us, the next question then is what are we willing to commit to? Committing to something higher than yourself and with an expectation of no return leads to a fundamental

shift inside ourselves; the answer to barter is generosity.

Committing to a larger place (e.g. an entire organization) rather than simply a narrowly defined work-unit and taking responsibility for its

health, even though we do not control it, helps align individual and institutional purpose. The leaders will listen to us if we find our voice. It also puts a subtle pressure on others to do the same.

Part 4: Social Architecture

This section is about the challenges we face when we want to act on what matters in the collective and institutional arena. There is an in-depth exploration of the instrumentality of the culture, and the archetypes of

engineer, economist, artist, and architect. Our current workplace is dominated by the engineer and economist mindsets and an absence of the artist mindset. The mindset and role of the social architect is a way

of integrating the gifts of the other three mindsets, i.e. acting on what matters in concert with those around us.

The Answer To How Is Yes

12. The Instrumental Imperative

Modern culture's default mode of "how-to" pragmatism has turned us into instruments of efficiency and commerce. But we are doing more and more about things that mean less and less. We constantly ask how? but rarely why? We use how as a defense-instead of acting on what we know to be of impor-

tance. We are gaining the world and losing our souls. At some point in time, either we our children will need to escape from what we are creating since it is not consistent with our deeper selves.

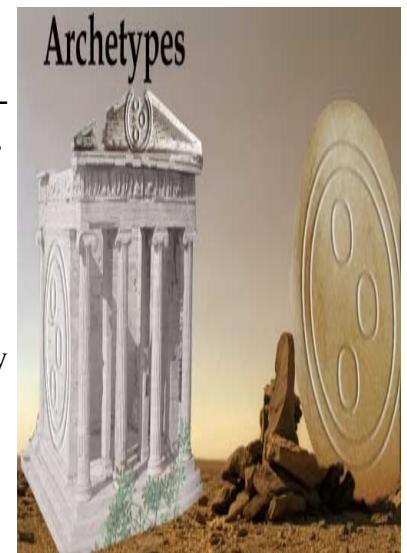


13. The Archetypes of Instrumentality and Desire

If the "yes" questions are more powerful, why do we stay focused on how? The explanation starts with four archetypes that guide how we run our organizations. An archetype is an inherited way of thinking. The dominant archetypes in organizational management are the Engineer and the

Economist. They represent the "how" way of doing things. Engineering is about problems and methodologies to solve them. The Economist's way is about cost-benefit analysis and an emphasis on growth and efficiency. They emphasize control, predictability,

measurement, and incentives. On the other hand, the Artist is about being creative and emotional and viewing commerce and power with suspicion and skepticism. This archetype is usually actively resisted in organizations.



14. The Role of the Social Architect

The Architect cares about both beauty and practicality; i.e. form and function. The Architect balances the needs and wishes of the client with his or her own aesthetic values, as well as the professional standards

and laws of physics that limit her or his work. This archetype integrates the previous three, thus resolving their unending battle.



The Answer To How Is Yes

“Problems that count need to be respected before they will reveal themselves to us”.

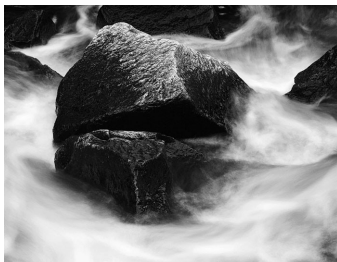
Social Architect role contd....

In organizations, this translates into the role of the “Social Architect.” It is a role for both the leader and the employee, and it changes the way everyone approaches the work of the organization. It is a role where the “personal, intimate, and subjective qualities of the institution are valued along with the practical,

technical, and economic objectives.” It is one that creates more opportunities for open discussion of these issues. It is one that maintains the discipline of asking and answering the “yes” questions in addition to the “how” questions. The social architect is a person who helps all people discover the values and

vision that they hold collectively and then provides the space for collaborative and creative solutions and designs.

15. It's A Mystery to Me



The instrumental culture is primarily driven by our need for certainty. However, human affairs are essentially insolvable. Trying to apply “science” based formulaic solutions to human endeavors ignore this basic tenet. Lasting de-

velopment of human systems would, instead, require attention to questions such as, a) shifting the demand for right answers to the search for the right question, b) recognizing that struggle is the right solution, c) seeing the reality in the cur-

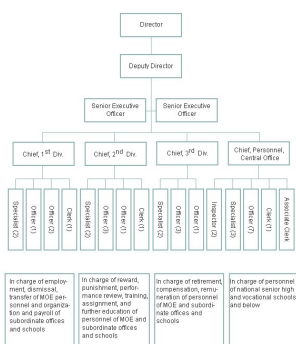
rent situation, d) grieving for the costs of what exists now, e) gaining control of the nature of the debate, f) treating the conversation as an action, g) raising the question of what do we want to create together.

Application to Educational Organizations

For most people applying this book’s lessons to the management of educational organizations will be difficult, because the book challenges extensively prevalent fundamental assumptions about culture- both so-

cial culture and work culture. For organizational leaders, it may mean empowering people at lower levels, taking the time to identify the right questions and altering communication styles. For employees it

may mean truly internalizing that their boss does not control their work life and that they can influence things. But mostly, it will provide a guidance and a compass and map for a very personal journey.



The Answer To How Is Yes

The management must stop the caretaking and confront people with their freedom, and employees must stop waiting for a better parent to arrive and take responsibility for creating the culture they desire. This book is about pushing responsibility down to each individual in the organization and what

that means practically to the individual. It teaches that we are powerful and play a critical role in creating our organization however we define that - whether it's self, family, business, government unit, or even society at large. We are challenged to accept that we alone write the script of our own story of existence,

experience, and meaning. The lessons in this book may well allow us to break that cycle, but only if we develop the courage first and foremost to be accountable for who we are.



In this book, Block shows that many standard solutions and improvement efforts, reinforced by most of the literature, keep people paralyzed. Here he places the "how to" craze in perspective and teaches individuals,

workers, and managers ways to act on what they know. This in turn allows them to reclaim their freedom and capacity to create the kind of world they want to live in. Block's "elements of choice" — the characteristic of a new workplace

and a new world based on more positive values — include self-mentoring, investing in relationships, accepting the unpredictability of life, and realizing that the individual prospers only when the community does.

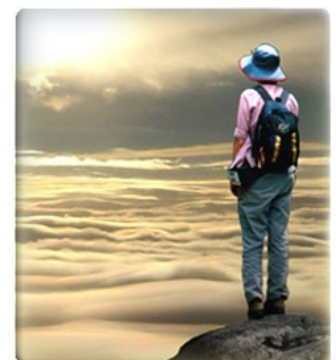


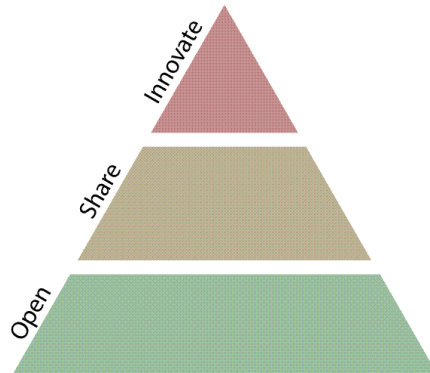
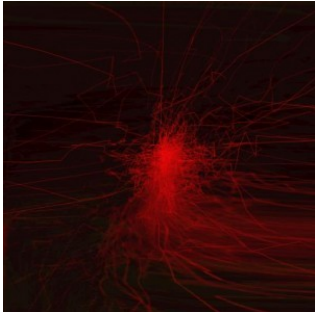
Why should you read this book?

One almost needs to read this book like sipping rare red wine. A lot of reflection and perhaps even meditation is involved in order to truly understand. It is very personal book and should you choose to

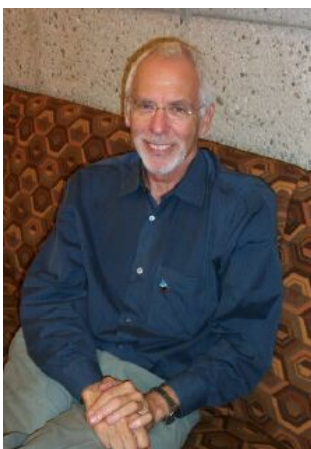
undertake this journey, you will need lots of time and patience. And be prepared to be uncomfortable as it will challenge you in all aspects of your life. The resistance to the ideas in this book can be reduced

by putting aside the assumptions of "how things are and work". It will be useful to try out some ideas initially to test "what matters". It is a journey of self-discovery.





About the author



Peter Block is an author whose work centers on ways to bring service and accountability to organizations and communities. He is the author of three best selling books: *Flawless Consulting: A Guide to Getting Your Expertise Used*, Second Edition (1999), *The Empowered Manager: Positive Political Skills at Work* (1987), and *Stewardship:*

Choosing Service Over Self-Interest (1993). His most recent book, *Flawless Consulting Fieldbook & Companion: A Guide to Understanding Your Expertise*, was released in November 2000. Block has joined with the Association for Quality and Participation to create *The School for Managing & Leading Change*. He is a partner in De-

signed Learning, a training company that offers consulting skills workshops. He has received several awards for outstanding contribution in the field of training and development.