Westley, Frances, Brenda Zimmerman, and Michael Quinn Patton. 2006. *Getting to Maybe: How the World is Changed***. Random House Canada.**

This book is about hope and features many stories of men and women who had an idea or a vision and set about to make the difference needed. What follows is a summary of the principles reflected from the stories—principles identified by the authors. To summarize the stories, which make up 90 percent of the book, would basically be to reproduce the book. If you need examples of people who have made an important difference in many areas of life and on many continents, buy the book.

"[Hope] is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out." Valclav Havel

Principles for Social Engagement

"Social innovators are explorers. To find their way, they have to stay tuned to the patterns around them, even as these patterns shift. Classic strategic models encourage people to think long and hard, gather all the data and then act, as if everything is logical and can be anticipated by careful planning. . . . But people . . . can develop the ability to stand still in the middle of the action, to tease out the pattern around them in order to understand deeply the dynamic they seek to change" (60).

Social innovators trust their intuition, their perception of problems, and they learn through action in relation to that intuition. They possess the rare quality of being able to wed action and reflection. "Deep reflection demands careful observation, not only of the details but also of their relationship to each other" (61).

"Successful social innovators are thoughtful actors and restless thinkers" (61).

"The need for *ongoing* reflection is shaped by the fact that in complex systems, no pattern stays in place for long and no intervention has a predictable result. The world is not acted upon, but rather interacts with us in often surprising ways. . . . A sense of timing is key: the instinctive feeling for when to move and when to stay still. The right timing is as much as given as it is created" (61).

"It's a common human reaction to view a forest fire, a plague of locusts or a bank collapse as an unmitigated disaster from which nothing happy can result. But Holling[1] argued that while disasters do destroy existing structures, they also *release* trapped resources and nutrients for new life. For instance, if all the water and nutrients in a region supported existing trees, burning down those trees released those nutrients to feed new growth.

Economist Joseph Schumpeter coined a term to describe this same idea in the 1940s: creative destruction. He noticed that healthy economies go through cycles of destruction that seemed to release innovation and creativity. The pattern Schumpeter saw in economies, Holling saw in ecosystems. In both natural and economic systems, after a phase of growth, followed by a

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[1] In the context of a description of the work of C.S. Holling who brought a multidisciplinary team of colleagues together to study the patterns in physical and social ecosystems. See pp. 65-67.

phase in which growth was conserved, there seemed to be the need for release/ Failure to release the creativity for the next phase created a rigidity to the system, which Holling described as the 'rigidity trap'" (67).

Change maybe inevitable but it is always difficult. It may mean "stopping doing something that we have done for years. . . . But the adaptive cycle tells us that unless we release resources of time, energy, money and skill locked up in our routines and our institutions on a regular basis, it is hard to create anything new or to look at things from a different perspective. Without those new perspectives, and the continuous infusion of novelty and innovation in our lives, our organizations and our systems, there is a slow but definite loss of resilience, and an increase in rigidity" (68). Note, in light of the current stress on seeking excellence, that an increase in excellence is almost always accompanied by an increase in rigidity.

"The phase after release, or creative destruction, is a time of reorganization. This is when new opportunities are sought and new connections made" (69. Organizations in this phase will often experience competition for resources and new growth seems to be springing up everywhere. However, Holling and his associates warn of a "poverty trap" – a circumstance that occurs "when none of the new ideas seem to take root or thrive. As exciting as the reorganization phase is, with its climate of exploration and promise of renewal, if the system is to be resilient, some death is required at this stage too. . . . some of the richness, some of the variety, must be let go, allowed to die in order to move to the next phase of the adaptive cycle: exploitation" (69-70).

In exploitation, the organization (or species) then moves its resources to making the new thing a reality. The last phase of the adaptive cycle described by Holling is conservation or maturity. Here the new growth has matured and now dominates the landscape—inevitably limiting the opportunity for new growth. Clearly, there is benefit in maturity; but there must also be to recognize of when release becomes necessary. "Resilience is about avoiding the traps—both of rigidity and poverty—that prevent the system from evolving" (71).

Developmental Evaluation

"Many forms of evaluation are the enemy of social innovation if applied at the wrong time or in the wrong way. But, serious social innovators want to make a difference and need some way to of determining whether what they are doing is actually working. The right kind of evaluation can be a powerful tool to help the social innovator stand still and take stock" (82).

"Most conventional evaluators insist that an effort cannot be judged without clear, measurable goals. . . . A road map specifying where you're going and how you'll know when you get there is essential, evaluators insist, for effective action and accountability. They are especially critical of grand schemes that vaguely envision systems change and transformation. But social innovators in complex systems learn to eschew clear, specific and measurable goals because clarity, specificity and measurability are limiting and can lead to tunnel vision. In contrast, when astute social innovators tackle an issue or a problem, they realize that they don't yet know enough to set specific goals or measurable targets; they also understand that different participants have different aims in the change process—and that those participants themselves should play a major role in goal setting" (83-84).

Developmental evaluation is essentially the process of looking back and ahead in order to gauge progress, lessons learned, and to determine what is working and what isn't. Empower those who habitually ask questions and suggest areas of inquiry. Bring together interdisciplinary teams to examine complex issues. Engage in "ongoing data collection and assessment to help policy makers adapt their decisions and implement their principles in the face of changed conditions" (87).

Information Sharing

Where agencies compete for resources, information hoarding is a ready temptation. "In the successful ant colony, each ant adds to the dirt pile" (158).

Skills common to social innovators include the capacity to see patterns, big picture thinking, and "knowing how to interpret information and convert it to knowledge you can use to move forward" (159).

Social Innovation Learning

"Harvesting the insights of social innovators can build knowledge about social innovation and effective philanthropy. But there are barriers embedded in traditional philanthropic practice to overcome. Many philanthropic funders say they value learning and want to know what works and doesn't work, then, in the next sentence, they reaffirm their bottom-line thinking about accountability: 'You (and we) will ultimately be judged by whether you attain your goals and achieve results.' This tension between learning and accountability is seldom, recognized, much less openly discussed. *Accountability messages trump learning messages every time.* As surely as night follows day, this attitude leads those receive funds to exaggerate results and hide failure—the antithesis of genuine reality testing and shared learning. Funders need to engage in their own thoughtful reality testing about the messages they're sending and the incentives (and distinctives) they're providing to learning. If a philanthropist asked us how to approach the evaluation of social innovation, we'd suggest the following: Support learning as a meaningful outcome—and reporting on learning as a form of authentic accountability" (182).

At the same time, experimentation is to be encouraged and learning about failed initiative pursued.

"Creating a civic culture in which people understand that things seldom work as expected, especially when trying to solve complex, intractable problems, would support a shift toward learning" (183).

"Support small 'safe-fail' initiatives to learn what works and doesn't work before implementing policy changes widely.
        The notion of 'safe-fail' emphasizes trying things out in a limited way, with lots of feedback and monitoring to learn what happens when an intervention is introduced. . . . This could be a small but important part of a [government] ministry's total budget" (183).

"Social innovation and transformation are the products of many forces. Overly harsh self-criticism and self-blame hinder rather than enhance learning" (185).

Discerning the Times

"Nothing is so powerful as an idea whose time has come. But how do we know when our efforts are truly in sync with the times? How does a leader recognize a tipping point? How do we know we are ready to move to the next level?" (212) The authors give several suggestions:

"Devote resources to identifying and tracking important trends. Make strategic analysis about the connections between local efforts and major trends a regular part of your work" (212).

"Bringing social innovators together to share and compare their observations at the ground level is also a way of identifying trends from the grassroots" (213).

"A practiced, ongoing, disciplined and serious process of trend analysis aimed at identifying emerging opportunities and detecting shifts in the landscape can inform both strategic decisions and more immediate tactics" (214)

"Make big-picture, strategic thinking an ongoing part of decision making, not something done only periodically in retreats" (214).

While celebration is given as an important activity, "Avoid falling prey to and being seduced by success" (214).

"Instead of cheerleading, cultivate the skills of rigorous pattern analysis and reality testing, which, far from dampening passion, can sharpen vision of the whetstone of mindfulness—paying attention t what is happening and figuring out what it means, becoming ever more adept at distinguishing signal from noise" (214).

"Help social innovators ask not only, Are we doing things right, but also, are we doing the right things" (214).

"The focus on increasing effectiveness frequently keeps leaders and evaluators from asking whether the specific program, initiative or strategy is the right thing to be pursuing in the current context" (215).

The authors challenge us to connect the past, with the present, with the immediate future and distant future. Doing this task well is an investment in the "lives of millions of people who could be touched and made better by what you do when you help hope and history rhyme" (215).