For my beautiful daughters Ivy and Violet.

This is a great world that will be made better by what you will do in it.
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To be a good teacher is to first be a good student. I can’t claim to be a good teacher, but I can say that over the years, I’ve tried to be a good student, a thirsty student and an appreciative student. And in that vein of appreciation, I’d like to thank just a few of my teachers. Yes it’s trite to say, but I hope forgivable because of its truth: There are just too many people to thank for the experiences that led to writing on a subject that I’ve had a deep passion for throughout my entire adult life.

Tom Wiese is a lifelong friend, my business partner, and one of the wisest people I’ve ever met. His sage guidance throughout this project has been immeasurably valuable. Tom also has a killer sense of humor and possesses a personality that exudes mirth and generosity. If alignment of dreams and visions undergirded by complete trust is the most important currency these days, then I have an extremely
wealthy relationship with my pal Tom. Journeying with you, my friend, is one of the greatest joys of my life.

As you’ll see, my professional path of being a civic designer began at Dayton Hudson and Target. I had an enormously satisfying career there, and I am gratified that I continue that relationship today. As is always the case, an institution is only as great as its people. And I can tell you that the place is rife with great talent and I have been graced by so many who have served as mentors, friends, and collaborators over the years. Susan Flack, who has served as Target’s outside government affairs counsel for decades, has been an important and valuable source of support over the years to me. We have traveled the world together and explored ideas throughout it all. She’s truly one of a kind.

Jim Hale, the company’s former General Counsel, gave me the overt permission to focus on community health from day one. Honestly, is that really what you would expect from a Fortune Fifty top tier corporate officer? From my perspective, you just can’t give a young and very inexperienced public affairs executive a better gift. And what is just as remarkable, is that gift was only extended by Tim Baer, who became Target’s General Counsel after Jim’s retirement. What Jim allowed me to plan and start, Tim became a critical backer of and the producer of what we were able to scale together. Both are true blue friends and two of the finest people I’ve ever known personally and professionally.

Jodee Kozlak is another former colleague of mine. As Target’s head of Human Resources, she has been the main architect of my career transition and words cannot adequately describe my appreciation for her friendship, counsel, and partnership. An incredibly exciting thinker, Jodee has been instrumental in creating new opportunities for me to push the envelope. She’s just one of the coolest people I’ve ever known. If you could ever ascribe the word “benefactors” to a professional path like mine, Jodee and Tim would fit that bill. Both are class acts with big brains and even bigger hearts. Their wisdom, continued support, and friendship are treasured, and I’m truly grateful for their faith in my efforts over the years.

Throughout my travels in the world of public affairs, my friend Doug Pinkham has been a constant and greatly valued thought partner. As President of the esteemed Public Affairs Council, Doug has been at the forefront of some of the most important global public policy conversations over the years. He treads with deep wisdom and a true concern for the public affairs profession and its impact on our communities. And the proof? Can you name another Washington DC-based trade association that can lay claim to memberships from Chevron to the Mayo Clinic? When it comes to operating at the highest public standard and asking the best from this influential community, Doug sets the bar and he does it with incredible wit, intelligence, and wisdom. There are few people whom I’d rather talk with in terms of what is, what should be, and how we’re going to get there.

Since leaving that terrific gig at Target, my work with Babson College has given me tremendous excitement. A quick word on Babson: From the time when folks first started creating rankings for entrepreneurial education, Babson’s been at the top of the heap, listed right there as number one. Always. And I believe that the reason for their recognized excellence is that this crowd believes that entrepreneurialism isn’t merely a business practice, but rather, it’s a problem-solving mind-set that can be taught and can apply anywhere when faced with an ambiguous, quickly changing environment — in other words, a world that looks a lot like today. My dear friend and even dearer soul mate, Cheryl Kiser, serves as the Executive Director of the Lewis Institute and the Social Innovation Lab at the school, and has graciously allowed me to play in her sandbox. I am quite certain that I’ve never met someone who is more connected to more interesting and impactful people than Cheryl. And I never have doubts as to why that is the case. To stand next to Cheryl is to be
next to a powerfully beating heart that spreads infectious optimism and purpose to actually do what your dreams tell you. I cherish every single moment with her.

Like Tom Wiese mentioned above, there is another couple of childhood friends whom I’d like to throw into this mix. Jim Sachs, on paper, is my ten-months older first cousin, but in reality, he’s my older brother. And there are birthday party photos going back to fourth grade with my friend Rich Paisner and me, although it wasn’t until the ripe old age of twelve when we really started getting into trouble together. Throughout the year, we have great conversations, but once a year, the three of us travel to the northern woods of Minnesota to take a “boys’ weekend” at the Sachs family cabin. Those weekends have been tremendously helpful in terms of testing out my thinking on a couple of wise and trusted friends. And I swear that it would have happened without many of those conversations fueled by fine Scotch. But it helped.

For many years, I have benefited from the partnership and friendship of Sean Kershaw, who leads what, unfortunately, is a rare organization in our country: a citizens’ led public policy think tank. The Citizens League is an amazing outfit that has benefited me personally and benefited my community over and over again. They’ve had some pretty terrific leaders over the years, but I’d be hard pressed to think of anyone better than Sean. He’s smart, he’s witty, he’s generous of mind and spirit, and I get to call him my friend.

Karen Antebi has grown into yet another trusted and dear friend, who always continues to impress me with her powerful and deep thinking. As Mexico’s Counselor for Economic Affairs based in Washington, DC, Karen became part of the landscape of my many trips to the nation’s capital throughout the years. In this new life of mine, those trips are not as plentiful, but our friendship has remained unabated. Full of wise perspective and overt intelligence with a passion for things that matter, Karen has honed and shaped so much of my thinking through our many wonderful conversations over the years. There are lots of colors that I could ascribe to Karen, but beige isn’t one of them. She’s a spark of bright colors that leave lasting impressions.

There are two people who helped me write this book, one mentioned on the cover, the other not. Kolina Cicero has been just the greatest sidekick I could hope for. She helps me scout for interesting things to think about, to design around, and to write about. Together, we produce my blog, and plenty of that work has ended up within these pages. And then, there’s Gene Rebeck. Gene is listed on the cover as the person who helped me produce the words you will read. And he did a fine job of that. I originally engaged him, knowing that I didn’t have the discipline nor would devote the time to write a book. But what happened turned out to be a much more important part of the “what” this book is all about. The real purpose of this work is to share some thoughts and start a conversation. Well, what better way to do that than produce a book out of a conversation? Gene has been so much more than a recorder, so much more than a scribe. It would be hard for me to adequately describe how enjoyable all those many conversations, give and take of ideas, and sharing of perspectives were. But I can describe to you that this book wouldn’t look nor feel nearly like it does had I not had the able partnership of my friend Gene.

And in that very same vein of outing me as the rookie author that I am, I want to thank my book design and editorial team. “Lost in the woods” would be a fair description of me without this incredibly talented trio. George Foster, award winning book cover designer extraordinaire, absolutely shocked me by how easily he and I fell into the same vibe about the subject matter of this book. Within two or three iterations, he nailed it with his artistry. My friends over at Spunk Design Machine, who are responsible for designing other elements such as the web site, then augmented George’s work in wonderful fashion. Together, they have produced an identity that
A number of years ago, I gave a speech with the pithy title: Uncivil Discourse and the Rise of the Outrage Industry. The premise was that we were living in an environment where we had actually begun to commoditize anger. People were selling it in packaged form, we were buying it by the hours, and it wasn’t good for us. At the end, I took some Q & A and a very good friend of mine named Ed Driscoll raised his hand and said exactly this: ”Nice speech. So, what?” Honestly ... from a friend! But what he was actually saying, and we had a good laugh about it right then and there by the way, was that now that we’re aware of the challenges of living in constant anger, what should we do about it? Well, Ed, it took about a half dozen years, but here’s your answer.
What if I told you that how we address the many challenges facing our communities is the biggest and most important challenge of all? In *Naked Civics*, I’m going to show you why that is the case. We are about to start a conversation on how to create a better community by thinking beyond our angry politics. In this book, you’ll not only learn about the tools that we have at our disposal, but you’ll see how they can be used to create new ways — new designs — to also make our communities more prosperous, and not just economically. You’ll also see how you can participate in this work and how you can find it inspiring — even fun. Yes ... I said it: fun. It’s time to start getting serious about fun and getting back into that engaging space. Because what personally inspires and motivates you to make things better is a critical element of getting beyond our current environment of anger, political polarity, doom, and despair.

In other words, this book is about how we can think creatively and collaboratively as we move into our future. And this, in turn, can help us overcome our toxic political climate. Yes, this is an optimistic vision of our common future. But I know from my own experience that it’s also a very practical one.

Ironically, my journey on this path, one that fills me with such optimism and even joy, started with a very nasty crime.

### A Murder

In May 1999, a repeatedly-convicted sex offender named Donald Blom was out on the streets of a small town in western Minnesota. He abducted, raped, and murdered a nineteen-year-old girl named Katie Poirier. It was a horrendous crime that shook that small community, indeed my entire home state of Minnesota, to the bone. Blom later confessed to the crime, and he is now behind bars for the rest of his life. That crime changed my life, too. From 1993 to 2010, I worked for Dayton-Hudson, now known as Target Corporation. Public policy and politics were the center of my professional attention, and when you work for a publicly-facing and community-oriented retailer like Target, you have permission to think about a whole host of issues that make a community prosperous enough to support you. It was a great gig with a great company.

In 1999, Jesse Ventura, Minnesota’s first and (so far) only governor belonging to the Independence Party, was wise enough to choose a very smart man, former county attorney and former state legislator Charlie Weaver, to serve as his Commissioner of Public Safety. During a conversation, I asked Charlie, who is also a longtime friend of mine, why Donald Blom had been out on the streets. Charlie’s answer shocked me: At that time, Minnesota had some eleven hundred-plus criminal justice jurisdictions, from the beat cop to the sentencing judge, and they didn’t share information very effectively. Some smaller cities were actually keeping fingerprints in shoeboxes. Put another way: There were plenty of cracks in the way our law enforcement system was designed for Blom to slip through.

“Target knows where every pair of socks is in its inventory,” I replied to Charlie. “Yet, Minnesota doesn’t know where all of its felons are.” That conversation marked the beginning of a partnership between Target, Charlie’s office, and a couple of Minnesota legislators, Democratic Senator Jane Ranum and Republican House member Rich Stanek. Together, they led the state in a bipartisan effort to create an information-sharing network called CriMNet. Today, we bemoan the lack of bipartisanship. Well, this was tripartisanship. And everyone worked well with each other. But even more importantly, the product that was created through the many partnerships that became CriMNet brought value to our community. It is a herculean task to integrate all the data points that make up a criminal justice system, and according the state’s Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (where CriMNet is housed), the state’s myriad of jurisdictions are much more coordinated and they remain on plan for further information sharing in the future.
A New Design

CriMNet wasn’t so much about passing new laws as it was an effort to realign existing efforts, manage information, and link them through technologies and practices similar to those Target uses to track its inventory. It wasn’t new thinking in and of itself, but existing thinking applied to a new situation. All Minnesotans owe Charlie, Jane, and Rich a debt of gratitude for the political courage that it took to do something that innovative.

The CriMNet experience also taught me that common-good outcomes aren’t the product of laws alone. The common good is a matter of creating a mix of technologies, institutional cooperation, and people who are willing to lead with new ways of thinking about our communities’ challenges. Over the years, my work at Target focused more and more on how to create public policy outcomes outside of the venue of a capitol and the production of legislation. Target continued to work on public safety issues, but our focus quickly blossomed into other types of opportunities where we found just by combining the right types of institutions and like-minded partners, our communities could work together much more productively than if we met solely in a legislative setting.

After nearly eighteen years at Target, I left what was a dream job to pursue another dream: a distinctive civic affairs practice. It had always been to my good fortune to be associated with Target, and my good fortune has been augmented greatly by having my corporate family join me along this path: Target remains an important and cherished part of my work. It’s a great outfit.

I’ve spent over twenty-five years at the intersection of big business, government, politics, media, public safety, philanthropy, academia, and non-governmental organizations. In that time, I’ve made some wonderful friends, and I’ve learned a lot about a variety of sectors. The people I’ve met are usually really good people, but too often their results don’t honor the good that they intend. And what I’ve learned most is that the challenges facing our communities are too complex for any one sector to do much on their own. These challenges require the efforts of many contributors focused on those things that we agree upon and the joint actions that move us forward. It takes a community coming together — not by accident, but by design.

A New Approach

I believe that it is time to change our thinking. And once we change our thinking, we can change the way we interact and produce designs that, not only serve ourselves individually, but serve the common good, too. In fact, as I’ll show you, we’ve been remarkably successful in doing that in the past. If we can look beyond the distracting political heat, we are actually doing quite a nice job of creating common good outcomes in a number of very important arenas. So many of the ways for creating better outcomes are right at our fingertips. Yes, our politics are angry and it seems as if “our voices” aren’t being heard in Congress and our state capitols. But, again, what if I told you that part of the problem lies in where we are focusing our attention?

In this book, you’ll learn about Angertainers and the Outrage Industry and how and why we’re being distracted from focusing on what is truly important. You’ll learn about the Naked Eight, those community imperatives that we almost never argue about. You’ll learn about an entire toolbox of assets that we have — assets that go beyond the tools of laws and politics. You’ll see how we’ve employed that broad variety of tools by creating habitat designs that truly
my practice. So, as you get further into the book, I’ll start describing some of my past examples. As you’d imagine, they’re not there to show you exactly how you’re going to become a designer alongside me, but to demonstrate how I tackled some of these challenges as well as some of the incredible people I’ve had the pleasure of partnering with.

**Let’s Get Designing!**

This book doesn’t purport to have all the answers to all of our societal ills. It’s aimed at giving us a perspective, so that we can ask more intelligent questions. Why can’t we:

- **Gather** differently in order to
- **Think** differently in order to
- **Design** differently in order to
- **Buy** differently so we can
- **Prosper** together?

We live in amazing times. Yes, our challenges are great. But we’ve never had so many different ways to address them. It’s time to stop warring over our politics. It’s time to strip ourselves down to the essential elements of what we all agree is important and start designing from there. *Naked Civics* isn’t just outside-the-box thinking. It’s deny-the-box-is-there thinking.
YOU KNOW THAT SENSATION WE’VE all experienced these past few years — the one that blinds us with its speed, dishevels our thinking about what we thought we knew, and fills us with daily angst? It’s as though the lights had suddenly been flicked on in a dark room. We can see, but we can’t focus. I call it Sudden Illumination Syndrome.

Actually, it’s been happening for years, as a building tsunami of digital media has engulfed our lives. But in the past few years, Sudden Illumination Syndrome has intensified. Think of it: All that content, those millions and millions of data points — not just from network TV, newspapers, and magazines, but millions upon millions of blogs, websites, tweets, Facebook, Wikipedia, YouTube, cable television, and talk radio. All this has become very familiar to us. Yet, paradoxically, it’s also strange and confusing. All this illumination, rather
than enlightening us, has thrown us off balance. We’re awfully confused right now.

Digital technology has truly brought us into the age of mass multimodal media. Today, it’s not just CNN, NBC, FOX, and NPR — we have become part of the media as we tweet, Facebook, Google+, and email each other. And this media is powerful with a capital “P.” When you pass something on to someone you know, it oftentimes has more authenticity than you would assign to your local newspaper. And let’s face it honestly; too much of our news is nothing more than entertainment dressed up in a news suit. We’re awfully cynical right now.

And here’s another thing about media these days: Even though we have more access to more information than ever before, mostly we access more information that we already agree with. Combine that self-reinforcing media with decreasing physical interactions with people who think differently from us, and we come up with a heady stew of anonymous anger. It is not only easy to say, “What a stupid idea,” but it is comically easy to say, “What an idiot with a stupid idea!” These are things few of us would say to someone face to face — and today we don’t have to, except, of course, if you’re into those heated protests where people on different sides of an issue seem to enjoy egging each other on, shouting, and jabbing with their fingers. For too many of us, the instant gratification of rage provides a kind of rush or high, a sensation of superiority to a world that we in fact are alienated from. We’re awfully coarse right now.

Tied to that is a climate of overreaction that blurs the context and the truth of a situation. For example, Amber Alerts, however useful they may be in some abduction cases, (and indeed there have been wonderful outcomes because of it), have also given many of us a feeling that abductions of children by strangers are more common than they actually are. That feeling turns into action as we plan more and more play dates for our children, instead of letting our kids run around and explore their world, even as we lament that that kind of freedom was what we enjoyed when “We were their age.” In fact, my friends in law enforcement tell me that the rate of abductions is about where it’s always been for the past fifty years or so, and that in the vast majority of cases, it is an estranged parent who’s responsible for the abduction. It doesn’t matter because our uncritical awareness has convinced us that our kids are in immediate danger. What is rare has begun to seem common in this suddenly-illuminated world of ours. We’re awfully paranoid right now.

Sudden Illumination Syndrome also has exposed us to conspiracy theories that once were considered fringe phenomena. What used to be relegated to the pages of a tabloid is now considered legitimate news: The “birthers” and “truthers” are two of the best known, perhaps too well known. Nearly everyone has a megaphone in the land of Sudden Illumination, and it seems that everyone has his or her volume control knob set to loud. We’re awfully suspicious right now.

In short, Sudden Illumination Syndrome may throw out a lot of light, but in this case, the light is generating too much heat, too much anxiety, too much anger, and too much ill will. We feel that not only toward one another, we just don’t have much trust in any institutions whether they are our governments, our businesses, our schools, our hospitals, political parties, religions, or what is called in some circles “traditional” or “mainstream” media.

All this makes it sound as though Sudden Illumination Syndrome is a bad thing, doesn’t it? But in fact, we all know it also has had real benefits. For one thing, if you care to, we now have the ability to easily access more than one or two sources of information — something to which we were limited in a more centralized media age. But we have to take that step outside the gated compounds of our minds if we are to make sense of our new supercharged awareness.

We have to make a shift:

Conte(n)t → Conte(x)t
We have a hyper-abundance of the former, but we need to balance it with much more of the latter. Context is what makes sense of what Sudden Illumination Syndrome has illuminated. Without the deeper connections of context, content is simply entertainment or distraction. Content and distraction are words that reflect the fact that as citizens, we have let ourselves become spectators, cheering on our side and booing the opponents. Too many of us are looking at our communities and our governments — through screens, whether of our televisions, our smartphones, or our laptops.

So here’s another shift that we need to make:

**Spectator → Actor**

Digital media has allowed us to talk like never before. But we aren’t putting the same energy into listening. And that means, to me, thinking outside of ourselves and the groups we “identify” with. Simply talking — or shouting! — isn’t the same as real interconnection. Put another way: We have lost a sense of civility and the ability to actually deliberate issues. We don’t share ideas; instead, we defend our positions and tear the other side down. We don’t stop at questioning our opponents’ intelligence; it doesn’t seem to count unless we question their motives as well.

Even as the problems and challenges we face become larger and more complex, we’re finding it harder and harder to come together to face them. And thus, I’ll put it out there as such: Our first challenge facing us is how we face our challenges. If we don’t get better at that, there’s not much hope that we’ll get much done, either.

*We don’t stop at questioning our opponents’ intelligence; it doesn’t seem to count unless we question their motives as well.*

That’s one of the main points of this book. Sudden Illumination Syndrome has allowed polarization to dominate the way our communities and country function — or is malfunctioning, really. But here’s the thing: *It doesn’t have to be that way.* I profoundly believe that the vast majority of us don’t wish to live in such a toxically-polarized society. Rather than the current environment of cynicism and despair, we could actually live in happier and more prosperous communities and hand off a better world for our children and theirs. This is not merely wishful thinking. It’s been my practice, and for quite a few years, it’s been my experience. And it can be your experience, too.

If we are to get beyond the destructive fear and distrust that Sudden Illumination Syndrome has engendered, we need to get re-centered, rather than being pulled to the left or right, and we certainly need to get past the idea that “our side” has the market cornered on good ideas, good people, and good intentions.

One other key point I’ll be making in *Naked Civics* is: Our current challenges didn’t happen by accident. They are a product of our civic designs. The word “design” may make most of us think of endeavors like graphics and architecture. But design is really about the creation and use of tools. And as you’ll read, what we design aesthetically and digitally is just a part of what we can do as designers. We also can (re)design our communities.

The problem with many of our current civic designs is that they no longer work the way they were originally intended. We certainly can see that in our political system, where perpetuating conflict has become more important than actually making progress on the challenges we must confront.

But here’s the great thing: *Anything that has been designed can be redesigned.* Redesigning doesn’t always have to be as hard as pushing a law through Congress. But it does mean that more of us will have to get back to the idea of being citizens who are active in building a better community. That’s not to say that it will always be easy, but it will probably be easier than you initially imagine. And it will be
fulfilling — certainly more fulfilling than the toxicity that we currently breathe every day.

To be successful in this endeavor, we have to reclaim a great many things. One of them is the word *civics*. It sounds like an old-fashioned term, redolent of long afternoons in a public school classroom, tuning out a teacher droning on about the term lengths of elected officials. Enough of that! I’m taking the word back because it is a rich one. Civics is about how we live together, and how our lives interconnect. And it concerns active involvement and listening, rather than shaking our fists at phones, computer screens, and flat-screen TVs. Civics also requires *civility*, which means taking a deep breath before we react to a news item or Twitter post in order to think out our beliefs — and to see whether we have good reasons to believe them. Civics also requires that rather than cheer, boo, and otherwise grandstand, we actually empathize even with people who we “know” are “wrong.” So, toss out that picture of a boring classroom and replace it with ones that have kids running around your street playing tag, rocking concerts, vibrant downtowns, and lush parks full of greenery and peace, and what it takes to produce it all. That’s what the word civics means to me.

The toolbox for building the public good includes what you traditionally think of: government, laws, and regulations. We’ll always need these — I’m certainly not saying that we can or should do away with government or politics. Quite the contrary. But we do need other tools as well. And one of our main challenges currently is that we’re not very used to thinking of anything but government, laws, and regulations when it comes to producing the common good. That’s not only a limiting way for us to think, but it puts us squarely back into the angry environment of our current political landscape. Folks, it’s not the only place to have conversations about how we live and thrive next to each other. Seriously.

One final point: I don’t want to suggest that *Naked Civics* is a recipe book for a perfect world. Such a world can never exist. We’ll never all think the same way — and despite the polarization that Sudden Illumination Syndrome has caused, that’s actually a good thing. Disagreeing is incredibly important. Being disagreeable is another thing, and something that we could stand less of. This book doesn’t have all the answers. It’s intended to stimulate a conversation about public life — one that leads to different actions. Yes, I hope you’ll find what I say is worth listening to. As I mentioned in the introduction, I’ve worked in a great number of sectors and worked with a great variety of leaders over the past couple dozen years. And here’s the thing I’ve learned over and over: The person who really doesn’t care about our communities doing better is extremely rare. Almost
all of us want a fairly similar outcome. But we’re just stymied. We all have much more power to make our communities better than we’ve been led to believe. We’ll get to that “led to believe” in a bit. It’s an important challenge that we need to address.

So, let’s begin the adventure. Let’s be civil. Let’s listen to each other. Let’s learn from each other. Let’s start interacting differently. And let’s start rebuilding a common-good world where we all can flourish.

As a first step, let’s look at one design that has driven us from common ground. I call it the Outrage Industry.

**That’s Angertainment!**

SUDDEN ILLUMINATION SYNDROME has given rise to — and is perpetuated by — a highly profitable Angertainment business. The stars in the Angertainment universe are names more familiar to many of us than those of our legislative representatives. Glenn Beck, Bill Maher, Rush Limbaugh, Keith Olbermann, Ann Coulter, Bill O’Reilly, Rachel Maddow, and innumerable other performers nationally and locally are starring today and tonight in yet another production of *The Merchants of Venom*. They’re making big money in what I call the Outrage Industry, stoking the steam engines of our worries and anger. They feed off fear, and they also use it to manufacture more of it.

The Outrage Industry plays out on the stage of advocacy and lobbying organizations, the number of which has exploded in the past number of years. (See the chart at the end of this chapter.)
By and large, these organizations advocate not for the common good, but for the *insular* good — namely, what’s good solely for the interests that they represent. Don’t get me wrong: That’s what they do by design. For the most part, they don’t advertise that they’re working for the betterment of the common good, although too often they are successful in portraying their particular interest as pivotal and singular toward all that is good and supportable. Name any cause or interest, and there’s likely to be an organization (often several) that is battling for it in the halls of government, online, or in mailboxes. Organizations, some of which have a staff consisting of one highly caffeinated individual, advocate on behalf of governments, businesses, labor, churches, and other nonprofit interests. Whether you are a pauper or a billionaire, there is someone “representing” your interests. The plain fact is that these days, *everybody* is part of a special interest.

Within the advocacy space, there are spectrums of representation on every issue. In the environmental movement, for example, you have everything from the Nature Conservancy, which buys and preserves green spaces on the private market, to the Earth Liberation Front, which likes to blow up things now and then (and which the FBI has listed as a terrorist group). But in politics, we too conveniently refer to these issues in monolithic terms. Here’s the environmental lobby and here’s the labor lobby and here’s the business lobby. Though if you look more closely, there are often dramatic differences between groups within these issue sets. For instance, the trade unions don’t always have the same political agenda as government employee unions. In other words, although every issue seems prone to being over politicized and infused with anger, not every advocacy group or advocate is playing the outrage game. But more often than not, we lump them all together and pit them against each other. It’s a shame, because advocacy in and of itself is an important part of how we address complex issues as a society.
The chart at the end of this chapter lists the number of advocates who have formally registered. There probably are innumerable informal advocates as well. The upshot is that we have an environment with a lot of mouthpieces out there. As Robert D. Putnam notes in his 1995 book, *Bowling Alone*, unlike service organizations, like the Elks and Moose, few of these advocacy organizations have meetings of their memberships. The fact that these old-line community service organizations are shrinking in membership speaks to the increasing disconnect between organization and membership. “Joining” an advocacy organization is mostly a matter of writing a check and hitting the send button. Once that’s done, your voice becomes that of the organization.

The political parties themselves seem to be some of the biggest stage actors in the Outrage Industry. Perhaps it is because so many of our current challenges lie outside of the capacity of our political structures alone. Commensurate with the inability of Democrats or Republicans being able to actually make significant headway, they revert instead to scaring the public about the other side: “Forget about voting for me — what you need to do is vote against THEM!” It really is quite pervasive in some ways: The parties are increasingly comprised with some of the most strident angry voices. Yet, according to field research done for the centrist political movement No Labels (mentioned later), independent voters are a very large and growing part of our electorate.

It’s important to realize that the organizations that make up the Outrage Industry are skillful marketers. But you already knew that, didn’t you? They know what emotional buttons to press, and how to press them for maximum effect. They rely upon the instantaneous, knee-jerk responses of their constituencies. And they gather those responses to put pressure on elected officials. You probably know the script better than you think: “Government run amok,” “Corporate jet owners and other fat cats,” “People who don’t live according to traditional family values.” etc. Blurted out in TV sound bites or embedded in fundraising letters, these are the buzzwords coming from both political sides.

Many of the players in the Outrage Industry focus on a single issue, whether it’s abortion, global warming, gun control, or what have you. That single-mindedness is key: The Outrage Industry wants us to look at things in a binary way. They (and those who support them) are number one; the “other side” is a big zero. To more and more of these groups, “the other side” is the enemy that they must fight with everything they have. *We can’t let them win. They want to destroy everything we hold dear. And we can never question our own side.*

There’s something else about many Outrage Industry organizations: While they generate a lot of sound and fury about problems, they don’t want to actually solve those problems. Too often, these interests are actually solution-adverse. The reason is simple: If the problem or issue that an advocacy organization has trumpeted is “solved,” then it’s likely that it is no longer needed. Whether it’s the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, the AFL-CIO, or the Sierra Club, too many advocacy operations can’t afford to let you know there’s actually progress being made on an issue. Why? Because when there’s progress, that’s when they start feeling vulnerable and that their membership (and income) is going to dry up. So, they must keep shouting, they must keep inciting fear and anger, and they must keep raising more funds — all checks, but not much balance.

And just as you know that these interests are skillful marketers, I bet you’ll recognize that there’s a number of tried-and-true tactics that they usually revert to. One is: Leave the middle ground undefined. The abortion debate is a lot like that. If you poll Americans, consistently you’ll find that most are pro-choice. But they’re not just pro-choice. They get nervous about preventing an abortion in the case of rape, but they also get very nervous about allowing the procedure in the third trimester. It’s a highly complex issue. Yet, you’ll never hear the
to an animal service and welfare business that provides a wonderful quality of life for all the animals it encounters. And, I should mention: They’re very profitable. Wonderful!

In short, social enterprises represent a worthy and innovative design approach to the challenges facing our world. It’s a growing segment that deserves your attention, your business, and your influence upon and through your networks.

The fact is that we need organizations of all types and all sizes to participate in the forums of interconnection and exchange, in order to build common-good communities. This requires us to design spaces where these kinds of exchange can take place. These places cannot be adversarial in their design, as is the case of the various political Temples of Conflict. What we’re talking about here is alignment — a key element of influence design.

And in order to do that, these diverse interests are going to need new kinds of gathering places where they can understand each other as complementary pieces in a common-good whole, rather than competing adversaries over the community purse.

**Why All This Focus on Business?**

Well, one reason is that there are a number of businesses that have become bigger, wealthier, and more powerful than many governments on the planet. They’re that important in our lives and as such, we should focus on them. We’ve seen the rise of empires, kingdoms, religions, and nations. And multinational businesses are the newest institutional form to have that kind of global dominance. I find it interesting how we talk about business needing to fit into society. That’s a common statement, right? But what’s funnier is that we don’t talk about that in regards to other institutions in

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**Corporate Social Responsibility Relevance**

Our society. We talk about how government, science, and a religion fit into our lives, but not how it fits into our society. But Business is treated differently. Perhaps it’s because it’s the newest kid on the block to assume that kind of societal impact and power?

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**Sometimes, the Best Gift Is to Allow Someone to Make One for You**

There is an interesting, but ultimately disturbing trend in our mind-set around consumption. With examples of over consumption obviously present around us, there is an understandable and important discussion to be had around that dilemma. There are voices reacting to this with the call to drastically reduce our consumption, and while there is more than a little kernel of truth to that attitude, taken too far, it’s easy to see how damaging that call can actually be.

Again, I can understand how this might be appealing to some. But there’s a problem with this too-simple solution for decreasing consumption. What this mind-set seems to overlook is that when we aren’t consuming, we aren’t producing. And when people aren’t producing, people are left without jobs. How’s that for holiday spirit?

To illustrate through a related issue, I’ve said in the past that if we were using renewable fuel, we wouldn’t really care what kind of mileage your SUV got. I think it might be useful to look at consumption in a similar manner. To the point: It’s good to make things, it’s good to transport things, it’s good to vend things, and it’s good to buy things. These are all activities that allow people to be productive and compensated. But
perhaps the more critical issue is how much of those myriad of activities involve the extraction of things that are finite.

Listen, I know that it’s not going to be possible in the short run to run our consumption off a totally renewable platform. But there are some interesting models to look at, such as William McDonough & Michael Braungart’s provocative school of thought around the concept of cradle to cradle. [www.mcdonough.com/cradle_to_cradle.htm](http://www.mcdonough.com/cradle_to_cradle.htm). Imagine a world where your bio plastic do-dad can be easily and cheaply turned into another bio plastic do-dad. It’s not science fiction ... it’s starting to happen and it may just point to a whole new era of consumerism.

There’s hardly an issue of importance out there that doesn’t run into conflicting values and it’s generally a dangerous path to solely focus on one value at the total expense of another. I’m afraid that putting a halt on consuming newly-manufactured products would result in some pretty steep issues, like more joblessness. So, here’s a perspective to consider:
Buy things. Support the economy. Provide jobs. Consumerism is still important because production is still important.

The question is what are you consuming?

When the various interests that make up our communities come together in diversity, it is usually under a capitol dome or the roof of another level of government. This is not unimportant activity in the least. But we do need to constantly recognize an important thing that I’ve reiterated over and over: These places are designed for adversarialism. Again, it’s a design that works admirably when the issue at hand is an actual policy, and where the scenario involves horse-trading between two different, often opposing sides.

But as I’ve also noted, too often the issue at hand is not policy, but a word that is frequently and purposefully confused with policy. That word is politics; and politics has gotten increasingly partisan in this Sudden Illumination Syndrome age. But if we recognize this situation, not as a hopeless dilemma, but as a design challenge, then
One of the best ways to start trading is by sharing information. And in that vein, I’d be remiss if I didn’t point you to some of the platforms and people that I find interesting in this space. It’s quite obvious that this is hardly an exhaustive listing of sites that are serving as hubs of socially-innovative products and services. And it’s equally so that the folks whom I’m following are not everyone you could or would find interesting. This is merely a sampling of what and whom I’m paying attention to. Check it out and let me know what you think. And tell me who and what is piquing your interest as well. Please.

Not surprisingly, there’s plenty out there in the world of environmental design. Here are a few leads to get you started.
What we commonly call education is usually a conversation about the tools that we’ve created toward the end of passing on knowledge and wisdom. Here are some sites that are pushing the limits of how we can receive ideas in ways that are interesting, useful, and compelling — and free, by the way.

- **Educational Reform:**
  - **Khan Academy:**

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In chapter six, I wrote about how we really have a sick care system, rather than a health care system, designed to keep you healthy, rather than repairing you once you’re out of sorts. Here are a few sites that will give you the tools to start operating with that mind-set.

- **Health & Wellness:**
  - **Organic Lifestyle Magazine:**
    
  - **iTunes Health & Fitness:**
    
  - **Infinite Wellness Solutions:**
    
  - **U.S. Preventative Medicine:**
    
  - **The Prevention Plan:**
    
- **Sustainability is Good:**
  
  - Forum for sustainable packaging, design and living that uses 100 percent renewable energy.
  
- **Ecopreneurist:**
  
  - A resource for eco-minded entrepreneurs that gives them access to information to make their businesses more eco-friendly.
  
- **Environmental Leader:**
  
  - Online portal for information on energy efficiency and sustainable leadership.
  
- **Amazon Green:**
  
  - This website has tips for living green and links to all its eco-friendly, sustainable living, organic, and green products.
  
- **The Green Thing:**
  
  - This website explains seven different ways to live greener lives. It has a blog about being green, and an online store to purchase green products.
www.khanacademy.org
- Has a library of 2,700 plus educational videos, covering virtually any topic you’d want to learn.

- **Academic Earth:**
  [http://academicearth.org](http://academicearth.org)
- Offers videos of college lectures on a wide variety of topics and from a wide variety of renowned universities.

- **BrainPop:**
  [www.brainpop.com](http://www.brainpop.com)
- An educational website for children, covering all topics from arts and music to engineering and technology.

- **Open Culture:**
  [www.openculture.com](http://www.openculture.com)
- Offers a bevy of free online courses (on essentially every topic, and many languages), along with access to many free films (including Film Noir, Hitchcock, or John Wayne films).

- **iTunes U:**
- Free university courses you can access on your iPad, iPhone, or iPod.

- **Discovery Education:**
  [www.discoveryeducation.com](http://www.discoveryeducation.com)
- Online hub of digital content for schools, including webinars, documentaries, and free step-by-step programs for various subjects.

- **Social Awareness:**
  - **MYOO:**
    [http://myoo.com/about](http://myoo.com/about)
- Dedicated to sparking innovative change and driving real-world solutions through collaboration.

- **Stanford Social Innovation Review:**
  [www.ssireview.org](http://www.ssireview.org)
- Articles, books, and blogs about social entrepreneurship.

- **Philadelphia Social Innovations Journal:**
  [www.philasocialinnovations.org/site/index.php](http://www.philasocialinnovations.org/site/index.php)
- Follow this journal to hear about social innovation goings-on.

In my introduction, I mentioned a painfully incomplete list of my teachers. Well, here I get to cheat and add a few more: all interesting folks who are interested in so many, many things. Thanks for letting me follow you.

- Nilofer Merchant [@nilofer](http://nilofermerchant.com)
- Andrea Learned [@AndreaLearned](http://learnedon.com)
- Fabian Pattberg [@FabianPattberg](http://fabianpattberg.com)
- Jack Uldrich [@jumpthecurve](http://jumpthecurve.net)
- Scott Belsky [@scottbelsky](http://scottbelsky.com)
- Nell Edgington [@nedgington](http://www.socialvelocity.net)
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