Acknowledgements

To Alissa, Alanna, and Mara
My wish is that each one of you experience the peaceful joy that comes with seeking truth and doing justice. In our artificially complicated world, there can be no greater gift than the satisfaction that comes from the realization that what you have done has made a difference in the lives of others. Know that your love and support have greatly helped me to become the person that I am today. In the life journey before you, remember to stay on the high road, regardless of the immediate cost. Believe me when I tell you that you will never regret it, when looking back.

To my many colleagues, students, and friends
Thank you for your support and encouragement throughout the years. Know that I learned much from our encounters and the honest sharing of ideas. This dialogue has been so important in shaping the contents of this handbook.

To young dreamers everywhere
Thank you for daring to dream. Thank you for recognizing that much can be changed for the better. Do not be disillusioned. Continue to dream in glorious colour. Stay focused on the prize and do not be afraid to work hard to make it happen. It might take longer than you expect. But then, evolution has long produced more lasting results than revolution. Do not let power and privilege crush or manipulate your dreams. All real power is latent. As any honest leader will tell you, the minute you have to resort to force, you have effectively lost power, not gained it. Never be afraid to speak truth to power and justice to privilege.
I vividly remember the events of October 1962, as if it were only yesterday. I remember almost two weeks of escalating tensions, bringing the world again to the brink of war. I did not understand exactly what was going on, but it became abundantly clear that what was happening, in the adult world, was not good.

I remember running home from school terrified one afternoon, while repeatedly looking up to the sky to see if Russian missiles were going to rain down on me, before I could make it safely home. I imagined pointed ballistic missiles striking me right on the top of my head. I was only eleven, so I did not have a grasp of adult realities like nuclear Armageddon and the material permanence of death.

I remember going through ‘civil defence’ drills in elementary school which consisted mainly of one thing: In the event of a nuclear attack, we were instructed to hide under our desks and pray silently. Only silent prayer was allowed because we had to listen for further instructions from our teachers. Much as I trusted the Sisters of St. Joseph, who ran our school, I was not totally convinced of the soundness of this defensive strategy, based on what my elders had told me about the bombardments they experienced during World War Two. These new bombs were supposed to be much more accurate, powerful, and deadly!

I was a new Canadian, having immigrated to Canada from Southern Italy, with my mother, seven years earlier. I was happy in my new home. We had many relatives in America. I remember being riveted to the flickering, second-hand television set that my father had brought home one day. We lived in the basement of my father’s barbershop. Unlike some of my American relatives, we did not have a bomb shelter and we did not have the room to build one. Every inch of basement was already occupied.
My father had spent twelve years serving his country during various wars—starting in North Africa and ending with World War Two. Each time he completed his obligatory military service, a new conflict would break out and he would be recalled to active duty. He did not talk much about his experiences of being under bombardment by enemy forces, but it did not take a rocket scientist to figure out that these new Russian missiles would be very different.

I remember watching flickering images of the youthful American president and a much older and meaner looking leader of the communist Soviet Union. They were playing a deadly game of nuclear chicken. It was not difficult to interpret the adult words we overheard, the fear on their faces, and the abrupt silence once we came into the room. The issue was the placement of Russian nuclear missiles in Cuba, a stone’s throw from the United States. The communist dictator of Cuba had requested these nuclear missiles to deter further aggression from the Americans.

The Cuban Missile Crisis was eventually averted when the Soviet Union backed down on its plan to bring missiles to Cuba, so as not to confront an American naval blockade. In the end, reason prevailed over emotion and hard cold facts triumphed over conflicting ideology and escalating rhetoric. The cold war between democratic and communist ideals continued but never again escalated to this breaking point. This, of course, is my adult understanding of what transpired, based on subsequent experienced knowledge, careful reflection, and emotion-free hindsight. My understanding at the time was that the Russians had changed their minds and no missiles would be coming at me, for the time being.

Fast forwarding to the present day, I see in my two adult daughters many of the fears, anxieties, and tensions I experienced about the fate of humankind on our planet. This anxiety has increased exponentially since Donald Trump acquired the mantle of leadership in America.

My daughters live in a world of renewed hostility. Russia’s ‘strongman for life’ becomes bolder each time international protocols are successfully abused. The unstable dictator of North Korea is flaunting his newly acquired capacity to fire missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons. He has threatened to use them against the United States. The American president has responded with equally aggressive rhetoric. A new game of nuclear chicken appears to have emerged. My daughters live in fear that, this time, logic and reason may not prevail. They fear the doomsday clock is rapidly approaching midnight.

I cannot allay my daughters’ fears, any more than my parents were able to protect me from “God-less communists bent on world domination.” But, I can focus their critical thinking to help my daughters sort through the hype, misinformation, and loaded rhetoric, often prevailing in today’s post-modern, digital world. In fact, it has become increasingly more important to process information carefully in our digital age.

Critical thinking may help uncover concealed realities about our human journey on this planet. This careful, probing, and thorough kind of thinking may help my daughters to read between the lines of the various media messages they are constantly being presented. This too is a kind of bombardment that requires careful consideration. Critical thinking will help people become more effective truth seekers, in an increasingly more complex and convoluted political world. My focus will not be on what to think, but rather, on how to think to become a discerning and contributing citizen locally, nationally, and globally.

Reasoned judgement requires choosing appropriate criteria to base your decision and solid evidence to support it. Complex and important decisions require sound critical thinking skills.
By sharing these reflections, I hope to pass on the experiences of my life journey to help illuminate the way forward. I hope to help my daughters to make more informed decisions, to keep their sense of humour, and to become more discerning truth seekers in an increasingly more politicized world. I hope to help them temper fear with logical and reasoned optimism, and to help them realize that the light at the end of a long dark tunnel need not be a fast approaching train.

The following pages do not reflect the results of exhaustive empirical research and strict academic analysis. Rather, the contents represent a personal, reflective, and hopefully humorous account. My hope is based on the experience charged belief that there is more good than evil in our world, and that benevolence will invariably prevail over malevolence. As an educator and lifelong learner, I have relished my calling as a voice of hope and promise, enabling young people to recognize opportunity, even when it comes cleverly disguised as an unsolvable problem or a difficult crisis.

In responding to my daughters’ fears, I am simultaneously speaking to all those who share their concerns and reluctance to assume the responsibility of moving our troubled world forward and leaving it in a better state for future generations. Mistakes can be painful, but they can also trigger learning and growth, as long as discernment, honesty, and altruism prevail over their opposites.  
— August 20, 2017

While attending a fundraiser four years ago, my eldest daughter, Alissa (left), won a family portrait. When the photographer asked what it was like being the only male in the family, I told him a bit about my experience and the rest is history. Of all the photos taken that day, this was the one the family unanimously chose as the official portrait. I know my girls all love me because they voluntarily took off their spiked heels to pose for this unusual portrait. Otherwise, the whole experience could have been very painful. (Courtesy of Ken Schultz Photography).
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North American dreams have long been laced with hopes of progress and economic security, and American dreamers have often led the way forward. In the process, Americans have created one of the most productive economic systems, driven by free enterprise capitalism. In theory, in this system the consumer is supposed to be sovereign. Competition between several manufactures and vendors is supposed to keep everyone honest and unable to manipulate the marketplace.

Through the judicious exercise of consumer choice, the sovereign consumer rewards some in the free marketplace and not others. The government, elected by consumers, is there to protect the rights of consumers and to punish businesses or private interests colluding against the public interest. Over time, this consumer sovereignty has been compromised. Today, it still exists on paper, but seldom in practice.

In today’s world of big business and constant media bombardment, the consumer is no longer king. With the advent of business consolidation through mergers and acquisitions, corporate giants like IBM, Microsoft, General Electric, Wal-Mart, Monsanto, Exxon Mobile, Home Depot, General Motors, Koch Industries, and Proctor & Gamble have emerged in America. Since each of these corporate giants conducts significant business in at least two countries, outside of their national home base, they are considered multinational corporations.

As successful enterprises either force weaker competitors out of business or acquire them, in many industries today the marketplace has been left to a few corporate giants. This concentration of power can effectively limit the level of competition. In these less competitive markets, often called oligopolies, dominant
companies are more able to influence prices, even by sheer suggestion. Consumer wants can be further manipulated to corporate advantage through massive advertising campaigns. The establishment of brand preferences, where consumers favour one brand over another, is one way to further manipulate pricing and market share.

To further consolidate the corporate agenda, all of the major media networks in America (ABC, CBS, NBC) were purchased by corporate giants during the 1990s. Small independent television stations continue to be bought up by large media companies, like the Sinclair Broadcasting Group, owning and controlling content in many localities across America. This provides big business further control over the airwaves, and ultimately, how people see and think about their world.

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This “corporations are your best friend” movement did not happen as one giant conspiracy against consumer sovereignty. It resulted from a series of shrewd (and sometimes unscrupulous) individual moves, over an extended period of time. Each of these moves was calculated to acquire or maintain a competitive edge over rivals and to maximize corporate profit and influence.

Ironically, the reflections of president Hayes apply even more today than when he first voiced his concerns about America’s future, back in the 1880s. In a nation still rebuilding after a devastating civil war, Hayes was a one-term compromise choice for president in 1877. In his lifetime, he observed the early stages of the industrialization of America, and the great accumulation of capital wealth and power that followed.

Big business has grown even more powerful in today’s world. Some corporate profits have been invested in politics. Donations to political parties and individual candidates have steadily increased. In the United States, these transparent donations are furthered by less transparent political action committees (PACs). These newer organizations pool donations and use them to fund campaigns for or against candidates or proposed legislation. An organization becomes a PAC when it receives or spends more than $1000 for the purpose of influencing a federal election, and registers with the Federal Election Commission. Rules for state elections vary by state.

Super PACs (officially known as independent expenditure only committees) are not allowed to make direct contributions to political parties or individual candidates, but they are allowed unlimited spending independent of campaigns. They can raise funds from individuals, corporations, labour unions, and other groups without legal limits on donation size. By creating new shell corporations, individual donors can effectively conceal their identity.

Super PACs can then independently promote or attack individual candidates or proposed legislation via massive advertising campaigns. Even though these campaigns are officially unaffiliated with individual candidates, the constant message bombardment they can afford to sustain, across all media, is bound to influence some voters. Most of the monies received by these PACs come from extremely wealthy Americans.

According to a New York Times/CBS News poll published on June 2, 2015, the vast majority (84%) of Americans, regardless of party preference or affiliation, believe money has too much influence in political campaigns. However, getting big money out of politics is not an issue Americans prioritize. The same poll found the economy and jobs are top priorities, followed by healthcare and immigration. Less than 1% identified campaign funding as the most important issue faced by Americans. This reality provides Big Business ample incentive to keep American voters worried about incomes, job security, and healthcare.

America seems to be constantly in election mode; either preparing for, engaging in, or winding down from hotly contested political campaigns for various levels of government. Not only can campaigns be influenced, but elected officials can be further influenced once in office. Lobbyists are professional ‘persuaders’ who earn a comfortable living attempting to
influence government decisions. Typically, they operate behind closed doors, through quiet discussion with elected officials. Washington, D.C. is overflowing with paid lobbyists promoting special interests.

Over time, successful lobbyists have found the following tactics most effective in the strategic influence of elected politicians.

1. **Conversation Control**
   Lobbyists are most successful when they manage to steer the terms of conversation or public debate away from those they cannot win and on to those they can. For example, if a public discussion on a corporation’s environmental impact is unfavourable, lobbyists manoeuvre the focus to hypothetical economic benefits, like the potential for job creation. Once they succeed in making this narrowly framed conversation prevail, dissenting voices can be made to appear marginal, irrelevant, or un-American.

2. **Media Spin**
   Effective lobbyists know when and how to use the press and when to avoid communication. Media messaging is carefully crafted to maximize and accentuate public benefit. For example, if the corporate goal is profit maximization, messaging will be dressed up to appear synonymous with national interests, such as economic growth and jobs.

3. **Engineering Critical Mass and Credibility**
   When a giant corporation is the only voice pitching its message to government, the voice can easily be written off as self-serving and highly specialized. Lobbyists can engineer and mobilize a critical mass of voices singing the company’s tune. Lobbyists also recruit credible and seemingly independent sources to help carry and authenticate the corporate message. Sometimes, think tanks are sponsored and co-opted to voice important messages.

4. **Opposition Neutralization**
   Lobbyists use focus groups, public meetings, and feedback sessions to flush out voices of criticism. In doing this, key opponents and their arguments can be identified and ultimately neutralized. Lobbyists often see their battles with opposition forces as a kind of guerrilla warfare. They act to gain the ear of government and to block or neutralize counter arguments from opposing groups such as environmental activists and social justice advocates. When giant corporations feel threatened, lobbyists have also undertaken to infiltrate key opposition groups, with paid spies, to report activities or to stir up internal dissent.

5. **Internet Control**
   Lobbyists monitor the web to detect early warnings of building protest or resistance. They seek to identify the leaders and most influential members of the voices of opposition. They can then distinguish militant from more friendly voices and use divide-and-conquer strategies to get moderates to argue with hardline advocates within the opposition ranks. When used effectively, this tactic can drive a wedge between opposing camps and expose the public to opposing forces and viewpoints at their worst. One key strategy to control online information is to flood the web with positive content that is not as benign or objective as it appears. Lobbyists hire experts to create fake blogs and other carefully worded positive content that fools search engines into placing this content ahead of others. This effectively drives opposing voices down Google rankings and off the most often viewed first page of search results.

6. **Networking Politicians**
   Lobbyists need access to politicians to exercise any influence. Access, over time, creates working relationships. This access can be bought. Examples of paid access include buying corporate tables at expensive fund raising dinners and paying politicians for speaking appearances. If not through a cash transaction, amounting to an access fee, an investment in relationship building is made over time to build trust, offer help, and provide favours. Sometimes, jobs are found for close friends of politicians. Sometimes, lucrative consulting opportunities are made available to politicians, for after they leave public office.

Over time, the lobbying of corporate interests has increased exponentially. If this activity was not seen to yield positive results, corporations would not have been willing to invest as much into it. Corporate lobbying has now grown

“Does the Senate work for Big Pharma that hires lobbyists and people who make giant contributions, or does it work for the American people who actually sent us here?”
—Elizabeth Warren
influence to effectively overwhelm countervailing forces. Lobbying has changed how Big Business interacts with government. Instead of trying to keep government out of business matters, corporations are now increasingly trying to bring government in as a partner—looking to what the country can do to better reward their enterprise.

As American corporations became more politically active during the 1990s, their lobbyists became more ambitious and forward thinking. For example, Big Pharma has long opposed the inclusion of a drug plan into the Medicare program because it would effectively give government more bargaining power through bulk purchasing. Bulk purchasing discounts would inevitably lead to reduced profits in the pharmaceutical industry.

Early in the new millennium, Big Pharma lobbyists proposed and supported what became Medicare Part D in the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003. This resulted in a prescription drug benefit, effective January 1, 2006, which explicitly banned bulk purchasing. In doing so, an estimated $20 billion in annual profits for Big Pharma was effectively preserved. This ‘modernization’ also confirmed Big Pharma’s right to charge what the market will bear for their prescription drugs.

In 2015, upstart Turing Pharmaceuticals acquired the American rights to the drug Daraprim®. This drug had been approved for use by the FDA since 1953. It is used as an anti-malaria and anti-parasitic drug and as a treatment for some AIDS related complications. Overnight, the price of the drug increased from $13.50 per dose to $750. Company founder and CEO Martin Shkreli publicly defended the price hike by saying, “If there was a company that was selling an Aston Martin at the price of a bicycle, and we buy that company and we ask to charge Toyota prices, I don’t think that that should be a crime.”

In the public outrage that followed, Shkreli was vilified as “the most hated man in America.” He promised to change the price but then reneged. In his nationally syndicated column, political commentator Robert Reich wrote that what Shkreli did wrong was to be more audacious, otherwise he was playing “the same game many others are playing on Wall Street and in corporate suits.” With the law firmly on his side, Shkreli saw himself as untouchable. In 2016, Shkreli was called before a congressional committee investigating the Daraprim® price increase. He refused to answer any questions. On the same day, Shkreli posted a Twitter message arrogantly saying, “Hard to accept that these imbeciles represent the people in our government.” He later accused the politicians of being motivated purely by “self-interest.” Ultimately, in August of 2017, Shkreli was convicted on two counts of securities fraud and one count of conspiracy to commit securities fraud, during his time as an investment fund manager.

In 2017, Marathon Pharmaceuticals of Deerfield, Illinois, raised the price of a steroid called Deflazacort® to $89,000 annually for a generic drug to treat Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Many American patients were previously getting this drug from Europe or Canada at an annual price between $1,000 and $2,000. This represented a staggering 6,000% price increase. The company argued that extensive and expensive mandatory testing was required by the FDA to approve the drug for use in America. Existing laws permit this kind of pricing to encourage companies to develop new drugs for rare diseases.

Clearly, tighter government oversight is needed to hold Big Pharma, and by extension all large and powerful corporations, accountable for their actions. Laws need to be reviewed to ensure that they do not allow corporations to abuse their power in the quest for greater profit. Unethical practices and practices seen as a disservice to the public good, need to be exposed and prosecuted. Then, punishments need to be substantial enough to serve as an effective deterrent.

Ultimately, free range capitalism needs to be replaced by capitalism with a social conscience. Human nature has not advanced sufficiently to make laissez-faire capitalism any more workable, for the advancement of humankind, than its socialist counterpart. The power shift that has allowed the pendulum to swing too much in favour of large corporations needs to be reversed, to address many of the harmful consequences of the new world order being created. A more balanced reality is required.
On October 1, 2017, a gunman opened fire on 22,000 people attending a country music concert in Las Vegas, Nevada. From his hotel window, 32 floors above, he was able to murder 58 people and wound several others before killing himself, with the police at his door. He was found with 23 guns in his hotel room, including semi-automatic rifles that had been converted to fully automatic assault weapons. These conversion kits were legalized after a massive lobby effort by the NRA. An additional 19 weapons were found at his Nevada home. It is not clear why a retired accountant needed all this weaponry and bomb making materials. In the end, 548 people were injured either by gun fire or from the stampede that followed. This carefully planned attack became the deadliest mass murder/shooting in American history. Ironically, the following week, the House of Representatives was scheduled to debate and pass an NRA backed bill to legalize the sale of silencers for guns. Comedian Jimmy Kimmel, who grew up in Las Vegas, delivered a raw, emotional monologue the night after the massacre, appealing for common sense relative to gun proliferation in America. Needless to say, he was harshly criticized by the gun lobby and their mouthpieces. Until America comes to terms with this escalating, and mostly self-inflicted, gun violence and does something to restore common sense to the long-contested gun debate, the dream of peaceful existence will remain elusive. Americans have much more to fear than foreign terrorists. They must also fear the well-armed evil within, capable of instantly transforming any dream into a recurring nightmare.

“Isn't this something profoundly wrong in America? When you have a million dollar company that pays nothing in federal income tax.”  
— Bernie Sanders

“Some of our forefathers, when they wrote the Second Amendment, I assume, wanted us to have AK-47s...”  
— Mitch McConnell

“I am talking about tonight isn't about gun control. It's about common sense. Common sense says that no good will ever come out of allowing a person to have weapons that can take down 527 Americans at a concert. Common sense says you don't let those who suffer from mental illness buy guns.”  
— Jimmy Kimmel
Globalization in the Golden Age of the Transnational Corporation

much right to safe drinking water as those living upstream. Low interest rates help make small business loans more affordable and help young families buying their first home. Low interest rates punish people with bank savings, like pensioners living on their life savings.

In each of these cases, there are clear winners and losers. The problem, according to social critics, is that the winner camp appears to be shrinking as the loser camp grows significantly over time. Corporate interests have strategically manoeuvred themselves into the winner’s circle by using productivity growth to maximize profits. Social concerns, often very expensive and complicated, have been effectively passed on to government.

The promise of globalization was to promote prosperity both nationally and internationally. In recent years, many countries have agreed to reduce trade tariffs to promote freer international trade. Regrettably, the corporate focus was on free trade to remove profit shrinking barriers like import taxes (tariffs) and restrictive quotas. New markets were opened up for corporations to enter. The notion of fair trade was not sufficiently addressed in the unregulated globalization that followed. In many ways, the globalization experienced to date has mirrored the frontier injustice experienced as America first expanded westward.

Increased global trade has made the world more interconnected and interdependent. By removing trade barriers, corporations have been able to increase productivity by conducting large scale operations employing available natural resources, labour, and capital most efficiently, wherever they can be brought together in a productive enterprise. They can then sell the goods and services they specialize in both domestic and international markets. Specialization and trade can increase the quantity of goods and services available to consumers. Opening markets to foreign imports can provide consumers more choice and lower prices. Developing nations can use specialization and trade to expand their economies and increase incomes for their workers. Given the promised benefits, this was to be a classic win-win scenario. The reality proved quite different. The benefits of specialization and global trade were not shared equally among all participants. Regrettably, the emphasis was placed on free trade rather than fair trade.

Productivity, Globalization, and Transnationalism

Once considered beneficial for all participants, the movement toward economic globalization has actually made matters worse.

Productivity advances have long been considered the principal catalyst driving economic growth for nations and profit maximization for corporations. In theory, productivity allows the efficient use of productive resources, allowing the maximization of goods and services available to consumers, while reducing prices. In practice, successful corporations are able to ruthlessly pare down their operating costs to maximize profits. Reduced consumer prices are not an automatic eventuality, given the corporate propensity to charge the highest price the market will bear. In addition, corporations tend to avoid responsibility for the side-effects or external costs of economic activity. They systematically pass all those responsibilities on to government, further complicating the social fabric of free-enterprise capitalism.

In its most basic sense, productivity means improved efficiency. The push to improve the productivity of capital has led to automated mass production technology and the advent of worker displacing robotics. The push to improve labour productivity has resulted in fewer costly workers producing more goods and providing more services. The push to improve resource productivity has led to large scale extraction and processing enterprises. As the Alberta tar sands initiatives have painfully demonstrated, conservation and environmental protection have often taken a back seat to the most efficient exploitation of natural resources.

The quest for productivity can create natural conflicts among different economic stakeholders. If you consider yourself lucky to have a job, then you might be reluctant to bite the corporate hand that feeds you. Asking for a pay raise to keep up with rising food prices may be out of the question. If you consider your labour to contribute significantly to company profits, then you should expect a fair share of those profits. People downstream from polluting industries have as

“The diseconomies of capitalism are treated as the public’s responsibility. Corporate America skims the cream and leaves the bill for us to pay, then boasts about how productive and efficient it is and complains about our wasteful government.”
— Michael Parenti

“Productivity growth, however it occurs, has a disruptive side to it. In the short term, most things that contribute to productivity growth are very painful.”
— Janet Yellen
Profit motivated globalization led to the exploitation of cheap labour and resources to maximize corporate profits. Jobs were exported to developing nations where labour costs and environmental regulations were minimal. Corporate profits increased significantly but consumer prices did not improve as significantly. If they had, this would have triggered a sharp downward drag on corporate profits. Product quality has declined in some cases, causing consumers to replace products more often. This results in the wasteful over-consumption of the world's limited natural resources.

Many giant corporations became multinationals, conducting significant business in different nations. This allows corporations to play off one host nation against another to secure the most profitable deals possible. In order to improve profitability, sometimes multinationals prefer to do business in countries where environmental regulations are lax.

In order to meet corporate demands for cost cutting, sometimes unsafe working conditions and child labour are used by small foreign companies supplying goods to multinationals. In many cases, the lion's share of the benefits of freer international trade and globalization remain with the multinational corporations. Developing nations, and their exploited labour force and environment, seldom receive appropriate compensation.

In time, some multinationals like Nestlé, General Electric, General Motors, McDonalds, Exxon Mobil, Nike Inc., Pfizer Inc., and Apple became larger, more wealthy and powerful than many of their host countries. These powerful corporations can effectively bypass government regulation and avoid taxation by shifting activities from one nation to another. They have, in effect, become ‘transnational’ corporations accountable only to themselves. When profits are on the line, transnationals may have limited loyalty to any one country, way of life, or political system.

The following two perspectives clearly distinguish between the promise and potential of globalization and the exploitative reality that emerged.

“Globalization has gone wrong, as it has no rules. Multinationals are almost above the law. They are so huge they are bigger than governments.”
— Dick Smith

The American Dream

“But what does our American Dream mean today? ... Today, it also means a better life now, as well as tomorrow. And to achieve our better life we want a better job, a better income, more opportunity, and more options. We want to continuously move up life’s ladder, and we want that ladder to keep reaching so our children have a chance to go even further tomorrow than we do today. In short, we want the stuff that dreams are made of.

It is these dreams of opportunity that are so inexplicably tied to our growth in trade. The days of selling to each other to support America’s economy are over. America may produce 28% of the world market in GDP—but we’re just 5% of the world’s population. In our global economy, we must increase our trade if we are to improve our well-being. Trade makes the American dream real.”
— C. Michael Armstrong (speech to the Detroit Economic Club, Jan. 15, 1997)

One of America’s Hottest New Businesses Candidly Explains its Success

“We have a factory in China where we have 250 people. We own them; it’s our factory. We pay them $40 a month and they work 28 days a month. They work from 7 am to 11 pm, with two breaks for lunch and dinner. They eat all together, 16 people to a room, stacked on four bunks to a corner. Generally, they’re young girls that come from the hills.”
— Irwin Gordon (president of Ava-Line Company of Whippany, New Jersey speaking to Business Week Magazine in 1996, after his lapel pin company was named one of the “Hottest New Small Businesses in America” by Entrepreneur Magazine)

American business executive, and former CEO of telecommunications giant AT&T, Michael Armstrong, makes a compelling case for why America could not afford to ignore the movement toward economic globalization. However, his life ladder of perpetual growth is quite ambitious and unrealistic for a world with finite resources. Millennials will be the first generation of Americans needing to scale down their expectations relative to their parents’ generation. The negative impacts of globalization on American workers were clearly not anticipated. Despite high productivity levels, American labour has not always been able to compete favourably with foreign workers earning as little as $1 per hour.
 CHAPTER EIGHT

To date, American workers have had to curtail their wage demands for fear of losing more jobs to foreign workers, willing to work for much less. Unfortunately, wages in developing countries have not moved significantly closer to American averages. Clearly, Armstrong did not foresee that the benefits of globalization would be so skewed in favour of corporations and the corporate elite. He also did not foresee the devastating impact globalization, corporate primacy, and the neutering of labour unions would have on America’s rapidly shrinking middle class.

The amazingly candid comments of Irwin Gordon, in 1996, provide insight into the business plan of a rapidly growing enterprise. This company unashamedly based its growth on the exploitation of young girls, working for all intents and purposes, as indentured servants of a corporation. Gordon needs to be commended for his honesty. Most corporate executives would have put a much more positive spin on this sad reality. One possible spin might highlight the provision of steady work, for desperate people previously unable to support themselves. Defaulting to such explanations, over time, the corporate face of globalization has learned to become rather two-faced.

In industrially developed countries like Canada and the United States, globalization has benefited consumers more than workers. Many jobs have been outsourced to developing nations where labour costs can be one-tenth of the average domestic wage. With stubbornly high unemployment rates, remaining workers have had to settle for modest wages to remain competitive with foreign labour costs. This, workers are often told, is the only way to avoid further outsourcing. In communities where many factories are closed down, like America’s badly affected ‘rust belt’, the mood has swung drastically away from globalization.

Anti-trade sentiment and isolationism have become more popular in the hardest hit communities. The problem is that communities and nations cannot cocoon themselves from globalization and expect to successfully return to a world, as it was, circa 1970. Globalization’s potential for good needs to be harnessed and corrections need to be implemented to ensure that a fairer version of globalization prevails over the current one-sided, two-faced model.

The push towards productivity in America has contributed to the dominance and subsequent decline of the big box store. Many small independent merchants, operating businesses like local hardware, book, home electronics, and variety stores, have been effectively forced out of business by big box warehouses like Home Depot, Barnes & Noble, Best Buy, Wal-Mart, and Costco. These big box stores operate efficiently through economies of scale.

Big box stores tend to carry a diverse product line, in large quantities. They systematically phase out low demand products that are proven to be less profitable. They then persuade their customers to switch to more profitable alternatives. Big box retailers are now experiencing challenging times because of the consumer switch to online shopping through mega corporations like Amazon and eBay. Big box stores and other major retailers may become the dinosaurs of our post-modern age.

Current one-sided, two-faced practices connected to globalizing the world economy are not sustainable. In time, discerning citizens and exploited workers will revolt against injustice. The corporate elite will have to use strong arm tactics to control growing dissent. Governments will have to make a clear moral choice regarding whose interests they are elected to serve. Citizens must play a key role in this transition to a more balanced and just form of globalization. It would be naïve to expect corporations and governments to get this transformation right, if left to their own devices.

To make this badly overdue transition possible, several key problems need to be overcome. First, citizens need a more functional understanding of how the economic world works and how their choices can contribute either to the problem or to the solution. Second, citizens need to know how to become effective change agents, both politically and economically. They need to know how to mobilize the power they still hold to affect desired changes. Civic and economic education must both be improved.

Another problem is that conscientious corporations, with a demonstrated social conscience, may not be recognized for their good corporate citizenship. These corporations may be painted with the same brush as their greedy counterparts. Citizenship need to be able to distinguish clearly between these two types of corporate citizenship. Self-interest powers the business world. Without rewards, individuals and groups would be reluctant to assume risks. The key question is: When does greed become excessive and harmful to the common good? Business tycoon Conrad Black’s quote about the need for greed is quite revealing. Even more revealing was his attempt to raid his Canadian workers’ pension fund surplus, when his corporate empire was facing a monetary shortfall. Similar unauthorized seizures of money, from his American companies, landed him in prison for three years.
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A commitment has been made to non-discrimination and gender equity; disadvantaged workers, farmers and producers have been empowered.

This Fairtrade initiative has been very effective in achieving fairer trade practices for several commodities. Consumers have responded positively to the initiative and this consumer power has motivated supermarkets to stock more Fairtrade products. The initiative now needs to be expanded to include more products and trade partners each year. In addition, a mechanism needs to be put in place to identify products and companies fraudulently using a Fairtrade logo or knockoff.

A similar strategy needs to be implemented for the identification of good corporate citizenship. In this golden age of the multinational corporation, good corporate citizenship needs to be more tightly defined and celebrated. The following example is adapted from the work of renowned economist Robert Reich and is appropriate for corporations with headquarters and a main base of operations in the USA.

**SAMPLE PLEDGE OF SOCIALLY CONSCIOUS CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP**

The [name] company pledges allegiance to the people of the United States of America. To that end, we further pledge to:

1. Create more jobs in the United States than we create outside the United States, either directly or in our foreign subsidiaries and subcontractors;
2. Provide a severance package to laid off American workers consisting of one week of normal wages for every two months they have worked for the company (including contract workers);
3. Ensure that no more than 25 percent of our total labour costs will be outsourced abroad;
4. Require subsidiaries, suppliers and contractors to bring wages, working conditions and environmental missions closer to American standards.

Figure 8.1: Fair trade requires economic, social and ecological justice.
each year (rather than dragging American standards closer to foreign conditions;
5. Hold payments to executives to no more than 50 times the median pay of American workers (defining ‘pay’ to include salary, bonuses, health benefits, pension benefits, deferred salary, stock options and every other form of compensation);
6. Pay at least 30 percent of the money earned in the United States in taxes to the American government, without shifting money to offshore tax havens and without using accounting tricks to conceal true earnings;
7. Not use our money to influence elections or to lobby politicians.

Source: Adapted from Robert Reich at RobertReich.org

“Every time you spend money, you're casting a vote for the kind of world you want.”
—Anna Lappé

“Let's face it. You have to make money to stay in business. Otherwise you have a charity, not a business. At the same time, when you build a thriving business in a community, it is important to give something back to that community. People never forget kindness, value, and service. And you have to have a sense of humour too. If you are too serious you should be in the funeral business or a banker. If you share one good laugh every day, you will enjoy a fuller life.”
—Honest Ed Mirvish

Companies that make this pledge, and are seen to be working diligently at delivering the individual undertakings made to the nation, can proudly display their seal of honour and serial number in promotional materials and communications. American consumers should be encouraged to look for and to support these socially conscious corporations in their business dealings.

A mechanism would have to be put in place to allow corporations to demonstrate and report achievement and progress relative to individual undertakings before an impartial adjudicating body. There should be an appeal process for unfavourable rulings.

This strategy, along with other forms of informed consumer activism will make the transition to a fairer economic reality possible, both domestically and globally. Good corporate citizens can in turn pressure associated companies and partners to join the transformation movement.

Critical Questions for Discerning Minds: Dealing Constructively with Globalization, Trade, and Corporate Power

In light of the politico-economic dilemma facing Americans today, discerning citizens need to ask themselves the following critical questions.

1. Where are this politician’s campaign funds coming from? What does this reveal about commitments and priorities?
2. What are this politician’s views on globalization?
3. What benefits are recognized?
4. What realistic improvements, adjustments, or corrections are being advocated?
5. How realistic are economic promises? How detailed are economic strategies and action plans?
6. How workable is what is being proposed to improve the economy? What evidence do I have to support my judgement?
7. How does this candidate or leader propose to make trade fairer for people? Is this workable?
8. How does this candidate or leader define good corporate citizenship? Is this workable?
9. How does this candidate or leader propose to support corporate America? Is this workable?
10. Can present leadership be trusted to right a listing ship in the direction of the common welfare of citizens rather than continuing the preferential treatment of the corporate elite? What evidence can I use to support my judgement?
11. Can the trickle-down approach to economics that did not work during the Reagan administration, during the 1980s, be expected to work better in today’s golden age of the corporation? What evidence can I use to support my judgement?
12. Which economic strategies should be prioritized? What evidence do I have to support my judgement?

An Experience Worth Noting: Socially Responsible Corporate Citizenship

Since 2013, I have been proudly working on a project, funded by the Government of Canada, to create an online educational resource documenting the immigrant experiences of Italian Canadians. The resulting interactive website features interesting personal, family, and community narratives along with classroom ready learning activities for teachers. Since narratives clearly outline how living in Canada has helped transform Italian immigrants, as well as how these immigrants have, in turn, helped to transform Canadian society, this labour of love has been called the Transformations Project.

“When buying and selling is controlled by legislation, the first things to be bought and sold are legislators.”
— P. J. O’Rourke

“Trickle-down economics is a fraud. Giving tax breaks to the rich and large corporations does not create jobs. It simply makes the rich richer, enlarges the deficit and increases income and wealth inequality. We need economic policies which benefit working families, not the billionaire class.”
— Bernie Sanders

Figure 8.2: Home page screen for the Transformations Canada website. (Courtesy of the National Congress of Italian-Canadians and the Toronto Catholic District School Board. [www.transformationscanada.com]
As project leader, I was required to ensure that the collection of narratives reflected a representative cross-section of experiences, including the achievements and contributions of successful entrepreneurs. For some thirty years, my father operated a successful barbershop business. One particular experience, during my days as a senior high school student, had left a bitter taste in my mouth regarding certain business practices. At the time, my father would buy heating oil to heat the building that included his shop and our living quarters.

An up-and-coming Italian businessman was operating a heating oil company. Being a fellow Italian, my father decided to give him his business. My father was in the habit of paying all his bills promptly. When he noticed that he was being double billed for an oil delivery, he confronted his supplier in the barbershop one day. From my study, directly behind the barbershop, I heard the entire exchange. At first, the bill was claimed to represent a different delivery. When that position proved untenable, a billing error was finally claimed. While laughing, the supplier then asked: “What have you got against a fellow Italian trying to get ahead in this country?” This puzzled me because my father had switched his provider to favour the same Italian who was now accusing him. My father’s quick response was: “I have absolutely nothing against an Italian getting ahead—as long as he does it honestly!”

After the next double billing, my father switched suppliers. I wondered how many others might get caught paying the second bill. Through diverse business interests, this fellow went on to become quite wealthy. But the experience left me with a cautious sensitivity regarding the entrepreneurial spirit.

Years later, while researching appropriate subjects for the Transformations Project, I found many successful business leaders, from across Canada, with a powerful recurring theme in their stories. Whether it was Johnny Lombardi and Nunzio Tumino in Toronto, Bruno and Silvio Di Gregorio in Thunder Bay, Ontario, Frank and Teresa Spinelli in Edmonton, Alberta, Joe Bova in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Josephine and Ennio Corsini in Hamilton, Ontario, Santo Montemurro in Rouyn, Quebec, or Joe Mancini in St. Peter’s, Nova Scotia, each narrative recounted the successful entrepreneur’s role in building community. All of these success stories underscored the need to give back to the community that sustained a successful enterprise. It was most encouraging to note the respectful treatment of customers and clients to establish long-term relationships based on mutual benefit and trust. This prevailing social consciousness was refreshing to encounter in the often hard and cold world of business.

The Trump experience provides discerning thinkers with ample opportunity to reflect on the tenements of socially responsible corporate citizenship. Trump’s business dealings reflect a clear focus on profit taking, over community building. As a businessman, Trump used available infrastructure to generate sizable profits, but he proudly avoided paying taxes to contribute to infrastructure maintenance and expansion. By using foreign suppliers, he increased company profits while exporting American jobs to countries where workers were drastically under paid. He expressed no remorse in regard to his winner take all, losers be damned approach to business. All the while, Trump considered himself to be a patriotic American, simply because he cited the Pledge of Allegiance with his right hand over his heart.

In an America where top CEOs earn almost 300 times more than the average wage paid to their workers, no claim that the nation’s wealth is equitably distributed can be even remotely justified. Trump has been a voluntary contributor to this harsh discrepancy. As president, he has furthered this divide by ensuring record high tax cuts for America’s most wealthy and relatively modest tax cuts for working class families. Sustainable business practices require economic justice, social justice, and ecological justice to prevail. This requires a social contract between citizens, government, labour unions, business executives, and corporate enterprises to be responsible stewards of the democratic society they claim to hold so dear. Given human nature, socially responsible corporate citizenship is not an automatic by-product of capitalism. It is something that must be worked on constantly, openly, and honestly.

This experience is by no means exclusive to Trump’s America. Liberal democracies are currently under attack throughout the free world. For some 70 years since the end of World War II, the shared tenements of free and uncompromised elections, collective peacekeeping through international military alliances, and prosperity through international trade agreements, all helped to maintain peace and promote economic development. Aggressive nationalist sentiments were also
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held in check. But by 2015, the cooperative model emerging from the bloody rubble of World War II had become increasingly more fragile as nationalist sentiments gained political momentum and nationalist interests reacquired primacy. The spirit of multilateral cooperation has been dealt a powerful blow by frustrated, angry, and quasi-tribal voices screaming for autonomy to address escalating social, political and economic problems closer to home — thus pitting “nationalists” against “globalists.”

For growing numbers of citizens, the cooperative/global approach has been far too costly. The working class have lost jobs and have seen their living standards decline. They feel betrayed by their political leaders and policies consistently enriching the wealthy elite. Clearly, very few of the gains of globalization have trickled down to the masses. Great Britain’s highly politicized decision to exit from the European Union (EU), as well as the growing ultra-right movements in Germany and France to reclaim lost autonomy from the EU, thus assuming greater control over national borders, immigration, crime rates, economic decision-making, and job creation are clear examples of this changing tide — a dangerous backlash to the maldistribution of wealth and power.

If this backlash is left unchallenged, we may be returning to power politics where might makes right. China has not become any more democratic or compromising since joining the World Trade Organization in 2001. Since joining in 2012, Russia has promoted increasingly more confrontational policies in world affairs. As a possible state supported breach of international protocols against meddling in the sovereign affairs of other nations, the suspected collusion of Russian cyber hacks to help sway British sentiments away from remaining in the EU, so as to weaken a rival power block, requires careful investigation and appropriate punitive sanctions in response.

Returning to the American scene, voices of moderation and globalism have continually lost influence in Trump’s White House, as nationalists clearly gained the upper hand. Trump has antagonized traditional allies with stiff tariffs on steel and aluminum and threatened to reverse trade practices long favouring or being abused by China. Over the years, Communist China has violated trade rules, stolen innovations from foreign competitors, and subsidized state-owned companies to reduce prices. China has never been seen as a stabilizing force in the world community, but America has. Regrettably, under Trump, America is now seen as a destabilizing force, like Russia and China. This must change for liberal democracy and social consciousness to prevail.

By using tariffs to force trading partners to acquiesce to new trade deals, more favourable to America, Trump has initiated a highly-publicized trade war where retaliatory tariffs are only the first step down a slippery ‘protectionist’ slope. This kind of pig headed strategy helped prolong the Great Depression of the 1930s.

Canadians, and their political leaders, have been singled out as “weak” and “dishonest” schemers and cheaters, much to the consternation of the governors of the many states that share the long border with Canada. Most of these governors have spoken out publicly to recognize the mutually beneficial trade relations with their Canadian neighbours.

Dating back to the 1980s, most trade disputes between Canada and the United States that have ended before the World Trade Organization (WTO), like the bitter and ongoing softwood lumber and dairy product supply management disputes, have been ultimately decided in Canada’s favour. It is not in the collective Canadian psyche to cheat, browbeat and exploit. But it is equally not in our nature to back down when being pushed around, even when being pushed around by the suddenly belligerent giant next door.

This climate of escalating hostility (and punitive tariffs) must change to preserve the mutually beneficial relationship between the two trading partners, military allies, and liberal democracies, without further harm to both political economies. Trump’s aggressive, heavy handed notion of ‘winner take all’ must be replaced by the collaborative spirit of ‘give and take’ which has served both nations well for many years.

“Many people in Europe and the United States have not benefitted much from overall economic growth over the past few decades, and they are naturally skeptical of the leaders and policies in place. But the solution is not to throw out the liberal order. It is to complement it with government policies that allow people to share in the benefits.”

— Douglas W. Elmendorf
The following post-modern parable depicts the flawed and one-sided assumptions of trickle-down economics, in a global reality currently favouring the rich and powerful while exploiting the poor and vulnerable.

**Trickle-Down Economics**

* * * * *

A billionaire misogynist spent his charmed life in the company of beautiful women. He discovered that money was a magnet attracting beautiful women. Luckily, he inherited a fortune from his parents so he always had lots of money to play with. Next to himself, the thing he loved best was to use money to make even more money. In time, he learned that the best deals are those where you make big profits while other investors assume all the risks. He was so proud of himself that he wrote a book about how to make money by wheeling and dealing. As gullible and curious people bought the book, he laughed all the way to the bank thinking, “As if I would ever reveal my real secrets to the rest of the world!”

One secret strategy he liked to use was to always have a designated fall guy to take the blame when a deal went badly. That way, his deal making record always remained perfect. Another strategy was to avoid paying taxes because governments waste tax dollars on the poor. A third strategy was to create his own charity. That way, he could give himself fancy toys and lavish gifts while earning huge tax breaks.

In time, he wheeled and dealt his way to the highest office in the land. He became dealmaker-in-chief for the entire nation. The very next day he took credit for an increase in stock market prices, claiming that the economy was already better with him in charge. A year later, faced with a sluggish economy, he blamed the incompetence of his predecessor and his current political foes.

After all, his economic plan was flawless. To deal with poverty and unemployment, instead of providing handouts to the needy (which is what stupid people would do), the dealmaker drastically lowered taxes for the rich. “As the rich become richer,” he reasoned, “they will hire more poor people to work for them, just like I always did.”

By keeping domestic wages competitively low, even more workers would eventually be hired. There would be no need to ship work contracts to China (like he had often done himself) to profit from cheap labour. That way, more jobs would stay at home. For the dealmaker, this created the perfect win-win situation.

First the rich win, and then, the rich win again!
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