

# Matthew's Book Club Summary #15

**By:** Matthew Klippenstein

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**Title:** The Necessary Revolution

The book club started as an informal, fun way to explore and consider business ideas relevant to our work with colleagues. The format consists of one person (usually Matthew) reading a book and writing a summary for discussion during team meetings. This allows the other team members to benefit from the book's insights, without carving time in their schedule to read the full volume.

The idea was to summarize *an interesting part* of each chapter in a paragraph or two, and where applicable, note how these could be relevant to the workplace. This provides the reviewer with practise condensing a mass of data into a few pieces of key information: an underappreciated skill. The reviews are meant to be accurate but light-hearted, on the assumption that people learn more when they're having fun.

Matthew's company gave permission for these to be distributed to non-employees as long as the employer-specific content was removed, for which he is sincerely appreciative.

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## **About the author:**

Peter Senge is an MIT professor. Back in the day, he wrote *The Fifth Discipline*, considered a management classic. (It's about organizational learning.)

He wrote *The Necessary Revolution* ("how individuals and organizations are working together to create a sustainable world") to describe how resourceful employees at hundreds of firms are changing their companies' approaches to sustainability, *from the bottom up*. Given today's daunting environmental challenges, he calls these changes a necessary revolution.

Part	Title	Summary
I	Endings, New Beginnings	<p>Like Paris Hilton trying to consume her full inheritance in her lifetime, we are living beyond our means. We're depleting non-renewable resources (oil, topsoil) and letting our wastes foul our habitat (think pollution, toxins in our environment). We've largely gotten away with it, because we started off with such a huge inheritance (all the world's natural services) but we won't get away with it forever.</p> <p>Fortunately, more and more people are waking up to the problem. They are correcting corporate behaviour – <i>and are getting results</i> – by going beyond the immediate issues. They collaborate with other groups inside (or outside) their organization to deal with the larger systems at play.</p> <p><i>To effect substantive change, you need to change the system. That takes a lot more time and effort than addressing symptoms. And it almost always takes bottom-up leadership. The contrast between "top-down" and "bottom-up" leadership was noted in <u>The Starfish and the Spider</u>:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- a CEO is a boss in the spotlight who organizes and directs using command-and-control</li> <li>- a catalyst is a peer who works behind-the-scenes by connecting and collaborating, using trust</li> </ul>
II	The Future Is Now	<p>Most people have heard about LEED building standards. In the US, the standards are set by the US Green Building Council, which formed in 1993 with ten people.</p> <p>Putting up buildings involves lots of parties, many with conflicting interests – real estate agents, developers, engineers, architects, construction firms, etc. Realizing that they needed everyone to buy in, the USGBC opened itself to everyone involved in the industry. As a result, everyone's perspective was broadened by hearing everyone else's perspective.</p> <p>The group focussed on getting high-level agreement on what the issues were, and in four years developed the LEED rating system. By then, LEED was so well-known that firms began to use the draft ratings system as a design guide, even before its official release.</p>

Part	Title	Summary
III	Getting Started	<p>Don't advocate.</p> <p>Lots of people get so enthusiastic about their Big New Idea, they don't listen to others' concerns; and because they don't listen, those concerns linger. And the Big New Idea doesn't catch on. And those people ask themselves, <i>what the heck happened?</i></p> <p>The most important skill needed to create systems change, is the ability to listen.</p>
IV	Seeing Systems	<p>The success stories discussed here were largely covered in <u>The Geography of Hope</u>. (e.g. DuPont reduced GHG emissions 70% from 1990 to 2005.)</p>
V	Collaborating Across Boundaries	<p>An Alcoa executive said "collaboration is key for achieving scale". And scale is what helps you hit a tipping point – whether it's high-enough buy-in to make a Big New Idea part of the corporate culture, or low-enough costs to create viability for recycling programs.</p> <p>Collaboration means building a coalition. And that means investing a lot of one-on-one time to build relationships in the entire system.</p> <p><i>One of the popular business books right now is called <u>The first 90 days: critical success strategies for leaders at all levels</u>. The takeaway from Part V is, don't be surprised if it takes 900 days. Doing great things right, takes time.</i></p>
VI	From Problem Solving to Creating	<p>Part of this section talks about John Elter, the Xerox VP who led their copier redesign which resulted in a 97% recyclable, 93% refurbishable photocopier. They reduced part count 90% (from 2000 to 200) and filed 200 patents.</p> <p><i>It would be very, very cool to do this at our firm. Especially the part about 200 patents. ☺ John has offered to fly here – on his own dime – to tell us more about his experiences and insights.</i></p>

Part	Title	Summary
VII	The Future	<p>A lot of ideas permeate Part VII of the book. The most interesting was the comment that the number of NGO's – like the Red Cross, David Suzuki Foundation, APEGBC, or your local business improvement association – has been growing like crazy in the past 50 years. (In 1948 the UN recognized 40 international NGO's. In 1999 they recognized 400,000 for that category alone.)</p> <p><i>If the number of NGO's is growing, that probably means there's a niche or function in modern society, that they serve. Could this imply that, just as a firm keeps good relations with corporate peers ("strategic partners") it should devote effort to cultivating good relations with selected NGO's?</i></p>