

# **Adjacent Opportunities**

**Sparking Emergent  
Social Action**



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## Sparking Emergent Social Action

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Ron Schultz

Forward by:  
Steve Farber  
*Greater Than Yourself*



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Sparking Emergent Social Action*  
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## **Advance Praise for *Adjacent Opportunities***

“Ron Schultz has written a book that goes directly to the heart and mind of social entrepreneurship. It inspires action and serves as a wonderfully thoughtful and light-hearted approach to engage those who live their lives as social entrepreneurs.”

Steve Mariotti, CEO, Network for Teaching Entrepreneurship (NFTE)

“Ron Schultz is a visionary in the spirit of Dr. Yunus.”

Alex Counts,  
CEO, Grameen Foundation

*“Adjacent Opportunities* offers some great examples that will help you brainstorm your own new solution to a social problem you care passionately about!”

Jim Fruchterman, CEO, Benetech,  
Recipient of the Skoll Award for Social  
Entrepreneurship and a MacArthur  
Foundation “Genius” Award

# CONTENTS

Foreword.....	1
Introduction .....	5
Designing the Possibility Space for Social Action.....	11
Applied Chutzpah .....	43
Ordinary Magic .....	53
Still More Chutzpah.....	63
Community Social Performance .....	73
Deciding to Decide.....	85
Access, Dignity, Respect and Opportunity.....	95
In Service.....	105
Cultivating the Emergent Constituency .....	117
Amplifying Weak Signals.....	127
Resources.....	137
About the Author .....	140



## Foreword

**W**here is the universal law that says creating success in business, amplifying personal joy and meaning, and changing the world for the better are mutually exclusive ideas? Where is it written?

It's not. There is no such law.

And yet, for some inexplicable reason we have structured our lives to conform to a belief that creating a better world—or a better local community—comes at the cost of significant personal and material sacrifice. Sometimes it does, to be sure, but we've come to believe that it *must*. And on the flipside, we've come to subscribe to a “reality” that dictates we go to work to earn a paycheck, but

we do all that other “goody-goody” stuff only to the degree that our left-over time and energy allows. And in believing in this so-called reality, we’ve caged ourselves in to a very limited world.

In this book, Ron Schultz sets out to rattle that cage and wake us up to a new world of ever-emerging possibilities and—even more important to business people like myself—*opportunities*. By first rattling and then systematically dismantling that isolating cage, he pushes us out into a world of rich interconnectedness. “As Americans,” Ron writes, “we love the romantic notion of ‘rugged individualism,’ but in reality, there is no such thing. None of us is truly independent or removed from our neighbors, our community,

our society, this vast, complex human system.”

Through this series of conversational, entertaining and provocative essays, you'll quickly come to understand that the term “Social Business” is not an oxymoron. But this book isn't just about an increased intellectual understanding of world-changing ideas or a philosophical treatise on the web of life; it is a call to action—yours.

I hope that when you've finished reading this book you'll put it down, reach out your hand, and grasp an adjacent opportunity to change the world for the better—for all of us.

Yourself included.

Steve Farber  
Author, *Greater Than Yourself*



## Introduction

**A**djacent Opportunities are one step away from where we are right now. They surround us and offer continual and alternative choice at every instance. We tend to forget this and lock our thinking into frequently prescribed methods of doing things, without considering what else might be available to us. This can be especially true in how we approach the greatest social needs within our community. This is often done for expediency sake, because the problems being faced are so immediate some action is required rather than an action delayed by the consideration of something new, different and perhaps untried. These habitual decisions are made in spite of

the fact that an adjacent opportunity might offer a better solution. There is no blame here. Habit is easier. And our overloaded social system is so understaffed and underfunded that we are often forced to do the best we can confined by the pressure of our limitations.

This has always been the issue at the heart of social action. How do you provide needed service on the one hand, while we change how service is provided on the other. Having operated within the system, it's difficult to let anything other than inertia win out. But that doesn't mean we do.

Over the past few years, I have had the great fortune to explore some new thinking about adjacent opportunities

that affect our communities like social entrepreneurs, social action and a shift in social consciousness. As these quarterly columns written in the *E:CO* journal (*Emergence: Complexity & Organization*) began to accumulate, it became evident that those dealing with social action could be collected as a way to provide some coherence and direction forward.

These columns represent some of my thinking, but not necessarily *the* thinking on these ideas and opportunities. They are offered not as the path itself, but as a ground on which to start the path. The whole nature of adjacent opportunities is that there is no one direction to be followed. Each choice produces new adjacent opportunities and a potential new and different direction. The only

map is being open to what is adjacent and present and flexible enough to recognize when something new and perhaps better emerges. But as we will see, adjacent opportunities are not all good. They are neither good nor bad, they simply are available. It is up to us to decide.

I want to thank Dr. Kurt Richardson, the publisher for Emergent Publications (formerly ISCE Publishing) and E:CO for allowing me the freedom to explore these ideas, and the journal space to publish them. And I'd like to acknowledge the profound impact of some people who have greatly influenced my thinking on these ideas. They include the late Howard Sherman, Dr. Michael Lissack, Bob Pratt, Bill Drayton, Stephen Heffernan, Dr. Les Forman, Stephen

Jacobs, Craig Dunn, Steve Farber, Alex Noble, Neville Bellimoria, Will Marre, Martyn Collins, Roi Ewell and countless others who have informed and lived these ideas within the world we encounter. I would also like to extend a special acknowledgement and appreciation to Laura Sanderford, who has provided me the space in this life to explore new ideas and mutually discover the adjacent opportunities we have chosen throughout our life together.

