

FOREWORDS BY AHMED RAHIM, CO-FOUNDER OF NUMI TEA
AND PAM HINDS, CHAIR, STANFORD UNIVERSITY, MANAGEMENT SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING

CAROL SANFORD

WITH BEN HAGGARD



INDIRECT
WORK

A REGENERATIVE CHANGE THEORY
FOR BUSINESSES, COMMUNITIES,
INSTITUTIONS AND HUMANS

Copyright © 2022 by Carol Sanford

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed “Attention: Permissions Coordinator,” at the address below.

InterOctave

14905 Bothell Everett Hwy Ste 362

Mill Creek, Washington 98012

www.interoctave.com

ISBN (paperback): 978-0-9893013-9-8

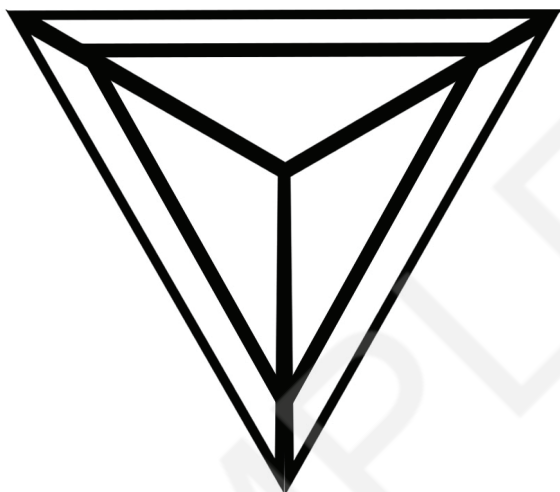
ISBN (ebook): 978-0-9893013-8-1

Ordering Information:

Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact InterOctave at the address above.

CAROL SANFORD

WITH BEN HAGGARD



**INDIRECT
WORK**

A REGENERATIVE CHANGE THEORY
FOR BUSINESSES, COMMUNITIES,
INSTITUTIONS AND HUMANS

To Sylvia Packer, my granddaughter,
for bringing beauty and love into our lives.

CONTENTS

FOREWORD FROM THE BOARDROOM: AHMED RAHIM	xi
FOREWORD FROM ACADEMIA: PAMELA J. HINDS	xv
INTRODUCTION: MAKING MY ESCAPE	1
CHAPTER ONE: A NEW MAP	5
FIRST INTERMEZZO	11
CHAPTER TWO: A STORY OF CHANGE	13
SECOND INTERMEZZO	21
CHAPTER THREE: A THEORY OF CHANGE	25
THIRD INTERMEZZO	37
CHAPTER FOUR: A TECHNOLOGY OF CHANGE	39
FOURTH INTERMEZZO	47
CHAPTER FIVE: CAPABILITY	49
FIFTH INTERMEZZO	59
CHAPTER SIX: CULTURE	61

SIXTH INTERMEZZO	71
CHAPTER SEVEN: CONSCIOUSNESS	73
SEVENTH INTERMEZZO	97
CHAPTER EIGHT: RESOURCING	99
EIGHTH INTERMEZZO	113
AFTERWORD: DEVELOPMENTAL COMMUNITIES	115
APPRECIATION AND INDEBTEDNESS	119

FOREWORD FROM THE BOARDROOM

AHMED RAHIM, CO-FOUNDER, NUMI, OSC,
AND THE COLLECTIVE

Growing up, trying to integrate between two very different cultures—coming from the Cradle of Civilization, where a deep sense of belonging is instilled in everyone, to a culture where rugged individualism is most prized—I chose a professional journey as an artist and explorer of culture and community. I could not have predicted that someday I would become an entrepreneur, but once there, I had to learn quickly how to swim in the turbulent waters of commerce, competition, and finance. In time, having adopted the identity of CEO of a fast-growing business, my response was to do what I thought successful business leaders are supposed to do: set goals, be decisive, and drive results (measured chiefly in financial terms). While this approach seemed to work well by traditional measures, it didn't satisfy my ongoing search for deeper meaning.

For as long as I can remember, I've been curious to understand the why and the how, to discover the hidden layers in each experience, and to learn how to deepen my relationship with others and the larger world. But how this all worked together and how it could be applied to my everyday experience lived mostly in the realm of intuition; that is, until I had the chance to work with Carol Sanford.

By reading Carol's earlier books, *The Regenerative Business* and *The Regenerative Life*, and working with her personally, and by helping to launch several organizations (Numi, OSC, The Collective, Numi Foundation, and others), I've had the

opportunity to stop and deeply reflect on patterns within myself and to heighten my state of awareness of what it means to be part of—and in service to—a regenerative living system. The lessons have been many, and they continue to unfold: how to get out of my own way by rewiring the thoughts and behaviors I've unconsciously adopted; how to move beyond a linear way of thinking and a desire for certainty toward embracing the present moment and recognizing the dynamic, systemic nature of life; and how to dissolve my awareness of self and recognize that, in everything I do, I am part of a collective, playing my unique role and helping to strengthen the greater whole.

Carol's lessons don't stop at ideas. She provides practical steps for tapping into one's purpose and living life as an extension of one's genuine essence. Over the years, as I put her guidance to work, I have shifted my approach to leadership, focusing more on building cultural values, asking questions with openness, advising rather than directing, collaborating, empowering others, creating a sense of belonging, and leaving doors open to creativity and magic. This has made a remarkable difference in the effectiveness and impact of the organizations I am privileged to steward and in the quality of life of those who are touched by them, including my own. Carol's insights and practices have also helped me shift my energy. I am more present in the moment, more trusting of the collective and accepting of the ups and downs that are part of the journey, and better able to stay connected to my essence.

Yet in the work of inner and outer transformation, it is hardest to know what you don't know, to see what you don't see. This is where *Indirect Work* comes in. In this latest book, Carol interweaves her teaching with artful intermezzos—exercises for activating one's inner reflections and creating new ways of thinking and approaching business, relationships, community, and society. It is an exploration, a journey that realizes the often-expressed principle that it's not the destination but how the journey is approached that matters. This is *the* critical work if we are to evolve our individual and organizational capacities to realize our highest purpose. It's the most exciting process to unravel, guided by pure openness to the present and to the greater collective.

When I reflect on Carol's total body of work, I see the vast ripples of change that have emanated from the wisdom of her teaching. She has a gift for shifting change-makers' consciousness and thinking, as she has shown with me and so many of my colleagues, moving us to adopt new ways of being in our work

and give flight to bold solutions to the social and environmental imperatives of our time.

I hope this new book, along with all of Carol's teaching, will enhance your life as it has mine.

SAMPLE

FOREWORD FROM ACADEMIA

PAMELA J. HINDS, FORTINET FOUNDERS CHAIR AND
PROFESSOR, MANAGEMENT SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING,
STANFORD UNIVERSITY

Indirect Work offers a radically different way to think about how to create change. It's clear to me, as it is to many, that we can't keep doing things the way we have. Even clearer, the methods that got us into our current ecological, social, and economic predicaments are not likely to get us out of them. *Indirect Work* presents a unique and powerful way to address the challenges of our time. It offers an in-depth introduction to Carol Sanford's theory of change, presented here in a compact form that is based on her decades of work as a highly successful educator serving businesses around the world.

This book is directed to change agents in all fields and at all levels, from students to seasoned professionals. The examples and stories are well-told, accessible, and moving, and they do a nice job of drawing readers in and helping them understand the points being made. Carol's overall message is clear and easy to follow from chapter to chapter. The intermezzos—pauses interspersed among the more theoretical chapters—are fabulously effective. They invited me to reflect on my own experience as a way of engaging more deeply with the material. By giving me real work to do, the intermezzos encouraged me to integrate what Carol has to say about bringing change to the world and apply it to the issues that drive me.

At a higher level, *Indirect Work* challenges our existing paradigms and theories of change and provides a well-reasoned, documented alternative. We can't bring about sweeping transformations in our practices and systems by taking them on

directly as big problems to solve, as we do now. *Indirect Work* proposes instead that we make fundamental changes in ourselves and come to know our places as effective agents in ascending orders of living systems. In other words, it helps readers know *how* to “be the change you wish to see in the world.” Don’t try to tackle what seems most wrong out there; develop the unique potential within yourself and then, through indirect work and in everything you do, be a resource to others and help them to see theirs. This is an iterative process and both an age-old and a brand-new way of bringing about transformation.

In this sense, *Indirect Work* is a wildly hopeful book. Anyone can read it and get value from it. Based on my own experience, it seems to me that whoever takes time to read the chapters carefully and work through the intermezzos will immediately make changes in the way they’re engaging with issues, and these will inevitably lead to beneficial effects in the world.

I have known and worked with Carol for almost 30 years. What I’ve learned from her has had a big influence on the way I think about the communities and endeavors I am a part of, my role in the world, and what it means to have impact. We have always agreed that our own ongoing learning and development are necessary to the ways that we engage in the world. This is core to the message of *Indirect Work*—that by helping others develop their own capability, we help to create the conditions for transformative and lasting change in the spheres to which each of them will dedicate their work.

Carol’s focus on capability building, the core activity in the stories and primary component of indirect work, seemed especially apt to me in my role as teacher. When I work with students at Stanford and elsewhere, I structure my teaching in ways that include exploration and reliance on lived experience, moment to moment. This encourages my students to find their own meanings in what they are learning. Their agency is strengthened, they become *capable* learners with the ability to develop as *capable* professionals, and they confirm or begin to know the roles they want to take on in their lives and careers.

I love this latest addition to Carol’s publications, and I look forward to reading it again. It articulates some important aspects of the work I do and illuminates how it is possible for me and others to make real change happen in the world, as individuals and as members of communities and society. The ideas in *Indirect Work* have triggered in me a profound realization of the importance of working in community and holding in awareness the communities that we affect beyond our

own—recognizing effects rippling out from individual and collective contributions. It leaves me with a powerful, enduring, and visceral sense of the incredible possibilities alive in my connections to things larger than myself.

SAMPLE

INTRODUCTION

MAKING MY ESCAPE

In the summer of 1964, straight out of my junior year at a Baptist college in Abilene, I hit the road with a carful of fellow students determined to see the world. It was my first time away from Texas, and although I didn't realize it, I was engineering my escape from an abusive childhood and a narrow religious culture that had no use for independent, outspoken women. Our little band of renegades followed the fabled Route 66 to California, driving for three days and sleeping on the ground at roadside parks in the time-honored tradition of college students everywhere. By the time we washed up in Hollywood at the home of my roommate's uncle, I knew I was never going back. Nine weeks later, I had met and married the man with whom I would have two children. Soon after, we moved to Berkeley, where he would pursue a master's degree and I could pick up where I left off as an undergraduate.

It was a tumultuous time at UC Berkeley, with the rise of the free speech and antiwar movements. I found my interests evolving as I moved from a focus on political science to political philosophy. This led me to a survey course on Greek philosophy, where my first encounter with Plato's Socratic dialogues and the "allegory of the cave" rocked my world. It was so obvious: in that mad ride from West Texas to California, I had escaped from the cave. My eyes had been opened to a bigger reality than I had ever imagined possible in my sheltered Christian upbringing. Reading the dialogues awakened in me a fervent desire to become a philosopher and to support others who, like me, were seeking meaning in their lives.

The allegory of the cave, which lies at the heart of Plato's *Republic*, is one of the

fundamental images of Western thought and culture. In the dialogue, Socrates describes a cave in which people are chained in place, unable to move, watching flickering shadows on the wall that they take to be reality. (This image is the basis for the popular movie *The Matrix*, which also shows human beings enslaved and pacified by an illusionary reality.) For one who has been freed from the chains, it becomes apparent that the shadows are produced by puppeteers holding up cutouts in front of a flickering fire. It takes a philosopher, a lover of wisdom and seeker of truth, to endure the painful process of climbing out of the comforting darkness of the cave to stand in the light of the sun.

Over the years, I've applied this image to my work in the world, which has focused on evolving the underlying beliefs and premises that organize human activity on our planet. Most of this work has been in the field of business and organizational development, although some of it has spilled over into the fields of governance and social change. For me, the shadows represent the world as it is conveyed to us by our senses, and the chains are the paradigms and mental models by which we interpret this world. The puppeteers are the priestly caste of experts and opinion leaders to whom we look in order to learn what is true, right, and good. The fire that casts the shadows is the cultural milieu that shapes what we believe, know, and consider worthy of knowing.

It takes deep and diligent work to see the hidden machineries (the puppets and puppeteers, chains and shadows) that generate consensus reality. Helping others to see these machineries is even harder because they believe the puppet show. It's not enough to tell them they are caught in a shadow play. To free them from the cave, one must build the capability and consciousness that will enable them to examine the hidden sources of their perceptions of reality. One must grow a culture and community of fellow seekers, each aiming to break the mechanical patterns of their thought. This is what I mean by *indirect work*.

A philosopher doesn't try to persuade us that this or that phenomenon is a shadow on a cave wall. Instead, she provides us with the method and means to step out of the cave and its illusions so that we can see for ourselves. We do this by learning to challenge the apparent evidence of our senses and the interpretations we make of this evidence. Indirect work teaches us to discern and then evolve the reality-making apparatus within ourselves.

Indirect Work is intended to serve as a key to my other writings, in particular my books and blog posts.¹ I have long understood that my words and teachings are often misinterpreted because people try to understand them as direct instruction. They want a template, something they can apply directly, something they can do. But what I'm saying has to be approached from the vantage of an indirect mind-set. Otherwise, everything that I'm describing is downgraded to tactics rather than experienced as an invitation to examine the source of one's beliefs about reality.

I hope with this book to evoke a shift in perspective that will enable readers to perceive the world in a new way. I sincerely believe that we will not make the urgent changes needed with regard to all aspects of how we live if we don't learn to work indirectly. I've even built in a set of exercises, presented here as brief intermezzos, to support this shift. I encourage you to use this text to challenge and explore your own processes of reading and making meaning.

1 Carol Sanford is the author of five previous books: *The Responsible Business: Reimagining Sustainability and Success*; *The Responsible Entrepreneur: Four Game-Changing Archetypes for Founders, Leaders, and Impact Investors*; *The Regenerative Business: Redesign Work, Cultivate Human Potential, Achieve Extraordinary Outcomes*; *No More Feedback: Cultivate Consciousness at Work*; and *The Regenerative Life: Transform Any Organization, Our Society, and Your Destiny*. She blogs at carolsanford.com.

