Thoughts from Linda:

Collaborating with the Enemy
How to Work with People You Don't
Agree with or Like or Trust

Adam Kahane
2017

The title is provocative, and as a practitioner of 'collaboration in action' for many years, it drew me to explore this latest work by Adam Kahane. His previous books: *Transformative Scenario Planning, Solving Tough Problems*, and *Power and Love*—have all contributed to the theoretical field of collaboration, and this latest book, published in 2017, is a smart addition. It comes at a good moment on the planet. The book is aimed primarily at professionals but has many insights for individual citizens who are seeking new ways to address the complexities of our world today.

As Peter Block notes in his *Foreword* to the book, "The promise (of the title) is particularly relevant in light of what is occurring in the world. We live in a complicated time. It is a divisive and polarizing era in which we respond by constantly seeking like-mindedness…As a larger society, cities are segregated into neighborhoods of people like us. As nations, we are voting for politicians who want to keep out strangers and reclaim our country as if someone had taken it away. We live in a time of growing alienation and isolation."

Just as in *The Moral Imagination*, this book invites us to reconsider our own mental models and create space for new ways of thinking and being. I found it most strategic and practical at the same time, as he offers a wise approach to addressing the realities of our world today. His global experience is strong, and he has a humble way of acknowledging his own foibles and key insights through real stories. In fact, the stories alone make the book 'worth the read.'

The master framework for Kahane's 'upgrades' to the field of collaboration is one he calls "stretch collaboration." While I have a different view of his framing of 'conventional

collaboration' (see. Page 2 in the book,) I appreciate his stretch paradigm and the tool kit he provides for experimentation in these approaches.

The book is organized into seven chapters: *Collaboration is Becoming More Necessary and More Difficult; Collaboration is Not the Only Option; Conventional, Constricted Collaboration is Becoming Obsolete; Unconventional, Stretch Collaboration is Becoming Essential; The First Stretch is to Embrace Conflict and Connection; The Second Stretch is to Experiment a Way Forward,* and *The Third Stretch Is to Step into the Game.*

These are followed by a *Conclusion* called *How to Stretch*, which offers a detailed six-week practice guide for anyone willing to step into the challenge of trying a different approach.

I particularly appreciated his insights into his 'first stretch' – embracing conflict and connection. He takes us through the many current approaches (dialogue, standard negotiating approaches, and structured problem solving, for example), illustrating their inadequacies for today's pluralism and challenging macro environments.

He tells a variety of stories in this chapter, including some of his work in facilitating a project in Guatemala in the late '90s that ultimately helped reach an agreement to end a six-year war. There is also a good, more complete assessment of the work of Nelson Mandela, reflecting his personal approach to the use of 'love and power' to achieve the positive outcomes in South Africa that ended apartheid. He illustrated how Mandela knew how and when to 'assert' and when to 'engage' in a way that brought both strategic mindsets into a whole approach versus an 'either/or' strategy. He uses the Arthur Koestler approach of "holon" to unpack the concept of 'multiple wholes,' which is another way of thinking strategically and broadly about stakeholders in any situation.

This chapter demonstrates the practicality of re-framing and broadening mindsets about what is possible to embrace conflict and collaboration through the lens of 'love and power.'

The second stretch deals with experimentation as an approach versus a strict and constricted approach to problem-solving. In this chapter, he synthesizes insights from scenario planning and Eastern philosophies to explain the power of iterative experimentation as a strategy for collaboration. He describes the process as: "an ongoing and emergent process in which it is more important to act than to agree. What is crucial is to create the conditions under which participants can act freely and

creatively, and, in doing so, create a path forward. Success in collaborating does not mean that the participants agree with, like, or trust one another; maybe they will, and maybe they won't. Success means that they are able to get unstuck and take a next step."

He continues, "Stretch collaboration also involves more than formulating, agreeing, and executing a plan. It can be a useful discipline to create a plan—as long as we hold it lightly and change it when it no longer makes sense. Stretch collaboration involves making our way forward amid uncertainty and contestation." He quotes Deng Xiaoping, former leader of the Chinese Communist Party, who famously said about his approach: '*We are crossing the river by feeling for stones.*'

Adam Kahane has a rich background in this field and is an acknowledged expert. He studied physics at McGill University in Montreal and energy and resource economics at The University of California, Berkeley. He worked in corporate planning at PG&E and was head of social, political, economic, environmental, and technological scenarios at Royal Dutch Shell in London. He has worked in the field of global collaboration, assisting in transformation in South Africa, and ultimately moved to Cape Town, where he lives today. He's worked in over fifty countries around the world.

There is much to like about this book. I think an alternative title could be "*A Recipe for Action in New Times,*" as this book offers help not only to professional collaboration consultants in the field but also to anyone who wants to create space for conversation and build understanding among people in a very complex world.

As Peter Goldmark, former President of The Rockefeller Foundation, noted, "How many of us have dreamed of developing the art of helping others solve 'impossible' problems and bridge 'uncrossable' divides? Adam Kahane has taken that journey. Read, listen, absorb, and integrate."