EVOLVING LEADERSHIP FOR COLLECTIVE WELLBEING
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EVOLVING LEADERSHIP FOR COLLECTIVE WELLBEING

Lessons for Implementing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

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In loving memory of Seana Lowe Steffen who is still lighting the way.
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Many thanks to all those whose support helped me to edit this book. As with most things in life, the people walking the path beside me on this journey have made all the difference (and there were many, without whom, this book would not exist).

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I am grateful for the contributions and extraordinary time and effort given by the authors in this volume. I learned from every one of you.

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Jamie Rezmovits
Co-Editor
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Seana Lowe Steffen, PhD, deceased, was the founder and CEO of the Restorative Leadership Institute (RLI), which cultivates leadership and enterprise that fulfills humanity’s potential to thrive in balance with all life. As a certified B Corp, RLI received “Best for the World” recognition among all certified B Corps globally in 2017, 2016, and 2013. Seana brought nearly 25 years of experience in strategic consulting, capacity building, and leadership and organizational development. Her client community spanned sectors and continents including Tostan, The Sustainability Consortium, National Civilian Community Corps, Hewlett Packard, Denver Water, and the Carter Center. For her positive impact, Seana was invited to be a delegate at the prestigious Skoll World Forum.

Jamie Rezmovits, JD, as the Chair of the Restorative Leadership Institute, supports purpose-driven organizations and planet-minded leadership to increase their positive impact. With specialties in environmental conflict transformation, education, and community development, her heart-centered work spans from university classrooms in the United States to rural communities abroad. As an educator at the University of Colorado, she worked as a faculty member for the INVST Community Studies Department where she trained community leaders to work for the benefit of humanity and the environment. Jamie is a practicing attorney at Scheitler & Rezmovits, PC in Denver, Colorado.

Shanah Trevenna has been leading and guiding leaders of companies and non-profit organizations in the impact space for over 15 years. Shanah’s unique style as an executive and leadership coach bridges her broad academic and professional experience with a honed intuition that helps leaders connect with their true nature and create their most fulfilling life and business. Her PhD focused on evolving business and the global economy, so she speaks and consults globally on diverse topics such as B Corps, women’s
empowerment, blockchain for good, and conscious entrepreneurship. Shanah currently works with 100 global coaching clients.

Shana Rappaport has worked actively for over a decade as a cross-industry convener to advance sustainability solutions. Over the last five years, as director of strategic programs for GreenBiz Group, Shana has helped build and scale the VERGE global event series, focusing on how technology accelerates the clean economy. Shana previously served as Director of Education for Bioneers, and as a nationally recognized community leader during her time as an undergraduate and graduate student at USC.
Seana Lowe Steffen was the creative and strategic visionary behind this book and a beautiful soul. Tragically, she was killed in car accident near Longmont, Colorado, on September 16, 2017, before it could be published, but her light has shined bright as a guide through my completion of this project on her behalf.

I remember Seana calling me in the fall of 2016 with the news of her book proposal having been selected for publication. She was giddy with excitement and pride — enough so that just the tone of her voice made me giggle, too. She had a way of doing that — of sharing in such an authentic and embodied way that I couldn’t help but want to get involved. That was one of Seana’s most powerful gifts — the ability to inspire those around her to work with her in service to the possibility of a better world.

Before she died, Seana was on a mission to answer the guiding question, “How do we bring out the best of our diverse humanity to ensure a sustainable future?” She believed in humanity’s potential to meet the environmental and social challenges facing our planet in a way that would result in wondrous outcomes. This book and the process for its creation are a reflection of all that Seana held good and true, from the collaborative nature of the writing process to what she believed in the core of her being would be the impact of having this resource exist in the world. She was very proud of it.

Seana intended that this book empower individuals, organizations, and communities with practical tools and actionable insights to manifest the vision of a future where all life can thrive. Specifically, she hoped to:

- *Awaken the world* to the potential of this pregnant moment in global history — inspiring recognition that our generation is the first, and possibly last, with the ability to meaningfully address these pressing global challenges.
• *Inspire belief in what’s possible* in and for our world — bridging the divide between urgency and agency.

Seana celebrated her 50th year of life just a couple of weeks before her untimely passing. She spent the week of her birthday in the same way she lived her life every single day, expressing delight and profound gratitude. The last words of her birthday reflection convey the very essence of her being:

_Infinite blessings to name and celebrate [...] I am so grateful for the gift of my life every moment of every day, and wish the deep contentment of a fulfilled heart to all. Onward._

I hope you will find this book as meaningful and relevant as Seana knew it could be.

Jamie Rezmovits
Co-Editor
INTRODUCTION

Seana Lowe Steffen and Jamie Rezmovits

On September 25, 2015, the 193 countries of the United Nations (UN) General Assembly adopted the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in what Elizabeth Cousens, the Deputy CEO of the UN Foundation, described as, “the most inclusive process the UN has ever seen” (E. Cousens, personal communication, February 3, 2017). Indeed, the agenda itself, which is a plan of action for people, the planet, and prosperity “to shift the world onto a sustainable and resilient path” states that, “Never before have world leaders pledged common action and endeavor across such a broad and universal policy agenda” (United Nations [UN], 2015b).

As if on synchronous cue, that week Mark Carney, head of the Bank of England and chair of the International Financial Stability Board, named climate change the “tragedy of the horizon” during his London City Dinner speech to Lloyd’s Register, a 325-year-old behemoth in the insurance industry (Carney, 2015). In the face of unprecedented change, Carney issued a “carbon bubble” warning shot over the bow of the future of a sustainable global economy with the threat of US$100 trillion in stranded assets. Back in New York, Paul Polman, CEO of Unilever, publicly broadcast from the UN General Assembly a welcome to the launch of the B Corp movement in the UK describing it as, “an important part of the shift toward a more inclusive purpose-driven economy which is unquestionably needed” (B Corp UK, 2015). Polman stated that “This is an exciting time to be in business. I am proud that Unilever will do its bit to help the B Corp movement scale so that one day all companies will compete not only to be the best in the world but be best for the world” (B Corp UK, 2015).
Each of these remarkable examples reflects an emergent trend in leadership with individuals, organizations, and communities answering a uniquely twenty-first century call to greatness. It is a call from metrics and movements demanding a response to breached critical thresholds. In 2016, the world experienced its hottest year on record—again. The global average temperature was the highest since global records began in 1880 (NOAA, 2017). According to the UN Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, rising human population has polluted or overexploited the majority of the ecological systems on which life depends, and humanity is straining the ability of the Earth’s ecosystems to sustain future generations (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). A majority of scientists concur that every major ecosystem in the world is in decline, and many believe that the sixth great extinction has begun (Ceballos, Ehrlich, & Dirzo, 2017). From a scientific perspective, this is now the Anthropocene epoch,2 ushered into existence by human-induced changes, such as climate change, which are global in scale (Zalasiewicz et al., 2008). Globally, in 2015, 736 million people lived in extreme poverty, with one in five people in developing regions living on less than USD 1.90 per day (World Bank, 2018).

Our understanding of the significance of sustainability threats and the implications at all levels—global, societal, and individual—has only begun. By 2050, the direction of this turning point will already be known, but from a systems perspective, the story itself is being written today through a collection of individual acts and leadership choices being made moment by moment.

In these uncertain times of unprecedented environmental, economic, social, and political change, the world needs leadership capable of charting a future of global sustainability and collective wellbeing. Beyond asking why the changes are happening to us, we also have the opportunity to question why they are happening for us. In other words, how are we being compelled to evolve our leadership, and who are we being called to become?

THE UNITED NATIONS’ TRANSFORMING OUR WORLD: 2030 AGENDA FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

History was made when world leaders stepped up and pledged unifying commitments to secure a sustainable future “where all life can thrive” by
adopting the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (the 2030 Agenda). The plan for developing the 2030 Agenda was created in June of 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, at the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (Rio + 20) as part of a three-year multi-lateral and multi-stakeholder process. The heart of the 2030 Agenda is the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The SDGs succeeded the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), created in 2000, which endeavored to meet the needs of the world’s poorest people by eradicating global poverty by 2015 (UN, 2015a). The MDGs established measurable objectives for addressing hunger, achieving universal primary education, promoting gender equality, and avoiding child and maternal mortality, among others. The final MDG report found that the 15-year attempt was “the most successful anti-poverty movement in history” reducing the number of people living in poverty by more than half (UN, 2015a).

The SDGs build on the extraordinary progress begun by the MDGs while also addressing areas where, despite best efforts, progress was not sufficient. In addition, while the MDGs only applied to developing countries, the SDGs will apply universally to all UN member states. The SDGs broadened the content, scope, and scale of the MDGs with a particular emphasis on environmental sustainability as central to the achievement of all goals. While the MDGs were more narrowly focused on reducing poverty in all its dimensions, the SDGs were developed with an explicit understanding of the relationship between environmental sustainability and two other dimensions of sustainable development: the economic and the social.

Designed by collective intelligence and diverse inputs from grassroots to the government, the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2015b) is a brilliant plan that emboldens local to global engagement and supports aligned momentum throughout the world. It charts a “sustainable and resilient path” designed to leave no one behind, and reach “those furthest behind first” (UN, 2015b). The 17 STGs and their 169 associated targets are “integrated and indivisible,” balancing economic, environmental, and social dimensions to achieve a vision of our world where:

- All human beings are free from poverty and hunger and “can fulfill their potential for dignity and equality and in a healthy environment.”
- “All human beings can enjoy prosperous and fulfilling lives […] in harmony with nature.”
The planet itself is free from degradation to be able to support present and future generations.

The SDGs address global challenges that are vital to the survival of humanity, tackling environmental issues such as climate change and clean energy and covering a wide range of social needs like health and wellbeing, education and access to livable wages, and job opportunities. In addition, the goals address core obstacles to sustainable development such as gender inequality and economic disparity. The goals are meant to be conceptualized holistically with the understanding that they address root problems in a systematic and interrelated way. The goals recognize that either progress or deterioration on one goal affects progress or deterioration on other goals as well. We cannot eliminate poverty (SDG 1), for example, without decent work and economic growth for all (SDG 8). We cannot take action to combat climate change and its impacts (SDG 13) without addressing responsible consumption and production (SDG 12). This profound interconnection makes the agenda the most significant global effort so far to advance sustainable development.3

Bridging the Leadership Gap

The outcomes of such universal and unanimous commitments are inspired and inspiring, yet what will it really take to bridge the leadership gap between a plan of action and unprecedented progress? The world’s leaders have made a promise, and now they and the rest of the world’s social actors need access to the best leadership guidance and resources available to accomplish what has never been done: to translate the bold vision of what is possible for humanity to a sustainable reality.

In response, Evolving Leadership for Collective Wellbeing: Lessons for Implementing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals aims to provide that guidance in the form of a useful resource designed to heighten leadership effectiveness through access to vanguard theory and practice. This collection highlights stories and insights from leadership practitioners and scholars around the world and offers invaluable lessons, models, and practices to draw upon. Case and place-based chapters bridge theory and practice to empower diverse actors around the world.
Part I of this book offers various perspectives on the leadership qualities and capacities necessary to achieve the UN SDGs. Liberating the power of our leadership potential starts with embracing our innate capacity to shape our world. When we are mindful that each action and inaction impacts the web of life, our choices can align with and evolve for the impact that we intend. The unprecedented opportunity before us to co-evolve a future of global sustainability and collective wellbeing requires leaders that understand that leadership matters. The choices that we make with our unavoidable influence on the web of life impact the present as well as the future. We have a profound opportunity and responsibility to look beyond our time and make choices that keep future generations in our minds and hearts.

Achieving the SDGs requires an integrated approach because the SDGs themselves are interrelated. Thus, leading for sustainable development means leading with the awareness of the interconnection of both our global challenges as well as their potential solutions. We begin our exploration of leadership qualities and capacities with Seana Steffen’s chapter on the “Emergence of Restorative Leadership,” a holistic approach to leadership that specifically recognizes the interconnectedness of all life and acts for the highest benefit to all. This chapter introduces the research-based guiding framework of restorative leadership and helps to answer this book’s guiding question: How do we bring out the best of our diverse humanity to ensure a sustainable future?

The greatest threats to a thriving future of global sustainability and collective well-being are cynicism and resignation. We can and must offset attitudes of impossibility with inspired voices and compelling demonstrations. The next two chapters in the book offer both. In Chapter 2, “Humanistic Leadership for Sustainable Transformation,” Barry A. Colbert, Jessica Nicholson, and Elizabeth C. Kurucz provide an empirical case study of Sustainable Waterloo Region (SWR), an environmental, social enterprise headquartered in Waterloo, Ontario, Canada. The authors demonstrate both the necessity and effectiveness of leading from a humanistic perspective — one that remembers that our shared humanity has the capacity to bind us together despite differences in geography, cultures, faiths, and conditions. In Chapter 3, “Collective Impact Through Regenerative Development: Lessons from Green and Healthy Home Repair,” Elizabeth A.
Walsh tells the story of how the Austin Housing Repair Coalition embodied the principles of regenerative design and development and succeeded in furthering the progress of at least three SDGs in their work providing green and healthy home repair services in Austin, Texas.

Sustainability, which is by definition forward thinking, can be used as a lens through which to navigate our rapidly changing world. In order to ensure a sustainable future, leaders must be able to adapt to changes in a way that moves progress forward toward the achievement of the SDGs. The freedom and power of conscious choice are innately available to us as human beings. When we live and lead with clarity of intention, breakdowns, and hardships can become ingredients for breakthrough progress — even beyond what would have been possible had those circumstances not occurred. Ebere Morgan explores these ideas in Chapter 4, “Achieving a Sustainable Future Through Adaptive and Strategic Leadership.” This chapter provides a framework for assisting leaders in learning to bring complex challenges to the surface as a tool for developing the skills necessary for leadership for the twenty-first century.

We complete this portion of the book with Wanda Krause’s Chapter 5, “Leadership Lessons from Women in High Risk Environments,” which asserts that women from locations other than the West should not be viewed as victims but as central actors in moving humanity toward sustainability. From them, we can learn how to embody qualities such as resiliency, trust, persistence, and hope — qualities which are vital to the achievement of the SDGs.

PART II: LEADING FROM ALIGNED VALUES

This extraordinary time brings us unique challenges and opportunities that call us to envision and manifest like never before. Translating bold visions to new levels of positive impact requires breakthroughs in design and practice. Understanding how to connect shared values for a common vision is essential in inspiring the vigorous, positive action that is needed to achieve the SDGs. Part II of this book explores the importance of value alignment and provides methods, frameworks, and examples for aligning values with action.
In Chapter 6, “Fossil Fuel Divestment: The Power of Positively Deviant Leadership for Catalyzing Climate Action and Financing Clean Energy,” Abigail Abrash Walton highlights the process and impact of leaders and organizations’ engagement in fossil fuel divestment whereby financial investments in the world’s largest fossil fuel extraction companies are reinvested into clean energy. Her chapter provides tangible methods for organizational leaders and others who want to improve institutional capacity in an effort to address climate change.

In Chapter 7, “Aligning Your Team’s Vision with the World’s Bold Goals,” Adriana Salazar, David García, and Mariana Quiroga present a strategic framework for guiding organizational actions toward addressing the world’s most pressing problems developed by Mexican-based Cirklo, a social innovation consulting company. Their Team Alignment Tool provides a method specifically for aligning organizational values with the UN SDGs.

Finally, in Chapter 8, Karen Cvitkovich tells the story of lessons she learned in Standing Rock, North Dakota, where she joined a group of activists working to stop the construction of the Dakota Access Pipeline in 2017. “Perspectives and Possibilities: Aligning for Social Change” describes how political, cultural, and informational differences between people on the same side of a social and environmental change initiative can serve as powerful tools for sustainable change.

PART III: RELATIONSHIPS AND THE HEART OF OUR SHARED HUMANITY

While the SDGs provide a global plan of action, they also require local participation and involvement to achieve them. Working together, individuals, not-for-profits, institutions, businesses, and governments must come together to ensure a sustainable future for all. At the core of coming together is the ability to relate. The ability to relate — to others, to ideas, to challenges, and to solutions — is critical for addressing the complex environmental, social, and economic aspects of sustainable development. Part III of this book examines the role of relating and relationship in the context of bringing out the best of our diverse humanity to ensure a sustainable future.

Dung Q. Tran and Michael R. Carey examine Pope Francis’ 2015 encyclical, *Laudato Si’* in Chapter 9, “Relational Leadership and Laudato Si’: Pope
Francis’ Call to Care for Our Common Home.” When Pope Francis described the environmental crisis in the context of spiritual and moral viewpoints, he demonstrated his belief that the ideas are inextricably interconnected. *Laudato Si’* overtly relates poverty, for example, to environmental degradation and addresses the need for integrated solutions to the world’s most pressing challenges.

Chapter 10, “Thriving as One Global Family: Leadership Beyond the Nation State” by Ejaj Ahmad and Hugh O’Doherty, inspires leadership that encourages breaking away from relating through tribalism and the idea that we are separated by ethnicity and nationality. They assert that if we are to achieve the SDGs, we need to look at the world’s challenges with the lens that each of the challenges affects all of us, and thus each challenge requires the cooperation of actors on a global scale. If we can look at others and see and feel our shared humanity, we are better able to make choices that bring about the highest benefit to all.

In “How to Negotiate for Sustainable Relationships and Prosperity,” Chapter 11, Mehrad Nazari shares a practical method of negotiation in which parties move beyond self-interests by harnessing the innate desire of the human spirit to connect, communicate, and co-create optimum results. Moving beyond self-interests is critical for achieving the SDGs as solutions to challenges like poverty and climate change necessitate seeing beyond ourselves to the heart of our shared humanity and profound interrelatedness.

**PART IV: THE MORAL AND ETHICAL IMPERATIVE OF AN INCLUSIVE ECONOMY**

Although the MDGs helped to bring more than one billion people out of extreme poverty (UN, 2015a), deep inequalities still exist in the global economy. Inclusion is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda. It is echoed in the pledge to leave no one behind and in the vision of a “just, equitable, tolerant, open and socially inclusive world in which the needs of the most vulnerable are met” and “a world in which every country enjoys sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth and decent work for all” (UN, 2015b). Creating an economic system that works for all is a moral and ethical imperative. This section of the book explores how we might co-evolve business and the economy in ways that increase economic health for all, even the