

*“If you are neutral in situations of injustice,
you have chosen the side of the oppressor.
If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a
mouse and you say that you are neutral, the
mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”*

– Archbishop Desmond Tutu

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Foreword

Why This Book? Why Now?

Most of us can remember an experience or person that helped shape our view of the world and our place in it. When I was a child, I had tuberculosis and spent nearly two years in a hospital. Once a week, a priest, a well-known anti-apartheid activist who happened to be white, would visit me. At the time, I was unaware of the impact his act of caring would have on my consciousness. This champion of the dispossessed touched my life deeply with his example of goodness.

Throughout this book, you will read similar stories of young people whose lives and worldview were fundamentally shaped by a person or event, and who today are reaching out to others, in much the same manner as that priest reached out to me.

Collected here are stories of passionate, committed young leaders who chose not to look the other way when they saw a problem – the shame experienced by a person with HIV/AIDS, the poisoning of a sacred river, the frustration of a nation's citizens in the face of a national crisis, the exclusion of the physically disabled. These are young people who choose to take a stand.

As a result of their efforts, low-income women are building small businesses, and students are learning about their role in a democracy. Once-illiterate adults are learning to read, and a host of other urgent needs are being met.

These young visionaries are representative of thousands of their peers in communities large and small around the globe. Youth are uniquely equipped to change the world because they dream. They choose not to accept what is, but to imagine what might be. Many of the youth you will read about here began their service work with little to no training, no money, and few connections to those who might help. Still, they persevered and successfully enrolled others in their efforts.



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The Desmond Tutu Peace Centre's Leadership Academy seeks to nurture and develop visionary leadership among young people and women. For further information, visit: www.tutu.org

While this book focuses on the motivations and accomplishments of more than thirty young leaders, it's also about the hundreds of young people who work side by side with them. As you will discover, those profiled, while leaders in their own right, humbly describe themselves as sparks that ignite other people's passion for social justice.

Leading is about serving others. In today's fast-paced, competitive society, it may seem unrealistic to live your life in service of a greater good, but that's just what our world needs most. What are the attributes of a leader? Integrity. Compassion. Gentleness. Magnanimity. When Nelson Mandela emerged from twenty-seven years in prison, what the world saw was not anger and bitterness, but a readiness to forgive and pursue reconciliation. These are the qualities we all need to aspire to and those that a true leader models for us.

This book seeks to foster connections between today's youth leaders. Far too often, young leaders work in isolation, unaware of their peers carrying out similar activities around the world. It's also about sharing good ideas. Included here is information and advice on how to strengthen youth-led – or, indeed, any grassroots – projects. Readers will gain insights into how to advocate their cause, raise money, plan an event, mobilize other youth, network, and collaborate with others.

What are the lessons in these stories? First and foremost is the power of every individual to make a difference in his or her community. All you need is an idea and the will to make it happen. Second is the growing contribution of today's youth in making our world a better place. The growth of civil society around the world and new

technologies, including the Internet, are providing young people with greater opportunities to get engaged, network with one another, and have their voices heard. Young people are taking action like never before. This is good news for all of us.

And a final, critical lesson is the vital role that each of us can play in supporting youth-led efforts. In these pages, you will read of the nonprofit leaders, business people, government officials, and community members who rallied behind these young leaders and their causes. Some provided encouragement. Others offered their time, their expertise, their financial support, or other key services.

Goodness, I believe, is inherent in all human beings. While bad news abounds in today's world, I believe that compassion and gentleness are the norm. Who hasn't experienced the wonderful feeling of doing something good for another? In that moment, we recognize our common humanity and reflect the light that is in each of us.

I have a dream that one day we will all come to realize that we are part of the same family. While our world is one of great divides – racial and ethnic divides, economic and political divides – we share the same earth and breathe the same air. It could very well be that today's global challenges have the capacity to bring us closer together than ever before.

To each of you who reads this book: I encourage you to dream, to care, to be compassionate, and to let yourselves soar with your ability to create positive change in a world that desperately needs you. **Your time is now!** ■