

Introduction

Paul Benedict's 63-year-old hands looked like those of a drowned cadaver — ghostly white, wrinkled, and swollen. But, Paul wasn't dead; he was homeless during a record rainfall in Los Angeles County in January 2010. He was one of more than six hundred homeless men in Los Angeles County who were forced out of homeless shelters during the wet days.

Mark Horvath and his Twitter followers came to Paul's rescue. Mark was a case manager for a homeless shelter in Los Angeles at the time. That was his Clark Kent identity. On Twitter, he was a superhero named "Hardly Normal" with nearly 20,000 followers. Some of Mark's online friends were also professional advocates but most were simply kind and generous people looking for ways to bring comfort to struggling people.

During that long, wet January, Mark went beneath highways and into culverts to recruit people to shelters. At the same time, he provided real-time Twitter updates and requests for help. His Twitter followers immediately responded with food, socks, clothing, and blankets. A few weeks later, one woman drove five hours to deliver a walker for a homeless, disabled woman Mark had tweeted about.

Mark also posted messages about the injustice of hundreds of homeless people forced outside during the torrential rainstorm. He uploaded videos to his YouTube channel, *InvisiblePeopleTV*, of him standing outside in the pouring rain, excoriating the state government for not providing full-day shelter relief. The local news media picked up Mark's story. Finally, Governor Schwarzenegger opened the National Guard Armories to provide full-day shelter relief during the rainy season.

Fast-forward two years, and Hurricane Sandy had just devastated New York City. Mark took to Twitter again and from LA asked his friends on the East Coast, "Can you find several generators?" Finding a generator right after Hurricane Sandy in New York City was like winning the lottery — a single hope with hopeless odds. But, within several hours, two men with three generators were driving to lower Manhattan.

Before Mark worked at a homeless shelter, he worked for a television syndication distribution company. In between these two jobs, he was homeless. He was also a drug dealer and a small-time crook, among other things. Mark worked hard to rebuild his life; he found religion, got sober, and began counseling other people. And then he was laid off again, and his economic troubles spiraled out of control again. This time, Mark found his voice and salvation by starting *InvisiblePeopleTV*. He eventually landed a job at a homeless shelter.

Having been homeless, Mark has a deep-felt understanding of what it meant to be voiceless and powerless. And even though Mark has managed to pull his life back together emotionally and financially, he understood how important it was that he make his voice heard and enable others to be heard as well.

Mark instinctively understood the concept of **Matterness**, meaning that he worked online and on land to make people known, heard and empowered. And when he did this, when Matterness was in full swing, these networks of people were catalyzed for large-scale action.

Networks of people have always existed on land, and then suddenly ten years ago robust social networks formed online. Online networks are critically important because they are both visible and scalable. They augment and never substitute for on land engagement.

In the euphoric first stages of the social media revolution, we reveled in our newfound freedom from music companies, newspapers, political parties, expensive retailers, and traditional advocacy organizations. We were suddenly living in a disaggregated, disrupted, digitally powered world, where starting businesses, movements, or revolutions happened quickly and inexpensively outside of the structures and strictures of traditional organizations. However, sustaining individual efforts was a lot harder than starting them.

No matter how many people are connected to one another, we still need businesses to manufacture and sell goods, government agencies to ensure civility, and nonprofits strive for social justice. We will likely always need organizations — we just need them to be and do better.

And yet, in an environment where, say, every shoe store is competing against many online competitors and every environmental cause is competing for attention and donations, it is remarkable how hard most organizations work to make their people feel insignificant and powerless. And not just people on the outside, they are working hard to marginalize and diminish their own staff people.

The antidote is Matterness.

Focusing on Matterness creates an organizational culture that embraces smart risks, engages in constructive conversations with people inside and outside, and considers time spent listening and learning to other people more important than time spent churning the wheels of transactions. Working this way creates a common purpose that trumps private interests and becomes the cornerstone for building strong, successful and sustainable organizations.

Sadly, rather than rethink their relationships with people and the world, too many organizations have doubled down on their old command-and-control habits. In fact, it is this lack of Matterness that results in organizations working *at* people rather than *with* them, that makes constituents either enraged or disinterested constituents. In *The Networked Nonprofit*, Beth Kanter and I called these organizations “fortresses,” meaning that they are bureaucratic on the inside, opaque and mysterious from the outside. As a result, a standoff has developed, with people taking to their social media channels to yell, “I accuse!” when organizations fail them, and organizations crouched behind their fortress walls, unwilling and unable to engage with individuals in open and honest ways.

This isn't just a feeling that we don't matter, there are a lot of studies that back this up:

- Top-level managers hear only 5% resulting in “trained helplessness,” the feeling on the part of constituents that no one cares about them or their concerns.
- Nearly 75% of respondents to a national survey of nonprofit organizations report using social media as a megaphone for broadcasting messages rather than building online communities.
- Over 70% of customer complaints made on Twitter were ignored by companies.
- The public views business as mediocre at best when it comes to trustworthiness, and government fares far worse. Congress has a lower approval rating today than at any other time in the eighty-year history of Gallup polls.
- No single indicator of American well being has improved significantly over the last several decades. Adjusted for inflation, incomes for most Americans have flattened or fallen over the past several decades. Billions of dollars spent by government and nonprofits on school-reform efforts, public health, housing, and job training have failed to improve outcomes in any area.

But you didn't need data to tell you what life feels like every day. Look around and you'll see:

The couple yelling at the hostess for not holding their dinner reservation. But we come here all the time — we're regulars!

The man watching his personal physician scan a chart furiously, trying to figure out who the shivering person sitting in a paper-towel gown in front of her is.

The donor who finally gives up on a cause they have donated to for years because their last name has been misspelled over and over again.

The company representative asking for the ID code they use to identify clients and acting indignant when their customer can't find it.

The pastor who still doesn't know his parishioner's name after ten years at the church.

The store employee who can't be bothered to greet a customer.

This feeling of personal diminishment is perfectly summed up by the urban legend of the Publisher's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes addressed to Mr. Roman C. Archbishop of Boston. *Congratulations, Mr. Archbishop — You May Have Just Won \$1 Million!*

These are all fundamentally the same complaint: I thought I was more important to you than a stranger off the street, but sadly, it feels like I am just a name, a data point, an address, a checkbook. In other words: I don't matter.

There are exceptions to this dismal state of being that are highlighted in this book. Spartan Race, Planned Parenthood and the Container Store and others are fully focused on relationship building and engagement. They are successful because they:

Take advantage of people's natural socialness. Sitting on the sidelines, voiceless and powerless, leads to feelings of rage, frustration, cynicism, and defeat. Organizations — and the people who lead them — can choose to keep us at a distance, frustrating our desire to matter, or they can engage us in satisfying ways that turn us into long-term customers and supporters. In addition, it feels great to be listened to and engaged as a smart, helpful person.

Focus on building relationships and reputations. Leadership that enhances Matterness is open to the input of constituents, encourages leaders to be human beings with real flaws and vulnerabilities, values relationships over transactions, and is a capable facilitator of crowds of people with their own good ideas and resources.

Take smart risks. As Micah Sifry writes, "...in an environment of increasingly dispersed attention, the Internet is much better at gathering 'stop' energy than it is at building 'go' energy." It is more important than ever that organizations push through the noise and resistance inside and out and worry less about trying to control the world and more about unleashing social and intellectual capital lying latent in their networks to lift their efforts.

About this Book

This book describes how each one of us can lead in such a way that people around us matter more. It is not a prescription but a general guide, with many pathways forward.

I have chosen specific words to convey specific meanings across sectors. For instance, it can get very confusing using different words, including "companies," "agencies," "institutions," "organizations," and "social networks" to express the same idea — an entity where people work together for a common purpose. In light of both the possibility for confusion and the blending of institutional types, I've chosen to use one word, organization, to mean all of those things and hope the context will make it clear if I mean an entity within a particular sector of the economy.

Additionally, I use the word constituent to mean all of the people who can participate in shaping an organization's culture and agenda — if the organization lets them. Constituents live and work in an ecosystem of other people and organizations. "Social networks" is often used to describe these ecosystems, however, I chose the word ecosystem deliberately because it better conveys the humanity of the sphere, rather than the technology of it.

Finally, please take a deep breath before trying to find holes in ideas presented here. Any work trying to make sense of societal patterns will provide easy fodder for those who want to point out the exceptions. For instance, it is easy to point out that some people are mean and greedy; but most people aren't, nor is it the way we are wired to behave. And some people's personal experiences have been so searing — perhaps they were mugged at one time, or were bullied online, or worked for a mean-spirited boss — that they cannot see clearly enough to recognize that, most of the time, the intentions and experiences of other people and institutions is positive. This book will be most helpful to you if you can push yourself beyond the exceptions and focus on the possibilities of how organizations and people can work better together.

The Organization of This Book

This book begins with chapter, *The Tyranny of Dichotomy*, discusses the assumptions holding us back from appreciating and understanding where and how we can matter. It is followed by *Living in Big Small Towns*, a description of the combined online and on land space in which we are living. The section on “Managing Matterness” includes two chapters. *Working From the Inside Out* outlines why organizations work at a distance from their constituents. This chapter includes discussion of “The Churn” — the inward gravitational pull of work away from constituents and toward process-focused to-do lists. *Leading From the Outside In* outlines how to reverse and engage people on the outside as active shapers, not passive bystanders, for organizations.

The following section, “Scaling Matterness,” has three chapters. *Scaling Matterness Within Organizations* explains how to work with the agility to match the fast change of ecosystems without getting sucked into The Churn. *Using Crowds to Scale Matterness* describes the different types of capital available to organizations now, but only if leaders understand what kinds of help they need. *Action Cascades of Matterness* provides leadership advice for plugging into and steering in a positive direction the crowds that may be activated to help your organization.

The final chapter is *A Call for Collective Responsibility* — the ways we need to live and work together, and the ways that online-platform providers need to ensure that our commons remain balanced between their private needs and our common interests.

So let's begin to remake organizations for this new century. As Maya Angelou wrote, “I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget the way you made them feel.” Understanding and incorporating Matterness into our professional and personal lives is the way to ensure that people and organizations bring out the best in each other.