

Matthew's Book Club Summary #1

By: Matthew Klippenstein

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Title: The Geography of Hope

The book club started as an informal, fun way to explore and consider business ideas relevant to our work with colleagues. The format consists of one person (usually Matthew) reading a book and writing a summary for discussion during team meetings. This allows the other team members to benefit from the book's insights, without carving time in their schedule to read the full volume.

The idea was to summarize *an interesting part* of each chapter in a paragraph or two, and where applicable, note how these could be relevant to the workplace. This provides the reviewer with practise condensing a mass of data into a few pieces of key information: an underappreciated skill. The reviews are meant to be accurate but light-hearted, on the assumption that people learn more when they're having fun.

Matthew's company gave permission for these to be distributed to non-employees as long as the employer-specific content was removed, for which he is sincerely appreciative.

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About the author:

Chris Turner lives in Calgary, writes on sustainability for The Globe & Mail, and wrote a book on The Simpsons. I emailed him a couple times; he seems like a cool guy. (Most authors – unless they sell as many books as JK Rowling or Dan Brown – will reply to emails from strangers.)

Ch	Title	Summary
1	the rebirth of hope (sustainable vision)	<p>"The death of environmentalism", published in 2004 by two prominent US environmentalists, argued that their movement had failed because it hadn't advanced significant laws in thirty years, in turn because it didn't offer a compelling (positive) vision to people, just depressing statistics. The author wrote this book to offer such a vision.</p> <p>He started by travelling to the island of Samsø in Denmark, where a few community organizers (like Barack Obama in earlier years) helped make the island "net" fossil-fuel free; excess wind power is sold to "offset" gasoline purchases for the non-electric vehicles on the island.</p> <p>The key message was that this transformation wasn't because of a charismatic leader, but rather a few regular Joes and Jills who patiently persisted in building buy-in for bigger and bigger projects, until they hit a tipping point and the momentum just kept things going. (darn – three paragraphs!)</p>
2	the renewable energy archipelago (sustainable power)	This chapter basically talked about a bunch of promising clean energy technologies and some promising projects – basically, trivia. But I learned that olden-days British bureaucrats in India would keep their files together with red tape, hence that expression.
3	out of gas (sustainable transport)	<p>The chapter starts about cars and finishes talking about public transit and urban planning; apparently Portland is the city to copy in the US.</p> <p>Building more fast transit to suburbs (e.g. The Evergreen Line) isn't necessarily the answer though – that will encourage more people to move there; and unless the new people also use transit, that means more people will make the longer commute to the city centre, by car.</p>
4	home, green home (sustainable housing)	The big idea here is the idea of <i>tunnelling under the cost barrier</i> ; this is the reason LEED and other green buildings don't need to cost more

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		<p>than inefficient buildings.</p> <p>Basically, if you build a house so well insulated that it never needs to be heated... you can subtract the cost of a heating system. If you use solar hot-water heating, you can buy a smaller/cheaper water heater unit.</p>
5	taj mahal 2.0 (sustainable design)	<p>Interface (the environmentally-leading carpet company) spent a lot of money to not just reduce waste, but reprocess it. They've now developed a process that can take virtually any plastic and turn it into the backing of their carpet.</p> <p>In other words, <i>they can take their competitor's worn-out carpet</i> and use it in their own product! And since landfills charge a tipping fee, Interface could get paid <i>by</i> their suppliers for taking the stuff! In this case, they tunneled under the cost barrier by not needing to pay for (some of their) input materials. In time, we'll need to pay attention to these concepts in our industry.</p>
6	green sprawl (sustainable metropolis)	<p>One of the topics in this chapter is about a mall redevelopment in Colorado; but I'll use south-east Vancouver's Champlain Mall because it's a local version of the same story.</p> <p>When Metrotown really got going (late 80's) Champlain Mall became a ghost town. It was recently redeveloped, with half the mall being demolished, replaced by townhouse complexes. The mall is vibrant again, because it's irresistibly convenient for thousands of people. And there's probably just as much retail space as before: so many people walk, they don't need a big parking lot (as far as malls go).</p>
7	the green boom (the economics of sustainability)	<p>This section is mainly about Joseph Schumacher (<i>Small is Beautiful</i>) and Amory Lovins (<i>Natural Capitalism</i>). By taking a broader, systems perspective of their business, Lovins bragged that DuPont had cut GHG</p>

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		<p>emissions 72% by 2001. (They did sell one division, so the real number was more like 60% by 2006.)</p> <p>A lot of countries are aiming for an 60-80% drop (from 1990 emissions) by 2050. Which means DuPont hit its target forty-four years early.</p>
8	the non-partisan environmentalist (the ideology of sustainability)	<p>Environmentalists failed because they couldn't step outside themselves to think about what the general public's priorities were. If you want to bring someone around to your point of view, you have to shut up long enough to find out how their value systems work, and <i>then</i> figure out how to tie their values to your cause. ☺</p> <p>The same may apply for you. e.g.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - boss, this course will help me deal with difficult people (so-so) - boss, this will improve our cross-functional teamwork (better) - boss, this will make me a better leader on the soccer pitch (best) <p>Marc Stoiber was mentioned in this chapter, see below.</p>
9	NGO 2.0 (the development of sustainability)	<p>The message here is that "small is beautiful" when it comes to "third-world" development; small local teams with a pittance of funding often accomplish more than international bureaucracies. And when it comes to accomplishments-per-dollar, there's no competition.</p> <p>At a firm, might mean small meetings / small teams are more effective than big ones. And to fix problems, there's no substitute for spending a lot of time on the floor (some people – myself included – aren't always diligent about this) – the Toyota expression for this is <i>genchi gembutsu</i>.</p>
10	the Dalai Lama & the dude (sustainable community)	<p>I think he was trying to write a tenth chapter for the round-number factor. ☺ This was about the power of community, and about a movie I never saw, called <i>The Big Lebowski</i>.</p>

How networking works (the Matthew edition):

I heard about Marc Stoiber through a composting company. I went for coffee with him, and recommended him for some work at the firm.

I found out about Offsetters through a company carbon-footprint study I did, so I had coffee with one of their guys. He knows Marc.

That was a good excuse to phone Marc up again and arrange lunch; he'd recently gotten written up in The Globe & Mail by Chris Turner (the author of the book).

I buy the book, and since Chris and I both know Marc, that's a great excuse to contact him – how did they meet? And if he ever needs information about the firm and our industry, I can direct him to the right folks.

Eventually I'll be connected with enough people whom I've helped, that it's statistically inevitable that one of them will be able to help *me* out when I need a hand. ☺ (See article [here](#) from the MIT Technology Review; altruism tends to benefit people who are social hubs. Message: become a social hub & help people.)

