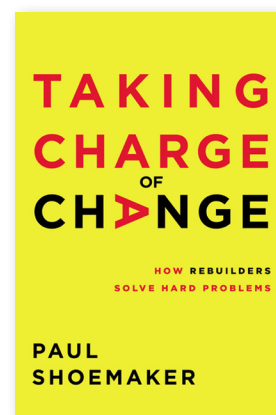


Taking Charge of Change

How Rebuilders Solve Hard Problems

by **Paul Shoemaker**



Contents

What are Rebuilders?

Page 2

Why Rebuilders Matter for the 2020s

Page 2

Where We've Come From

Page 3

Where We Are

Page 3

Where We Are Going

Page 4

The Five Vital Traits

Page 5

THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Bridges across the United States in 2020 are deteriorating. The state of our structurally deficient bridges in 2020 is an evocative metaphor for the nation we are living in right now. The social, economic, and health structures underlying American civil society are in a more critical condition than they have been in decades. As is and always will be the case, these times call for a new kind of leader. We need Rebuilders. Rebuilders are leaders for the 2020s that have a combination of qualities and skill sets that will enable them to effectively address the accelerating economic, social, and health disparities across an increasingly uneven, siloed America.

Paul Shoemaker wrote *Taking Charge of Change: How Rebuilders Solve Hard Problems* for socially conscious and civically active leaders who are starting to redefine the leader they need to be and are hungry for clarity, stories, and direction. The leadership traits of Rebuilders give you, your team, and your organization an indispensable checklist for effective leadership for the 2020s. They are directly aligned to address the megachallenges America is facing in the decade ahead.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- The five megachallenges that America will face in the next decade.
- Why Rebuilders matter in the 2020s
- Where we have been, where we are, and where we are going
- The five vital traits of Rebuilders that will matter the most

Part One: Rebuilders

Shoemaker studied dozens of leaders from a broad range of industries and causes from all three sectors: private, public, and nonprofit. They were a mix of people with different genders, ethnicities, and places in companies and communities—a mix like the collective profile of leaders America is absolutely going to need in the 2020s. These rebuilders meet an imperfect but intentional, subjective but substantiated, criteria:

- They have achieved a level of measurable success or effectiveness. There is some objective, public measure by which one can ascertain effectiveness.
- A majority of them have substantial experience in two, or all three, sectors of the American economy.
- Each clearly demonstrated and is an exemplar of a specific trait (or two) that fits the profile of a Rebuilder.

Rebuilders are leaders who don't look and sound and act the same as we are used to seeing. Qualities like hyperauthenticity, an exceptional capacity for complexity, extensive cross-sector experience, plus others are what will define the leaders we need for our future.

Part Two: Why Rebuilders Matter for the 2020s

Just like the foundations on deteriorating bridges, the economic, social, and health foundations of America are in great need of repair and rebuilding. Just like any bridge you drive or walk or bike across, our nation is only as strong as the underlying foundation.

Human beings are always trying to “build bridges” with people they might disagree with. Dozens of songs include the word “bridge” in the title. Perhaps the most poignant bridge metaphor is of providing a crossing to the hereafter. Bridges do, in fact, have to be rebuilt across American civil society in the decade ahead. Not just the physical ones. We need to:

- Rebuild economic bridges for more Americans to be able to get back to the middle class and to have a chance again at the American dream.
- Create technological bridges so that access to broadband and enhanced technology is greater and can narrow the gap between the haves and have-nots.
- Have leaders that know how to bridge from the private

to the nonprofit to the public sector.

- Make real, sustained progress on many more “bridges” that need to be rebuilt across American civil society.

Many of these Rebuilders have already been leading, but we need to intentionally connect more like them together in the 2020s. Just like you can't build a fully functioning, beautiful bridge without all the parts, we can't make the change we want to see without all of the traits of these Rebuilders being brought together and working together, like the many parts of a strong, enduring bridge.

Rebuilders have a combination of qualities and skill sets that will enable them to effectively address the accelerating economic, social, and health disparities across an increasingly uneven, siloed America. Those five leadership qualities and skill sets, the five vital traits, of Rebuilders that will matter the most are:

1. 24-7 Authenticity
2. Complexity Capacity
3. Generosity Mindset
4. Data Conviction
5. Cross-Vector Fluency

For Rebuilders, the vital traits of 24-7 Authenticity and a Generosity Mindset are in balance with the tangible skill sets of Data Conviction and the Capacity for Complexity. And the trait that connects them together is Cross-Sector Fluency, which we will dive deeper into later.

Why These Five Traits

America's economic, social, and health conditions are creating a scale and scope of change unlike anything we have seen in generations. Those underlying conditions have helped create and are playing out in the context of five megachallenges America is facing in the decade ahead:

1. Significant, growing differences in the access to and use of technology combined with the hyper attention of today's media as major amplifiers of our inequities.
2. A breadth and depth of challenges greater than we've faced in the last seventy-five years, especially now in a post (?)-COVID world.
3. The reality that we are less connected and more siloed, making coming together harder today than it has perhaps ever been.

The index of income inequality for Americans started increasing in the '90s and the degree of inequity has accelerated ever since.

4. Slowing, less certain, more unequal progress across a broad array of social, health, and economic indicators.
5. The intersecting and blurring lines between historical norms of our private, nonprofit, and public sectors in ways we have never seen before (and it isn't going back to the way it was).

These five megachallenges directly suggest the five vital traits desperately needed in the leaders who will make a difference in the decade ahead.

Where We've Come From (1950-2000)

The story of America, from 1950 to 2000, was one of progress on a range of challenges that affect us all—childhood mortality, literacy, life expectancy, public health, women's and civil rights, per capita GDP, and the list goes on.

Progress wasn't always even, but overall, there was steadily growing economic prosperity in the second half of the twentieth century. For a long time, this progress broadened the middle class, fueled our economy, and brought a significant majority of citizens along.

There was a wave of progress—economic, health, social—that seemed inevitably, if not always evenly, positive and shared by a majority of people over the second half of the twentieth century. But then things started to change. Really, they began changing in the '90s, but there was sort of a “frog in the frying pan” effect that hadn't turned up the heat enough yet.

The sometimes-euphoric technological advances and economic growth of the '90s masked economic, social, and health fractures in America's foundation that were beginning to emerge and would widen and accelerate over the first twenty years of the new millennium.

Where We Are (2000-2020)

Let's get this out of the way. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to know how politically fractured we are in America today. Politics matters, but the disparities in our underlying foundations (economic, health, social) are much more the

root causes. Many of the currents of our political divide are downstream from the economic, health, and social inequities that are more the original source of our increasingly unequal and siloed nation over the last twenty to thirty years.

In the 2000s so far, the positive economic progress of most of 1950-2000 has slowed dramatically and halted or gone backward for far too many people. The 2000s have seen that trend line of progress go flat or downward for many people while taking a steep upward, positive arc for a smaller and smaller niche of Americans.

Middle-class families today earn an average of \$4000 *less* than they did in 2000, adjusted for inflation. That is a profound change from the previous fifty years, when the income of the middle class steadily *increased*. The index of income inequality for Americans started increasing in the '90s and the degree of inequity has accelerated ever since.

Health inequality and disparity has also steadily grown to the highest levels in decades. The devolution of social conditions and the decreasing of opportunities for all individuals to reach their potential has had perhaps an even deeper, more foundational effect than the increasing income and health disparities over the last twenty years.

We've seen how intertwined all of these disparities are and how they feed off of and more deeply embed each of its own and collectively. That's the very definition of a vicious cycle; it must be interrupted. It will take new leaders with a set of vital traits that have never been called upon this urgently.

Amplifiers

At the same time as economic, social, and health progress are becoming more disparate and unequal, we have these incredible amplifiers—technology and media—that are accelerating these destabilizing trends even more. They make it easier to create a negative domino effect.

The foundations of American civil society—economic, social, health—are as shaky these days as many of our bridges across America. Technology, media, and now COVID, are amplifying those fractures at an alarming rate. This is a complex set of accelerating changes that needs leaders that

can take charge for the good of America's economic, social, and health future.

Where Are We Going?

To rebuild, we need to leverage the strengths of American society today, namely the diversity of people, approaches, perspectives, and backgrounds. That diversity of people, place, and power is what will lead us to better and stronger leaders that will make rebuilding possible at all.

To be very clear, this is about going forward to a new future, not a return to some "glorious past" with any MAGA-type inferences. We need to rebuild, but not return to, many of the systemic weaknesses that got us here in the first place.

The equation to solve is now far more complex, multivariate, and will require new kinds and updated versions of skill sets and qualities. We will find leaders for our future in less expected places, in neighborhoods, community organizations, sports teams, and so on in addition to corporate America.

Some individual leaders are more ready than others. But leadership as a fundamental asset in our civil society—across our private, public and social sectors—has not been adapted nearly *enough*.

Part Three: The Five Vital Traits

The foundations of American civil society, like tens of thousands of bridges across America, are deteriorating. There are many connected parts of the foundation, substructure, superstructure of a bridge that need to be looked at holistically before a plan is developed to rebuild. We need to look at these leaders holistically, and the five vital, connected traits, to rebuild communities and companies across America.

24-7 Authenticity

There are, as we've discussed, significant, growing differences in the use of and access to technology. Media today creates hyper attention and analysis. Because both act as huge amplifiers (megachallenge #1), the value and importance of 24-7 Authenticity grows by the day.

No matter your politics, we all have skepticism about some news or information from some sources. What grows in value is genuine authenticity. It is very hard to build, very easy to lose if you misstep, and utterly invaluable, personally as well as professionally, if you can manifest it every day.

There's been quite a bit written about authenticity and

transparency as leadership qualities. Authenticity, in the dictionary, conveys that someone is worthy of belief, is not false or an imitation, and is true to one's own personality, spirit, or character. Sometimes the dictionary definition is an awkward fit; in this case, it's very well put.

Authenticity sort of sits at the intersection of radical transparency and media-as-an-amplifier. You *need* to be authentic and open before you *have* to be. It's not as if it's optional or variable in today's world. A leader just needs to start from that as a grounding principle.

And 24-7 implies a proactive quality. Not just responsively authentic, but leaning in, pushing your comfort zone on authenticity. As with all of these attributes, it needs to become second nature. In our world of sometimes-hard-to-discern (or fake?) news, this can't be a transitory, transactional trait; it has to become a part of the essential DNA of Rebuilders for the future.

Being and leading with 24-7 Authenticity in the world of technology, especially social media, has gotten logarithmically more challenging and, hence, that much more valuable. A leader with 24-7 Authenticity can't depend only on positive information. Rampant, self-reinforcing negativity makes the job of establishing true, deep authenticity so much harder in 2020 than it was in 2010.

We all make personal and professional choices every day. Our depth and degree of authenticity is a summation of all those individual decisions and choices. You are constantly building up your account balance of authenticity or making withdrawals (or going bankrupt). While it's fairly easy to go bankrupt, it's very hard to have a full account, and even harder to keep the balance full.

Complexity Capacity

Given that the total depth and breadth of challenges future leaders need to grapple with in the decade ahead are greater than we've faced, at least in the past seventy-five years (megachallenge #2), a capacity for complexity is an absolute need in any serious organization. Especially in a post-COVID world.

The capacity means you not only have to be able to take in the many variables at play, but interpret, process, and make sense of them, and ultimately communicate effectively. This trait is very much about using both sides of your brain.

Complexity can scare many people away. This is the most innate of the five vital traits although you can increase

When you come to any setting, you are looking to see who's missing from the table and who needs to be connected.

someone's capacity in degrees through specific professional development.

Rebuilders are uniquely suited to have this innate capacity to understand and interpret the complexity around them and take on the biggest loads. Complexity Capacity benefits from an open heart and strategic mind, aka a Generosity Mindset, to put that intricate understanding to work.

Complexity Capacity is about being and thinking in a nonlinear, less sequential way. It's about knowing that past solutions may be decreasingly useful for informing future solutions, hence the need to rethink and rebuild. It's about adaptability and being able to take in new information constantly. Complexity Capacity means, metaphorically, that you are better at open-ended essay questions on the "test" than multiple choice or true-false.

Last but not least, listening as a core asset and attribute has always been a "special sauce" in the recipe for leadership. Active listening is the act of genuinely listening, not just to hear or to be ready to respond, but wholly leaning in and fully understanding what others are saying. It's not hard to understand how vital active listening is as a characteristic of leaders with a high Complexity Capacity.

Generosity Mindset

When we are less connected and more siloed and isolated, and our ability to come together is harder today than it perhaps ever has been (megachallenge #3), the openness and expansiveness of a Generosity Mindset becomes vital. This might be the hardest trait to put into practice persistently with fidelity.

The ability to be the leader that creates a commitment to unity and looks for what you can commonly share while respecting each other's differences is pivotal.

The mindset to leave room for multiple identities at just about all costs is paramount. And remember that a Generosity Mindset needs to be able to process complexity in order to know where and how opportunities arise that can be leveraged and sustained.

Just to reemphasize, the point isn't about being nicey-nice or polite. It's a strategic mindset. It's a way of working and doing business, all the time. When you come to any setting, you are looking to see who's missing from the table and who needs to be connected. You are able to keep your eyes on the ultimate prize and get past disagreements, detours, and diversions.

Generosity appears to have especially strong associations with psychological health and well-being. Generosity toward others has been shown to help smooth over "relational noise"—perceived unfairness that can arise from everyday misunderstandings—making it a critical ingredient for increasing relational trust.

One study found that generosity creates self-other overlap, a sense of "oneness" with others, and reasoned that, when we help others under this state of oneness, we feel as if we are also helping ourselves.

What that meta-research affirms is the need to keep a constantly open mind. Fewer and fewer people can do this today, so its unique value constantly increases. In a sense, a Generosity Mindset also requires you to have a sort of relentless authenticity.

Data Conviction

When there is slowing, more unequal, less certain progress across a broad array of social, health, and economic indicators (megachallenge #4), data becomes an indispensable element in trying to forge a path toward more equal progress across American civil society. With the data, progress is not assured. Without the data, progress is just about impossible.

Think constant learning and improvement. Instead of data being an afterthought to understand social and community impact at a point in time, it's more powerful to develop a relentless focus on understanding the real-world, real-time, ongoing impact of programs, practices, and policies.

Ensure that the data being used is the right, not just readily available data. It can then inform persistent, day-to-day improvement in companies and communities. And remember that Data Conviction risks being dehumanizing or too for-

mulaic without the humanizing quality of 24-7 Authenticity.

Data Conviction may seem a little dry or stale as a leadership trait, but it's not. It's the conviction about and passion for data that is an absolutely necessary mindset for Rebuilders in the 2020s.

Think about how complex the challenges are that our private, public, and nonprofit sectors are going to face in a post-COVID world. Without data to create some baseline degree of clarity, as well as a basis for bringing competing worldviews together, there is little chance for success.

Let's define this as not just understanding but being able to process and then get good at interpreting and using data. This is about a core belief that the data is an indispensable part of the answer, that data is not just a tactic or a number; it's strategic. We know that good programs are necessary, but without data, they are not sufficient.

The two biggest differences between the private versus nonprofit and public sectors are (1) the private sector has one primary bottom line, net profit, whereas nonprofit and public sectors have many and much less black-and-white outcomes; and (2) in the private sector the customer pays for the product, whereas in the nonprofit and public sectors payment often comes through third parties.

A primary function of data for social change is trying to find the best replacement, or create effective proxies, for a bottom line and paying customer. It isn't perfect, but it is way, way better than the absence of it.

Cross-Sector Fluency

When the lines between and the historical norms of our private, nonprofit, and public sectors are intersecting and overlapping as never before (megachallenge #5), Cross-Sector Fluency becomes a must-have, not a nice-to-have. This does not refer to an individual hopping into a project in another sector and then going back into their longtime professional sector silo for most of their career. This means genuine immersion in the other two sectors or at least one of the other two sectors.

Cross-Sector Fluency often provides the glue that brings everything else together. Not just because of the experience itself but because it suggests that those who have it view the world more holistically, are more willing to see the nuance, have a wider lens, make trade-offs, and create the whole solution. They aren't unicorns, but they're pretty invaluable. Cross-Sector Fluency can often allow the different players

some flexibility, facilitate give-and-take, and help bring the systems and people together and keep them in balance.

In defining Cross-Sector Fluency, the dictionary definition of fluency is helpful: gracefulness and ease of movement or style. Our challenges today do not exist in silos, within one sector or another; they cut across sectors. A generation ago, all three sectors were mostly able to live in their own ecosystem, tangentially paying attention to the other two sectors around it.

Those days are long gone, but it does point out a tension point. The fact that the three sectors are running together is in contrast to the siloing of America. While individuals are more siloed, solving big challenges will require more leaders to be less siloed and have more Cross-Sector Fluency.

If a private sector company wants to be economically successful, its leaders have to understand how to navigate the public sector as well as the nonprofit sector in the community around them. If a social sector entity is trying to make progress on an intractable social problem, they cannot do it without the public sector if they want to make true, sustained progress. And the private sector is now an asset—human, financial, and intellectual—that is indispensable for tackling the community challenges nonprofits have been working on for decades. All of those interactions are positive dependencies and virtuous feedback loops.

Rebuilding America's bridges will sometimes involve repairing the deck or the superstructure, redoing part of the substructure, or replacing the piles or bridge bearings. Rebuilding America's economic, health, and social foundations will take everything we've got, because we're rebuilding not just the parts but the whole bridge.

Rebuilding is not sexy. For most people, it's way more exciting to build something new. People love to do ribbon-cutting ceremonies, but they don't congregate around a building to celebrate its repairs. It will take leaders—individuals, teams, companies, communities—with all five of these traits brought fully to bear on the problems at hand. All five work together, in part because they balance one another and because you need all of these traits and fluencies at the table of positive change.



Shoemaker is the Founding President of Social Venture Partners International—the first-of-its-kind and still-largest global network of thousands of social innovators, entrepreneurs, philanthropists, and business leaders supporting social change agents in over 40 cities and 8 countries. He is a global thought leader and consultant on activating social change agents and increasing civic impact. Shoemaker was twice named one of the “Top 50 Most Influential People in the Nonprofit Sector” by The Non Profit Times. He was named “Philanthropist of the Year” by Future in Review.

From *Taking Charge of Change: How Rebuilders Solve Hard Problems* by Paul Shoemaker. Copyright © 2021 by Paul Shoemaker. Published by arrangement with HarperCollins Leadership, a division of HarperCollins Focus, LLC. ISBN 978-1400221691. Published by Soundview Executive Book Summaries®. Copyright © 2022 by Soundview, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part is prohibited. #4426