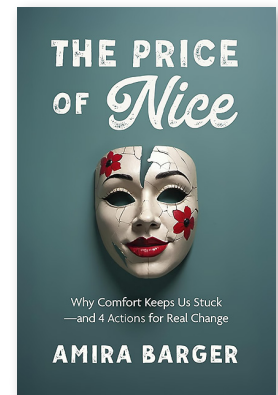


Executive Book Summaries®

The Price of Nice

Why Comfort Keeps Us Stuck—
and 4 Actions for Real Change

by **Amira Barger**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

We live in a culture that prizes niceness above nearly everything else: rewarding politeness, comfort, and agreeability while discouraging dissent, honesty, and disruption. This obsession shapes how we show up in our communities and, increasingly, in the modern workplace, where difficult conversations are avoided, inequities are smoothed over, and real problems are left unaddressed.

What's framed as kindness often becomes a mechanism for maintaining the status quo, muting critical voices, and slowing progress, leaving individuals disengaged and organizations stuck in cycles of superficial harmony rather than meaningful change. *The Price of Nice: Why Comfort Keeps Us Stuck—and 4 Actions for Real Change* offers a practical path forward. The book challenges readers to interrogate cultural norms around niceness and introduces a four-action, social-psychological model—think, feel, do, and revisit—to help people spot hidden barriers, engage in difficult conversations, move from discussion to action, and build accountability over time.

Author Amira Barger, a behavioral communications strategist, professor, and DEI advisor, draws on her work at the intersection of health equity, organizational change, and employee engagement, combining real-world experience and research, to show how individuals and institutions can disrupt comfort-driven habits and take concrete steps toward healthier, more equitable workplaces.

IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY

- Understand how “niceness” can quietly reinforce inequity and stalled progress
- Learn the four actions to move from comfort to courageous action
- Gain tools for navigating conflict and facilitating honest workplace conversations
- Build sustainable habits for continuous learning, reflection, and improvement

Introduction

Niceness is a velvet glove over an iron fist, stifling dissent and prioritizing comfort over progress. It conditions us to accept the status quo, protecting those in power at the expense of equity and opportunity.

As children, we're taught that being "nice" is everything. We allow niceness to shape our lives, relationships, and workplaces in ways that rarely serve us. But what if "nice" isn't as harmless as we think? What if it's the very thing keeping us from real progress?

Unchecked niceness is never benign. It is always, without exception, upheld because someone benefits from it, and from the toxicity that inevitably follows.

Wholeness in the Workplace

Performative corporate gestures may check a box, but they merely preserve the status quo. Hispanic Heritage Month or Pride celebrations may bring festive decorations to the break room, but they don't shift hiring or promotion practices. Niceness signals change without delivering it.

Corporate culture conditions us to suppress discomfort and avoid conversations that disrupt this illusion of harmony. We are expected to adhere to a "professional decorum" that separates our personal lives from our work. This unspoken requirement to compartmentalize—to keep our personal beliefs, values, and even struggles out of the workplace—lies at the heart of performative niceness in corporate spaces.

Forced separation of the personal and professional is neither natural nor sustainable or even desirable. In fact, research by Harvard professor Amy Edmondson underscores that genuine collaboration and innovation rely on psychological safety: the belief that we can show up fully, speak honestly, and challenge norms without fear of retribution. When people feel safe enough to bring their whole selves to work, they're more likely to contribute, take risks, and surface the very truths organizations need to evolve.

A Tool Kit, Not a Blueprint

To build something new, we need new tools. As a communications practitioner, I start by asking: *What problem are we aiming to solve?*

This clarifies our purpose and sets direction. It's followed by: *Who are we solving this problem for? Who do we need to influence, and what specific shifts in thought, emotion, or action do we want to inspire?*

To answer these questions, we investigate the motivations, values, and trusted voices of the people we wish to reach. By understanding their worldviews, we can craft messages that inspire wonder, resonate deeply, and mobilize action. Breaking down complex behavioral patterns into manageable component dimensions allows us to more easily identify and replicate opportunities for prevention, intervention, restoration, or transformation.

ACTION 1: THINK

CHAPTER 1

The Velvet Glove Comes Off

On the surface, being nice seems like an innocent, even admirable quality: a balm that soothes social interactions. But niceness often hides more profound problems. It's a learned behavior meant to keep things comfortable, avoid conflict, and preserve the existing order.

The truth is more complicated: It costs a great deal to be nice. I'm not suggesting we throw human decency out the window; no one likes an asshole. Instead, I want us to examine niceness as a *social construct*, not a natural or inherent truth, as one of many collectively agreed-upon ideas that shape our behaviors, relationships, and institutions.

Do You Understand What I'm Saying?

Everyone's experiences shape how they interpret the world and the language they use, and assuming a shared understanding can lead to miscommunication, confusion, and disrupted collaboration.

Consider two terms that anchor my premise: *nice* and *nerve*. While it may not be obvious at first glance, these two familiar words actually represent starkly different approaches to navigating the world: one preserves the current norms, the other drives real change.

Nice

According to Merriam-Webster, some definitions of nice are *polite, kind; pleasing, agreeable; appropriate, fitting; well-executed*. We are not addressing nice from this defined vantage point, but as a social construct. You mustn't conflate or confuse the two. Nice, when prioritized above all else, is a trap. It can lead to:

- avoiding difficult conversations to preserve a false sense of peace

When we solve for those most at the margins, we solve for everyone.



- tolerating harmful behavior because confronting it feels uncomfortable
- masking systemic injustices under a veneer of politeness

Nice emphasizes how things feel rather than how they are. While it soothes in the short term, it stifles growth, silences dissent, and upholds the current state of affairs in the long run.

Nerve

I think of the antithesis of “nice” as “nerve.” Nerve has a wide range of definitions, from the physical receptors in the human body that send signals to our brains to feelings of agitation or irritability (such as when someone “gets on your nerves”). We will focus on this term as it relates more specifically to the *power of endurance or control; fortitude, strength; assurance, boldness; audacity.*

Unlike nice, which seeks to avoid discomfort, nerve leans into it, acknowledging that growth, justice, and transformation often require us to be uncomfortable, and even to make others uncomfortable. Nerve is:

- speaking up when silence feels safer
- challenging the status quo even at the cost of relationships or personal gain
- holding boundaries and advocating for opportunity despite criticism or misunderstanding

Nerve is about resilience and the willingness to act when it matters most. Where nice prioritizes agreeability, nerve disrupts. Choosing between nice and nerve isn’t only about personal values or professional strategies. It’s about the world we are building or failing to build for future generations.

Understanding Mental Models

It is easy to overlook perspectives that fall outside of our own. We unconsciously rely on mental models when navigating more complex challenges, such as those involving language or systemic influences.

The underlying mental models are deeply ingrained beliefs that operate both consciously and unconsciously to shape how we interpret reality and make decisions.

Like the words we use, these internal frameworks reflect societal norms, historical narratives, and personal experiences.

Here are some common mental models that you may recognize when interpreting and articulating your experiences:

Cause and effect

- Belief: “If I work hard, I will succeed.”
- How it shapes behavior: This model drives people to prioritize effort, but it may cause them to overlook systemic barriers or external factors.

Confirmation bias

- Belief: “What I already believe is true.”
- How it shapes behavior: This model encourages people to seek information that supports their beliefs while ignoring contradictory evidence.

Zero-sum thinking

- Belief: “If someone else wins, I lose.”
- How it shapes behavior: This model drives competition in areas where collaboration could create mutual benefits.

Mental models offer stability and predictability, but when applied to complex social issues, they can also reinforce harmful biases and inequitable outcomes. Because many people struggle to articulate (or even recognize) these models, outdated historical or cultural influences often shape how we interact with the world.

We start to see the world differently when we challenge our mental models. Anyone can change their mental models; it just takes a choice to do so. By making this shift, we can break down outdated ideas and build new ones based on inclusion, fairness, and shared understanding. All that’s needed are the right ingredients: curiosity, reflection, context, and a willingness to try new things.

Centering the Margins for Collective Good

There is a foundational mental model we must keep in mind: When we solve for those most at the margins, we solve for everyone. That’s why change must begin at the edges, by elevating those most often overlooked, and ripple inward to transform the whole; because the most marginalized hold the truths and needs that should shape the center.

Some will undoubtedly resist this idea, misbelieving that fo-

cusing on *any* marginalized population means disregarding everyone else. Nothing could be further from the truth. When we center the needs of those who are often overlooked or underserved, we cultivate an environment that strengthens everyone, improving resilience and well-being across the board.

CHAPTER 2

Nice by Design

From childhood, we're taught to be nice: play fair, share, say *please* and *thank you*. As we grow, niceness becomes a rule, a prerequisite for success and belonging in schools, workplaces, and society. But beneath this civility lies a tool of control, a product of historical and systemic conditioning.

America has historically been fixated on niceness, even when it hinders justice and equity. Born from colonial conformity and shaped by powerful institutions, this legacy persists today. One key concept, psychological projection, helps explain why many Americans resist confronting our past.

Psychological projection happens when people blame others for their own discomfort. It takes courage to ask questions, be introspective, and open yourself to the possibility that you've been wrong. Belittling others for doing what you are unwilling to do is just easier.

It doesn't have to be this way, though. Research shows there is a path to bridging ideological divides, and it's not paved with more facts or louder arguments. A 2024 study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology* found that people are more willing to trust ideological opponents when those opponents speak from personal experience rather than citing statistics or generalized stories.

Us versus them has rarely accomplished any good. But the longer we avoid discomfort, whether on a personal level or within our institutions, the more deeply entrenched our problems become, and we keep reinforcing old systems even when those systems are unfair. Finding the courage is the first step toward building something new.

CHAPTER 3

Society's Silent Partner

"Nice" is a contract signed in silence, subtly shaping our thoughts, feelings, and actions without us realizing it. Power dynamics, unspoken expectations, and the constant battle between authenticity and acceptance capture the universal challenge of navigating societal norms.

The (Social) Proof Is in the Pudding

Social proof is the psychological phenomenon of looking to others to define what is acceptable or desirable. Humans are wired to emulate behaviors that bring approval or avoid conflict. In today's digital world, social proof plays out through curated social media feeds, where likes and shares subtly dictate what we value.

Niceness operates much the same way. This unspoken code of conduct pressures us to behave in ways that yield acceptance or avoid conflict, at the cost of authenticity. Over time, this standard becomes unquestioned. Recognizing these patterns allows us to disrupt them and make more intentional choices about how we engage with the world.

The Chemistry of Compliance

If social proof shows us how niceness subtly pressures individuals, frameworks in psychology and sociology reveal the mechanisms that sustain it.

In psychology, particularly social and behavioral psychology, the focus is often on how societal influences shape individual behavior and thought processes. Relevant concepts include:

- **Social norms:** The unwritten rules we internalize to gain acceptance or avoid disapproval, like invisible traffic signs guiding behavior.
- **Behavioral conditioning:** Mechanisms like reinforcement and punishment (operant conditioning) that shape behavior and are influenced by societal expectations.
- **Conformity and obedience:** Psychological processes that encourage individuals to align their behaviors with group norms or authority figures.
- **Implicit bias:** Subconscious stereotypes shaped by cultural norms, like wearing tinted sunglasses that color your view without you realizing it.

In sociology, the discussion commonly centers on social or institutional influence mechanisms; frameworks intended to maintain order and cohesion within a society. Relevant concepts include:

- **Social control:** Formal mechanisms (laws, regulations) and informal triggers (peer pressure, cultural norms) that enforce conformity to societal expectations.
- **Structural functionalism:** A perspective that views societal structures (like legal systems, education, or the media) as serving a purpose in maintaining stability, but also as systems of control.

The question isn't whether we should adapt, but how we do it.



- **Conflict theory:** A framework that emphasizes how societal control reflects power dynamics.
- **Symbolic interactionism:** Examines how social norms and roles are constructed through interaction, shaping behavior and identity.
- **Hegemony:** Describes how dominant groups maintain control by shaping cultural norms and ideologies, making them appear natural and unquestionable.

The Undue Influence of Nice

Sacred values—deeply held principles like freedom, loyalty, or environmental conservation—shape human behavior.

They aren't just beliefs; they're core to identity. Neuroscience shows that when these values are threatened, the brain's logic center (the dorsolateral prefrontal cortex) essentially shuts down, while emotional and social judgment areas activate.

Like sacred values, niceness operates quietly, shaping our behavior in profound ways. It becomes an unspoken expectation: Stay agreeable, avoid confrontation, and maintain harmony. Over time, niceness traps people in passive acceptance, stifling authenticity and accountability.

Institutional Manipulation

Media, politics, and education shape public opinion to preserve the status quo. By elevating niceness as a virtue, institutions condition individuals to see dissent as harmful. Schools teach "respect for authority," casting questions about injustice as insubordination, while governments label activists and whistleblowers as "un-American" or "radical."

This gaslighting erodes confidence in personal judgment, discouraging challenges to authority and sustaining harmful systems, especially in the workplace.

The result? A workforce and society disarmed of its ability to challenge oppression, trapped in a cycle of conformity masquerading as virtue, focusing on conflict avoidance at the expense of progress.

Institutions rely on niceness to mask exploitation, ensuring the system thrives even as it harms. Unmasking this manipulation is the first step toward progress.

ACTION 2: FEEL

CHAPTER 4

Flow or Crash

"Now, water can flow or it can crash. Be water, my friend." This famous quote from Bruce Lee reflects his martial arts philosophy: letting go of rigid beliefs and being open-minded and flexible to adjust to the situation. Just like water adapts to its surroundings, so must we; the question isn't whether we should adapt, but how we do it.

Armed with an understanding of "nice" as a construct, our response can be to go with the flow or to meet that temptation head-on and crash. Otherwise, we risk simply being carried away by the current of niceness that pervades our society.

Four Characteristics of Nice That Hinder Progress

Many behaviors that keep us stuck in a cycle of submission often go unnoticed. Recognizing them is the first step toward breaking free and creating change. Conditioned constraints we must overcome include:

- lack of awareness
- lack of accountability
- lack of agency
- lack of adaptability

We must question how and why systems work as they do, embrace hard truths, and take responsibility. Rather than avoiding discomfort, use it to grow. Challenge injustice, speak up, support others, and take even small steps toward change. Reflect on what works and what doesn't, and refine your approach to sustain meaningful impact.

Outwit, Outplay, Outlast

In a society that has long prized conformity and discouraged dissent, authenticity has often invited punishment. Forced to conceal our culture, physical attributes, emotions, and language, marginalized people have developed various psy-

chological strategies, such as *tuning*, *covering*, *masking*, and *code switching*, as survival mechanisms.

These adaptations are rooted in a history of systemic oppression. Over generations, they have become ingrained habits. The flawed ideal of “colorblindness” is a product of this legacy, promoting the idea that seeing everyone as the same will dispel racism. While seemingly well-intentioned, it erases individual histories and lived experiences, weakening us by valuing conformity over the strength of diversity.

When Nerve Is Used to Harm

A caveat on building your nerve: It can drive positive change, but also harm. Disruption for its own sake helps no one (again, no one likes an asshole). Worse, history is full of bad actors who’ve weaponized behavior change, using communication to sow division, consolidate power, and dehumanize others.

In a world where bad actors sow harm, our strongest response is to match their resolve with our own, creating a world where harm cannot thrive. The nerve to oppress is real, evident in policies, slogans, and movements that impede or roll back progress. But we have a choice. Having nerve isn’t just about standing up to bullies; it’s about standing up for something better and more just.

CHAPTER 5

Start a Burn Book

In 2013, my then-employer brought in a consultant as we developed the next iteration of our five-year strategic plan. Her process included an unconventional exercise: keeping a weekly creative journal. The goal? To help us shift our perspectives on the problems we were solving and uncover new ways of thinking. So, not a “burn book” exactly, but it was more fun to think of it that way.

What initially felt like unwelcome homework became one of the most valuable tools I’ve encountered. Journaling daily allowed me to spotlight “rules” I’d internalized and unspoken norms I’d never questioned. Our burn books were not about pettiness or gossip, but about burning the assumptions that held us back.

As it turns out, journaling is a science-backed tool. This process creates clarity, strengthens problem-solving skills, and builds the mental agility to navigate personal and professional challenges. Think of it this way: Creating your own burn book doesn’t just expose what’s holding you back; it provides you with a tool to move forward.

How Our Brains Make Sense of Experiences

In neurology, *conscious perception* is when your brain recognizes and makes sense of what you’re experiencing: a sound, a sight, or a feeling. It’s the brain “switching on the light bulb” and connecting the dots.

When it comes to our organizations, conscious perception allows us to recognize what’s happening beneath the surface. We must train ourselves to see past the familiar ways of operating and identify the systems that have outlived their usefulness. This shift is crucial for changemakers because you can’t fix a problem until you recognize it’s there.

This is where the power of perspective comes into play. We can become so accustomed to the current state of affairs that we stop questioning it. We don’t recognize the outdated processes or unchallenged biases that keep us from progressing. But once our perspective shifts, once we see the inefficiencies, inequities, or possibilities we missed before, we can’t go back. The change is permanent, and so is the growth potential.

CHAPTER 6

Dancing with the Devil

Where is the line between hero and villain? Who gets to decide? And what do those titles really mean? Here’s how I break down those roles:

- **For the good of all mankind.** Many people, when asked to name a hero, might pick a celebrity, politician, sports star, or author. I define a hero as someone who acts without the promise of personal benefit or the chance to witness the impact of their efforts.
- **Some people just want to watch the world burn.** Villains are the antagonists no one admires. Their actions serve little purpose beyond self-aggrandizement, driven by an insatiable need for power, control, or personal gain.

Good versus evil. Light versus dark. Justice versus the systems that perpetuate inequity. But what happens when someone who seems complicit in the very system we’re questioning starts challenging it themselves?

Am I the Asshole Here?

A popular Reddit thread, #AITAH (Am I the Asshole Here?) is a very interesting sociological experiment that questions the nature of our interactions. But for me, it also resonated with a truth that I had long sensed but resisted acknowl-

Sometimes, to be the hero, you have to be the villain in someone else's story.

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edging. Wrestling with self-doubt, the lesson came slowly: Sometimes, to be the hero, I would have to be the villain in someone else's story.

I began my career as a communicator and fundraiser in the nonprofit sector with clear eyes and a full heart. I wanted to help people, have a meaningful impact on the world, and be an agent of sustainable change in a system that desperately needed it. Little did I know the hoops I would have to jump through to fund that change. Far removed from the philanthropic ideal I had imagined, I found the mission itself overshadowed as I navigated a labyrinth of social expectations and unspoken rules.

We spent too much time indulging wealthy donors, catering to their whims, and playing by their rules. My experience became a cautionary tale of how easily their trivial concerns overshadowed our critical work. But it also taught me this: Sometimes, you must risk the wrath of those in power. If you don't, you'll keep bending to their will, losing sight of what matters, or worse, losing yourself. In their world, they were the heroes: graceful benefactors, saviors of the less fortunate. But if challenging their performative philanthropy would make me the villain, maybe that was a title worth embracing.

ACTION 3: DO

CHAPTER 7

Status Update: It's Complicated

Throughout this journey, I've embraced a core belief: Question everything and everyone. Seeking answers is essential to understanding the world and imagining change. But what if everything I've been taught about heroes and villains is flawed? Am I meant to root for the villains now?

Maybe the real lesson is: It's complicated.

I would like to help us solve for this by proposing a third classification: the *antihero*. Not the hero we deserve, but the one we need. Our world isn't black and white; it's full of gray areas where multiple truths coexist, demanding a more nuanced perspective. An antihero acts out of necessity rather than altruism. Though perhaps not inherently driven by vir-

tue, they navigate the messy middle ground to step up when others won't, confronting challenges head-on.

Antiheroes are catalysts for progress. They question the established order and force others to confront uncomfortable truths. In comic books, the antihero often utilizes questionable methods to achieve their goals. But taking on this role is not about causing harm; I am not giving you permission to act out of pocket. The difference is, *our actions will be righteous, but society will tell us they are wrong.*

Why Disruption Alone Isn't the Vibe

Disruption is the starting line, not the conclusion. It is incomplete and naive as a singular notion. It exposes inequities and challenges accepted norms, but after the dust settles, no benevolent overseer is waiting to ensure progress takes root.

This world—with all its flaws, injustices, and potential—is ours to break or build. Our progress can be charted in the systems we design, the stories we tell, and the legacies we leave.

Applying the Power of Communication to Drive Change

The cartoon *Captain Planet* taught a generation of kids to reduce, reuse, and recycle. The *Got Milk?* campaign made drinking dairy sexy.

These stories highlight a key insight: Communication isn't just about exchanging information. It's about shaping how people see the world and choose to act within it. The words, phrases, and symbols we use are far more than semantics; they are tools of influence and transformation.

If your company prides itself on excellence, integrity, or innovation, position DEI as an integral part of that identity. Make it clear that failing to embrace diversity is failing to live up to the company's own standards. Be willing to confront resistance directly. Use language that doesn't just "invite" inclusion but demands accountability.

In our communities, we can use communication to mobilize people toward collective action and challenge systemic issues like racism, environmental injustice, and economic inequality. Community campaigns work when they tap into shared values.

The Mandate: “Have Nerve, Even If It’s Not Nice”

Change requires us to communicate with intention, clarity, courage, and conviction. Communication shapes behavior, culture, and norms. But to drive the change we seek, we must be willing to disrupt comfort, challenge assumptions, and reject complacency.

Niceness may smooth the edges, but it rarely shifts the ground beneath us. Nerve bends the moral arc, tips the scales of justice, and creates a world where progress is not just possible, but achievable, because we choose to make it so.

CHAPTER 8

Sweat the Small Stuff

Challenging entrenched systems is *hard*. It takes labor, collective effort, and courage to insist that something new can exist where only the old once thrived. Resistance demands perseverance and resolve.

This is what the system fears most: not loud, rebellious declarations, but the quiet determination of those who refuse to accept its terms.

Small resistance, even with the simplest tools, creates transformation, and the influence ripples outward. So, ask yourself: What would it take to clear a space for something new within your world, your workplace, your relationships, or yourself?

Rebel *with* a Cause

I’m reminded of another icon, Rosa Parks, who could not have envisioned the impact that her act of resistance would set in motion. Her rebellion is often credited with being the ripple that turned into a tidal wave, the spark that lit the forest ablaze to awaken so many to the cause and incite momentum for the Civil Rights Movement. But why?

I believe it’s because when she decided to stop playing nice, to refuse to be relegated to the back of the bus, she stood directly against the tyranny of the status quo and challenged the worldview of what would have been perceived as acceptable.

It wasn’t just about dismantling injustice; it was about building a new, more just framework that serves everyone. A world where power is shared, not hoarded. A world where our actions reflect our ideals.

Building such a world demands accountability, imagination, and collaboration. It’s unglamorous, messy, and rarely celebrated, but it is where lasting progress takes shape.

CHAPTER 9

Break the Back Row Barrier

Some leaders operate from a scarcity mindset: fear of losing reputation, revenue, relationships, or relevance. Acting from this place of fear distorts how people think and act.

When we perceive resources as limited, we focus narrowly on immediate needs at the expense of long-term vision. Scarcity thinking results in fear-driven choices, holding us in reactive cycles and preventing us from imagining alternatives or taking bold action.

Yet scarcity is often more perception than reality. Shifting to an abundance mindset doesn’t deny limitations; it reframes them. An abundance mindset reframes risk as a meaningful opportunity, fostering courage, creativity, and a broader perspective, allowing people to see the potential benefits rather than just the costs.

Not Doing Nothing

The concept of inevitability is a trap we cannot afford to get stuck in. This mindset, consciously or unconsciously held, rests on the idea that no matter what we do or fail to do, the world will inevitably become better, fairer, and more just. This myth keeps us in a comfort-induced paralysis, willfully ignorant of the world’s evils. We convince ourselves that if we wait long enough and keep our heads down, justice and equality will manifest on their own.

Progress is never the result of passive optimism. It’s the product of deliberate, sustained disruption. The world evolves through solidarity, action, and an unwavering refusal to accept what is. The idea that justice will “just happen” is a dangerous delusion. The future we want is ours to build.

ACTION 4: REVISIT

CHAPTER 10

The Circle of Life

Progress along the Nice to Nerve Continuum is not a straight line; it’s a circle. Change is not a one-time event but a continuous process of learning and adaptation.

At its core, revisiting hinges on the distinction between a fixed mindset and a growth mindset, shaping how individuals and systems approach change, setbacks, and progress:

- A *fixed mindset* believes character, intelligence, and abilities are static and tends to focus on goals viewed as easily achievable, avoiding failure to preserve a fragile sense of worth.
- A *growth mindset* thrives on challenges, prioritizing curiosity and viewing failure as a chance to stretch and improve.

Apathy and complacency are constant threats, tempting us to believe the work is done or that it doesn't matter. Revisiting is the antidote to stagnation, keeping us engaged and ensuring we continue to hold ourselves and others accountable. It embraces the impermanence of transformation, urging us to constantly iterate and refine strategies. It means facing discomfort and rethinking what we thought we knew. Growth demands it.

Revisiting is a tool for reclaiming the nerve that has been socialized out of us. Revisit your assumptions, narratives, heroes, and villains. Rethink your values and reimagine a more equitable world. Question every system and every actor within those systems, including yourself.

CONCLUSION

Cost Analysis

Progress demands rejecting the compulsion of comfort in favor of community and collective courage. The compulsion of comfort isn't easy to overcome, but by recognizing and naming it, we take steps toward building a world that works for all of us. This is solidarity: working together across differences to demand that systems serve everyone, not just a privileged few.

The decision is yours: Will you pay the price of nerve, or continue shouldering the cost of nice?

Make no mistake, there is a cost to choosing nerve over nice.

Paying the Cost

Stepping into the antihero role often strains relationships. Friends and colleagues, even family members who once stood beside you may retreat. This path tests even the most steadfast resolve. The cost is paid in sleepless nights, repeated battles, and the weight of knowing that doing what's right doesn't often bring immediate reward.

Nice keeps us compliant, comfortable, and complicit in the systems that harm us. The stakes of our compliance are not just stagnation; they're erosion. Erosion of our dignity. Erosion of our humanity. Every time we choose palatability over principle, we pay a quiet tax: a little less truth, a little less justice, a little less of ourselves.

This isn't about one moment of courage. It's about committing to a lifetime of resistance, one choice at a time. You cannot change everything, but you can change something. And that is enough, so long as you keep going.

Leave people and places better than you found them.

The question we must ask ourselves daily isn't whether we can afford to challenge the carefully constructed social order imposed on us; the real question is, *can we afford not to?*

The price of nice is comfort at the cost of progress. The price of nerve is discomfort in the pursuit of something greater.

I dare you to have the nerve.



Amira Barger is an award-winning executive vice president at a global communications firm, where she leads DEI Advisory and provides strategic counsel worldwide. With more than twenty years of experience, she is a recognized scholar-practitioner and thought leader focused on leadership, organizational health, and behavioral communications. Barger is a contributor to *MSNBC* and *Fast Company* and has been featured in outlets including *Forbes*, *Business Insider*, and *CNBC*. She has received numerous honors, including recognition among top global DEI leaders and executives. Barger also teaches at California State University, East Bay, and the University of California, San Francisco, preparing future leaders.

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