Beyond Good

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How technology is leading a purpose-driven business revolution

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This book is dedicated to our families and friends, and all those who work tirelessly to make the world a better place.

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About the authors

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Theodora Lau is the Founder of Unconventional Ventures. She is a public speaker, writer and adviser, whose work seeks to spark innovation to improve consumer health and financial wellbeing. She focuses on developing and growing an ecosystem of financial institutions, corporates, entrepreneurs and venture capitalists to better address the unmet needs of consumers, with a focus on women and minority founders. She co-hosts One Vision, a podcast on innovation and FinTech.

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About Unconventional Ventures

Unconventional Ventures provides consulting services to drive innovation to improve systematic financial wellbeing. We connect founders to funders, provide mentorship to entrepreneurs, strategic advisory services to a broad set of corporates, and broaden opportunities for diversity within the ecosystem. Our belief is that anyone with great ideas should have a chance to succeed. We work with banking clients, FinTech startups, conference and media organizers and technology firms. Our approach is to help these players navigate, contextualize and diversify their business models in order to be prepared for the changes to the broader financial-services landscape.

Foreword

The invitation to write the foreword to this book was extended – and accepted – under vastly different circumstances from those that we are experiencing today. Even in the old version of the world that was not living through a world-wide pandemic and the deepest global recession since the Second World War, Theo and Bradley's vision was compelling – to create a book inviting and inspiring business leaders to play an even bigger role than before in solving society's most pressing challenges. And to use the digital revolution happening in the financial-services sector to show how the purposeful application of technology can be the catalyst for greater social inclusion and equity.

I happily signed on to Theo and Bradley's project because I, too, felt that the urgency for change was clear even before 2020. In the midst of the longest economic expansion in US history, millions of workers experienced deteriorating financial and physical health. And while global inequality between countries was decreasing and tens of millions of people had moved out of deepest poverty, in-country inequality was reaching historic levels, undermining social cohesion and dangerously increasing political polarization.

Enter 2020, and coronavirus and the global lockdowns implemented to contain it revealed just how deep and systemic the fault lines of inequality lay, and also how interdependent we all are. If the call for the business sector to lean into social purpose was growing before the pandemic, changing circumstances spurred a sea-change.

Overnight, the dominant narratives of the business sector's leading role in driving economic growth were tempered by a newfound respect for essential workers and the reality that an economy fuelled by consumption was capable of freefall when workers with volatile cash flow, living pay cheque to pay cheque, lacked the means to keep demand strong.

To the degree that the economy has stayed tenable, much of the success can be attributed to the ways in which technology has facilitated everything from remote work to tele-health to digital payments. Already we are seeing evidence that countries that prioritized digital financial inclusion and interoperability with government safety net programmes are experiencing greater economic resilience and faster recoveries.

Conversely, the many failures contributing to human suffering – and disproportionately harming Black, Indigenous and People of Colour (BIPOC) communities – are evidence of how much work is ahead of us, and how critical it is that leaders in all sectors centre our most ambitious and innovative thinking on solving for core problems. When solved, these solutions will provide households with the financial security, dignity and tools to be resilient and capable of contributing to a full economic recovery.

As with so many things in our society right now, this book raises provocative questions, and refreshingly, it doesn't pretend to have all the answers. That is the work we must do together.

Beyond Good is an important companion to other work emerging right now, centreing on the margins and talking about the technical and structural-opportunity horizon that we must aim for.

Read it because there is much to be inspired by. Read it because there is a lot of work ahead of us. Read it because we are at an inflection point where business leadership matters and time is of the essence.

Ida Rademacher, Vice President, Aspen Institute and Executive Director, Aspen Financial Security Program
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