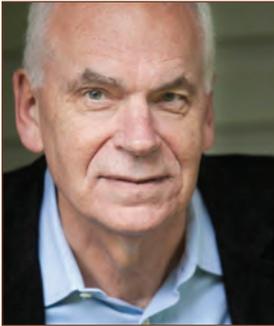




A Human Future

VOLUME 14 ■ NUMBER 1 ■ SPRING 2016

WWW.LARCHE.CA/SUBSCRIBE



Al Etmanski is a community organizer, social entrepreneur, and author of several books, including the recent bestseller *Impact: Six Patterns to Spread Your Social Innovation*. He co-founded Social Innovation Generation, and as co-founder of Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network, he led the campaign to create Canada's – and the world's – first Registered Disability Savings Plan. He is also co-founder of BC Partners for Social Impact. He is an Ashoka Fellow.

Social Innovation; Social Entrepreneurship: An Interview with Al Etmanski

Al Etmanski has long been bringing his giant intellect and his energy and compassion to effect significant social change in attitudes and real, practical improvements in the lives of vulnerable Canadians. A global thinker and keen observer, he recognizes possibilities and has helped organizations get “unstuck.” He connects others in significant conversations, and he writes an excellent blog in which he often draws attention to creative and fruitful approaches of other groups to a range of issues, including the environment, women's initiatives, and indigenous concerns. He and his wife, Vickie Cammack, received the Order of Canada for social-innovation leadership and their work with people with disabilities. – B. Porter, ed.

Beth Porter: You have just completed a Webinar for Tamarack. What did you talk about?

Al Etmanski: The theme was mobilizing your economic power. I started by quoting Father Moses Coady, the radical priest co-founder of the extremely influential Antigonish Movement in the '30s. It gave birth to a cooperative economy still alive today in the Maritimes. It is a phenomenal example of social and economic power but also of knowledge mobilization, values in action, and understanding what a good life is.

I'm cautious about using words like social innovation or social enterprise without anchoring what I'm saying in the heritage of social change that exists in Canada. As Fr. Coady said, “In a democracy people don't sit in the social and economic bleachers; they all play the game.” I suspect that, not only for me but for many people who want to make the world a better place,

coming down from the social bleachers to play is more comfortable than coming down to play in the economic game. Yet, this combination of first realizing that you have an economic muscle, and then using it to fulfill your social objectives of equity and justice is very powerful. I am attempting to shift the discussion away from techniques and technologies to the stories of social finance, social enterprise, social innovation.

Social change in Canada is unique and has a rich history. We should pay attention to this.

What is particular about social change in Canada?

Social change in Canada is unique and has a rich history. We should pay attention to this. It's fine to import grapes from elsewhere but it's rather silly to expect that the

L'Arche Canada
10271 Yonge St., Suite 300
Richmond Hill, ON L4C 3B5

Tel: 800-571-0212
Ed: eporter@larche.ca
www.larche.ca

Charitable # 88990 9719 RR0001



grapes will grow and taste the same as, for example, in France. I think social change starts with understanding what grows best in the soil, climate and heritage of Canada. Then, if we import concepts, theories, methodologies, we understand our own context and growing conditions.

Throughout the country are many examples of our commitment to social and economic justice. Staying with the economic framework, in Quebec there has been the incredible work of the journalist Alphonse Desjardins, which has led to a thriving social economy there. Vancity here in British Columbia is one of the biggest financial credit unions in Canada and in the world.

When I speak about social enterprises I bring a statue of Mother d'Youville, the founder of the Grey Nuns. She lived in Quebec in the 1700s, at a time when there were no social and health support services

and infrastructure. In fact, they were frowned upon, seen to be frivolous. By becoming a social entrepreneur she found a way to finance her social welfare and health care work helping orphans, vulnerable women and debilitated soldiers.

You sent me a graphic depicting movement from “recognition of suffering” on up to “resurrection and transformation.” I gather that you feel that we can focus too much on the end point.

This is one of the lessons I have taken from Jean Vanier. The idea that intelligence is enlightened by love is something that Simone Weil also observed. When I read Jean I understand his message as a constant iteration that we are more than our intelligence. It's not about diminishing intelligence, but when we start talking about societal transformation, we tend to go into complexity theory and whole systems change and it almost becomes a Rubik's cube that we think we can solve with our intelligence. This is far from what I

The Antigonish Movement

The Antigonish Movement improved people's economic status through cooperation in a secular, non-partisan, ecumenical arena. It was based on adult education (including basic economics) in small social action study groups throughout rural areas, and on economic cooperation for the common good. St. Francis Xavier University Extension Department in Antigonish became an incubator for the movement and some of its priests, one Fr. Moses Coady, became leaders and spokespersons for the Movement. Extracted from the St. FX Coady Extension website. [Read more.](#)

[Read Dr. Coady's vision](#) for helping the fishers, farmers and miners become “Masters of their Own Destiny.” [Watch a 1938 silent film](#) about the Antigonish Movement. The Antigonish Movement grew into the Coady International Institute. [Read more.](#)



St. FX Extension Staff and Fr. Coady (in white shirt) visiting a Nova Scotian fishing village. In the 1920s and 1930s many fisher families were impoverished. The fishers were exploited by middlemen who denied them a fair price for their catch. Organizing and learning how to market their fish cooperatively enabled them to have a better standard of living.



consider to be the sacred headwaters of all ingenuity and creativity. At these headwaters are a group of people I call passionate amateurs who do what they do because someone or something is suffering or vulnerable, and if they don't

act no one else will. If “necessity is the mother of invention,” the other parent is love and caring. It's that combination of love and necessity that creates the change. You can recite the statistics on the growth of poverty in Canada or the situation of many of Canada's indigenous people, but lose the connection with those who are experiencing it. To open your heart to understand their experience—

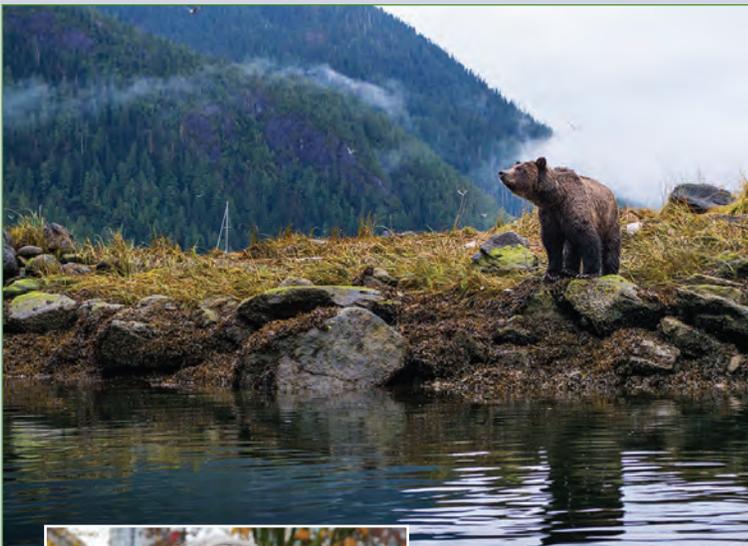
Social innovation is a mixture of the old and the new—the best of the old, our heritage, accompanied by what we are learning...

—that's the sacred headwaters, that's what creates the clarity of vision and ensures that all the way down to the mouth of the river there is some fidelity to what you need to change in order for that experience to change. Social innovation is a mixture of the old and the new—the best of the old, our heritage, accompanied by what we are learning that seems to be more effective.

One of the patterns for success that you describe in your book is to think and act like a movement, but social activists can become bogged down and can find themselves unable to step back and do the required thinking.

I think we're all in that situation. My book was really an attempt to codify my observations on how people make change. First, I wanted people to think beyond just their immediate strategies, their focus on a program or the law they want to change. Those are

Negotiating the Great Bear Rainforest Agreement



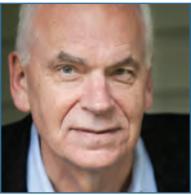
The Great Bear Rainforest—incorporating traditional areas known as *Txalgiu*, *Tsee-Motsa*, *Waglisla*, *Klemdulxk*, *Aweenak'ola* and more to local First Nations—is a rare and remarkable ecosystem stretching over many thousands of square kilometers from the northern tip of Vancouver Island to Alaska. It is the largest coastal temperate rainforest left on Earth. The two-decade story of the Great Bear Rainforest agreement is a fascinating window into the ongoing efforts of Indigenous people to reclaim power over their traditional lands. [Read more](#). (Excerpted from *The National Observer*)



The recent groundbreaking co-management agreement between First Nations and environmental groups, the forest industry, and government ensures ecosystem preservation and Indigenous rights. [Jody Holmes](#) (left) was one of the chief negotiators from the environmental side and has been involved from the beginning. [Watch a short](#) video narrated by Jody.

Photo by Sophie Wright courtesy of The National Observer

Photo by Elizabeth McShaffrey courtesy of The National Observer



incredibly important but there's something deeper and equally necessary that I think L'Arche and Vanier stand testimony to—that is the engagement with culture, with why people

think the way they think, and what informs their values, habits and beliefs. I observed that many players who seek longer-term impact are thinking and acting like a movement. This doesn't imply that you should drop everything you are doing. I'd be happy if people were to devote one percent of their time to beginning to catalogue the movements they are already part of, and then to thinking about how those movements can be useful for shifting the mindsets that they are up against, because that is what movements do better than anything.

You recommend partnerships that bring together people who think very differently. Why?

To get beyond just speaking to our friends and allies and to engage with an open heart with adversaries and strangers, believing they also care deeply about society, seems fundamental to the broader cultural changes that we would like to see. For example, we can institute good programming and improve financial incentives, and those are important, but they don't fundamentally shift perceptions about people with disabilities. That's a

cultural task, and so we have to engage with culture. Culture is where habits and attitudes and beliefs are formed and changed.

You point out that often people who are social change leaders have difficulty engaging together in problem-solving.

I think this is common. Many people have the impression that Social Innovation Generation somehow came together magically and proceeded harmoniously. We had a noble objective and we respected and liked each other and yet we brought out the worst in each other. When this happens, see it as a sign that you are getting somewhere! Being in the territory of uncertainty and ambiguity is unsettling. It makes me want to revert to what I know, even though I know it's not working. The challenge is to let go of habits and beliefs about how the world works and to begin to explore solutions that might actually get to the heart of the matter. I think the journey is one from hubris to humility.

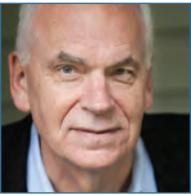
Today I call myself a pilgrim. I feel I have returned to my roots or to my home in community which I feel I lost touch with by becoming a policy maker, a lobbyist and a social entrepreneur. Now, I am surrounded by passionate amateurs and I feel I have come home.

TYZE – Online Private Personal Support Networks



Vickie Cammack, founder of TYZE

TYZE is a social innovation and social enterprise that provides a private online platform for personal support networks of people facing life challenges. TYZE offers a service and is also a business. It meets a great need and now has over 10,000 users. Recently TYZE was acquired by Saint Elizabeth Health Care, the largest home care provider in Canada. Vickie Cammack is the founder and was CEO of TYZE. Vickie is a leading Canadian social entrepreneur. She founded the Family Support Institute of BC, now in its 30th year, was founding director of PLAN Institute, and co-founder with her husband Al Etmanski, of Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN), a pioneer social enterprise supporting families to secure the future of their family member with a disability.



You and Vickie have borne the heat of the day and have experienced discouragement and exhaustion. What enables you to carry on?

This kind of work, this kind of caring can be harsh and unyielding. It can take a toll on you and your family, your friends, your colleagues and how you relate to others, not only friends and allies but adversaries and strangers. Sustenance for the journey, in our experience, comes from what the Quebec philosopher Jacques Dufresne describes as “moral oxygen.” The source of that varies but it is something that must be taken seriously and approached with intentionality. For Vickie and me, I think it involves, for starters, the mystery of our love for each other. How splendid that we have each other and are able to be curious about what each other is thinking and why, and to be challenged by each other. Of course there are other more prosaic pursuits: Vickie does yoga, I’m a cyclist, which is in many ways my meditative practice. And we love dancing and walking together. ■

For Your Information

- Al Etanski: *Impact: Six Patterns to Spread your Social Innovation*, 2015 (Special offer: Our readers may obtain this book for \$8.00 plus shipping. Add the code “AHF” after your first name on the order form. Click here: www.aletmanski.com).
- Al Etanski’s [blog](#) (Scroll down to subscribe.)

- [Social Innovation Generation \(SiG\)](#) is a unique living laboratory that aims to foster a climate of continuous social innovation. Its partner organizations include MaRs Discovery District, the J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, PLAN Institute, and the Waterloo Institute for Social Innovation and Resilience.
- [Tamarack](#) – An Institute for Community Engagement
- [Tamarack Webinars](#)
- [PLAN E-zine](#)
- [The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation](#)
- [Marguerite d’Youville](#)
- [Alphonse Desjardins](#), founder of the Caisses populaires in Quebec
- [Vancity Credit Union](#)
- [Abundant Community](#) (website of pioneer activist and founder of Asset Based Community Development Foundation, John McKnight)
- [Ashoka](#) – Innovators for the Public
- [Headwaters Communities in Action](#) (combatting poverty)
- [Transformation](#) – Where Love Meets Social Justice. See especially, “[How strong friendships can defy dementia.](#)”
- [The Caregiver’s Living Room: A Blog by Donna Thomson](#)
- [Jacques Dufresne: “La proposition Philia. Réflexions sur la maladie mentale et la déficience intellectuelle.”](#) (in French)

www.larche.ca/en/inspiration



The L’Arche movement was founded by Jean Vanier, in France in 1964. Today there are 149 communities of L’Arche on six continents, 29 in Canada. In L’Arche, people with intellectual disabilities and those who come to assist them share life together.

A Human Future is offered as a contribution to the Canadian conversation about values and the fostering of a society where everyone belongs and can make a contribution.