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The Dragonfly Effect: Quick, Effective, and Powerful Ways to Use Social Media to Drive Social Change: Book Review

Sophia Guevara

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The Dragonfly Effect: Quick, Effective, and Powerful Ways to Use Social Media to Drive Social Change

Jennifer Lynn Aaker, Andy Smith, and Carlye Adler. 2010.
San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 211 pages. \$25.95. [ISBN 9780470614150]

This book examines how people and organizations can use social media effectively to drive social change. The co-authors are Jennifer Aaker, a professor of marketing at Stanford University's Graduate School of Business, and Andy Smith, the principal of a marketing and customer strategy consulting firm. Aaker's research focuses on topics like happiness and her work has been featured by a variety of national news organizations. The book's foreword was written by Chip Heath, who authored *Made to Stick* and the afterword is written by Dan Ariely, who authored *Predictably Irrational*. These two authors have focused on making ideas successful and influencing human behavior, making them excellent choices to provide commentary on the book.

Aaker and Smith have paired up to create a book squarely in the "popular business" category – long on stories and engaging enough to finish in one afternoon.

The Dragonfly Effect identifies a four-step process symbolized by the wings of the dragonfly. The metaphor does a good job of describing how these four major areas must work in tandem to give the lift needed to reach one's goals:

Focus—Identify a concrete goal. What is it that you want to achieve?

Grab Attention—Develop a message that attracts an audience and makes them pay attention.

Engage—Go beyond advertising and develop a personal connection. Make your audience care enough to incite them to take action.

Take Action—Give your audience the tools and resources they need to take action. Be willing to tweak your strategy to encourage more of your audience to transition from consumers of your content to team members.

The book shares vivid stories of how others have used the steps outlined in the dragonfly model to identify a concrete goal and develop an engaging message to win attention for their cause and incite action. One of the biggest reasons why this book is so engaging is the fact that the authors skillfully share intriguing stories that elicit an emotional response. An example of this was the story of Alex Scott.

Alex was diagnosed with an aggressive form of childhood cancer before her first birthday. By the age of four, she had already undergone a stem cell transplant. While in the hospital, she let her parents know that she wanted to open up a lemonade stand to help other children fight cancer just like she did. She set up her lemonade stand and started selling at fifty cents a cup - a price level that she was advised would be hard to raise money at.

Visitors started purchasing from Alex and giving her \$1, \$5 and \$10 bills and letting her keep the change as her stand sign read that all proceeds would be given to childhood cancer research.

Reopening her stand each year, Alex continued to raise money. News of her activities inspired others to open up their own lemonade stands and her project began to gain momentum. Alex was given the opportunity to appear on national talk shows to spread information about her project and ended up setting a goal of raising \$1 million for childhood cancer research.

Even though Alex finally succumbed to cancer four years after opening up her first lemonade stand, her parents ended up creating a foundation to carry on Alex's idea and have so far raised in excess of \$27 million. The use of social media helped Alex's Lemonade Stand Foundation garner even more support and recruited thousands of volunteers to open up more lemonade stands to raise funds for cancer research. The foundation's experience showed how one can:

Identify a goal—The goal of the foundation was to honor Alex's wish to raise money to fight childhood cancer.

Grabbed attention: Owned the color "yellow" and made use of the lemonade stand which is popular in American culture.

Engage others—Alex's story engages people's emotions.

Take action—Made it easy for others to open up their own lemonade stands and provided an opportunity for volunteers to become part of the solution.

The book is aimed at a broad audience, so that no matter where you are skill-wise when it comes to social media, you will be able to take away value. For those who consider themselves advanced when it comes to their knowledge of social media, you won't be disappointed. For those who are novices, the book includes "boot camp" pages that provide the reader with a quick and dirty understanding of popular social tools and techniques like Twitter and vlogging. If you're a novice looking for a book that will provide both strategy and a step-by-step process of how to make use of social media tools like Facebook, this book isn't for you.

For those foundation professionals who are looking to improve upon their organization's current social media strategies and audience engagement techniques, this book is a must-read. While many foundations use social media as another advertising channel to speak at their audience instead of with, this book will provide you with new ideas to actually authentically engage them.

So what will it take for a foundation or a nonprofit to implement the suggestions made in this book? Well, if your organization is already making use of social media tools, then you are half way there. At this point, you would just have to take a look at your current social media strategy and review it with a critical eye. Can your organization's current use of social media be described as a strategy or is it something that just happens? If it is the latter, you can read this book to develop a more targeted way of working with social media to influence action. If you already have what you describe as an "effective" social media strategy - ask yourself in what way is it effective. In other words, are you only using these tools to advertise like so many other foundations and nonprofits do? If so, then you'll want to read this book to learn how to revamp your strategy to transition your use of social media into a way that provides for an engaged conversation that will incite action.

As for the cost of implementing these ideas, it can be as expensive as you want to make it. Keep in mind that the tools and strategies that this book suggests could be implemented for free. With that being said, some organizations will feel comfortable putting a staff person or an intern in charge of developing and implementing a more "dragonfly-like" social media strategy. Others will want to hire a consultant to tell them how and what to do even though the book itself does a pretty good job of doing this. Still others will want to hire an outside firm to do all the legwork for them.

As for technology skill requirements, you don't have to be a programmer to make use of social media tools. If you can register, point, click and upload - that is pretty much all the tech knowledge you need to have.

In addition to tool and strategy implementation for your organization, they recommend developing additional tools that can help your audience take action. After you make a focused request for action using your social media accounts, you want to make sure you have some tools ready that makes it easier for your audience to heed your call. Here are some examples of resources that you can provide for those who want to invest time or money in your cause:

YouTube videos that can be shared with others to incite action and educate viewers on your organization's specific goals.

Badges that can become status symbols will alert others that the individual person has signed on to become part of the solution that your organization has developed.

A toolkit of online templates that can help the individual spread your organization's message and incite action among their own friends, family and colleagues.

Develop a social community that can keep the momentum going. Use sites like Facebook or LinkedIn to connect professionals and other volunteers that your organization has incited to take action. Provide them with an opportunity to connect with other individuals who feel the same way about your cause and provide support that can keep the momentum going. Creating an online community can also make it easier for the organization or a group of volunteers to coordinate action.

Relevant studies and articles are referenced throughout, with full citations provided in the book's Notes section. You can also look at some of the more current research that Jennifer Aaker is involved in and even participate in a research study by accessing the book's accompanying website: <http://www.dragonflyeffect.com/blog/dragonfly-in-action/research/>.

In conclusion, this book is recommended for those foundation and nonprofit professionals who are looking for concrete ideas to expand their use of social media beyond the usual, rather than those with a more academic interest in social media.

*Reviewed by Sophia Guevara,
sophiaguevara@gmail.com*