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**Introduction**

Kanter, Rosabeth Moss. (2020). *Think outside the building: How advanced leaders can change*

*the world one smart innovation at a time*. Hachette UK.

This is THE David and Goliath how-to change leadership book for cutting through today’s messy world written by one of the top thought leaders on the planet, Dr. Rosabeth M. Kanter. Before getting into the book, the author deserves a solid introduction to best provide context of both the author and the book itself.

Dr. Rosabeth Moss Kanter holds the Ernest L. Arbuckle Professorship at Harvard Business School, specializing in strategy, innovation, and leadership for change. Kanter is the founder of the Harvard Business Review Magazine and co-founder of the Advanced Leadership Initiative. Dr Kanter is a Thinkers50 member, a London-based organisation for innovators making the world a better place. Kanter’s work and prestige is central to the movement for social innovation and new thinking.

**Content Brief**

Kanter raises the bar on leadership to tackle the reality and complexity of global challenges, the most pressing being poverty, war and inequalities along with it and climate change. Castles and what they represent are Kanter’s starting point. Castles are buildings for sure, and equally, according to the author, represent an institutionalized mindset. Change rarely comes from deep within an establishment and the challenges are so much bigger than what any one person or institution can handle.Think Outside the Building tackles the two sides of the same vexatious coin, physical and mental structures, by demonstrating how those with courage have broadened their thinking beyond borders with advanced leadership and creative problem solving skills.

Kanter openly draws from the Advanced Leadership Initiative skill set to provide this handbook accessible to anyone wanting to make the world a better place. While the ALI started out targeting retirees into new innovative purposeful solutions, the research and audience for the book is anyone bold and imaginative to go for it.“Creative new approaches are key,” says Kanter. Innovation and change can’t follow a script so Kanter calls for “direct positive action, a creative entrepreneurial mind set of taking on leadership without anyone asking you to do it.” This is what award winning social entrepreneur Alan Khazei called ‘big citizenship” says Kanter. Kanter challenges us to step up and provides this true gift of a handbook.

Clearly, Kanter connects to the field of creativity both in narrative style and process for wedging into challenges. Kanter highlights and encourages entrepreneurs who have “courage and imagination to break conventional thinking and think outside their professions to take on new challenges with a new approach.” It starts with dreaming, says Kanter and the hope that comes with it. Dream the worst nightmare too and invest in it, Kanter advises. In this book, Kanter reflects ALI in charting creative problem solving skills across multiple success stories to demonstrate the path for change agents. Catraca Livre in Brazil (investors wanted to talk money, founder Dimenstein wanted to talk dreams); Daily Table, Doug Rausch, former president Trader Joe’s (curiosity around food waste and low-income people); and Profiles in Courage Award 2018 recipient and former mayor of New Orleans Mitch Landrieu (with a new story) are among numerous case studies that have demonstrably attacked convoluted challenges with advanced leadership and creative skill for good.

Keep the mission front and center, find allies, talk to everyone, nudge things a long, get in the room, get to the table, make a circle and expand/contract as necessary, learn before pre-selling, be flexible, tell stories, and fill gaps are among the creative and strategic methodologies for problem solving outlined in the book. Perhaps my key takeaway is the notion of kaleidoscopic thinking, as “a way of constructing new patterns from fragments of data available that no one else has yet imagined, because they challenge conventional assumptions about how pieces of the organization, the marketplace, or the community can fit together.”

Kanter is in the big league of big dreamers and problem solvers, democratizing advanced leadership for social innovation, a decades-old and well-rooted movement to include the UN Sustainable Development goals, World Economic Forum and multiple organizations around the world. As a co-founder of the Harvard Advanced Leadership Initiative, whose vision is “to unleash the potential of experienced leaders to help solve society's most pressing challenges,” clearly Kanter is a major contributor to social innovation as she masterfully shares advanced leadership and creativity in this must have handbook. Outside the Building has been praised by academic and business leaders to include Harvard University, Columbia University, the CEOs of Procter & Gamble, Pepsico, Verizon and the list goes on.

**In Summary**

Progress today requires upending entire interconnected systems. Think Outside the Building is a roadmap that demonstrates strategies, tactics and imaginative thinking backed by the highest rung of academia, expertise and academic and corporate respect now shared with all who have the courage to wedge in and make positive change. Experienced leaders in business should act on youthful idealism, draw on advanced leadership and the creative skills within it and apply them to a world rife with ambiguity and conflict. There are plenty of forged paths and the social innovation community is strong. Kanter’s law puts it best, “if everything looks like a failure in the middle, then it can be turned into a success with some creative rejiggering.”

**My reactions**

This book is powerful. A thought leader demonstrating and guiding how just about anyone can significantly impact the world can only be a good thing. In my opinion, such a significant book by such a highly regarded leader should be mandatory reading by all graduating high schoolers and university students in an effort to raise awareness and can-do for what is facing the next generation. Wow, that is a very strong endorsement.

**References**

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