

humanize

jamie notter
maddie grant

how people-centric
organizations succeed
in a social world

Praise for *Humanize*

“*Humanize* offers practical content and insightful thinking that will help businesses make the deep changes needed to thrive in today’s social world. “

—Mike Smith, author of *Matchpoint* and President of Forbes.com

“Companies need to be social, and worry less about doing social media. In this timely and important book, Grant and Notter provide a detailed model for making the humanization leap. Social media success is about people, not logos, and embedding that attitude in your company isn’t easy. But armed with this book, you’ve got a fighting chance.”

—Jay Baer, co-author of *The NOW Revolution: 7 Shifts to Make Your Business Faster, Smarter, and More Social*

“I like how-to. Which is why I like this book immensely. It gets beyond theory (which is interesting) to give you something you can actually act on (which is far more useful)! Think roadmap, not research. In other words, you won’t finish reading this book and go, ‘Now what...?’”

—Ann Handley, Chief Content Officer, MarketingProfs, and co-author of *Content Rules: How to Create Killer Blogs, Podcasts, Videos, Ebooks, Webinars (and More) That Engage Customers and Ignite Your Business*

“*Humanize* is a deep dive on the impact of social media on leadership and the challenges of harnessing the power of engaged people. Wherever you are in the organization, this book helps you figure out what you need to change and dares you to make it happen. Stimulating and well done!”

—Mark Sanborn, New York Times Bestselling Author of *The Fred Factor*

“The days of controlling your message are dead. Born is the human organization where people buy from people, not companies. This is not another social media book. Notter and Grant dispel the notion that your leadership and your culture can continue to be self-centered and two-dimensional. With additional reading recommendations and worksheets, they’ll have you well on your way to creating a sustainable shift inside and outside of your organization.”

—Gini Dietrich, CEO, Arment Dietrich and founder, Spin Sucks Pro

“Our organizations have been modeled after mechanistic machines, where the human being is often treated as a cog. We know better. We know humans matter. It’s time for a change. And this book illustrates how to be change agents as leaders, and for our organizations.”

—Nilofer Merchant, author of *The New How: Creating Business Solutions Through Collaborative Strategy*

“In 2002, Malcolm Gladwell released *The Tipping Point*, and changed the way we looked at influence. In 2008, Seth Godin released *Tribes*, and showed us how small groups of people could take Gladwell’s influence model and become leaders. Now, in 2011, Maddie Grant and Jamie Notter take these seminal books to their natural evolu-

tion. *Humanize: How People-Centric Organizations Succeed in a Social World* shows us how leadership and influence of your internal and external customer starts as all businesses start—with its people. This book strips away the myth of strong-arm leadership and offers solid, actionable paths that actually work. This is your compass for the direction your business needs to travel if you want to stay alive.”

—Danny Brown, CEO of Bonsai Interactive Marketing, award-winning marketer and blogger at dannyybrown.me, and author of *The Parables of Business*

“This is a systems leadership book hidden inside a social media book. We work with clients who encounter major challenges when we start helping them incorporate social media into their business practices, but those challenges are not solved with solely social media tactics and those hurdles are not cleared without digging deep inside the organization. By helping our clients figure out how to make their organizations more human, we get them on the path to success more rapidly. This book is an amazing first step and is a great tool for businesses as they venture into the social space. I can’t wait to share it with our clients!”

—Shelly Kramer, CEO, V3 Integrated Marketing

“This book defines the new human quotient within organizations around the world. Large and small business alike should heed the call being screamed from the rooftops and shouted down the hallways. Maddie and Jamie make me want to be more human.”

—Kyle Lacy, author of *Branding Yourself* and *Twitter Marketing for Dummies*

“Jamie Notter and Maddie Grant have produced a real rarity among management books: truly insightful thinking that is both brilliantly fresh and actionably disciplined. First, they comprehensively reframe the problem of leadership in organizations. Next, they draw out and organize the resulting insights into a system that hangs together of its own accord. Finally, they explain to any manager at any level what this means in a practical sense, and how to profitably adapt and act on it.”

—Jim Stroup, DBA, author and management consultant

“Social media is not only changing how we communicate with key constituencies but it is challenging the very structure of our organizations. Historically, organizations have been structured to optimize efficiency for themselves, but not for their customers and markets. The open dialog organizations are now having with their markets is exposing how inefficiently those organizations work in the context of their larger ecosystems. Maddie Grant and Jamie Notter take a crack at pulling apart this puzzle and providing guidance in how to make concepts like trust and authenticity apply not only to people but to the organizations with which they interact.”

—Rachel Happe, Co-Founder & Principal, The Community Roundtable

HUMANIZE

How People-Centric Organizations
Succeed in a Social World

Jamie Notter
Maddie Grant

que[®]

800 East 96th Street
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Humanize: How People-Centric Organizations Succeed in a Social World

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Visit <http://www.humanizebook.com> for access to a set of four downloadable worksheets that will help you turn the ideas in this book into concrete action. There is one worksheet for each of the four chapters on the elements of a human organization: Open (Chapter 6), Trustworthy (Chapter 7), Generative (Chapter 8), and Courageous (Chapter 9).

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Dedication

*To my parents, George and Sarah Notter.
Jamie Notter*

*To Lindy Dreyer, without whom this book could never have been written.
Maddie Grant*

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Humanizing our organizations is a collaborative effort. Thank you to all for being part of it.

We Want to Hear from You!

As the reader of this book, *you* are our most important critic and commentator. We value your opinion and want to know what we're doing right, what we could do better, what areas you'd like to see us publish in, and any other words of wisdom you're willing to pass our way.

As an editor-in-chief for Que Publishing, I welcome your comments. You can email or write me directly to let me know what you did or didn't like about this book—as well as what we can do to make our books better.

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The Human Revolution

Throughout human history, we have been dependent on machines to survive. Fate, it seems, is not without a sense of irony.

—Morpheus, in *The Matrix*, 1999

The Matrix movies, directed by the Wachowski brothers, tell an allegorical tale of a future where machines control the human race, creating for them an imaginary existence (the Matrix) that the humans perceive as real. This allows the machines to keep humans sedated to extract fuel from their bodies. The movies tell a story of revolution in which a small group of people, led by Keanu Reeves' character, Neo, is able to break free from the hypnotic clutches of the Matrix. They struggle to regain their autonomy and live more full, human lives. Like any good movie, the *Matrix* trilogy is rooted in a universal story—one of people seeking freedom, struggling to be fully human, and trying to escape oppressive control to create a better future for themselves.

The World We Live in Today

So how does this relate to you? Most of you reading this book are likely living in societies where oppressive controls are a thing of the past, right? Maybe a few centuries ago your brave ancestors rose up to throw off the shackles of an oppressive regime, but these days we don't particularly find ourselves struggling against oppression to regain our human dignity, do we? We can certainly relate to that story of *The Matrix* revolution in terms of our culture and history, but our everyday experiences, for the most part, would seem to have very little connection to a struggle to be fully human.

Or do they? Maybe you should think about that, the next time you are bored during a staff meeting. Or during that annual performance review, where once again you're reviewing issues with your direct report that haven't particularly been addressed in the last year. Or as you walk back to your office dejectedly after your boss has once again squashed your creative ideas because you didn't go through the proper channels. Or ask your colleague how she feels, after she complains to you that she has been crushed by the weight of layers of bureaucracy. Or talk to anyone who has seen opportunities pass his organization by because no one had the authority to act quickly or because the organization lacked any processes that would allow for deviance from the way things have always been done. Forget the science fiction of machines altering our brains to convince us that a virtual reality is actually happening. Take a look at our organizational lives, in which we routinely give up what is important to us, spending the overwhelming majority of our waking hours working in organizations that are more likely to inspire endless complaining and self-medication than truly fulfilling lives. We may not be locked in a literal struggle between life and death, but there is something disconcerting about the way so many of us plod forward in frustrating work environments. We tolerate a subpar existence, accepting that living a true and full human existence is actually a luxury, something we dream about, rather than a natural part of life to which we are entitled.

Perhaps it should not surprise us that we are here struggling to be more fully human within our organizational lives, because our organizations have for centuries been modeled after machines. Machines completely transformed our economy and our society. So it was only natural that we would look to them as we created the structures, processes, and behavioral expectations of our employees. We created organizations to be more productive, to grow as a society, so we wanted the same kind of efficiency and consistency that our machines provided for us. We organized into divisions, units, or components. We developed data-driven strategies. We reengineered our processes. We built companies with consistent brand messaging that measured outputs. We drive, direct, manage, order, measure, and process. There is no Matrix, but we certainly live in a machine world.

But over the last ten years, in an ironic twist of fate, a revolutionary breakthrough in technology—the Internet—has created a “glitch in the Matrix,” so to speak. It is subtly (or not so subtly, depending on how much we’re paying attention) shattering our perception of reality. As the Internet has become more central in our lives, we have begun to witness a revival of the importance of being human. Almost overnight, it seems, the world has become social, and the work world, too. Markets are conversations. Social media has enabled us to connect with individual people inside organizations and brands. We’re leaping over corporate hurdles imposed by PR and marketing departments and the chain of command; customers are being heard in ways that ignore traditional channels. Content is being created that blurs the line between the “professionals” and the “amateurs.” Rules are defied. People are demanding truth, honesty, transparency, and openness from the brands and organizations they deal with every day. The companies that are winning are those that are listening—and social media makes it easy to listen (though maybe not so easy to manage the work of listening and responding), so the rest have no excuse anymore. And why is all this so disruptive?

Because we like it. A lot.

We like being human. We like having the capacity to publish our own thoughts and to create things and share them with the people in our communities who actually matter to us. One of the reasons social media has grown so fast is that it taps into what we, as human beings, naturally love and need and want to do—create, share, connect, relate. So even though we don’t know how these ever-changing technologies are going to play out or whether they will connect perfectly to our work world, we are diving right in and giving energy and attention to this new social world. We’re watching as Twitter turns into a real-time news stream; we’re amazed by the millions of people using Facebook every day; and we’re trying to keep up with new social concepts like “engagement” and “influencers” and “gamification.” But without knowing for sure what the business impact of these specific concepts will be, we’re watching them unfold, we’re personally excited by them, and we’re ready to jump in and explore the newest social tool.

Our organizations, however, are not as enthusiastic. We see the potential that social media has for our organizations, because of the energy and attention social media attracts, but we are having a hard time trying to fit these new practices into our existing systems. We’re drowning in tactics. We’re arguing over who “owns” social media for our company. We mandate social media adoption, and then we’re frustrated when our shiny new outposts on social media sites languish, unused and ignored. We’re reading a lot of books about social media implementation, but the technology is moving faster than these books can be printed. The technologies we’re trying to keep up with are not only developing faster, but they are also changing organically and unpredictably. What was the hottest site on the Web a year ago, with millions of people using it, just died almost overnight. A few individuals—bloggers,

enthusiasts, and consultants—are just about able to keep up but not nearly enough to build the capacity we need for every organization to do the same. Ultimately, it's not (just) about writing better books about social media, or even printing them faster. There are some good books, and they hit the social media issues perfectly. What they do not address, however, is the deeper fabric of our organizations.

We are trying to force-fit social media technology—a technology that is unleashing a wave of creative energy that draws its strength by tapping into deeply human desires and aspirations—into organizations that have been built (and reinforced for decades) on an entirely mechanical model. We work in “systems,” but we need to break down the doors and windows and let them become “ecosystems.” We need to make human beings, not machine systems, into the core energy that drives growth. We are starting to realize that for our social media work to truly take off, we need more than smarter social media tactics and better social media implementation. The challenge here is not to do social media better. The challenge is to do our organizations better.

The challenge is to make our organizations more human.

This requires some different books (like this one), books that are not about tactics but about the deeper forces behind the disruptive changes we're seeing in a more social world. But more importantly, it requires more action. We need to unplug from how we traditionally have done things. We need to try new ways. We also need to stop doing other things at the same time. We have to take some chances. They can be calculated chances—we don't bet the farm, maybe—but we have to do things differently. That means giving up control. That means shifting authority. That means thinking about old issues from new perspectives, bringing in new voices. This is happening already around us, of course, because of the social web. People are finding ways to get things done without organizations, so this is actually the perfect opportunity to *not* do things like they have always been done. And we can talk about them and share what we are doing and learn from each other at a scale never seen before.

We need to follow the white rabbit, like in the movie. We need the red pill, the one that opens our eyes to the construct that is the world we live in, the one that unplugs us from the Matrix. (And yes, it might be gooey and messy when we do.)

We need to see the code to break it. This book will help.

Tomorrow's World: Human Organizations

We need organizations that are more human. We need to re-create our organizations so that the power and energy of being more human in our work life can be leveraged. This has the power not only to transform our individual experiences in the work world, but also to access untapped potential in our organizations.

That's what this book is about. We propose that the reason that we find it hard, in many instances, to truly take advantage of the opportunities created by social media is because our mechanistic business environment is not human enough. It's not built to allow for human qualities, as messy as they are—qualities like being open, trustworthy, generous, creative, courageous, loving, fallible, and fun. There's a lot of talk about these qualities, particularly emerging from social media circles. But talking about them is not the same as having them.

Because let's face it, our organizations still leave a lot to be desired. If you don't believe us, take a few minutes to walk around your office and pluck the various *Dilbert* cartoons off the cubicle walls to get a sense of what we've created. So many of our organizations are predictably bad. And the impact of the disengaged employees, turnover, and wasted productivity is unfortunately not as funny as those *Dilbert* cartoons. Part of our problem is our apparent inability to change the way we run our organizations. While we are all working on computers that would have seemed like science fiction only 40 or 50 years ago, we also work within cultures, structures, and processes that have not been noticeably innovated in more than a century. We are still mired in a machine-centric view of organizations, and we're paying a steep price.

And implementing social media is not the same thing as leading and managing organizations. This is not, in fact, a social media book. We dig into social media because it is relevant to the challenges we face in making our organizations more human. Social media is definitely here to stay and it has much to teach us. But social media is not going to get us out of our current mess on its own. Social media is shining a light on the root of our organizational problems. It has captured our attention and energy because it has quickly given us access at a broad, societal level to those elements of being human that we've been craving for the last few generations.

Creating human organizations requires more than social media. It requires new leadership. Ultimately, this is a leadership book, though not in the tradition of "individual leadership," where we provide executives and those who aspire to be executives a list of skills to develop to lead others. We lay ourselves bare here and tell you that those kinds of leadership skills are not enough to create human organizations. We need leadership that is accessible to everyone and that can develop the *whole system's* capacity for growth. We believe leadership should be as unique as our Twitter streams—meaning that it should be cultivated in each of us through interactions and conversations and connections inside and outside our organizations, both in the center and at the periphery. This is leadership that leaves space for crowdsourced ideas, innovation, transparency as to what will work and what won't and why, courage to admit failures, and diversity of thought and experience. This is

leadership that comes in the form of ownership and the ability to act. This is leadership that sparks and encourages turbo-charged, continuous learning. This is leadership in human organizations.

This book seeks to change our path, through all these things and more. Creating more human organizations is an imperative—the disruption brought about by the social web shows us that—and it is also incredibly achievable by all of us. When we talk about a human revolution, we do not imply that we need to come together to prepare for a generation of turmoil to achieve a new world order. Creating human organizations is simply a process of identifying the core elements of organization based on human principles, and then putting one foot in front of the other down that path. It may take a while, and like any valuable endeavor it will be hard work. But it is eminently doable, and doable by you and me, not just by people in positions of authority. Social media is showing us that, too. The amateurs are winning—and some of us are really pretty awesome. What we hope to achieve with this book is to provide a way for you—yes, you, at whatever level you are in your organization—to start making the changes necessary for your organization to become more human.

How This Book Is Structured

In the next three chapters, we set the scene and describe the big picture of the situation we're in now. Chapter 5 lays out the framework for taking action to become more human in our organizations, and Chapters 6 through 9 describe the four human elements we have identified as the most important and the ways they play out in three levels of organizational culture, processes and systems, and individual behavior. Most chapters include three “must read” resources for deeper learning on the topics we discuss. We also have developed four worksheets, one each to accompany Chapters 6 through 9, that help you assess your organization and figure out how to get started, no matter where in the system you are. The worksheets can be downloaded at www.humanizebook.com.

In Chapter 2, “We Can't Go Back,” we take a big-picture snapshot of social media and how it is changing our popular culture, industry, and business. All this should be familiar to you already—you're living it just like we are. But if you have any lingering doubts about the power of social media, or still think it might be just a fad, we provide a practitioner's-eye-view of the deep cultural changes that are happening around us, backed up by some of the smart people who've paved the way in terms of our collective understanding of those changes.

Then in Chapter 3, “We're Not Moving Forward,” we contrast the social media revolution with the relative stagnation in change and innovation in our organizations. We explain how a series of key assumptions and models for how organizations

work have been breaking down over the past few decades—yet we seem unable to come up with viable alternatives. Our “systems,” which have worked perfectly well in the past, are becoming ecosystems where things work differently, organically. But our management practices are not built to allow for that, and they’re not adapting fast enough.

Chapters 2 and 3 ultimately present an intersection that sets the stage for an inevitable collision: Social media is changing the world around us radically, yet our organizations are not changing to accommodate this new reality. Chapter 4, “Challenges to Socializing Business,” describes the challenges we face at this intersection. We have been hearing the cries of frustration from people who are trying to implement social media in our mechanistic organizations for some time now. In this chapter we break the challenges down at three different levels: organizational culture, internal process, and individual behavior.

All this sets the stage for Chapter 5, “Social Organizations Are More Human.” We lay out a framework for actually addressing the conflicts and contradictions we are experiencing as mechanical organizations in a more social world. It’s not a step-by-step model that you can copy into your organization. It’s a framework that helps draw your attention to the areas that need work, inspiring you to come up with the answers that will help you create more people-centric organizations. The framework is organized around four key elements of being human—being open, trustworthy, generative, and courageous—that will help you create more people-centric organizations by making changes at the culture, process, and behavior levels.

Chapter 6, “How to Be Open”; Chapter 7, “How to Be Trustworthy”; Chapter 8, “How to Be Generative”; and Chapter 9, “How to Be Courageous,” explore these human elements in greater detail. Each human element presents its own unique challenges and opportunities as you seek to change the way your organization operates. The framework we present is fleshed out as each chapter talks more specifically about the implications of being a more human organization in culture, process, and behavior:

- Being open translates to *decentralization* at the culture level, *systems thinking* at the process level, and *ownership* at the individual behavior level.
- Being trustworthy translates to *transparency* at the culture level, *truth* at the process level, and *authenticity* at the individual behavior level.
- Being generative translates to *inclusion* at the culture level, *collaboration* at the process level, and *relationship building* at the individual behavior level.

- Being courageous translates to *learning* at the culture level, *experimentation* at the process level, and *personal development* at the individual behavior level.

Our goal with this book is to facilitate action, so we provide guidance about making changes in all these contexts. Our discussion of culture in each chapter, for example, is broken down in terms of the “walk, talk, and thought” of culture creation and change.

- **Walk.** What organizations need to be actively doing to build a culture that is more open, trustworthy, generative, or courageous
- **Talk.** How organizations should actively communicate about their culture and what they are doing to change it
- **Thought.** How to address cultural assumptions that underlie “the way things are”

Similarly, at the level of organizational processes and systems, we look at the different challenges for each human element in addressing process at the structural, internal, and external levels:

- **Structural.** How to build capacity for being open, trustworthy, generative, and courageous by adjusting structure and the way work is organized
- **Internal.** Where certain internal processes and systems are getting in the way of being human
- **External.** What the human elements look like when the outside community or network is let in to participate

At the behavior level we explore the categories of knowledge and skills:

- **Knowledge.** What information any employee at any level should have access to, to be able to act in a more human way
- **Skills.** What interpersonal skills are specifically relevant to each human element

We present our four human elements in this way to enable you to find something, somewhere, you can hook into to get started doing the work of pushing your organization to be more human. There’s a lot of meaty stuff in here, and you can’t do it all at once. But in one or several of these subsections, you’ll think, “OK. This is where I can find a chink in the armor. This is something I can talk to colleagues about. This is something I can look into today.” The downloadable worksheets are designed the same way. They help you analyze and assess your organization and start comparing notes with other colleagues to develop an action plan for change.

Wherever you are in the organization, you can take steps toward creating a more human organization right away.

And of course, there is a certain amount of overlap between the chapters, too. Humans are not merely a collection of component parts. We are a rather magical combination of deep and complex layers of biology that somehow work together in such a way that we can walk around upright and sentient. Our human elements are the same—once you start honing in and thinking about one, you'll find areas of the others that connect. It makes sense to read this book with a notebook handy for making those connections and then revisiting them while reading later chapters. We have a logic for presenting the chapters in the order we do; though of course we have to practice what we preach and let go of control, knowing you'll read them in whatever order you want. Besides, the worksheets can be completed in any order, because we know that you may want to focus on one particular element that you already know your organization is ready to hone in on. Conversations are going on all over the social web about these four elements. Your customers or stakeholders may already be forcing you to pay attention to one or more of these areas, and this book will help to parse out what needs to be done.

We assume you're keen to start reading and to get to the meat. This brings us to an important point.

What's Different About This Book

Although we are both consultants, we tried hard to keep our framework from becoming a consultancy “model.” It has no clever acronyms associated with it. (We actually really hate acronyms. There, we said it.) It's a simple, straightforward, common sense framework, broken down into manageable parts that you can use to help grow and nurture your organization within its particular ecosystem. The book is meant to simplify the many thoughts and conversations that may be swirling around your organization about becoming more human. It is a guide, and the resources and worksheets we've included will help.

Something else important to note—this book doesn't have a lot of stories. We include examples where relevant, of course, but we're a little tired of all those books that go on and on to illustrate their points. Storytelling is important, in general, to help readers identify with the theories raised in business books, but in this case, you know the story better than we do. You know the story because you're living it in your organization or business. We all are. And if that's not enough, there is also a whole Internet full of relevant stories. We're not here to Google that for you; we're here to help you just get cracking. Because the way we structured this book, looking at the four essential human elements of the social organization from a cultural, structural, and individual level, boils down to one simple fact: The buck stops with you.

There's no point in reading this if you don't want to get started making changes. If you're happy to stay plugged into the Matrix, that's totally fine; we won't waste more of your time. Organizations and businesses have mechanisms in place to *stop* progress, to stop themselves from evolving. Mainly because of an inherent fear of change and fear of losing control, they have an interest in maintaining the status quo. We feel strongly that such an approach is becoming increasingly less viable. Mark our words: If you think your organization is behind now, just spend a year or two treading water, and you'll see how much ground there is to make up. There's no time to waste. It's up to you, if you care about your organization, to help it not only survive this transition but to also flourish.

And you're not alone. We can all help each other—on the social web, everyone's watching. Follow the white rabbit. Let's go.

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