

Rosabeth Moss Kanter

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Rosabeth Moss Kanter is a world-renowned expert on strategy, innovation, and leadership for change. She currently holds the Ernest L. Arbuckle Professorship at Harvard Business School for Business Administration. She has also held tenured professorships at Yale University and Brandeis University. In 1977, Kanter founded the global management consulting firm Goodmeasure Inc. along with Barry A. Stein, of which she is still chairman. In addition, Kanter has authored or coauthored 17 books, including best-sellers and award-winners such as *The Change Masters* and *When Giants Learn to Dance*.

Kanter's credits include being the recipient of 22 honorary doctoral degrees; remaining on Suntop Media and Skillsoft's *Thinkers 50* list since its inception in 2001; and being awarded the Academy of Management's Distinguished Career Award for her contributions to management knowledge in 2001. She has spoken at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and has also served on both civic and not-for-profit boards.

Q: What made you decide to co-found Goodmeasure Inc.?

A: I was always interested in two things. One was new ideas, new theories, and finding new knowledge, and the other was applying all of it to make a difference. From the time I was in college and graduate school, I wanted to advise the kinds of systems that I studied and design organizations that would improve the world.

After I left graduate school, I combined theoretical studies and teaching with being in the field and talking to managers. It was natural to start gaining some experience. This was about the time that management consulting was becoming a real profession. It was natural to then start having some experience, pulling that experience together, seeking other clients, doing that on the side, leading, and learning leadership from doing it.

I think it's very important to have that combination of research and practice; of knowledge and application; and of writing about leadership and having to do it. It has enriched my teaching, provided new insights in my research, and been very synergistic.

Q: What do you see as the next set of global challenges affecting people and economies?

A: We live in an interconnected world thanks to information technology, which also makes it hard to conceal information. Transparency definitely changes the context. It's possible to compare people, companies, and job offers, which is a tremendous amount of information. Competition used to be very local, but now that jobs can be done virtually from anywhere in the world, it means that people have to be even better. For the field of training and development, it means that lifelong learning is a reality. If people don't keep learning, improving, knowing what the next issues are, and continuing to be educated, they are going to fall behind.

In terms of international and cultural diversity, more and more, people come from many places in different combinations of ethnicity, nationality, places they've lived, and places they've worked, and they all have to understand each other. They have to have

common goals and purpose as well as tools and a vocabulary that will help them work together. Yet, we still have an awful lot of people with biases. In fact, I think there are more conflicts now because of connections. But global connectedness can help save civilizations and cultural heritages, because we can preserve everything digitally. There are possibilities, but we have to learn to work with this enormous diversity.

Q: What is the idea behind corporate citizenship?

A: This is one of the newest big developments in business in the past 10 years. There have always been companies that were really good contributors to their communities, but now every company wants to be on that bandwagon. That's a big expectation of customers, consumers, the public, and employees. Corporate citizenship is a bigger way of saying social responsibility. It's saying that you not only give charity, but you also take on responsibilities because you are doing business in particular places.

For companies like IBM, Proctor & Gamble, and Cisco Systems, this is at the center of what they do. It's a combination of things—it certainly creates goodwill, but it also helps the company reach customers by saying it stands for good things. Many companies are involved with education. Many companies are involved with education. Rarely is that self-interest in that they need something from those particular schools. For the most part, it's a sense of obligation. Because employees live in those communities, they really care about the community. The more global we become, the greater the interest in local involvement and improvement.

Q: Could you explain “Kanter’s Law,” which states that “Everything is a failure in the middle?”

A: I defined “Kanter’s Law” in a research project I did many years ago comparing successful and unsuccessful innovations. I discovered that one of the differences between success and failure was just how long people gave something before they gave up. People who got easily discouraged found that they stopped; they shut down the project; and it was automatically a failure.

The secret of success at change and innovation is giving it enough time. When you're trying to do something new or change something, you're always going to run into problems after you get started. It's inevitable. There's a temptation to give up, but if you give up in the middle, it's a failure. Instead, if you use those opportunities for learning, you reenergize yourself, you look at the vision again, you talk to the members of your team, and you keep on going. You need the flexibility to make changes in the middle because it might be that there were some things you should have done differently. Great leaders of change persist; they don't give up easily.

Q: Do you have any new projects or books in the works?

A: I am working right now on a book on globalization and diversity, and how we, as individuals, manage to be successful in this world of great change. It's also about how companies are reshaping themselves to be better corporate citizens. The working title is *Transforming Giants*. That's a play on words because it's about how companies are transforming themselves into forces for transforming the world.

I'm working with a set of vanguard companies, based on just about every continent, that are setting the terms for the new competition. We've done interviews all over the United States and Europe, India, China, Brazil, Egypt, Japan, and Korea. We have posed similar sets of questions to people about their companies, particularly when their companies were headquartered elsewhere. I want to know what they have in common and how they're coping with change because I think those are the guide posts to the future. The book will be out sometime in May 2009.

Q: How do you enjoy spending your free time?

A: I love to catch my breath by walking on a beach or through the woods. I'll walk nearly everywhere I go. When I'm in Boston, I walk to work in the morning from home. When I can, I walk places in the city rather than drive because it's a great combination of exercise and an opportunity to clear your head.

I also love to play tennis, see friends and family, and travel. I do most of my travel on business, but I find it fascinating to have some personal sense of what's going on in so many parts of the world.