

Meet the Author - Mike Hudson

Mike Hudson is the Founder of Compass Partnership. He was the Administrative Director of Friends of the Earth during its formative years. Following this, Mike worked in the UK and USA for a business strategy consultancy. He has worked as a consultant to not-for-profit organisations for 20 years leading teams that bring about major change in complex organisations.

His latest book, *Managing at the Leading Edge*, is the result of research by the author in America, home to the largest nonprofit sector in the world.

His book, *Managing Without Profit: The Art of Managing Third Sector Organisations*, (Penguin 1999 and Directory of Social Change 2002), now in its second edition, has been translated into two other languages and has sold over 15,000 copies.

When did you first become involved in the voluntary sector?

In 1972 I won an engineering scholarship with British Rail and was shipped off to spend a year in Merseyside maintaining signal boxes, laying copper cables and pouring over wiring diagrams to ensure railway signals always turned red if anything went wrong.

Bored with this, I joined Liverpool Friends of the Earth and spent my evenings and weekends campaigning against urban motorways, producing evidence for public enquiries and writing reports that annoyed the pro-road labour local authority.

After a year I moved to Durham University to study engineering, not acknowledging how uninterested I was with the subject, and spent most of my three years running a community action group and establishing the first project in the UK that recruited unemployed people to insulate the roofs of elderly and disabled people.

Towards the end of the three years a call from the Director of Friends of the Earth landed me the job of Local Groups Co-ordinator at the national headquarters. That began a life in the voluntary sector and the end of any career with British Rail.

Why did you write *Managing at the Leading Edge*?

It all began as a project which I created because I wanted to refresh my thinking after 15 years consulting in the voluntary sector and, to be honest, I love travelling to other countries and having a clear purpose for the trip.

The Centre for Civil Society at LSE offered me a Visiting Fellowship and a consortium of funders led by Zurich agreed to fund two trips to the US. This enabled me to interview chief executives of leading edge organisations and a cross section of academics, consultants and leaders of intermediary organisations.

I also felt that there was much UK voluntary organisations could learn from the larger and better researched nonprofit sector in America – just as there is much that they can learn from our experience.

It was only after I had read the huge literature on nonprofit management and governance and interviewed 65 leaders in New York, Boston, Washington, Los Angeles and San Francisco that I realised I had the material for another book.

What are you working on now?

The experience of meeting so many warm, welcoming and insightful leaders was extraordinarily energising. What I learned is informing much of my work at Compass Partnership which currently includes:

Advising the Home Office Active Community Directorate on strategies for strengthening voluntary sector infrastructure

Working with the Multiple Sclerosis Society, Citizens Advice, the National Consumer Council and the Royal College of Nursing to enhance their governance

Working with Age Concern on their new corporate strategy and on leadership development.

What do you see as the three most important issues in the voluntary sector today?

I believe the voluntary sector faces three big challenges.

First, organisations need to demonstrate to their members, users, funders, staff, boards and the wider public what they are accomplishing. The achievements of the voluntary sector are quite remarkable, but they are not well promoted or understood either by organisations themselves or by the sector as a whole. Most organisations put more resources into measuring their financial performance than into tracking the achievement of their mission. Much greater effort needs to be focussed on monitoring and managing impact and promoting achievements to all stakeholders.

Second, organisations need to develop much stronger leadership skills at every level of their operations. There is great potential to unlock more energy from a motivated and talented workforce, but it will require many more people to acquire the allusive and subtle skills of effective leadership. This will take time and bold investment in leadership development but it will enable the 563,000 people who work in the sector and millions of volunteers to deliver much greater impact.

All of this requires a greater willingness to invest in people and infrastructure – moving away from a shoe-string approach to building organisation capacity and committing to the sustained investment that is required to make create organisations that can make a real difference.

*Mike Hudson's new book **Managing at the Leading Edge** was published by Directory of Social Change on October 16th.*

*His previous book **Managing without Profit**, also available from DSC has been translated into two other languages and sold over 15,000 copies.*