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WALK OUT WALK ON

**A LEARNING JOURNEY INTO COMMUNITIES
DARING TO LIVE THE FUTURE NOW**

By the bestselling author of *Leadership and the New Science*

The whole globe is shook up, so what are you going to do
when things are falling apart?
You're either going to become more fundamentalist
and try to hold things together,
or you're going to forsake the old ambitions and goals
and live life as an experiment,
making it up as you go along.

—Pema Chödrön
Buddhist Teacher

THE ROLE WALK OUTS PLAY IN CREATING CHANGE

Walk Outs Who Walk On play a crucial role in societal change. They use this time of dissolution and failing systems to create and experiment with new ways of working and organizing. In doing their pioneering work, they rely on the fact that people's capacity to self-organize is the most powerful change process there is. They've seen how local efforts can emerge into larger, transformative changes when they connect with other local efforts. They've confirmed Margaret Mead's brilliant statement that the world changes by dint of small groups of dedicated people. And they've demonstrated that when people know where they come from—their traditions and culture—they develop strength and stamina. These pathfinders have



come to understand that living is a synonym for learning: they experiment, take risks, fail, succeed, make it up as they go along, and offer compassion and forgiveness to each other.

When any of us experiment with walking on, we're able to discover potential that we couldn't see before we freed ourselves from constraints. It's motivating to discover these hidden capacities and see how they serve us to accomplish good work. It's essential that we feel motivated, that we have faith that we're doing the right work, because whenever we use ideas and approaches that don't conform to the world's expectations, we're going to meet with resistance.

At Berkana, we use a map (co-created with our global family of friends and colleagues) to describe the predictable dynamics that are bound to occur between those pioneering the new and those preserving the old. We've used it for many years in diverse organizations and communities and now rely on it to know what to expect when we decide to walk out and walk on.

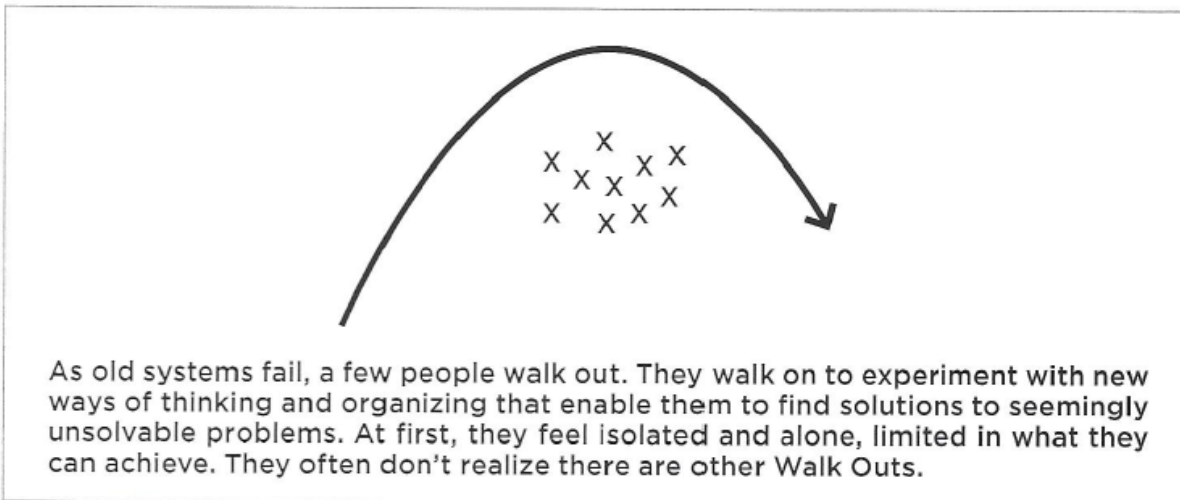
All systems go through life cycles. There's progress, setbacks, seasons. When a new effort begins, it feels like spring. People are excited by new possibilities, innovations and ideas abound, problems get solved, people feel inspired and motivated to contribute. It all works very well, for a time.

And then, especially if there's growth and success, things can start to go downhill. Leaders lose trust in people's ability to self-organize and feel the need to take control, to standardize everything, to issue policies, regulations, and laws. Self-organization gets replaced by over-organization; compliance becomes more important than creativity. Means and ends get reversed, and people struggle to uphold the system rather than having the system support them. These large, lumbering bureaucracies—think about education, health care, government, business—no longer have the capacity to create solutions to the very problems they were created to solve.

When a system reaches this stage of impotence, when it becomes the problem rather than the solution, we as individuals and communities have a choice. Either we struggle to fix and repair the current system, or we create new alternatives. New alternatives can be created either inside or outside the failing system. But if we choose to walk out and walk on, there are two competing roles we're called upon to play: We have to be thoughtful and

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compassionate in attending to what's dying—we have to be good hospice workers. And we have to be experimenters, pioneers, edge-walkers. Playing these dual roles is never easy, of course, but even so, there are enough people brave enough to do so.



Skilled hospice workers offer comfort and support to those at the end of their lives far beyond attending to physical needs. They help the dying focus on the transition ahead, and encourage them to see what their life has taught them—what wisdom and values shine clearly now that the distractions are gone.

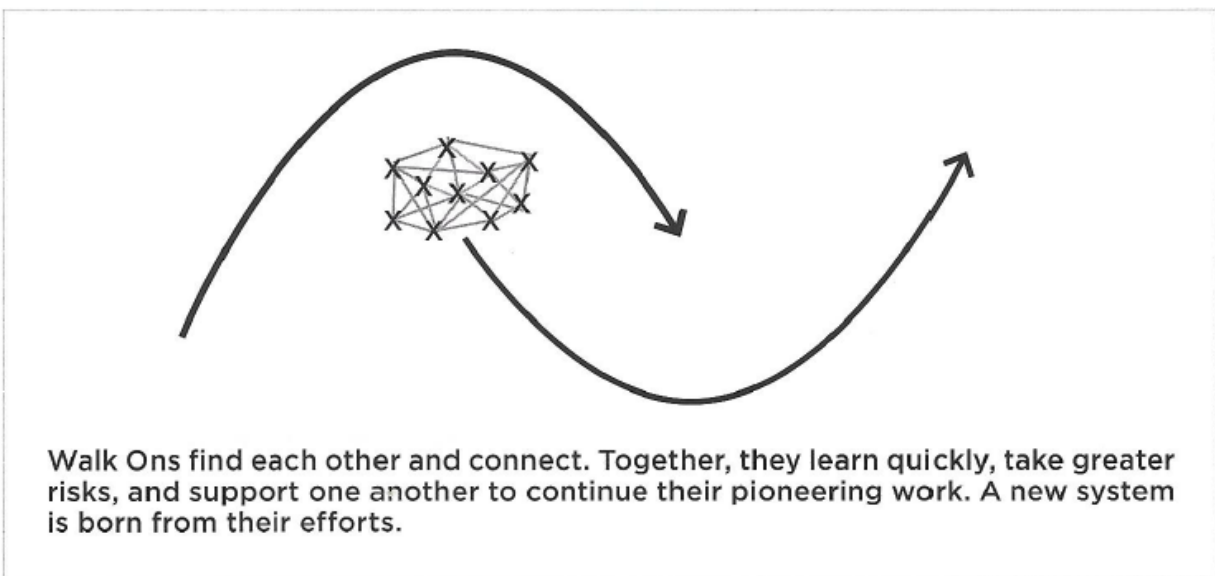
Walk Outs need to do this kind of hospice work on ourselves. Even as we stop struggling to fix things, even as we reject the status quo, we don't leap empty-handed into the future. We need to consciously carry with us the values and practices that feel essential. What have we learned, what do we treasure as the means to create good work, fulfilling lives, meaningful relationships? From our many experiences—the battles, victories, disappointments, successes—we need to glean our hard-won wisdom and preserve it at all costs. This is what we'll most need as we walk out and walk on to give birth to the future.

Inside dying systems, Walk Outs Who Walk On are those few leaders who refuse to work from the dominant values that permeate the bureaucracy, such things as speed, greed, fear, and aggression. They use their formal leadership to champion values and practices that respect people, that rely on people's inherent motivation, creativity, and caring to get quality work done. These leaders consciously create oases or protected areas within the bureaucracy where people can still contribute, protected from the

disabling demands of the old system. These leaders are treasures. They're dedicated, thoughtful revolutionaries who work hard to give birth to the new in very difficult circumstances.

And then there are those who leave the system entirely, eager to be free of all constraints to experiment with the future. You'll read their stories in the next pages. But even though they might appear to have more freedom than those still inside, they encounter many challenges that restrict their actions. Old habits and ways of thinking constantly rear up on their path. It's easy to get yanked backward, or to doubt that this is the right direction. It takes vigilance to notice when these old ways of thinking block the path ahead.

Pioneers have to expect to feel ignored, invisible, and lonely a good portion of the time. What they're doing is so new and different that others can't see their work even when it's staring them in the face. These are difficult dynamics to live with, especially when you know you've done good work, that you've solved problems that others are still struggling with. This is why it's so important that pioneers work as community, encouraging one another through the trials and risks natural to those giving birth to the new in the midst of the breakdown of the old.



If you've walked out of confining situations, you've probably experienced at least some of these dynamics. They're easily observable in the lives of innovators and courageous leaders everywhere. They'll be quite noticeable in the stories you're about to read as we journey through these seven communities. In each visit, we'll see how these difficult dynamics lose their

power as we work together in community. It's so much easier to keep walking on when we're in the company of kindred spirits.

Before we move on to Mexico, we'd like to talk about packing. How can you travel light but ensure that you have all the essentials for a rich learning experience?

PREPARING TO LEAVE HOME

A Learning Journey can be judged successful by how much it destabilizes and challenges our worldview. If we take the risk to step into a world very different from our own, we discover that our particular way of seeing is incomplete, that there are many more ways to see and interpret what's going on in life. We can discover that judgments and assumptions often limit our ability to see new possibilities.

Most traditions and cultures have initiation rituals that require setting out in order to be transformed. We willingly and bravely undertake a quest. We leave the comforts and safety of home, travel to strange and unfamiliar lands, and are welcomed to return only after we've discovered answers to our quest that we're prepared to put into practice.

This Learning Journey in book form might not seem to be asking that much of you. You're probably reading this in familiar surroundings. But don't be fooled. You won't be tested by the demons and dragons of old, but you might well be confronted by your beliefs and assumptions, internal demons that may rear up to block your path, or warn you to turn back, preventing you from reaching lands of new possibility.

THE COURAGE TO QUEST

Quests begin with a yearning that won't let us go. These questions of profound longing can be deceptively simple: "Why can't people be more kind?" "Why can't we work together better?" "Why are so many people unhappy?" "Does life have to be so hard?"

Behind these questions—perhaps the reason we're brave enough to ask them—is a deep intuition that things could be better, that life doesn't have

to be this way. This sense that more is possible can propel us beyond the safety of our daily routines, the security of our habitual ways of thinking, and send us out into the world to find answers.

Leaving home takes courage. We have to be brave enough to explore our questions, to cultivate our dissatisfaction with the present state of things, to notice what disturbs us, what feels unfair, terrible, heartbreaking. We have to be unafraid to look reality in the eye and notice what's really going on. If what we see opens our hearts, this is a good thing, because that's where our courage is found. With open hearts, we can bravely begin searching. We can go into the world with our questions, carried by our yearning to find a simpler and more effective way to live life and to benefit more people.

Here are a few questions that we offer to engage you as a learner. They're designed to help you notice what you notice in your world. Among all possible information and situations, we only observe a miniscule percentage of what's happening. As you notice what gets your attention, you can also see your filters.

What issues consistently get your attention? Which ones make you angry? Which ones make you excited?

Have you glimpsed or experienced a future that inspires and motivates you?

Who do you want to be for this world? What is the contribution you hope to make?

Are you willing to risk being changed by this journey?

PACKING FOR THE JOURNEY

As with any journey, it's better to pack light. For this particular trip, since you're sitting someplace comfortable, the only baggage you need to attend to is what you're carrying in your mind. By this stage in our lives, we each have a well-developed lens for viewing the world. We began constructing this lens as young children from the beliefs and assumptions taught by our families and culture. Throughout most of our lives, we polish and refine this lens with our experiences—the good, the bad, the ugly, the sublime.

As we rush about our lives, preoccupied with tasks and responsibilities, it becomes easy to forget that how we see the world is just one of many possible interpretations. We settle into our opinions and judgments, and assume that everyone else sees things the same way. But if this were true, we wouldn't get into arguments or difficulties with our partners, colleagues, leaders.

When we enter a new culture, we can expect to feel surprised, confused, disrupted. These are promising feelings, because they offer us a choice. Either we can retreat to the safety of our familiar opinions, or we can become curious. If we're willing to be disturbed, we can try to let go of our judgments and confess that we don't understand what we're seeing.

Confusing moments are wonderful opportunities to observe our minds more closely. If something's provoked or startled me, it's because I assumed something different was true. I thought things worked like this, but now I'm not so sure. . . .

- I thought material well-being made people happy, yet I'm sitting with people who have no material goods and we're feeling very happy, just because we're together, sharing stories.
- I expected that good community leaders had to be formally trained and developed, yet here I am meeting dozens of people, some with no education, who are bright and capable leaders, skilled at engaging others and getting work done.
- I believed that social entrepreneurs were a rare breed of people, yet here everyone I meet seems to have ideas and is thinking about the next project or dream.
- I assumed that our methods of planning, budgeting, and strategizing were necessary to get anything done, yet here I'm meeting highly motivated people who are accomplishing great work without doing any of those activities.

As we journey together, we encourage you to welcome those moments when you feel confronted, surprised. Each one is an opportunity to see your own mind, to notice your beliefs and assumptions. And to be open to change.

Now let's begin.