

**BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE**

# **STEPPING FORWARD**

**A POSITIVE, PRACTICAL PATH  
TO TRANSFORM OUR  
COMMUNITIES AND OUR LIVES**



# WELCOME!

## - A NEW PATH FORWARD -

How do we bring people together when our society is breaking apart? What will it take bridge our divides, overcome mistrust, and restore our belief that we can get things done together as Americans? How do we bring out the best in us?

In *Stepping Forward*, Richard C. Harwood gives us a new blueprint to rediscover what we share in common and how to actively build upon it. Harwood shows us how we can reach within and beyond ourselves to address our shared challenges and create more purpose and meaning in our lives by:

- Being a part of something larger than ourselves and truly making a difference in our communities
- Refocusing on the desire for good in each other
- Unleashing a greater sense of shared responsibility
- Finding the courage and humility to take such a path

So many of us are yearning for answers to the country's rampant polarization, hate speech, and gridlock. *Stepping Forward* shows us how to channel our frustration, energies, and aspirations to get on a more hopeful path.



## A PERSONAL NOTE FROM AUTHOR RICH HARWOOD

Dear Friend,

I'm thrilled that you have decided to read my new book. My hope is that you will be inspired to step forward and join with others to build a more hopeful community and society.

As you talk with others about the book, I hope you'll give yourself permission to listen deeply to others, engage actively and openly with one another, and focus on what you share in common and how you can actively build upon it.

And I hope that you'll make room to hear about other people's lived experiences, even their pain and sorrow and fears. Only then can we come together to achieve our shared aspirations.

We each face a choice today. As a society, we can choose to be divided, even polarized, hunkered down and retreated from one another. Or, we can exercise the power that each of us has to step forward and bring out the best in us, the best of us—and to restore our belief that we can get things done together.

I'd welcome hearing about what you discover and learn in your conversations with others. Please write me at [rich@theharwoodinstitute.org](mailto:rich@theharwoodinstitute.org).

I'm inspired by you stepping forward to create a more hopeful society.

Be well.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Rich Harwood". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

# BOOK DISCUSSION GUIDE

## I. Awaken



Rich opens *Stepping Forward* with the reflection, “Here I Am.” He writes, “At this moment in America, these three words call on us to engage with one another—to take greater responsibility for where we are and who we can become.”

- What does it mean for you to step forward in community life and say, “Here I am”?
- What can make this difficult for you to do?
- What doubts or fears do you need to overcome?
- What do you need to keep in mind to guide you as you step forward?

Throughout the book, Rich writes about “dignity,” “hope” and “community as a common enterprise.”

- He says that dignity is non-negotiable and a birthright, but that many people today feel their dignity has been stripped from them. What does it mean to afford each and every individual dignity in our communities?
- Rich writes about the difference between false hope and authentic hope pgs. 53-54. How do we sometimes promote false hope, even unintentionally? And what is authentic hope to you, and how can you and others help to create it?
- Rich talks about “community as a common enterprise.” What does that mean to you? Given what Rich has written about, what does it take to make community a common enterprise?

## II. Shared Responsibility



Rich makes the point that we Americans must restore our belief that we can get things done together, and he argues that this will occur in our local communities.

- What do you think it means to restore our belief that we can get things done together?
- Why is working in our local communities so important to this—what happens when we work in our local communities that can help to restore our belief in ourselves and in one another?

Rich talks about Americans as “builders” in the book (see *Pitch a Tent That's Open on All Sides*). He says that we need to become co-creators, partners, doers in our communities—rather than bystanders, consumers and claimants.

- Where have you and/or others stepped forward to be “doers” in building a stronger community?
- What do you feel when you are a doer—and why is that important?
- What are some ways we can tap into the innate capabilities of others in our communities to step forward and help move their community forward?

## II. Shared Responsibility (con't) —▶▶▶

On pages 129-143, Rich writes about the importance of creating a new can-do narrative.

- What are some of the negative stories in our communities? How can these shape our mindset, attitudes, actions and behaviors?
- What are authentic positive examples of people stepping forward that counter these negative narratives?
- Rich writes on pages 134-138 about the elements of good "civic parables." Why do you think these are so important in telling authentic stories of progress?

Throughout the book, Rich talks about the importance of focusing on what matters to people.

- Why do you think he believe this is so important, especially nowadays?
- He makes a critical distinction between focusing on people's "shared aspirations" rather than on "problems" or "utopian visions." What are your shared aspirations for your community?

### III. Welcome Home

Rich writes in the chapter, *The Choices We Make*: “What I am asking you to do is to seize your intrinsic power and step forward.”

- What are some of your earliest memories in your life when you remember people stepping forward to make a difference? What do you take from these examples?
- Where in your own life can you step forward—where can you have a positive influence?
- What does it mean to be more “intentional” in the choices you make when you step forward? Why does Rich place such emphasis on this?

In the book, Rich talks about the need for courage and humility.

- What is courage to you—and why is it important when stepping forward?
- Why when talking about courage, is humility also so important?
- Can you truly have one without the other?

In the short chapter *Rediscovery*, Rich writes, “I found that what matters most in life—those things that we are most in search of—are often right in front of us. If only we are to see them. If only we are to value them, embrace them, and make them real again in our lives.”

- What has this book helped you to rediscover?
- How will that rediscovery help to shape your actions and words?

## ABOUT RICH HARWOOD & THE HARWOOD INSTITUTE



Rich Harwood has devoted his career to revitalizing the nation's hardest-hit communities, transforming the world's largest organizations and reconnecting institutions to society. He is an inspiring, sought after speaker who regularly keynotes major conferences and events. He has written several books, scores of articles and groundbreaking reports, and frequently appears on national media.

He is the Founder and President of The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation, a non-profit, nonpartisan organization that equips people, organizations, communities and networks with the tools to bridge divides, build capacity and tackle shared challenges. The Harwood Institute's work is rooted in a philosophy of Civic Faith and the practice of Turning Outward. Founded in 1988, the Institute partners with some of the world's largest nonprofits, and its approach has spread to all 50 states across the US and 40 countries around the world. In 2019-20, The Harwood Institute is celebrating its 30th Anniversary.