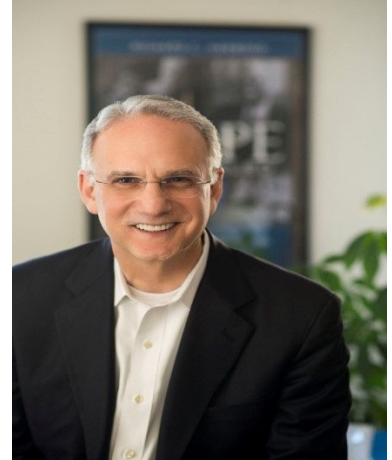


Rich Harwood

President & Founder, The Harwood Institute
Author, Speaker, Innovator



His Story

A public life inspired by deep personal conviction and experience.

Led by the example set by his parents—who built their community’s first halfway house to support those with mental illness following deinstitutionalization, re-energized the NAACP, spoke out for the voiceless on urban renewal, and founded their local synagogue—Rich grew up in a family that believed everyone in the community should be treated fairly and with compassion. As a sick child, who was initially diagnosed with cystic fibrosis, Rich spent much of his youth and early adulthood in hospital beds, where doctors, nurses and specialists routinely surrounded his bed, all talking with one another, but never to him. He learned first-hand the pain and loneliness of being neither seen nor heard.

His parents’ example, along with those of mentors, coaches, and teachers who reached out to him, and his deep faith, all left a lasting impression on Rich. He vowed to dedicate his life to working so that all people are afforded dignity, that they can fulfill their potential and have a shot at the American Dream, and that a sense of possibility and hope is real.

In 1988, after working on more than 20 political campaigns by the time he was 23 years old, attending Skidmore College (BA, Political Economy) and Princeton University (MA, Public Affairs), being named a Harry S. Truman Scholar, and working for two highly respected non-profits (Public Agenda and Jobs for the Future), Rich, then 27, set out to create something entirely different.

He was disappointed and impatient with non-profits that had laudable missions but were afraid to do work that got dirt under their fingernails, and political campaigns that sought to win at any cost. And so Rich left his job at a major non-profit to create a highly entrepreneurial, public spirited and for-profit company.

Everyone told him setting out on his own, and pursuing his vision would not work. But despite the risks he went ahead. He sought to demonstrate that there was in fact a market for a hard-hitting, highly entrepreneurial approach to tackling tough issues and making society work better, while operating with the highest integrity and ethics. Fear of failure was nothing compared to the fear of failing to act—and to the possibility of abandoning the lessons of his childhood.

His firm, The Harwood Group, started out of his one bedroom Washington D.C. apartment and quickly grew into one of the most widely respected companies in the country working to address tough public concerns. Along the way, Rich demonstrated that there *was* a market and that people would invest their limited time, resources, and gifts because of proven results.

Soon after its founding, Rich wrote the ground breaking report, *Citizens and Politics: A View from Main Street*, the first national study to uncover that Americans did not feel apathetic about politics, but instead held a deep sense of anger and disconnection. Spurred by the success of *Citizens and Politics*,

Rich soon became a national leader in rethinking how to improve politics and public life, generate the civic capacity needed to move communities forward, and develop news media with deeper ties and connections to their communities.

Then, in 1998, Rich faced another choice. National foundations and other supporters came to him to expand his work, and so he ultimately made the decision to close the successful for-profit model and transform it into a non-profit, The Harwood Institute for Public Innovation. Becoming a non-profit resulted in forgoing significant personal financial gains, but it meant that his work would be able to spread to more communities and reach more people. There was really no choice. The nonprofit would keep the nimbleness of an entrepreneurial enterprise, but now focus on expanding access and use of the work.

By 2005, with its strong and growing staff, increased funding from many of the most well-known and respected foundations, and requests from across the country to partner, the Institute was by most standards a runaway success. And yet Rich realized that despite the expectation that every leader wants a bigger staff, better offices, larger budget and more funders—these signs of success would not lead to the kind of impact he was seeking. Rich believed that the staff could never grow large enough to meet growing demand. And he had deep equity concerns about how the work could spread to the hardest hit communities.

These choices came to a head when Rich was working with local groups serving vulnerable children and families in Newark, NJ, and he got a call that the project's key funder was pulling out. That night, Rich decided that rather than abandon the community, the Institute would continue its work pro bono. But he never again wanted a community that sought to act on its shared aspirations to lack access to his approach. This would mean fundamentally changing how the Institute worked with communities.

Spurred by the visceral memory of the people in Newark, Rich made another hard choice, this time to flip the Harwood Institute's business model and approaches. He chose to reduce staff to just three people and turn down funding in order to re-focus. Yet again Rich chose the more difficult path, when easier ones were available. Instead of pursuing short-term growth opportunities, the Institute would focus on what it would take to make the work even more accessible to more people, in more places.

Today, those hard choices are paying off. Over the past 30 years, Rich has innovated and developed a new philosophy and practice of how communities can solve shared problems and change their civic culture that has spread to all 50 U.S. states and is being used in 40 countries. He is the driving force behind the Institute's partnerships with the largest non-profits in the world, and he has attracted some of the world's largest financial supporters.

His approach is used in the hardest hit communities, including Flint, MI, the Mississippi Delta, Youngstown, OH, and Detroit. He has been called in personally to solve some of the most difficult problems of our times. In Newtown, CT, after the massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School that left 20 first-graders and six adults dead, he led the process for the community to collectively decide the fate of the school building. Rich has worked with Goodwill Industries International, where he led the \$5 billion social enterprise to pull back from its contentious practice of paying sub-minimum wage to people with disabilities, once highlighted on CBS's *60 Minutes*.

The philosophy and practice developed by Rich is located in the long tradition in American history of pragmatic idealists—such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, Margaret Fuller, Dorothy Day and John Dewey—

whose individual efforts and small catalytic organizations made outsized contributions to improving society.

Rich is an inspiring, sought after speaker, who regularly keynotes major conferences and events. He appears regularly on major media outlets. He has written four books, scores of articles and numerous groundbreaking reports. Recently, he became a regular contributor to *The Christian Citizen*, a publication which speaks on issues of justice, mercy and faith.

Rich has never forgotten the feeling of being sick, unseen and unheard—but today as a national speaker, author and leader he is able to lend his voice to the fight for a different kind of public life and politics, where we see and hear all people, face up to the tough choices to reach our shared aspirations, and make hope real.