



CIVILITY CENTER BOOK SUMMARY



NEXT
...the road to the good society

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Rabbi Harold Kushner, author of *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* says, “Intelligent, impassioned, insightful- Etzioni’s is a voice we need to listen to” regarding this book entitled simply ‘next.’ What is he talking about?

Amitai Etzioni reflects on the role and function of the common ordinary citizen in this short and simple book. The secret, if there is one, is for us the average citizen to be more involved and more empowered to serve in three areas: community, government and the economy of our nation.

How will we govern ourselves in the future with a touch of civility? Professor Etzioni starts with us....our local communities. We all aspire to live in a good community, which he describes as one

being free from ills such as child and spousal abuse, or violent crimes; a good community being one which leads to a world that is a peace, not war. War is the ultimate violator of a good community.

The author believes that for good communities to exist we must change from volunteerism to mutuality. Rather than helping another for the sake of helping another, he argues that a good community is one where one helps another for the mutual benefit of both parties. This recognition that we live with others and not just as individual cells is very important for Etzioni. For a good society is one where the rights and responsibilities of all citizens are respected. So one's property, beliefs and values are held in check as communities learn about one another's understanding through community dialogue. Dialogues create understanding and empowerment with our communities as well as check and balances.

So what's the role of government? Etzioni argues that it should be lean, but active. Several areas where the author maintains that government has particular responsibilities include: public safety, public health, health insurance, environmental protection, certitude that those who violate laws will suffer consequences, provide a rich, basic minimum standard of living, and foster active communities.

Although all of these areas are pretty self-explanatory, Etzioni shares some specific ideas that are creative and interesting to ponder. For example, he believes crime will go down if people know the consequences for violating laws are real. He contends that for those who rob, their chances of getting caught, having a trial and actually serving time is only 1.7%. Rather than punishing these individuals with long sentences, Etzioni suggests they receive real rehabilitation in a shorter time frame, leading to an avoidance of costly incarceration.

Lastly, Etzioni maintains the economy plays a role in a good society. The author supports a principled expansion of the market, and believes this happens when we invest in people. Local schools and teachers are the priority here rather than colleges or corporate America. A good portion of the "people force" in our country now is comprised of new immigrants. Therefore, Etzioni believes that special efforts should be made to help immigrants become mutual partners in our economy. All who wish to work ought to be able to participate in this economy. He also has special words about curbing white collar crime. He feels that a good society should treat these wrongs as seriously as other nonviolent crimes.

After describing these three components found in a good society, that author then provides suggestions to live within them. Frankly some of them need to be thought through within our communities. As we begin this process, perhaps we will see improvements in our neighborhoods.

About the Author: Amaitai Etzioni is the University Professor of the The George Washington University and the author of 19 books, including *The Limits of Privacy* and *The Spirit of Community*.

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Review completed by the team at The Institute for Civility www.instituteforcivility.org