

Malcolm McIntosh (1953-2017): a tribute from friends and colleagues

Plant apple trees everywhere you go! The trees will bear fruit forever [. . .] and the world will keep on turning (Malcolm McIntosh)

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Malcolm McIntosh, thought leader, intellectual pioneer, and global citizen, passed away on June 7, 2017. Those words hardly capture the spirit, curiosity, adventurous spirit, and wicked sense of humor of the man who was my friend, collaborator and co-author. Author, editor or co-author of more than 25 books and numerous articles, Malcolm pioneered thinking about corporate citizenship and responsibility, business and peace, and political economy, among other topics. His books range from *Thinking the Twenty-First Century* to *Raising a Ladder to the Moon*, and are about the complexities of corporate social and environmental responsibilities and peace and defense. His posthumous *In Search of the Good Society* (November 2017, Greenleaf/Taylor & Francis) pushes his thinking, started in *Thinking the Twenty-First Century*, and explores democracy and art in the context of global capitalism – in what he describes as a post-human world.

Always an original thinker, Malcolm was unafraid to speak truth to power and say what most people hesitate to say. His intelligent and archetypally British sense of humor was always in play and he was genuinely fun to be around, and he inevitably engaged deeply and passionately with ideas. Even as he faced the prospect of his own demise, he was always making jokes. Founder of the *Journal of Corporate Citizenship* and founding executive director and professor at the Asia Pacific Centre for Sustainable Enterprise, Griffith University, Brisbane, Australia, he was known for his research on peace, his work for the BBC in television production and journalism and for pioneering thought leadership in multiple subjects. He was a passionate advocate for environmental and social corporate responsibility, and most recently, a more inclusive and sustainable political economy, or what he ended up calling “the good society”. Among numerous appointments, he served as special advisor to the UN Global Compact (UNGC), worked at the University of Warwick and held visiting professorships at the universities of Doshisha, Bath, Bristol, Stellenbosch, Waikato and Sydney, appointments that neatly illustrate the extent of his global reach.

A true boundary spanner and an intellectual shaman of the first order, Malcolm broke many intellectual boundaries, his thinking inevitably spanning across fossilized silos to see the whole picture and bring sharp insights that otherwise might be hard to see into focus. Malcolm cared deeply about the fate of fellow humans and the world itself, as well as his wife of many years, Louise (Lou), and his two wonderful daughters, Sophie and Cleo. As one person’s words cannot begin to express his amazing spirit and his contributions, I asked some of his friends and colleagues to comment on their experiences of Malcolm and their thoughts are included below.

Georg Kell, founding executive head of the UNGC, with whom Malcolm worked closely for many years promoting the UNGC, who is now Chair of Arabesque Partners, captures some of Malcolm’s spirit:

Malcolm was a thought leader and a pioneer of the modern corporate responsibility movement. Through his work with the UK Foreign Office in the late 1990s and his involvement with the United Nations Global Compact he played an important role in spreading the idea and practice of responsible business practices and making it a global movement. Always driven to push the boundaries of knowledge about the role of business in society, he inspired and encouraged



countless people through his many activities, writings and teaching. His positive outlook on life – even when battling cancer—and his ability to build bridges between ideas and people across many geographies—made him a genuine network and community builder of our modern age.

Along similar lines, Andreas Rasche, Professor of Business in Society, Copenhagen Business School, who worked closely with Malcolm in the early days of the UNGC, notes:

Malcolm McIntosh was a pioneer. He was among the first to recognize the power of multi-stakeholder initiatives for corporate sustainability and responsibility. He made important contributions to research on the UN Global Compact and other initiatives. His book on the Compact, *Learning to Talk* (2004), captured the spirit of the times very well; it really was about giving different stakeholders the chance to learn to talk to each other. Malcolm knew very well that this was not an easy task, but he was willing to accept the challenge. He also started to realize early that problems in the corporate sustainability and responsibility field need to be tackled at different levels of analysis. His intellectual contributions to conceptualizing what many nowadays call a “sustainable enterprise economy” will not be forgotten. Malcolm’s oeuvre skillfully combined ideas from disciplines as diverse as political science, history, management, sociology, and environmental studies. Integrating insights from these disciplines requires courage and competence—Malcolm had both!

Indeed, that intellectual courage and competence combined with initiative and a willingness to collaborate across boundaries enabled Malcolm to work cooperatively with a large task force that established the Principles for Responsible Management Education (PRME), which were presented to Ban Ki-moon at the United Nations in Geneva in 2007. Jonas Haertle, who heads the PRME, recalls Malcolm’s contribution:

I first met Malcolm when he joined the original task force to develop the six Principles for Responsible Management Education in 2006. Prior to that, Malcolm had already been involved in the informal academic network of the UN Global Compact. Over the coming years, Malcolm would become a guide to many UN Global Compact and PRME initiatives. My most vivid memory of Malcolm is of us traveling from his then home in Brisbane, Australia, to the Gold Coast in 2011. While we were meant to meet with some of Malcolm’s colleagues there, he did not forget to give me the opportunity to take a swim in the ocean beforehand. Malcolm always struck me as somebody who would take each person seriously and engage in a conversation. This would always lead to some really interesting discoveries. Malcolm has had a big impact on the PRME and our journey during the first decade of the initiative. He will be remembered fondly.

Beyond his thought leadership and many books, Malcolm inevitably had a personal impact on the people he met. His sense of humor, his insights and his polymath way of viewing the world tended to make a deep impression. Several people commented on that impact, including Ralph Hamman, research director at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business, South Africa and research chair at the UCT African Climate and Development Initiative. Ralph captures some of this spirit in his comment:

Malcolm’s name was already prominent when I was a research student, 17 years ago. He brought ethos and pathos to the study of business’s role in society, complementing the sometimes dry logoi predominating in the scholarly literature. He was also super supportive. I remember speaking to him on the phone about an article for the *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, which he was editing. “We need more of this, more like you”—wonderfully encouraging words for a PhD student more accustomed to occasionally biting critique. Malcolm’s ability and willingness to embrace the stories in and around his subject, and his supportive nature, were much appreciated by his students, too. For 12 years, I co-taught a course on corporate citizenship with him at the Sustainability Institute in South Africa. From the outset, I saw students inspired and, yes, entertained by him. They gained not only insights but also passion for the topic. We didn’t always agree in our joint sessions, but this just added to the dynamism of the lectures, and he was

unfailingly gracious. His sense of grace became especially powerful in his fight against cancer, which he sometimes talked about with unnerving humor. Despite his hardships, he showed up in South Africa, again and again, to teach and to learn. His enthusiasm and passion became even more electric. His most recent emails expressed a poignant lucidity and beauty that I won't forget.

Similarly, Jem Bendell, professor of Sustainability Leadership at the Institute for Leadership and Sustainability (IFLAS), University of Cumbria, has vivid memories of Malcolm that span his intellectual curiosity, wit, and willingness to engage in important issues:

I remember that my PhD supervisor wasn't the only person who told me Malcolm would be perfect to host the event. It was 1996 and I was organising a workshop on social and environmental certification at the University of Bristol, and needed a chairperson. Malcolm loved the idea and facilitated the event in a lively and insightful way. It was the beginning of a collaboration that spanned two decades and continents. A highlight was our collaboration to start a specialist centre at Griffith Business School in Australia. He also gave me a platform to reflect on trends in this field, through quarterly reviews in the *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*. Malcolm saw the potential of the UN Global Compact from its very beginning, and helped it globalise the conversation on the role of the corporation in society. All these initiatives reflect how he loved fresh ideas, an international outlook and would happily get things started. When we both moved back to the UK, I appreciated his support as I founded the Institute for Leadership and Sustainability (IFLAS). I have happy memories of discussing endless possibilities while we enjoyed the Lake District landscape. In a sector increasingly pressured by teaching, publishing and administrative loads, Malcolm was a walking talking reminder that being involved in ideas can and should be both meaningful and tremendous fun.

Derick DeJongh, director of the Albert Luthuli Centre for Responsible Leadership, University of Pretoria, South Africa, has a related sense of the type of impact that Malcolm made on other scholars and innovators:

My career into the field of Corporate Citizenship back in 1998 was to a large extent made possible through my readings of Malcolm McIntosh's work. At the time, due to some personal "awakenings" on the role of business in society in South Africa, my desire to consume as much as possible often left me totally overwhelmed, being confronted with a sea of writings, opinions, scholarly contributions, and "wannabe" expert advice. Malcolm's work allowed me to enter this space with ease and without him knowing, he took my proverbial hand, guiding me on a clear path of discovery. I felt intellectually safe knowing that his writings have left a solid residual value in my personal make-up. When I eventually met Malcolm in person, it was like an intellectual homecoming. He embodied sincerity in the cause he was pursuing and was always willing to share his wisdom in abundance. I had the privilege to spend time with him over many years. His love for South Africa and interest in my personal pursuit to advance corporate citizenship on home soil, was encouraging and allowed me to feel grounded in my attempts over many years. I believe all will agree that his energy and passion were contagious. He never disappointed in being "ready" for a complex debate. He embraced contention and succeeded in often arguing the "not so obvious" on matters concerning corporate responsibility. I found this fresh which always forced me to stay at the top of our game—never settling for anything less. I salute Malcolm and know that his spirit will live on for many generations to come.

Jeremy Williams, who took over as professor and director of the Asia-Pacific Centre for Sustainable Enterprise at Griffith University when Malcolm returned to England, and also served as program director of the Graduate Certificate in Sustainable Enterprise there, fondly recalls his interactions with Malcolm. Williams, who is now chief inspiration officer at Green School for Girls, India, recalls:

Malcolm was a wonderfully contrary, affably cantankerous, and thoroughly adorable man whom I knew for too short a time. I served as his deputy for a year at the Asia Pacific Centre for

Sustainable Enterprise, before taking over as Director the following year when he decided to return to the UK. When we worked together, Malcolm and I used to laugh loudly when we shared stories about university bureaucracy and the cunning plans we devised to circumnavigate it. Unfortunately, without his good company (and connivance!), I left myself a year later when the managerialism that pervades universities these days finally got the better of me. Thankfully, my enthusiasm for the promotion of sustainable enterprise did not wane and I moved to India to start my own venture called Green School for Girls. It was a big risk for me to take but Malcolm, as always, was very encouraging. His parting words – the last he ever shared with me – were as follows: “I just wanted to say this: You are an entrepreneur with a passion for progress on ecoliteracy who temporarily got stuck in an inertia-led institution. I saw you leave angry and frustrated. I am sorry you and I did not get to work together more as I respect what you know and how you are.” This was all the motivation I needed to be assured I was doing the right thing. This was Malcolm McIntosh the positive deviant, the advocate for change, the mover and shaker who influenced me and countless others during his life. Thanks MM.

David Murphy, deputy director and senior lecturer at IFLAS, University of Cumbria, and now editor of the *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, who took over from Malcolm when he could no longer sustain those duties (after his third stint as editor), reflects on Malcolm’s leadership:

I first met Malcolm McIntosh in Bristol, England in 1993 when we both worked on a collaborative research project between the School for Policy Studies, University of Bristol and New Consumer on “The Implementation of Corporate Social Responsibility Policies”. Malcolm’s first book in the broad CSR field *Good Business? Case Studies in Corporate Social Responsibility* (Bristol: Policy Press, 1993) formed part of this research project. Note the question mark in the title!

My first and enduring impression of Malcolm was his warm, unforgettable smile, his bright eyes, and his openness to new ideas. In particular, I would like to evoke Malcolm in his role as General Editor of *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, a position he held on three different occasions from its founding in 2001 until 2015. I remember Malcolm as someone who recognised and valued the importance of context and diversity in our efforts to develop theories, concepts, frameworks, policies, tools and practices of corporate citizenship, and always taking into account its multidisciplinary seeds, roots, branches and blossoms.

Three other reflections help characterize both the person that Malcolm was and his intellectual and other contributions, capturing some of the essence of this special man’s spirit. Jane Nelson, Director of the Corporate Responsibility Initiative at Harvard Kennedy School reflects:

Malcolm brought a special energy, sense of possibility, and generosity of spirit to his relationships and work. He combined a strong intellect and interest in new ideas with an equally strong passion for achieving practical change and an interest in people. He was a pioneering field builder, and community builder, and above all a personal friend and inspiration to so many of us. He has left us with a precious legacy of thoughtful and thought-provoking books as well as many institutions and individuals who are better for having had the privilege to work with him.

Rebecca Marsh, who is publisher at Greenleaf Publishing, Malcolm’s long-term publisher (now part of Taylor & Francis/Routledge), has this remembrance:

I first met Malcolm in the Queen’s Hotel in Leeds. We had come together with my colleague, Becky, to discuss his then new book idea for *Thinking the Twenty-First Century*; his quick wit, intelligence and passion came across immediately. As the Founding Editor of the *Journal of Corporate Citizenship*, and the author of a number of significant books with Greenleaf Publishing, Malcolm recognised the importance of communication. A naturally gifted writer, he had the

ability to successfully distil complex research themes and communicate these in a way that reach out and resonate with a much wider general audience. We owe him a great deal.

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Malcolm
McIntosh

Above all, however, I will remember Malcolm for his humanity. He provided friendship and inspiration to the small but very dedicated team at Greenleaf Publishing. We all knew him and all knew that he cared about the organisation and the people. The next time I met Malcolm was at the UN Global Forum in 2015. Malcolm's overwhelming support for what we did and the way in which he made this known to others will remain with me. A true friend.

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Finally, the words of John Stuart, founder of Greenleaf Publishing (now John Stuart Editorial) and Malcolm's long-time publisher, summarize what so many of us feel:

I'm honored to have worked and sometimes played with Malcolm McIntosh over the last 20 years. He was a trailblazer, idealist, zealot, and pathfinder for the corporate responsibility movement. As the founder of *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship* in 2001, I collaborated closely with Malcolm for many years to give his ideas traction and a friendly home at Greenleaf Publishing. I also published many of his books. He was always a provocative and innovative thinker—going beyond the easy platitudes of some of the CSR literature to argue that business should be a positive instrument for global social and environmental justice. He's a massive loss to the caring capitalism and responsible management education communities. Malcolm advocated for peace throughout his life and I am certain that he has found it. God speed, Malcolm.

Even as his energy waned and his disease caught up with him – after beating it back to the astonishment of his doctors multiple times – Malcolm continued to work and live joyfully. According to his wife, Lou, he worked as long as possible and was proud to have finished his last book, *In Search of the Good Society*, in 2017, as he engaged with his final struggles. He continued to live as fully as possible to the end, visiting cafes and friends, debating the ills of the world and how to make them right. That passion and commitment to making the world a better place was just part of who Malcolm McIntosh was. He will be missed by many. *I will miss Malcolm and his generous spirit, sense of humor, intelligent insights and capacity to fully live life.*

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