

'GETS YOUR MIND OFF THE BEATEN TRACK'

SIR KEN ROBINSON

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FIND WONDER IN THE EVERYDAY. EVERY DAY.

DAVID PEARL

FOUNDER OF STREET WISDOM

About the Author

David Pearl is an innovator in business, the arts and social change. Drawing on a lifetime's experience in opera, theatre and film, he has pioneered the use of the arts in business and is creative confidante to high-profile CEOs and their teams across the globe. Known as the 'Experience Engineer', responsible for designing, orchestrating and animating high-stakes meetings, David's work has appeared in media such as the BBC, *The Sunday Times*, *New Statesman*, *The Independent* and *The Telegraph*.

Wanderful is David's third book, following *Will There be Donuts?* (*The Times* Top 10) on the art of meeting and *Story for Leaders*, a handbook for anyone who wants to harness the engaging power of narrative.

David is the founder of the non-profit social venture, Street Wisdom (streetwisdom.org), which transforms ordinary city streets around the world into inspirational learning zones. He keeps his creative instincts sharp by making up operas on the spot with his improvising ensemble, Impropera (impropera.co.uk).

David describes the common thread between all his work as finding the magic in the everyday.

He lives in London and Italy with his family and is an enthusiastic, if out of breath, road cyclist.

Find out more at davidpearl.net and see David sharing at TEDx how he invented the technology behind Street Wisdom on YouTube (bit.ly/2OTJgdn).

(Best Foot) Foreword

‘I’ve never been for a walk...’

A young woman has just stood up at the end of a Street Wisdom event we are running for a giant electronics company; she has tears in her eyes. She’s one of 250 hard-working store managers who we have invited out of their normal workplace and immersed in a very different environment, one which they wouldn’t normally associate with learning – the street. And now, reflecting on her experience, this young woman has something to say.

‘I just realised I have never been for a walk...’

You can hear a pin drop, she goes on to explain. She’s a doer, constantly busy, on her way from here to there. For her the street isn’t a place to dwell, it’s just the space between one task and another – something to be got through as quickly as possible. Her Street Wisdom experience has made her realise that she’s been marching through life, looking straight ahead, never allowing herself to look around, dawdle, deviate or connect with the world.

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She's forgotten how to wander, and looking around that large conference room, I see that she's not alone.

I wrote this book for her, and for the millions of us like her. We hurry through the day, head down, task-oriented, whilst treating the business of getting from A to B as a tactical challenge or as wasteful downtime to be minimised. Moving *forward* seems to be the only way forward. Meandering is fine for holidays but it's not something we can justify on a working day. Reflection is something we'll do when there's time on the agenda – which there rarely is. Indeed, when unexpected pauses do come our way – jams, queues, disruptions, diversion, delays – we fill the time by checking our phones, replying to emails, catching up on the news, replaying in our minds what has just happened and preparing for what's to come.

Like the girl in the seminar, we're stuck in our familiar paths and miss the possibilities hiding in the side roads. We're so focused on getting to our destination, that we can lose our sense of direction on the way. We may look like we're on course, but inside there's often a nagging feeling that we're heading somewhere which we don't want to go – and, at speed.

It's stressful, a challenge to our well-being, and it can be lonely. As Zachary, my teenage son, was explaining to me the other day: 'In an urban setting everyone is on their own. No one is speaking really. If you are by yourself, you are very isolated – headphones on, sunglasses on, hood up – that is how it is now.'

But is that how it has to be?

This book is an invitation to break the lockstep of modern life and take yourself for a creative meander. It is an invitation to unhook from the devices, switch on your innate navigation system and plot your own distinct course through life. And as

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you'll discover when you do, there's a reason why wonder and wander are almost the same words.

To be frank, I also wrote this book for me.

As leader of an international social venture bent on getting the world wandering, I had questions I wanted to explore more deeply. How can we be *purposely purposeless* in a world where productivity rules? Why are we so obsessed with straight lines when Nature teaches us to wiggle? What's exciting about being lost and how is it different from feeling lost? How can we read the street as though it's a book full of messages for us? When you come to a crossroads (in life), which way should you turn? Are people we don't know really strangers? And if so, how is it that they can sometimes offer us better advice than people who know us well? If you could set the pace in your life, would you choose the one you are marching to right now? When something wonderful happens 'by chance', what's really happening and can we make it happen more often? And, perhaps most importantly of all, what can spending time on an everyday street teach us about navigating complexity at a time when the world is sorely in need of new direction?

I wrote *Wanderful* to explore questions like these and hope you'll enjoy accompanying me into some fascinating side streets, hidden alleys and secret gardens in search of answers.

David Pearl

London, September 2019

Introduction: New Navigation for New Times

I have deep reservations about the effects of technology on our environment, our societies, our communities, our electoral systems and our world in general. But, if there's one digital advance that gets my like, my five-star rating and heart-shaped favourite sign, it's Satellite Navigation, satnav or GPS if you prefer.

The Pearls don't own a car anymore but when we do travel by road, this navigational gizmo gets us where we want to go – beating traffic, skirting roadworks, alerting us to lurking speed traps and most importantly, pre-empting domestic collisions between my wife and I. Jo has a great sense of direction. I do not. But I am a man, and men, you may have noticed, find it challenging to admit that they don't know where they are. We're just not built that way, which is why the early journeys of our marriage were fraught with huffs, long drawn-out sighs, snapped 'are we there yet?'s and some outright yelling.

Wouldn't it be great if there was a satnav for our lives? A

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system we could trust to get us where we need – and, more importantly, want – to go. A methodology that could help us thread our way through complexity, filter the noise and stay orientated – a satnav for the soul.

I think I may have invented one. At least, that's how Street Wisdom is being described.

Candidly, that wasn't my original intention. My first experiments focused on exploring the street as a place to feed our creativity. That's my day job – helping businesses and those who lead them to be more creative. And, it's why I started taking people out of their steel and glass offices – literally out of the box – into the surrounding streets to connect with the world and people outside. But, as Street Wisdom has grown (at the time of writing this, more than 500 events have been staged in over forty countries) more and more people are using it to find and maintain professional and personal orientation.

And not a moment too soon.

NEW TIMES

To borrow a phrase from Madeleine Albright: I am an optimist who worries a lot.

Albright is a real hero of mine. She arrived in the United States as a wartime refugee from Czechoslovakia and rose to be its first ever female Secretary of State. Scholar, teacher, writer, diplomat; she has seen more of the world than most. The fact that she's both encouraged and alarmed by what she now sees resonates with me.

Certainly, when you take a look around there's plenty to be both joyous and fretful about. Every day gives cause for hope and disappointment. Dazzling breakthroughs are offset by frustrating breakdowns. Unparalleled prosperity co-exists with epic inequality.

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We're able to peer into the deepest reaches of the cosmos but can be blind to the person right next to us. We've never had more access to knowledge or behaved with such monumental stupidity.

My friend Jim Garrison, former President of the State of the World Forum, puts it this way: 'Things are getting better and better and worse and worse faster and faster.'

We've been here before. In the opening lines of *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859), Charles Dickens famously describes the volatile period before the French Revolution as neither 'the best of times' nor 'the worst of times' but both simultaneously:

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way.

I like to think of our times as neither good nor bad, but new. 'New' in that, while much is familiar from previous ages, the diversity, complexity and velocity of what we're experiencing is unprecedented. The options we face are bewildering and the dilemmas and trade-offs increasingly demanding. The choices we make feel ever more significant, but it's like every junction we arrive at has a vast number of possible turns.

It's a paradox. Never before has every inch of the world been mapped out. There's almost nowhere you can get lost any more. And yet, we're collectively disoriented. We're hurrying down a road that has existential consequences for us as a species, with less and less time for course correction. Do we head 'direct to Heaven', as Dickens puts it? Or turn 'the other way'?

That's a question we all have to ask and answer.

There is no shortage of people offering us their guidance.

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But they do it, usually for a price, or a vote, and who is to say their ‘best way forward’ is ours?

Anyone who tells you they *know* what’s coming is deluding themselves. We’re off the map. And ploughing straight ahead on our customary compass setting is clearly not going to work. These are indeed New Times, and it’s high time we found new ways to guide ourselves forward: new paths through the noise, more heart filled, soul driven and wiser.

I think I have found one. I’d like to share it with you, and with as many people as possible.

NEW NAVIGATION

Street Wisdom is a learning experience that uses the streets to help you have new ideas, solve problems and, most importantly, figure out the best way forward for yourself. Instead of relying on technological route-finding, it’s a way of switching on your own personal navigation system and steering your own path to the answers you need right now. It’s human navigation for a complex world.

Wisdom isn’t a word you’d typically associate with the street. Crime, yes. Protest, increasingly. But why wisdom? This approach is based on the idea that there’s an inexhaustible supply of ideas around us all the time, if we know how to look. Answers are everywhere, if we reach out and ask. The world is our creative playmate, if we’re willing to play. Street Wisdom uses the street and the urban landscape as the stimuli and mirror for our thinking. It awakens our sensibilities and fires up our innate intelligences. So whatever next steps people are contemplating – major or minor, private or

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work-related, life purpose or lifestyle purchase – Street Wisdom gives them a way to make better, more informed, creative decisions.

For many, particularly those caught up in high velocity careers, Street Wisdom is a chance to get your bearings, and then, intuitively, to prioritise the competing demands on your time.

Instead of sitting and thinking, it invites you to go and have a creative conversation with your surroundings, to stop charging about like you know where you're going, hit the pause button and discover where you *want* to go. This increases your chances of ending up where you want rather than where everyone else wants you to be, whilst feeling better, more confident and prouder of the course you are taking.

It's also an experience that has a way of magnetising you towards the people you need to meet and things you need to learn.

There's nothing 'new' about the elements. Much of what we are doing is reawakening our ancestral senses and skills for use in the contemporary world. But, they are combined in a way that is new, fresh and accessible for the world in which we live.

HOW IT WORKS

At the heart of Street Wisdom, is a three-hour, experiential walking workshop. That's a bit of a mouthful so I came up with the simple name *WalkShop*. It typically involves a group of up to ten people, led by a volunteer facilitator who has been trained remotely using our specially designed online tools.

The experience is structured in three parts, each an hour long. In the first phase, participants Tune Up their senses so they connect in a much more accurate way than normal with all that's going on around (as well as within) them. In the second phase, each participant thinks of a question and then goes for a wander through

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the streets, using their heightened awareness to see what answers they get. We call this phase, with slight tongue in cheek, the Quest, partly because it has a question at its heart but also because it is, in a way, a mini heroic journey. In the final Share phase, the group gathers in a predetermined place (usually a friendly cafe) to discuss what happened during the Quest, what they learned and how they can apply their learnings.

When it's over, people leave with a technique they can use anywhere, any time, to turn on a heightened awareness and connect with the wisdom that's all around.

It sounds simple, and it is. But that's because we've taken many years to simplify it.

I should explain that I spend a lot of my professional life designing and leading extraordinary events around the world. They are usually high stakes, pretty elaborate and very demanding to stage. I wanted these WalkShops to be so uncomplicated that anyone could lead or take part in one, in any street, anywhere in the world. An everyday wonder – every day.

Once we had made it really simple, we gave it away. That is to say, inspired by the open source and shareware movement, we made the instructions available to the public for free. The thousands of people who have experienced Street Wisdom so far have done so without any charge. The social movement is funded by donations and, increasingly, the for-profit projects we create for businesses around the world.

We encouraged volunteers to run events and supported them when they did. In return we asked that people share stories of what they are experiencing out there in the streets – and they have, in their hundreds. This book is informed by all they've been discovering.

Quickly, the events became a movement. I know everyone is using the m-word currently, but I think Street Wisdom's growth can justify it being called at least a mini-movement,

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especially because getting out into the world and *moving* is what it's all about.

Today, participants are finding Street Wisdom a powerful way to activate their awareness and log into the database of latent wisdom that surrounds us. At a time when we're increasingly lost in our heads, disorientated by fake news, closed-loop networks and bias-reinforcing echo chambers, Street Wisdom helps us to turn our attention outwards again – to escape the mental musing and daydreams and enjoy a present tense, right-here-right-now, full-sensory life experience of being human.

Augmented reality is a new buzzword, beloved of technologists who are keen to plug us into machines that make everyday reality 'more interesting'. I think of Street Wisdom as throwing a switch so we can experience reality as the multi-dimensional wonder that it already is, without strapping on a plastic headset.

For an approach that's all about way-finding, it can seem strangely disorientating at first. But that's intentional because it asks you to dial down the reasonable, know-it-all, agenda-setting part of your mind and have an adventure instead. The uncertainty we feel when we really start mentally off-roading is just the know-it-all part of our minds struggling not to learn something new. Sometimes we have to get lost to find what we're looking for.

Importantly, Street Wisdom is designed to work in the towns and cities where, increasingly, more people live. Ours is going to be an urban century, where we live together in concentrated and hopefully more sustainable ways. The planet can't afford for it to be anything else. Street Wisdom is a way of bringing those places to life. It reminds us that inspiration doesn't have to be a fuel-guzzling plane flight away. We don't have to – and shouldn't – wait until holidays for reflection time. Enchanting though Nature might be,

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there's just as much wonder on the street outside, once we know how to find it.

We realise, that for too many people the streets are currently anything but an inspiring setting; they can be unsettling places. Thinking more positively about this resource of ours – and yes, most streets legally do belong to us, the public – is key to the movement.

WANDERING THROUGH *WANDERFUL*

Because wandering is something to experience, I have structured this book less like a read and more like a stroll. If you haven't already experienced one of our WalkShops, I am hoping this will convey something of the joy and magic of sauntering through a town, being stimulated, puzzled, awed and delighted by what we see and who we meet. If you *are* already familiar with Street Wisdom, then I am hoping this book deepens your understanding of what's going on beneath the surface, and sharpens your curiosity to seek further.

I should say now, this book is *not* a how-to manual for Street Wisdom (if you want the detail on how to experience and/or run a WalkShop feel free to head to streetwisdom.org), nor is it a Street Wisdom promotion. I don't want to 'sell' these ideas to anyone. Use them if you like, but feel no pressure. Street Wisdom is about the opposite of pressure. When I refer to our Street Wisdom events, mechanism, history, participants and people, it's because our experimental social venture has generated much of the book's content. This is more of a stroll through the ideas *behind* Street Wisdom – its intellectual, philosophical, historical, scientific and spiritual backstreets, if you like – and it's going to be a voyage of discovery for me as well.

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SO WHAT LIES AHEAD?

I have written the book in three phases, which loosely follow the profile of a Street Wisdom event – preparation, wandering and reflection. That said, the chapters are self-contained, so if (like me) you're allergic to reading a book cover to cover, you are very welcome to dip in and out as you wish.

It's easier to find your way forward once you know where you are. In *The Road to Here* I share the backstory of Street Wisdom, plotting some of the highs and lows from my own life that brought me – and this is still something of a surprise to me – to be leading a plucky, international social venture that's fast wandering its way around the globe. The next thing we need to do is awaken our senses, which means activating our many intelligences, not just our mental reasoning. As we'll explore in *Tuning In*, those intelligences reside throughout our bodies, not just in our heads. Which is why getting out into the streets and beyond the limits of brain logic makes real sense. As Fleur, a client of mine put it recently: 'Street Wisdom is a way of making your unconscious, hidden thoughts visible in the streets around you – a way to find out what you're thinking'. This chapter explains how.

Extraordinary things regularly happen on Street Wisdom events: wildly improbable coincidences, unlikely things discovered precisely when they are needed, the right people popping up just when they should.

In *Synchroni-City* I take a look at what's really going on, with the help of Carl Jung, shamanism and an onion. Is this happening to us? Or are we making it happen? What are we doing to make the world co-operate better with us and how can we do this more reliably? I am saying this before we set out so you can decide how much wonder you are prepared to let into your daily life.

Now we saunter through a sequence of six chapters, each of

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which explores an aspect of the Street Wisdom experience and what we can learn there about how to live, work and navigate life more wanderfully.

If we're going to wander and be truly purposefully purposeless, we are going to have to break out of the tyranny of straight-line thinking and reset our course *Off the Straight and Narrow*. When we're tuned in, we find the urban environment is constantly sending us messages, stimulus, and answers to our questions. As one Street Wisdom participant beautifully put it, the city is a *Stone Book*, but it's one that we have to learn to read, decoding its signs, signposts and symbols. Time for a *Change of Pace*. We often bemoan the speed of city life but velocity itself isn't the problem. Yes, slowing down enriches many facets of life but lots of things are better faster too. The key is to reclaim control of your own personal tempo. We'll also explore what it means to get *Lost and Found* and we'll take a look at why we resist losing our way, but why that's often essential – mentally, creatively, spiritually – to find what we're looking for.

We won't be alone on our literary amble. There will be many others out there on the street with us – people we don't know and would probably, under normal circumstances, avoid. Here we cross the space that divides us from them and learn about the *Wisdom of Strangers*. You're actually going to be bumping into strangers throughout this book, as you might in a real city, because between each of the chapters you're going to be invited to *Meet A Stranger*. These are all people I have met on my own journey and each have their wisdom to share. They're brilliant folk and many are quite well known but you'll notice I only use their first names so you can meet them authentically, as fellow wanderers, rather as you would a stranger on a street. If you're interested to know who they are and more about their considerable achievements, you'll find a gallery of their portraits and biographies at the end of the book (*Meet the Strangers*). I should also mention here that I often refer to Street Wis-

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dom participants and the experiences they have had. Mostly I have used real names but occasionally, where appropriate, have disguised identities.

Just before our wander finishes, we'll find ourselves at a *Fork in the Road*. Navigation is all about making choices, responding to conditions and making course corrections as we go. Now it's decision time and we'll explore how the street can help you make better, richer choices for the way ahead.

We'll bring the book to a close, as we do in *Street Wisdom*, by considering what we've learned on the way and how we can use this in the future. We'll gather in the *Connection Cafe* to share some thoughts and end – appropriately for a walking experience – by looking at the next steps you and we might like to make.

THANK YOU

Before we begin, I'd just like to thank you for buying and now reading this book. *Street Wisdom* is a non-profit organisation that offers its public work free around the world. Our mission is to bring inspiration to every street on Earth. When you consider how difficult life is on many of those streets, this is not a small challenge. But that's the galvanising power of a mission, right? All proceeds we receive from sales are donated directly to our social venture. So, by purchasing this copy, you've already helped make this world just a little more wonderful. On behalf of the whole *Street Wisdom* team, thank you.

**THIS IS AN EXCERPT TO GIVE YOU A TASTER OF WANDERFUL.
YOU CAN FIND THE WHOLE BOOK [HERE](#). HAPPY WANDERING!**