

Foreword by Peter Block  
Bestselling Author of *Community* and *Stewardship*

---

# Collaborating *with the* Enemy



How to Work with People  
You Don't Agree with  
or Like or Trust

---

Adam Kahane

Bestselling author of *Solving Tough Problems* and *Power and Love*

# Collaborating with the Enemy

---

*HOW TO WORK WITH PEOPLE YOU DON'T  
AGREE WITH OR LIKE OR TRUST*

Adam Kahane

Drawings by Jeff Barnum

*A Reos Partners Publication*



**BK**

Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

*a BK Business book*

# Collaborating with the Enemy

Copyright © 2017 by Adam Morris Kahane

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions Coordinator," at the address below.



**Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.**

1333 Broadway, Suite 1000

Oakland, CA 94612-1921

Tel: (510) 817-2277, Fax: (510) 817-2278

[www.bkconnection.com](http://www.bkconnection.com)

**BK**

## Ordering information for print editions

*Quantity sales.* Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the "Special Sales Department" at the Berrett-Koehler address above.

*Individual sales.* Berrett-Koehler publications are available through most bookstores. They can also be ordered directly from Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626; [www.bkconnection.com](http://www.bkconnection.com)

*Orders for college textbook/course adoption use.* Please contact Berrett-Koehler: Tel: (800) 929-2929; Fax: (802) 864-7626.

*Orders by U.S. trade bookstores and wholesalers.* Please contact Ingram Publisher Services, Tel: (800) 509-4887; Fax: (800) 838-1149; E-mail: [customer.service@ingrampublisherservices.com](mailto:customer.service@ingrampublisherservices.com); or visit [www.ingrampublisherservices.com/Ordering](http://www.ingrampublisherservices.com/Ordering) for details about electronic ordering.

Berrett-Koehler and the BK logo are registered trademarks of Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.

First Edition

Paperback print edition ISBN 978-1-62656-822-8

PDF e-book ISBN 978-1-62656-823-5

IDPF e-book ISBN 978-1-62656-824-2

2017-1

Text design: Gopa & Ted2 Design. Cover design: Dan Tesser, Studio Carnelian. Cover art: Shutterstock by Siberia Video and Photo. Edit: Elissa Rabellino. Proofread: Karen Hill Green. Index: Paula C. Durbin-Westby. Production: Linda Jupiter Productions.


# Contents



Foreword by Peter Block	ix
Preface	xvii
INTRODUCTION: How to Work with People You Don't Agree with or Like or Trust	1
1: COLLABORATION IS BECOMING MORE NECESSARY AND MORE DIFFICULT	5
"I could never work with <i>those</i> people!"	5
The enemyfying syndrome	7
The central challenge of collaboration	9
2: COLLABORATION IS NOT THE ONLY OPTION	11
The way forward is unclear	12
"The miraculous option is that we work things through together"	12
There are three alternatives to collaboration	15
Collaboration must be a choice	18
3: CONVENTIONAL, CONSTRICTED COLLABORATION IS BECOMING OBSOLETE	25
Constriction prevents movement	25
Change management assumes control	26
"There is only one right answer"	29
The limitations of conventional collaboration	31

4: UNCONVENTIONAL, STRETCH COLLABORATION IS BECOMING ESSENTIAL	39
Stretching creates flexibility and discomfort	39
How to end a civil war	41
Stretch collaboration abandons the illusion of control	46
5: THE FIRST STRETCH IS TO EMBRACE CONFLICT AND CONNECTION	49
Dialogue is not enough	49
There is more than one whole	55
Every holon has two drives	59
Alternate power and love	61
6: THE SECOND STRETCH IS TO EXPERIMENT A WAY FORWARD	69
We cannot control the future, but we can influence it	69
We are crossing the river by feeling for stones	75
Creativity requires negative capability	80
Listen for possibility rather than for certainty	82
7: THE THIRD STRETCH IS TO STEP INTO THE GAME	89
“They need to change!”	90
If you’re not part of the problem, you can’t be part of the solution	93
Be a pig rather than a chicken	96
CONCLUSION: How to Learn to Stretch	99
Notes	109
Acknowledgements	115
Index	118
About the Author	126
About Reos Partners	128
A Note from the Artist, Jeff Barnum	130

## Introduction: How to Work with People You Don't Agree with or Like or Trust



We face the same basic challenge everywhere: at home and work, in business and politics, on community and national and global issues. We are trying to get something done that we think is crucial. To do this, we need to work with others. These others include people we do not agree with or like or trust. And so we are torn: we think that we must work with these others and also that we must not. Collaboration seems both imperative and impossible. What do we do?

The reason such collaborations seem impossible is that we misunderstand collaboration.

Our conventional understanding of collaboration is that it requires us all to be on the same team and headed in the same direction, to agree on what has to happen and make sure this happens, and to get people to do what needs to be done. In other words, we assume that collaboration can and must be under control. Conventional collaboration looks like a planning meeting.

But this conventional assumption is wrong. When we are working in complex situations with diverse others, collaboration cannot and need not be controlled.

Unconventional, *stretch collaboration* abandons the assumption of control. It gives up unrealistic fantasies of harmony,

## Two Approaches to Collaboration

	Conventional Collaboration	Stretch Collaboration
How we relate with our collaborators	Focus on the good and harmony of the team (one superior whole)	Embrace conflict and connection (multiple diverse holons)
How we advance our work	Agree on the problem and the solution (one optimum plan)	Experiment our way forward (multiple emergent possibilities)
How we participate in our situation	Change what other people are doing (one paramount leader)	Step into the game (multiple cocreators)



*Conventional*



*Stretch*

certainty, and compliance, and embraces messy realities of discord, trial and error, and cocreation. Stretch collaboration looks like martial arts practice. Stretch collaboration enables us to get things done even in complex situations with people we don't agree with or like or trust.

Stretch collaboration requires us to make three fundamental shifts in how we work.

First, in how we relate with our fellow collaborators, we must stretch away from focusing narrowly on the collective goals and harmony of our team, and move toward embracing both conflict and connection within and beyond the team.

Second, in how we advance our work, we must stretch away from insisting on clear agreements about the problem, the solution, and the plan, and move toward experimenting systematically with different perspectives and possibilities.

And third, in how we participate in our situation—in the role we play—we must stretch away from trying to change what other people are doing, and move toward entering fully into the action, willing to change ourselves.

Stretch collaboration is challenging because all three of these stretches require us to do the opposite of what seems natural. Rather than shrink away from complexity we must plunge into it. Often this feels uncomfortable and frightening.

These stretches require us to pluralize: to move away from paying attention only to one dominant whole, one optimum plan, and one superior leader, toward attending to multiple diverse holons (wholes that are part of larger wholes), multiple emergent possibilities, and multiple cocreators.

Getting things done in complex situations with diverse others is never straightforward. Energies must be mobilized; needs must be balanced; actions must be taken. Stretching does not make this work disappear; it just enables us to do it with less fear and distraction and more connection and awareness. The proverb says, "Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood, carry water." After enlightened



stretching, we still have our work to do, but now we have a better chance of doing it successfully.

This book presents a theory and practice of stretch collaboration. Chapter 1 explains why collaboration is necessary and why it is intrinsically difficult. Chapter 2 suggests a way to decide when to collaborate and when instead to force, adapt, or exit. Chapter 3 specifies the limitations of conventional collaboration and the narrow conditions under which it is applicable. Chapter 4 outlines stretch collaboration, and chapters 5, 6, and 7 elaborate the three stretches it entails: embracing conflict and connection, experimenting a way forward, and stepping into the game. The conclusion offers a program of exercises to put these ideas into practice.