

Greed to Green: The Transformation of an Industry and a Life

David Gottfried

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Following a vision to change the world can seem easy. The ideal is abstract and, though it may call for personal sacrifice, it can be abandoned when it becomes too challenging. Following a vision that requires change within oneself, however, is much harder. The world goes on in spite of one's internal struggles, which hardly matter to those trying to change the world.

Sometimes, though, these two aims—the desire to change the world and the compelling need to change oneself—coincide, as they do in the case of this author. Born into a wealthy family, pampered and expected to do great things, Gottfried graduates from Stanford in 1982 with his sights set on wealth and fame. With a degree in engineering management, he plunges into the world to take advantage of the business boom of the 1980s.

He lands a job with his cousin Diane's development firm in Washington, DC. A powerful businesswoman, Diane takes Gottfried under her wing and instructs him in the ways of wealth and power. She whisks him away to Barney's in New York to buy suits appropriate for a fashionable, aggressive young real estate mogul.

When he makes his first deal, Gottfried's eyes grow big at his \$10,000 check. He shares his success proudly with his father—whom he continually tries to please—and sets off on a greedy journey to gather more money and power.

As with most memoirs, the high-flying hero experiences a fall from grace and tries to learn a lesson from his tumble. In Gottfried's case, a deceitful woman and dishonest business practices lead him to question his own ethics, even though leaving this company means losing his connection to the wealthy.

After several months of disillusionment, Gottfried attends the annual meeting of the American Institute of Architects, whose theme is sustainability and designing buildings that will fit into the environment. The meeting changes Gottfried's life, and he launches into a life-long campaign to build ecologically friendly structures.

Of course, he experiences the usual struggles to build up his green business, but ultimately he succeeds at developing the most important green trade organization in the world, the U.S. Green Building Council.

Told in fast-paced vignettes, Gottfried's memoir often rings hollow. He piles one experience upon another, leaving the impression that he wrote it more to brag about himself than to show how much he did indeed change. He does offer some reflections on his journey in the final chapter.

Despite these shortcomings, this memoir demonstrates the ways that one person's vision and tenacity can blaze a path that will lead others to help change the world.

HENRY L. CARRIGAN (March / April 2004)

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