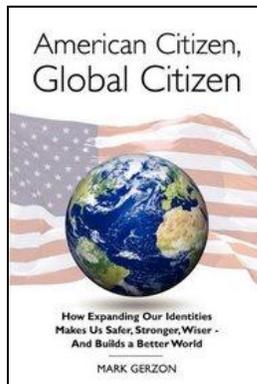


Professional Book Review

Gerzon, M. (2010). *American Citizen, Global Citizen*. Boulder, CO: Spirit Scope Publishing. 221 pp., ISBN: 978-0984093014 (paperback). \$15.95.

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There has been much talk among educators about the need to prepare our students to be global citizens, especially after Thomas L. Friedman's book *The World is Flat* (2005), in which he presents a world changed by globalization. While the idea of becoming a global citizen seems logical to some, teaching our students to become one is a daunting task; if educators are not themselves citizens of the world, preparing students for global citizenship becomes an unattainable goal. How do we go about convincing school administrators and teachers of the need to hone their own global citizenship skills in order to better serve their students? Mark Gerzon, the president and founder of Mediators Foundation, provides a world citizen's guidebook in his most recent publication. First released in London and recently re-formatted for the United States, *American Citizen, Global Citizen* aims to convert a reluctant American public, convincing them to expand their identities and embrace the "global dimension of our citizenship" (p. 12). This book is not written for the 35% of Americans who embrace the ideals of being a global citizen; rather, it speaks to the 65% who believe—rather dangerously, according to Gerzon—that they are citizens of the United States and nothing more.

Speaking directly to a U.S. audience, Gerzon insists that Americans can be proud, patriotic citizens of our country while being a valuable part of a larger whole as a citizen of the world. Too often, he believes, Americans have a tendency to let their national pride interfere with recognizing when we are in the wrong. This arrogance, accompanied by unilateral foreign policy, is off-putting to other nations whose own citizens often believe they too live in the best nation in the world. As a result, our safety, prosperity, and pursuit of happiness are put into jeopardy. Gerzon is not advocating the elimination of borders as some would fear; rather, he is encouraging Americans to learn about and respect the other citizens with whom we share this planet. He writes, "If we want to see globally and think globally, then we must learn something that our own culture alone cannot teach us" (p. 43).

Gerzon's work challenges Friedman's notion of a flat world and refers to *New York Times* columnist Mansour Javidian who said, "Maybe [the world] will be [flat] seventy-five years from now. But now, the global terrain is pretty bumpy" (p. 25). These bumps in the road are the "cultural differences that prevent us

from truly learning—and leading—across boundaries” (p. 26). To smooth out these obstacles, Gerzon aims to guide Americans to develop their global mindset.

Appealing to a 21st century, tech-savvy audience, Gerzon speaks of citizens in terms of software upgrades. Depending on their worldviews, he classifies people into five levels on a global citizenship scale from 1.0 – 5.0. Gerzon envisions a world populated by Citizens 5.0 who possess a fully developed level of global intelligence and civic consciousness.

Gerzon challenges Citizens 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0, the egocentric, ideocentric, and sociocentric people who represent the majority of U.S. citizens, to evolve to the higher multicentric and geocentric levels of global citizenship. To help them face the challenge, he provides some specific steps for them to do so.

At the core of Gerzon's beliefs lies the idea that Americans must be open to cross-boundary learning. Throughout the book, he intersperses interviews, anecdotes, news stories, and personal experiences that illustrate the need to be global citizens. With each, he demonstrates the key concepts of opening eyes, minds, hearts, and hands through witnessing, learning, connecting, and geo-partnering. Chapter 1 focuses on opening our eyes and helping us see our shared home much like the first astronauts saw it during the first orbital flight: not as individual countries or continents, but as one Earth. According to Gerzon, the moment the astronauts were first able to view our planet from space gave birth to the concept of “global awareness.” Seeing the Earth as a whole triggered an “idealistic outburst of global awareness” that more than 50 years later requires a practical approach accompanied by concrete, tangible actions (p. 24). For many, this shift from ethnocentric to geocentric requires a significant alteration in how they view the world. While it may not be comfortable for many, it is a necessary shift so they may see the world from a global citizen's perspective.

To learn more about the world, Gerzon states that we must first unlearn certain beliefs and learn to open our minds. One of the greatest obstacles to being a world citizen, writes Gerzon, is the notion that ours is the “greatest nation on earth.” While being proud of where one lives is valid, thinking we are the best prevents us from seeing the world as a whole. In Chapter 2, he promotes cross-boundary learning and cites an example of a British student who chose to pursue his MBA in the People's Republic of China because he recognized the need to master situations in ways that can only be learned by having multi-cultural experience. Gerzon says that “only cross-boundary learning will provide us with the internal passport that we need to navigate throughout our interconnected world” (p. 75). Chapter 3 provides suggestions on how to connect effectively with others by opening our hearts. He believes that connecting involves respect for differences because, “when we fail to connect with our neighbors and instead act on stereotypes, we build walls that do not have to exist” (p. 92).

Once we have mastered the first three core skills of opening our eyes, minds, and hearts, we are ready to build bridges with other world citizens. Chapter 4 focuses on the idea that by opening our hands and geo-partnering across boundaries, we are ready to face challenges together. He cites problems

like reducing poverty, sustaining the environment, and peacemaking that can only be solved when they are approached as issues that involve all the world's citizens.

Gerzon believes that by developing the four capacities of witnessing, learning, connecting, and geo-partnering we can raise our global intelligence, which he calls our GQ. He defines this concept as “our ability to use all our faculties in ways that cross the borders that separate humankind” and holds that “it is not just about how we think, but also how we feel; not just about what we know, but how we act” (p. 155). He suggests that we engage ourselves in daily, lifelong activities to stimulate our global intelligence and, in his conclusion, provides a list of 20 practices to help us reach that goal. Woven through these practices is the theme of perspective taking. Learning to partner with our “enemies” to engage them in “a promising, fruitful, honest relationship” includes seeing things from their points of view (p. 166). Building upon that, Gerzon encourages us to build relationships by learning about the lives of others and listening to their life stories.

To make it easier for readers to develop their four capacities of opening their eyes, minds, hearts, and hands, Gerzon provides an action guide. This annotated resource guide of books, websites, and organizations is connected to the 20 strategies outlined in his conclusion. While it contains few resources specifically designed for educators to implement in their classrooms, teachers will be particularly interested in the section entitled “Make Sure Your House Has a Door,” which suggests both a website and a book, as well as in “Transform Stereotypes into Relationships,” which provides suggestions on connecting with citizens of the world.

Many schools say they are preparing their students to become global citizens, but educators must do more than promote the ideal; they must make global thinking part of tangible, daily actions. If, as Gerzon states, 65% of Americans do not believe in the need to be part of a larger whole, chances are a large number of educators fall into that category. In order for schools to encourage global citizenship skills, the schools' leaders must first change their personal worldviews and become world citizens themselves. They must set the tone and example for their students to emulate. Reading Gerzon's book would be a good first step; hopefully, educators will heed the call to examine their own beliefs and then open their eyes, minds, hearts, and hands. Only then will students become the next generation of global citizens our world so desperately needs.