



The Power of Onlyness: Make Your Wild Ideas Mighty Enough to Dent the World

Nilofer Merchant

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An 800-CEO-READ Staff Pick
Shortlisted for the Thinkers50 Breakthrough Idea Award
A *Financial Times* Business Book of the Month

"For any would-be activists who hear the voice: 'not me' or 'not now,' Merchant makes the strong case for 'yes you' and 'yes now'--and even shows you how to jump in." --**Van Jones, host of CNN's *The Messy Truth*, author of *Rebuild the Dream* and *The Green Collar Economy***

"*The Power of Onlyness* is a book for our times. . . . Merchant forces us to dig deep, into the book and ourselves, and it goes beyond self-knowledge and self-empowerment, obliterating the fear of otherness with an understanding of the onlyness of us all." --**Sally Haldorson, 800-CEO-READ**

An innovation expert illuminates why your power to make a difference is no longer bound by your status

If you're like most people, you wish you had the ability to make a difference, but you don't have the credentials, or a seat at the table, can't get past the gatekeepers, and aren't high enough in any hierarchy to get your ideas heard.

In *The Power of Onlyness*, Nilofer Merchant, one of the world's top-ranked business thinkers, reveals that, in fact, we have now reached an unprecedented moment of opportunity for your ideas to "make a dent" on the world. Now that the Internet has liberated ideas to spread through networks instead of hierarchies, power is no longer determined by your status, but by "onlyness"--that spot in the world only you stand in, a function of your distinct history and experiences, visions and hopes. If you build upon your signature ingredient of purpose and connect with those who are equally passionate, you have a lever by which to move the world.

This new ability is already within your grasp, but to command it, you need to know how to meaningfully mobilize others around your ideas. Through inspirational and instructive stories, Merchant reveals proven strategies to unleash the centrifugal force of a new idea, no matter how weird or wild it may seem.

Imagine how much better the world could be if every idea could have its shot, not just the ones that come from expected people and places. Which long-intractable problems would we solve, what new levels of creativity would be unlocked, and who might innovate a breakthrough that could benefit ourselves, our communities, and especially our economy. This limitless potential of onlyness has already been recognized by Thinkers 50, the Oscars of management, which cited it one of the five ideas that will shape business for next twenty years.

Why do some individuals make scalable impact with their ideas, regardless of their power or status? *The Power of Onlyness* unravels this mystery for the first time so that anyone can make a dent. Even you.

The Power of Onlyness: Make Your Wild Ideas Mighty Enough to Dent the World Details

Date : Published August 29th 2017 by Viking

ISBN : 9780525429135

Author : Nilofer Merchant

Format : Hardcover 304 pages

Genre : Nonfiction, Business, Philosophy, Psychology



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From Reader Review The Power of Onlyness: Make Your Wild Ideas Mighty Enough to Dent the World for online ebook

Derek says

How would you like to make more of a difference in the world? Do you sometimes wake up in the morning with a bit of angst about your role in impacting change, but perhaps have no idea how to do it? If so, then *The Power of Onlyness* (published/on sale on August 29, 2017) is a must read for you. Nilofer Merchant's newest book is an accessible, timely, relevant, bold and powerful guide that shows how anyone can use their own ideas to make a valuable contribution.

Merchant quickly pulls you into the narrative by sharing her own story of transformation, when she walks out on an arranged marriage and how that helped her to define her "onlyness." And while Merchant's story is unique to her, her bold move is empowering and serves as a metaphor for how everyone of us can discover our own value in our own lives. Merchant weaves in 20 captivating stories that encourage you to embrace your own unique identity and purpose. In doing so, she makes a clear distinction between "uniqueness" (too contextual) and "onlyness," which only you can define. Unlocking your "onlyness" gives you the keys to take control of what happens to you. Even if you may not be responsible for much of what occurs in your life, you are completely responsible for your reaction to it. Yet in defining your "onlyness," it doesn't isolate you. *Onlyness* simply directs you to recognize your own value, so that you are making your own contribution to society.

Indeed, this very notion of collaboration and co-creation, which Merchant introduced in her earlier two works, comes full circle in *Onlyness*. The magic of "onlyness" is that it fuses individuality, collaboration and what we can accomplish together. You define it and work with others to include your ideas and co-create as part of the larger group that shares your values. Doing this means taking ownership of your ideas and having the confidence to say no to anyone who attempts to define something that is inherently yours. Yet even that which may be inherently yours does not make you perfect; but no one else will value what you bring to the table unless you do. That inherent value and self-acceptance are pillars that define your "onlyness."

The concepts and ideas that Merchant shares throughout *Onlyness* are equally tangible and accessible. You can't help but feel empowered to change something while you're reading the book or when you put it down. As Merchant points out, "We each want to add value and be valued. We need to design systems that enable that." And it's urgent that we do it now. Broad parts of our workforce are being underutilized because they are unable to contribute their own ideas, creativity or judgment, Merchant says, and that will only be exacerbated by the automation of many jobs. Merchant provides the road map. We owe it to ourselves, individually and collectively, to act on it.

There are countless pearls of wisdom throughout *Onlyness*, and likely we will each find different ones that resonate with us. Don't ignore the footnotes at the bottom of many pages, as I frequently do when reading many other books, for it is there, in Merchant's book, that you may find even deeper meaning to your "onlyness."

Christine says

This book started really strong for me and then it seemed kind of long by the end. The stories in the book were good, but I feel like the point was dissolving by the end. This is one of those books that may or may not stay with me. If I find myself thinking about it, I'll come back and up it a star. Until then, I consider it a good enough read but not ground shaking.

Martin says

While this America settles in the mould of its vulgarity, heavily thickening to empire

And protest, only a bubble in the molten mass, pops and sighs out, and the mass hardens...*

Nilofer Merchant has written one of the most essential books of the year.

The Power of Onlyness is a book for all those who see something that they want to change, but don't believe that they have the power to change anything, that by themselves they are nobody. These days especially, that is demonstrably false, as she proves in example after example. TPoO is a call to arms, a new way of looking at the world and your place in it.

I prefaced this review with a quote from Robinson Jeffers, because a great deal of what I hear around me these days is dissatisfaction with the current political climate. And The Power of Onlyness has lessons for those who want to expedite political change. But TPoO is far more than that. It shows a way not only to make your voice heard, but to lead the way in effecting change wherever it is needed.

Highly recommended.

Kony says

Nilofer Merchant's premise - that *everyone* has unique ideas that can benefit the world - is intriguing and inspiring. In developing this premise into a practical philosophy, she makes use of well-honed storytelling skills and spotlights a diverse array of change makers, ensuring that readers of *all* backgrounds can see their potential reflected in her book.

Derek Brookmeyer says

I read this book while in transition out of full time corporate employment into a self employed freelance career. It was great timing to be empowered by Nilofer's theory on onlyness. She shares beautiful and inspiring stories of people making a difference in the the world by harnessing their uniqueness. While the book is filled with great rhetoric, it was Nilofer's personal stories that have stuck with me. She is an excellent storyteller and her message will resonate with anyone looking to make the most of life. I listened to the book and really enjoyed hearing Nilofer narrate, which solidified the authenticity of her words.

Wilma Jakobsen says

This book has already inspired me and I am only on chapter 4. It's going to become an important book. Based on 20 powerful narratives of people who made a difference in the world, it is clear about the premise that we can all make a difference in the world. The effect of the dent we make is best achieved through knowing our uniqueness, being rooted in our identity and context, then finding ourselves in community with others who share our passion, then spreading the passion, going viral and watching it all unfold. Using the methodology of insights based on the narratives is powerful. I'm going to continue reading it now. Will add to this review once finished.

Allison says

"Through the power of only ness, an individual conceives an idea born of his narrative, nurtures it with the help of a community that embraces it, and through shared action, makes the idea powerful enough to dent the world."

"Finding 'your people' sometimes means having to walk away from places you don't fit in rather than trying to squeeze yourself into a too-tight space with the aim to belong. It isn't until people make that choice that they are able to find others who share something meaningful with them."

"Instead of waiting for some 'perfect' way to add value, maybe just see what needs to be done. Even if that action is small."

"The uniting power here is common purpose. When purpose is the glue, then the group's 'us' does not suppress individual ideas at the expense of greater unity, and as a result, those ideas can grow big enough to dent the world. The way to achieve this is through defining (or, rather, redefining) who we are to one another."

"The key quality that makes a group or tribe or community yours is that for you it becomes a place that you can shape and be shaped by. The bonds--of caring, of trust, of love, and, of course, of purpose--make your community a sanctuary where you can freely admit you don't have it all together and where you can be willing to ask for or give help."

"She pays attention, shifts priorities, blends, and creates a context where everyone can be more than he or she is alone."

"When a community shares its failures, it shows how and what it is learning and thus demonstrates increased competence. When it shares its decision-making process, it reveals its values. When it makes a tough choice and shares its reasoning, it demonstrates its integrity. When a leader has demonstrated selflessness over a period of time, it shows he will reliably choose the community interest over his own."

"Technology is the enabling agent; what actually creates the binding scale are the purpose, meaning, and shared values that are inherent in onlyness. Just as technology is displacing jobs, it is also opening up ways to connect and create value."

Terri Griffith says

"Great book." "Perfect time." I expect these are the phrases I'm going to hear a lot about Nilofer Merchant's new book, *The Power Of Onlyness: Make Your Wild Ideas Mighty Enough To Dent The World*. "Great book," because it is. This is an actionable book filled with stories that would have made you glad to read them even if they didn't teach you something. "Perfect time," because of all the conflict in the world and how we need to deepen our discussions around many of the things we may have let slide before. Perhaps, perfect timing for me as I embark upon a new set of adventures around my research, speaking, and consulting.

The image of onlyness resonated with me from the very beginning. On page 2, Merchant says:

"You're standing in the spot in the world that only you stand in, a function of your history and experiences, visions, and hopes. From this spot where only you stand, you offer a distinct point of view, novel insights, and even groundbreaking ideas."

<http://amzn.to/2wQ7Jtf>

<HTTP://AMZN.TO/2WQ7JTF>

My research is about the mixing of human, technical, and organizational dimensions of work. This book is a deep dive into the human -- and particularly, your own -- contributions. Until talking with Nilofer about the idea of onlyness, I'd never thought as deeply about the unique contribution that each one of us can make. Only I can stand in this particular spot at this particular moment. Yes, my science fiction loving-self could challenge that, but even there we could have some interesting insights about that.

Onlyness is more than finding your passion. It's about exploring your opportunities to contribute. The book offers examples big and small. It also helps you focus on the evolution of onlyness. My first goal is to assess how I can further develop my onlyness. I want my place in the world to be more than happenstance.

For Santa Clara University Readers

We have an extra gift in Chapter 3. Merchant, an MBA alumna (and now my colleague and friend), chronicles Prof. André Delbecq's story of onlyness. Though I'd been honored to know André for more than 16 years (we lost him to cancer this year), I did not know how much work it took for him to stand in his particular place in the world. André was one of the wisest people I've known and this chapter is a unique view into the evolution and enactment of that wisdom.

For all of us: "Don't Be a Lonely Only" (p. 53)

Like most great books, this is a call to action. It's a call to collaborate. The quote from p. 2 continues, "Now that you can grow and realize those ideas through the power of networks, you have a new lever to move the world." More than ever before we have the chance to find and work with others to make dents in the world. As I write this, it seems that more than ever before the world needs us to make positive contributions. Make your ideas mighty!

Disclaimer: I received a free galley copy from the publisher and a gift copy from Nilofer. My purchased copy from Amazon arrives today.

Naomi says

THE best book I've read in years. I couldn't put it down and have pages and pages of notes. This new book from Nilofer Merchant is a deep dive into the power of YOU to make a DENT in this world. Discussion archaic leadership models, power, creativity and making a difference in the world, this is something that IS indeed accessible to everyone - not just those bestowed a leadership title.

We all matter, and inside of our collaboration and individuality, there is a greatness to be had, discovered and introduced to the world. We CAN all make our wild ideas mighty enough to dent the world.

Some take away quotes:

Onlyness: your signature concoction of what matters to you, gives you clarity of purpose and enables you to focus on what matters. That is your path forward.

Existing power and status frameworks act as self-reinforcing loops, keeping the status quo, the status quo. Stand in the spot that only YOU can stand in. Then meaningfully connect with others so that you (and your ideas) finally have a new pathway.

The protagonist does not wait for permission to lead, innovate or strategize, but does what is needed and right for the group as a whole, without regard to his / her own status.

The “power of us” is not the sheer number of members in any group, but the bonds between them, such as curiosity, vulnerability, the ability to handle conflict.

We must signal our passions and seek our allies.

We must give ourselves permission to have an original idea, even when no one else is advocating for it. We're going to have to honor the onlyness of ALL people we meet along the way - especially when we disagree with them.

We must reframe the questions people pose, and change the conversation to find new ways through.

We must learn how to lean on one another to build trust and scale our ideas.

We must learn how to galvanize those who might not experience what we know to be true by showing them value.

We must engage people to work with us, not by telling them the answers but by pointing toward a new horizon.

Miriam says

There are many interesting and valuable ideas in this book- and many interesting stories of paths people took

to get to certain places and almost all of this sounds kindly intended. It got more and more interesting to me as I progressed- I felt "Lean In"-ed at the beginning in a way that I did not like very much but- the author seems to have the intention to empower human beings to pay attention to themselves and take actions on their "productive" thoughts and also sees and encourages the inherent capacity of cooperative human efforts in a very smart way. On the other hand- she speaks at one point of being at a party, soon after having "retired as ceo," after many business pursuits of various sorts, and doesn't know how to answer the question: "...and who are you?" and so she says "nobody". and then she's like i should have spoken my accomplishments. to her these mean words like "global manager". some people- me included- work without being somebody in the way that nilifer merchant expects the people reading this book to be- nobody and global manager are not opposites. she is very savvy about how to solve problems and is obviously a good observer of the world in many ways. It is in the last few chapters that she acknowledges that there is a place outside of where she solves problems, the rest of humanity, she mentions that the 80% who don't have "advanced degrees or executive positions" etc harbor the creativity of humanity and the ability to solve problems and, basically, "should" be incorporated into the solving being done by global managers. Her perspective on this is kind of strange to me- she says the top needs to pull in the bottom. I agree with her. I also- don't think we'll all fit there. Which is a big problem that she doesn't seem to see right in the middle of some of the lacks that she sees, which is where I see it.

I think a lot about the kinds of "work" there are for what kinds of people. Nilofer Merchant, and a lot of people, see a way of life to climb into through industries- advertising, technology, engineering, communications (i almost feel that all of these need "scare quotes"). She's like let's find new places to climb into with ingenuous human-ness... I don't want the starting places to be i mean certainly first and in many ways bummeriest: advertising. Anyway this structuring of priorities is strange. She also definitely is working within these systems in the world to create systems that legislate equality and collectively research diseases. What do I mean by this complaint I am dancing around? Do you know?

very interesting predicament we're in. our systems cultivate the cream at the top; she sees the importance of actually every kind of person contributing to systems of ideas and solutions; she only knows how to work from inside that cultivated cream, but calls out so specifically the need to flex this space outward; I see imminent failure by pulling people one by one into this space.

I had a meeting at the children's museum today about making a small thing, and talked to them about their arts funding programs and about how the people who work in the shop got there- I have an old friend who works there and now I see this open door there. not being like offered a job or position or project. When I was younger I was so mad about how this is how the world works. I didn't have any old acquaintances here or any particular skills and certainly no social skills. I still show up at a situation like this and see that there's a way that nilifer merchant, and a lot of people in my social circle, would ply this situation to their advantage- that i don't understand quite how to do. they asked me to do this thing- i asked to see their water drain room. i wish the art grant could be to install some sort of power generation system from the water that falls three stories and put it into the system to where it is filtered that pumps it back up three stories to where it is the brominated play stuff of the water room. we have weird money stacking problems. i guess money is allocated for things like water and energy all the time and that's why special funds are allocated to arts. i feel like i just don't understand though. and that nilifer merchant is better at playing by the rules and then breaking them than i can be. maybe?!?! some other crunchy person read this, please and let me know what you think i mean or am i just being shitty?

and this is all besides the actual point of the book. which is to talk through validating pursuing a path that you see that others don't. i wish she also discussed crackpot-ism. I guess the actual point was so succinct and well supported that i'm just talking about the narrative construct itself or something? I keep ending these

paragraphs in questions because i really don't understand what i mean to say but i know there's something that i mean to say. maybe part of it is that nobody vs global manager thing. these big things about society and individualism and collectivism and money making and need and want and problem solving are woven in with like imposter syndrome and office culture skirt suit and self esteem/doubt things too tightly.

Lynn Lyon says

This book was recommended via LinkedIn by Beth Comstock, vice Chair at GE. I think this is important because the book can resonate with those of us in the midst of the corporate world with our onlyness as well as the entrepreneurs who will be inspired by the challenge.

It was a slow thought provoking read. Nilofer is an excellent writer. The book was well-organized with insightful examples.

I took notes, bended page corners and realized I could relate and try to apply her challenge.

I love reading memoirs which are always stories of onlyness. I imagined that individuals would love to see their own onlyness and recognize their value and power while they are in the midst of the journey.

I love her positive attitude of acceptance with an idealistic view of the future. I can imagine the world that way.

Bonnie Shuster says

When I started this book, I had low expectations. I feared it would be a self-help book filled with buzzwords. I still think “onlyness” is a bit of a buzzword, but Merchant’s stories of folks who have “dented” the world are fascinating, instructive, and inspiring. A worthwhile read.

Andy Roth says

The world has changed. Those who are “in”; whether that be from money, connections, or status; have a plethora of mechanisms to effect change. Often, they were the few who made a difference.

The world has changed. Those of us who thought we had none of those things now have a way to impact, to dent, the world, even if just our small part of it—to realize what we do have to offer—and a way to do it.

The endless list of how-to and self-help books simply provide someone’s cookbook—what worked for them and maybe, possibly, could be—will work for you. Nilofer’s previous books have set the stage for making a difference in this changed world, especially with 11 Rules for Creating Value in the #SocialEra. Drawn from her experience and research, they are, while fantastic, still somewhat prescriptive.

The Power of Onlyness is something very different.

The Power of Onlyness is deeply personal from Nilofer sharing much of herself to the stories she presents as

exemplars. Rather than providing another set of steps or a checklist, Nilofer takes us on a self-discovery dispelling the doubts and uncertainties which keep a lot of us from making the dent on the world we want to make. We're shown a path and the markers along the way to chart a course that only we can travel. She further shows how, in a world which seems increasingly divisive, we can harness our onlyness and the power of others to accomplish our goals. We not only don't have to do it alone, we thrive when we do things together.

Whether you are an entrepreneur, an intrepreneur, an activist, or need to make a dent in your life's passion, this is your primer. How-to books offer useful mechanics but start here to understand the most important component is how to bring to bear the genuine you—which only you possess.

You can pre-order the book at <http://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/boo...>

Melinda Sabo says

I learned of this book while reading an article about communication and emotional intelligence across political divides. The idea of listening more to those whom you strongly disagree with appealed to me. The book's chapter on the subject was stunning. The book as a whole is about using your unique gifts to make a dent in the world. It presents many amazing case studies. If you've given up on the dream of making a difference (or you're still committed to it!) this book is for you. I found it to be full of hope. ?

Joy Beaver says

Individually Empowering!

All of our individual experiences provide valuable insights into common sense solutions to the problems that affect the lives of all citizens. By actively participating in voicing our concerns and our insights to our elected representatives and monitoring their actions, we can regain the power we have relinquished through neglect of our duty to hold those who govern us responsible for their decisions and the effects they have on our lives. Every senator and every representative is accountable to every citizen, not just those who reside in their jurisdiction.
