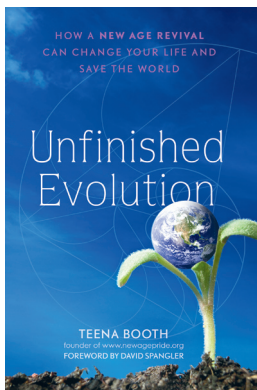


# Interview with Teena Booth



## Q & A with Author Teena Booth

In her new book, *Unfinished Evolution* Teena Booth makes the case that what's needed to solve the world's problems—economic decline, global conflict, planetary warming and worldwide poverty—is a revival of the term “New Age” and the philosophy that defines it.



Although few have been clamoring for a New Age revival, especially not in its colorful, crystal-stamped 1980s incarnation, Booth contends that in allowing the term to drift away we “threw the baby out with the bathwater.” Before the movement became tangled up in pop culture with occult practices and dippy notions, the New Age was an intellectually grounded, leading-edge social movement that developed new and more effective ways to address threats to the future. What we need, Booth adds, is a return to the original intent of the New Age and re-create a movement that empowers us to join together and work for a better world.

### *Why did you write “Unfinished Evolution?”*

I wrote this book because I have three children, and their future is looking increasingly bleak with threats like global warming—threats caused by the failures of the old ruling paradigm of materialism. I feel a huge responsibility to protect my children's future, and do what I can to promote an alternative paradigm. But I also wrote this book because I keep running into spiritual people who say they feel lonely and isolated because they don't know how to connect with people with similar beliefs and hopes. It seems so clear to me that we need a common identity so that we can recognize each other, and start building the social capital we need to truly bring a new paradigm into being now, today.

### *How do you define New Age in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?*

The idea at the heart of the New Age is timeless, it's been around thousands of years, in both Eastern religions and in the Western philosophy of idealism, and it says that Spirit or God of whatever you call your higher power is the basic essence of all reality. The New Age movement is about learning how that spirit unfolds in us, in the world, and how that knowledge should guide our actions.

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However, the New Age movement of today is very different than the movement made infamous in the 1980s by Shirley MacLaine and the psychics and so on that most of the media attention. Today's New Age is more sophisticated, more grounded in science and facts on the knowledge side, and time-tested contemplative practices on the spiritual side. It is also becoming less me-oriented and more all-of-us-oriented.

*Why the New Age now?*

Because the “old age” is collapsing all around us. The age of religion-based aggression and capitalistic exploitation has brought our society quite literally to the brink of ruin. So as I see it, we have two choices: We “spiritual but not religious” people can keep “working on ourselves” while the future become ugly and scary, or we can join together under a common identity that will allow us to create an alternative future.

*The world today seems to be so fast-paced that we're losing our connections with each other, nature and spirituality. How can the New Age help people who are searching for a deeper meaning?*

All our thoughts, beliefs and actions grow from our basic set of assumptions about reality. If your basic assumptions are materialistic—if you believe matter is the only basis of reality—you're going to have a hard time finding connection and meaning, because everything is random and chaotic through the materialistic window. The dualistic window of traditional religions isn't much better, because while there is plenty of meaning there, spirit and nature are deemed separate things. Feelings of connection to God are thus subject to specific rules, and fraught with difficulty.

But when you look through an idealistic window like that of the New Age, you are able to see the underlying connections, and you begin operating from a set of assumptions that infuse meaning in just about everything you see. It is remarkable how an idealistic philosophy can change your feelings about yourself and being alive in the world—as well as utterly change your relationship to spirit, to nature, to other people, to everything.

*Why do people who seem to have New Age belief, shun the label New Age?*

It is one of those great cosmic jokes that the ideas and feelings that make one New Age seem to require one to deny being a New Ager or any one thing in particular. An idealistic person often refuses labels on principal because they are perceived as limiting, and because they've so often been used as weapons to exclude or condemn others. But in dodging the negatives that can come with labels, we have also forsaken the positive work labels do. A good label can unite people who have a common agenda, and make it possible for them to be seen and heard within their society. Without a label, they become invisible, powerless.

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*How will “Unfinished Evolution” change people’s perception of New Age?*

First, it will help people examine their knee-jerk rejection of the label. But more important, it will clear up a number of myths that have become connected to the New Age in popular culture. Because of the skewed way the media portrayed the movement in the 1980s, the New Age gained a reputation for being far-out and clueless. I like to think that the extensive philosophy section in the book will help people see that the New Age has a strong intellectual foundation and can be the most sensible and reasonable way to see the world and solve our problems.

*Do you think “Unfinished Evolution” can make people see New Age the way you do?*

For people who don’t know much about the New Age, I do believe the book will help them get an accurate picture of what the movement is all about and whether it has something to offer them. But as for New Agers themselves, they are without a doubt the most independent and individualistic group of people on the planet, and I’m pretty sure I won’t sway a single one of them to my point of view if they happen to see things differently. However, I’ve heard from enough New Age-y people who have stumbled across my Web site—[www.newagepride.org](http://www.newagepride.org)—that I believe that the message in the book will resonate with many.

*How do you propose that all the disjointed groups like the Buddhists, yoga enthusiasts, pagans, alternative healers, environmentalists etc. unite under the New Age flag?*

The groups you mentioned are not disjointed at all. They are different expressions of the same basic philosophy, the same set of ideas about reality: that our minds, bodies and spirits are all connected, and that we are all connected and interdependent with each other, and with nature. So while these groups do exist and operate independently, it would take no great effort to acknowledge the common ground upon which they stand, and their common goals for the future. In fact, if they are going to achieve those goals, they will have no choice but to recognize each other, reach out to each other and support each other. They don’t have to sacrifice their independence and uniqueness in order to be a meaningful part of a greater whole.

*What power do you see in a unified group of New Agers?*

Any unified group inevitably amasses social capital, and with it, the ability to influence the shape of society. A unified group gains the ability to communicate with its own members and create an agenda. A unified group has a block of votes, a hefty chunk of consumer dollars, and a voice that must be heeded. I have visions of corporations operating differently, and offering products and services that are kind to people and the environment in order to attract “New Age” dollars. (We see hints of that now with the Green Movement). I have visions

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of our legislators having no choice but take into account “the New Age vote” when making public policy or writing laws, and our nation becoming much more sane and just as a result.

*You believe that the idealistic philosophy of the New Age can “save the world.” How do you address the fact that America’s enemies don’t want peaceful coexistence? How can the New Age deal with entities that aren’t willing to have intellectual, thoughtful discussion?*

I do believe New Age ideas can save the world, but certainly not by forcing others to adopt them. America’s so-called enemies are people who are not unlike ourselves, people who become aggressive when they feel threatened in one form or another. You are right, there is no intellectual way to talk people out of fear and the desire to fight. The New Age must deal with those who oppose us as the great idealists like Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. have always dealt with them, by refusing to look upon them as enemies, by insisting we are all in this together. Gandhi talked about persistently “holding on to truth,” no matter what happens. And that is what the New Age must do as well, hold firmly to its truth until the world comes round. In the meantime, we will defend ourselves when we must, and do the work necessary to raise the spiritual center of gravity of the whole. That includes old-fashioned humanitarian work of feeding the hungry and creating economic opportunity so that people have less reason to feel afraid and become aggressive.

*Describe how the world would look if the New Age resurfaced and had a large impact in American political and social life?*

The New Age movement has always been big on “envisioning” the future, and I do think it’s vital to imagine an America that, thanks to a broader New Age influence, has become more effective in addressing the good of the whole rather than just the isolated part. In our social life, we need to imagine an America that respectfully honors and makes room for expressions of spirituality besides Christianity. And in our political life, we need to imagine an America that relates well to the rest of the world, puts up restraints against corporate aggression and exploitation, protects the environment, promotes education and economic opportunity, provides health care for all, finds a better balance between the punishment and rehabilitation of criminals, and just plain invests our resources in policies and programs that actually improve our lives.

But even as we keep such pictures in mind, we need to keep our real focus on the present. We can spend so much time imagining the future that we neglect what we need to do today to get there. Dreaming up pictures of the future, says author Peter Block, is basically a desperate attempt “to take the uncertainty out of the future. But when we take uncertainty out, it is no longer the future. It is the present projected forward. Nothing new can come for the desire for a predictable tomorrow.” A New Age-influenced future is not something we can predict for tomorrow, it is a choice we have to make today, a choice we have to live into right now. Saving the world must become a way of life we choose today, not just envision for tomorrow.