

What Are We Building?

By Chris Manzano



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Illustrations created with AI assistance.

Digital reading edition.





A vibrant, high-angle photograph of a busy city sidewalk at sunset. The scene is filled with diverse people in motion. In the foreground, a man in a blue suit and glasses walks while looking at his phone and holding a coffee cup. Next to him, a woman in a tan business suit walks with a black handbag. Further back, a man in a blue shirt and cap carries three cardboard boxes, and a young woman in a white shirt and blue apron carries a wooden crate full of fresh vegetables. The sidewalk is wet, reflecting the warm orange and yellow light of the setting sun. In the background, a blue city bus is visible, and the city skyline is silhouetted against the bright sky. Flower pots with sunflowers and pink flowers are in the foreground, adding to the urban atmosphere.

Every morning, the world shouted,
“Hurry!”

People hurried to earn more, buy
more, and get ahead.

Some were hurrying just to have
enough.

“Where are we all going?”
Nia asked.

“Forward,” said a grown-up.

“Toward what?”

The grown-up stopped.



At school, Nia met a thinking machine.
It could help people grow food, build
homes, and manage mountains of money.
“Can you make us faster?” she asked.
“Yes.”



“But what should we be doing?”
Her teacher pulled up a chair.
“Let’s ask more people.”



Their class called classrooms around the world.

“I want our river to be clean,” said one child.



“I want everyone to have enough to eat,”
said another.

“I want my papa home before I’m
asleep.”



The children began drawing.

One drew a river. Another drew the forest beside it. Another drew the sea it flowed into.



Their pictures would not stay separate.
“Neither does our world,” Nia said.
They joined the pages.



Soon, their picture stretched down the hall.

It had room for homes, animals, music, gardens, and people doing things they loved.



It did not fit inside one country.



They sent it to families, builders, farmers,
and leaders everywhere.

Not everyone agreed. They listened. They
argued. They changed the drawing.



And they asked a different question.
Not “How can we have more than them?”
**But “What can we make possible
together?”**



Engineers shared ways to clean water.
Farmers shared ways to care for soil.
Countries began making plans together.



People changed rules about work and money, so the machines could help more than a lucky few.



The machines helped with the numbers and the heavy lifting.



People checked their work—and kept asking who was still being left out.



One evening, Grandpa studied
the enormous drawing.

“We learned to cook
with fire,” he said. “To
sail with wind. To grow
food in the earth.”



“And now our machines can help us do so much,” Nia said.

“What will we do with that chance?”



Nia found a blank place on the paper.

She wrote:

TAKE CARE OF OUR WORLD.

TAKE CARE OF EACH OTHER.



Then she passed the pencil.

There was still a whole world to hear from.



