Ten Ways to Change the World

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to
Change the World

in the way it needs to change

Matthew Shapiro

2025

No AI has been used in the writing or editing of this booklet.

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1. See the Big in the Small: You Matter

A Paradox

- When you drive a gasoline-powered car, you contribute to global warming…but each of your trips is one of 230 billion driving trips that Americans take each year. And we have a society built around the car. So do *you* make a difference when choosing whether to use a car or not?
- If you don't vote in an election, you indirectly help someone win and help someone else to lose…but 190 million people *did* vote in the last national election. We also have a system in which voting sometimes seems to not even matter. So does *your* vote make a difference?
- When you make an AI video, or use AI in a search, the energy consumption for it is leading to an increase in the need for new power plants. But use of AI is taking off all across society. So does *your* using AI really make a difference in energy demand?

We often feel powerless to make a difference because "the way things are" seems to be much bigger than us. The way things are may have been decided long ago, and by people with greater influence than we have. Therefore, anything we say or do individually would seem to make little difference. **And yet…**

All of the power and authority that a government or a billionaire or an industry has is determined by the daily choices of millions of people. By you. By deciding to buy something (or not), use something (or not), speak up (or remain quiet), and choose (or not choose) all the other kinds of actions we take, we either (a) help perpetuate the situation and sustain the pattern or (b) push things in a different direction.

Patterns

We are part of a culture. It's part of our identity. The culture provides us with routines, patterns that keep us alive and sustained. The patterns are "instructions" we get all day, every day, mostly from inside our own heads, that tell us how to act. When we act—eat food, burn gas, say this, think that, do this, do that—we move energy. The way we move energy sends a signal to the system we're a part of. Usually the signal we send says *"Ok, did it. Keep going. Status quo."* If our action deviates from the instructions, we are sending a different signal: *"No. Not doing it. Doing something else. Change."*

Are you okay with the current situation, the existing patterns? What if we want to change the cultural patterns driving personal patterns that move energy in a way that validates the existing patterns? What if an existing cultural pattern is bad? What can help break the pattern and make a new one?

- Reflection: Pausing to look at the cycle and deciding if it's okay with you.
- Dialogue: Talking with others about how our daily acts affect the whole system.
- Injustice leading to outrage: Sometimes something happens in the dominant pattern that we see as wrong or unjust, and it makes us angry. That can trigger doing something different, which if shared by enough people, can change a culture / system.
- Seeing other people act differently, inspiring and informing us.
- Working with others to change policies, laws, or even the very design of institutions, or to promote new ways of interacting and participating (like this booklet suggests).

Small Acts are Big (and sometimes Big Acts are Small)

As mentioned above, everything we do either supports or challenges an existing pattern. For example, buying food grown locally challenges the dominant pattern of food supply and supports a different pattern of food supply. Maybe you don't know where to buy food locally? You can learn. And you can share that information. There's no "small" because without you x 1000 people choosing like you, that local food is unavailable. It's tempting to think that only a "big" act—like an order from a president or decision of a big corporation—makes a difference. But those acts most often don't change underlying patterns of things. They are often just "rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic."

Critical Masses, Crowds and Herds

It's clear that if everyone agreed to stop doing something that they currently do, or to start doing something differently, a lot would change. It could be for the good, or for the bad. To make it for the good, we need to learn democracy, and to do that, we need to learn dialogue (both things covered in this booklet). Otherwise, we are just a crowd or a herd, which can be manipulated easily. But you don't need to wait for a "critical mass" to make a difference.

You are Not Just a Cell in the Body of Society

A cell just does its part; it doesn't get a sense of the whole body. You are different. You *can* get a sense of your whole society, your whole world. That's what happens when you study history. It's why you learn about different cultures and think about the way things are going. **You have the potential to think beyond the society, to question its instructions, to make choices.**

Living an Example → Setting an Example → Showing Examples

At the very least, you can **live an example**. Do something differently because it's right, even if you think no one notices.

> If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change.
>
> Gandhi

Following your conscience when no one else is can be hard, but it is really important because it's the start of change. Sometimes, doing it is simply a matter of

> People do not decide their future. They decide their habits and their habits decide their future.
>
> Attributed to F.M. Alexander

overcoming initial inconvenience or putting in a little effort to learn how to do something new. But sometimes it takes courage. Not the kind of courage that a firefighter uses when rushing into a burning building, but the courage to take risks that are social, political, or financial.

If people notice what you're doing, then you're **setting an example**. It becomes more powerful because they notice, and maybe they decide to do it, too.

> The world is changed by your example, not by your opinion.
>
> Paolo Coelho

If you go beyond this to **show examples** that people (including you) are setting, then you are a leader. We need people who live, set, and show examples.

It's Not Just You – It's the System, Too

A point of this chapter is that everyone's daily "small" choices can either maintain or change the "big" patterns. But individual people can challenge and change patterns much more easily much more easily when the environment they live in in supportive of that. That's why changing laws and policies and designs and leaders matters a lot. So it's not either-or. It's bottom-up *and* top-down. It's inside-out *and* outside-in.

<u>Activity</u>

(1) Try making a list of all the choices you make in a day, consciously or unconsciously. What pattern might those choices help maintain at the level of community or society?

(2) Think about what you would do differently that might make a positive difference in the world, if only you knew *how* to do it.

(3) Tomorrow, make one choice or take one action that is *different* from one you'd usually make, and which you think could make a positive difference in your community or the world, no matter how "small" it seems.

2. Mind Your Attention

"Attention! Attention!" squawk the talkative tropical birds in a novel called *Island.* They were trained to do this generations ago by the founder of an island society who wanted to remind people to, well, mind their attention. The message is more important than ever. Where our attention goes, so goes our energy.

Attention has always been important. But lately, your attention has become the most fought-over thing in the world. Corporations, marketing firms, "influencers," pundits, politicians, and even some of your friends are hungry for your precious attention, through scrolling, eyeball time, clicks, likes, up-votes, dollars, and votes.

Pay attention to your attention, and to what matters, and it will change the world.

Distraction

Whether it's distracted driving, distracted sleep, or being distracted by entertaining memes or "news" that's designed to trigger, distraction keeps you from putting your attention toward what matters. What matters? That's not for the author of this booklet to decide for you. But it's a question you should definitely be asking yourself.

Diffusion of Attention = No One is Paying Attention

Diffusion means a spreading out. It's the opposite of focus. If you look at society today, you'll see a lot of diffusion of attention. You can see why this is a problem – it's like a basketball team whose players are looking everywhere else but the ball.

"Multi-Tasking": Overrated (and Maybe Not Even Real)

It's easy to do routine things like brushing our teeth or washing dishes while listening to music or having a conversation. But now, it seems to have become a virtue to be able to work on more than one complex task at once. Unfortunately (or fortunately), multi-tasking appears to be a myth. Psychology tells us that we can't *effectively* do two complex things at once. It's best to focus on one thing at a time. Multi-tasking also takes us away from practicing our ability to focus our attention.

Attention-Seeking: One of the Biggest Reasons Why People "Act Out"

Everyone needs a sense of belonging and significance. When they don't get it through "legitimate" or constructive means, they seek it in other ways, including attention-grabbing behavior. This explains certain classroom behaviors, the extremely loud motorcycle going up and down your street, and the actions of some national leaders. You may find opportunities where giving your attention to someone in a positive way can help them. You might also be in situations when withholding your attention is a better approach. Be prepared for both of these opportunities and situations.

Activity: Fill This In

What Matters	Do you give it enough attention and focus?

Activity

Find the "Digital Well Being" function on your phone. Use it to track how often you checked your phone in a single day. If you think you checked it more often than you actually need to or should, try to cut back and track your progress each day.

Activity (Do Any or All of These)

- The next time you eat something, don't just put the food in your mouth and forget about it while you listen to someone talk or look at your phone. Instead, focus on what's in your mouth. Slow down. Take time to chew. Taste it. Feel the flavor, and the texture. Do the whole meal like that. If it takes eating alone to do this, then eat alone.
- Find a few minutes when you can be undistracted. Turn off your phone and put it in another room. Eyes open or closed, body in any position, breathe in through your nose for a count of four seconds. Hold it for four seconds. Exhale through your mouth for four seconds. Repeat. (This is one form of what's called box

breathing). This can be alone or with others. *Caution: if you have a severe medical condition, asthma, etc. check before you do this*.

- Pick anything that you typically do. The next time you do it, give it your 100% focus. It could be exercising; a household thing like washing dishes; even driving. 100% attention – try for the whole duration, without music or TV or conversation. (This is what we naturally do when we're immersed in games or recreational activities we are really into).

- When sitting with someone you care about—a family member or a friend—turn off your phone and put it out of sight for the duration of your time together.

- In a quiet place, close your eyes and practice clearing your mind of chatter, worry, any particular thing. Maybe start with one single thing—a single object, or your breath. Then work toward putting your attention toward…nothing. (If you meditate, you already know what this is about).

- If you have a chance to visit the ocean, a forest or wilderness, turn off your phone; forget the artificial, the human-made, and turn all your attention to the sights, sounds, smells of the unbuilt world. When you get back home, recall that memory and feeling for as long as you can.

- If you find yourself feeling bored, don't immediately try to "fill the void" and have your attention occupied. Let your mind wander and be open to what comes. (Encourage this among your kids, too. Boredom is not necessarily a bad thing for them.)

3. Have Conversations that Create Understanding

A word for this is *dialogue*. It is the key to changing the world.

We are more used to other kinds of conversation. *Small talk* is important for our everyday relationships. "How are you? Nice weather, isn't it? Did you hear about…?" *Discussion* might happen around serious things, but often doesn't go very deep or build relationships. Occasionally, if we feel strongly about a position and confident enough, we might *debate*. *Dialogue* is much less common.

Dialogue is not about just airing opinions or winning an argument. It is about creating understanding, for yourself and for others.

Dialogue is the key to making progress on many other things in this booklet, including examining our assumptions and practicing everyday democracy. This is because only dialogue can connect your mind with other minds, refresh relationships and culture, and let you create together.

To make dialogue a part of your life:

1. Recognize when there is a need for dialogue:
   - Do you and others really understand each other? **If not, you need dialogue.**
   - Do you have all the answers? **If not, you need dialogue.**
   - Would it be better to work together? **If so, you need dialogue.**
2. Recognize and acknowledge that the purpose of dialogue is (1) to create understanding, (2) to explore issues and needs, and (3) (if needed) to create solutions to problems and come to agreement on action.

To Do Dialogue Well:

- Focus more on listening than on talking.
- Ask for clarification if you don't understand something. "Can you explain…" "Can you give me an example…" etc.
- Reflect back what someone said in order to confirm understanding. "What I heard you say was…Is this what you meant?"

- Look for "grains of truth" in what someone else is saying; look for and highlight common ground.
- Listen to your own reaction to things brought up and consider what assumptions you hold that may be giving rise to that reaction.

Dialogue is not just for situations where you don't agree with someone. You should also engage in dialogue with the "like-minded," because it keeps your thinking fresh and helps you re-examine your ideas, values, beliefs, and assumptions.

Where to do dialogue?

- At home
- In school
- At work
- In your neighborhood
- In your place of worship
- On social media (where dialogue is extra challenging)

How many people? Any number.

- Interpersonal – Just one other person is enough.
- Small group – More perspectives, more impact, but still fairly personal.
- Large groups – Some say that this is the most powerful scale at which to have dialogue because it allows people to break away from inter-personal dynamics and open up a window to the wider society.

Recognize when dialogue is needed. Seek opportunities for dialogue. Have dialogue with people who are different from you. Dialogue is the least common form of conversation but it is the key to changing the world.

4. Examine Assumptions

Teenagers feel awake earlier in the morning than do younger children.
Voting should be optional.
*Marijuana is more dangerous to society than alcohol.*
Good health care is a privilege, not a right.

You might agree with some of these statements and disagree with others. Either way, these are examples of *assumptions* that appear to underlie current aspects of our community and our society. Assumptions are ideas that usually go unexamined.

Assumptions are not necessarily wrong. They're just unexamined. They go unexamined either because they are very reliable (like "the sun will rise tomorrow") or because they are buried deep inside routines and patterns.

***Whose* assumptions should you examine?**

- Your assumptions
- The assumptions of other people
- Assumptions that are widely held or assumptions on which our systems and institutions are built
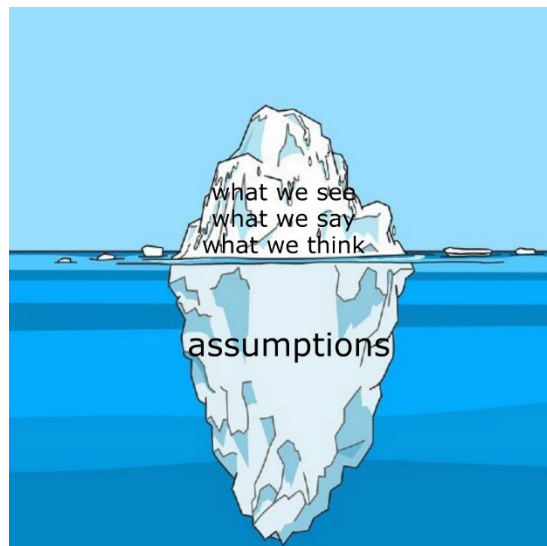
***Why* is it important that you examine assumptions?**

- Examining assumptions helps you to better understand your thought process and biases, and those of other people. This helps make sure you're on the right track, in your own thinking, in how you use information, in hearing others, etc.
- Examining assumptions in our institutions, systems, and society helps us check whether they are what we really want and need.
  - If we find conflicts between what these institutions and systems are built on and what we actually know, believe, and value, we can point these conflicts out, and we can call for changing the assumptions that they operate by.

How can you examine assumptions?

Bringing assumptions to light is not easy. You'll find that it takes practice to uncover them and to express them clearly. Doing it in groups can help because groups allow people to share and compare their insights and trigger new ones. But whether alone or in a group, try these things:

Ask – "What are the assumptions behind what I'm/you're/they're thinking, saying, doing?" "What are the assumptions beneath the way I/you or my/your (group, organization, institution) see and do things?"

Observe – "Based on how this is / looks / feels / is done / works…what assumptions are operating here?"

Reflect – "Do I agree with those assumptions?" "Do we agree with those assumptions?" "If not, what different assumptions (ideas, values) *should* we be relying on?"

Activity

    1. Pick a physical space (like a street, building, or room).

    2. Based on the features you see, try to glean (bring to the surface) at least one assumption that you see operating there.

    3. Consider whether or not you agree with/support that assumption.

Activity

    1. Think of a system or institution (for example, education, government/politics, justice, health care, etc.) or other aspect of society that touches your life.

    2. Based on some features of that system or aspect of society and how it works, try to glean an assumption that it seems to be based on.

   3. Consider whether or not you agree with/support that assumption.

We can't always be conscious of every idea that forms the basis of our thinking and the basis of the systems and aspects of our community and society. But if we never examine our assumptions, we can end up heading down the wrong track—personally and as a society. So make it a habit to examine assumptions—yours, theirs, and ours—and you will change the world.

5. See Wholes, Not Just Parts

Everything is made of relationships, and everything exists within a larger context. Nothing exists in isolation. When we try to understand or solve problems in isolation, we will always be ineffective. This is well-known, yet so often we still see and try to address one part of a problem, or address an effect and not the conditions that created it. For example:

- Our approach to health care focuses on treating physical issues, with mental and life issues secondary.
- Our approach to the affordable housing problem looks mainly at the supply of housing, not at closely related things like transportation and wages.
- Our approach to justice focuses on reacting to bad actions, not the circumstances or actors leading to bad actions.
- We treat environmental impact as "external' to the use of particular sources of energy, rather than as part of it.
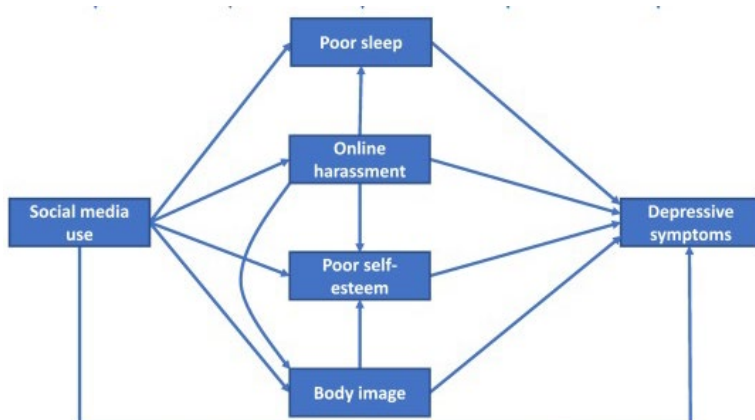
By contrast, below are a few examples of issues being framed as a whole set of relationships.
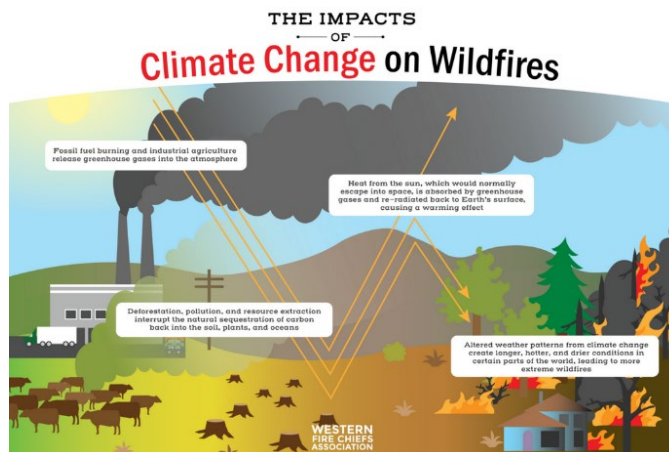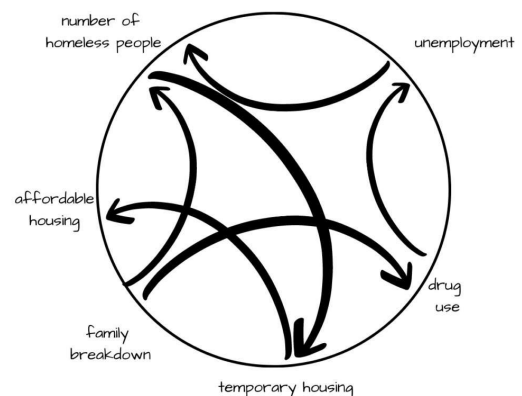
When you hear about issues (or ideas for new ways of doing things), ask: *"Are we addressing these issues as wholes, including all of the relationships, or only focusing on effects or factors as if they were separate?"*

How We Learn to Focus on Parts, Not Wholes

Many things led our culture to focus on parts rather than wholes, and many practices reinforce that focus. As successful as our modern approach to science has been, one weakness was that it taught us to take things apart and not focus much on wholes. In school, we teach mostly around separate "subjects" rather than around problems or situations that require combining all kinds of understanding. The way we measure economic health focuses on jobs, growth, and profits but ignore social and environmental values. These are just a few examples.

Complex Problems are Different

If you see interconnections, you start to recognize complexity. Then you need to recognize what's different about complexity. It's hard to keep in mind all of the ways that different factors affect each other. Too often, we (as a community and society) use the same approach to complexity that we use for simple things, and we end up focusing our energy on symptoms, not causes. That makes us ineffective at addressing complexity. What we *can* do is this:
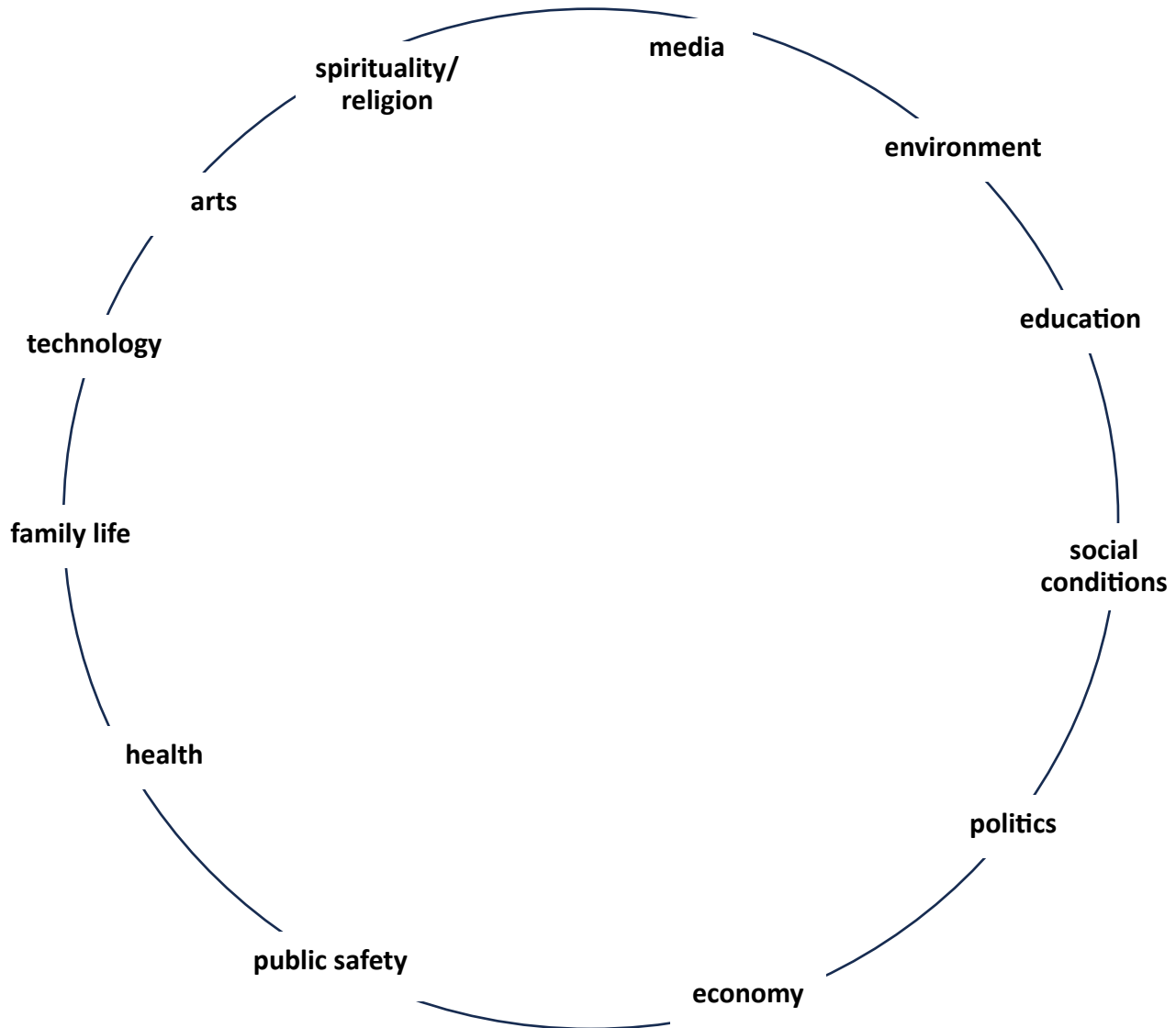
- Slow down
- Take a look at all of the factors related to an issue or situation
- Consider "what drives what?"
- Try to figure out what the deepest roots are
- Develop ideas and solutions that are most powerful at addressing those deepest roots

Working with complex public issues is best done in groups where a wide variety of voices and insights can be brought together and where appropriate methods are used.

If you see wholes and relationships, not just parts, you will have a much better understanding of things. You will be more effective at addressing problems and pursuing goals and visions. You will be changing the world for the better.

Activity

1. Think of a way one of the items on the circle is related to another. (Try to think of a meaningful or *powerful* relation).
2. Draw a line between them those two items.
3. Write on the line how the two are connected (the relation you see).
4. Repeat as many times as you can. Ask for help from others.

media

spirituality/
religion

environment

arts

education

technology

family life

social
conditions

health

politics

public safety

economy

6. Learn & Practice Everyday Democracy

This is not about the democracy of "majority rule," nor the democracy that is about voting for representatives. We're talking about democracy in its greatest and deepest meaning: *you creating ideas and making decisions together with other people*.

If you explore issues in a way that invites everyone's perspective, allows everyone to contribute ideas, and gives everyone a say in making decisions, then you are doing democracy, and you are changing the world for the better.

Why is this important? Everyday democracy opens up possibilities, appreciates and uses diversity, lets the individual really shine, strengthens community, and leads to better ideas and wiser decisions.

Unfortunately, we've drifted away from the idea that democracy is a way of life and that all people can contribute to exploring issues and developing solutions and policies. Many people have accepted the idea of democracy as merely "majority rule," with the occasional act of voting being the main form of participation. It's even worse when the system we call a *republic* becomes mere party rule or (even worse) one-person rule.
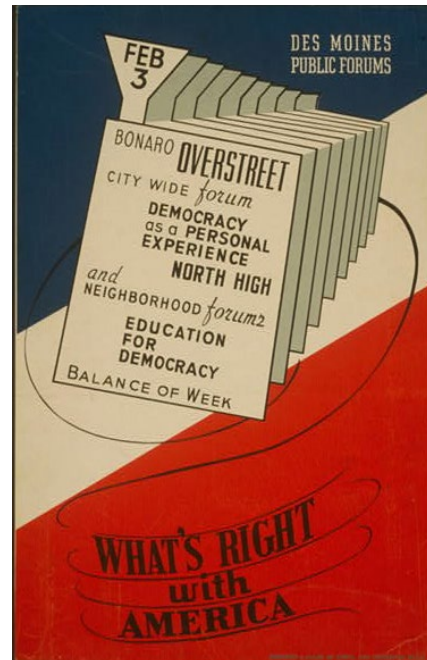
Democracy's Had Many Flavors

The ancient Athenians did democracy through big conversations and voting among randomly-selected citizens (which for them meant only male landowners). The Quakers (the religious group) do it by inviting every voice and seeking 100% agreement on a solution. They don't vote. The American founders set up a system where the citizens vote for other people to do the governing. But that didn't preclude everyday people from having community discussions and being directly involved in decisions, too. In fact, that's how New England's famous town-hall meetings worked.

Do we always need to be democratic? Not always. Sometimes there's an emergency, no time for discussion, and only one course of action to take. Sometimes *delegating* the decision-making is fine because someone with expertise can best handle it. **But**

in general, whenever something is being created or decided that's going to affect more than one person, and where all involved may have perspectives and ideas to contribute, all of the people affected should be encouraged and helped to participate in the idea-making and decision-making.

Since not everyone has the same knowledge, experience, maturity, personality, etc., people need to be allowed to participate in a way that fits them**.**

What does practicing everyday democracy require?

- Confirming that **the voice of every affected person is present** or at least represented (as much as possible).
- **Framing questions together**, and if possible, framing them in a way that invites fresh perspectives and ideas.
- Taking turns, letting everyone speak, and learning. **Every person's voice should be treated as authentic and with respect.**
- **Allowing the solutions and conclusions to emerge**, rather than being pre-determined or limited to a choice between just two pre-arranged alternatives.
- **Going beyond majority rule:** Seek consensus. Majority rule is overrated and overused. The more we strive for 100% agreement—and not just agreement, but a <u>true integration of interests and ideas</u>—the more people will feel ownership of the outcome and the more creativity will come out in the process.
- **Go beyond compromise: Seek win-win solutions.** Compromise is overrated. Compromise involves the assumption that each "side" has to give up something in order to reach agreement. But if time is given to finding out what people really care the most about, it can be possible (more often than we think) to come up with better solutions. This is where democracy is really allowed to shine.

Where to Learn and Practice Democracy? Everywhere. At home, in school, at work, in your neighborhood, in City Hall. *If democracy isn't learned in these places, it isn't learned at all.* Unfortunately, not only are these places missing democracy, but they often—without anyone really thinking about it—rely on methods that are undemocratic or even anti-democratic. Our work is cut out for us. Look for opportunities:

Setting	Opportunity for Building Skills for Democracy
Home/Family	Allow kids to take responsibility; involve kids in decision-making and solving problems; model critical thinking; use Positive Discipline rather than fear-based discipline; seek the wisdom in all generations, from grandparents to grandkids.
School	Practice group discussion, problem-solving, and decision-making by consensus; allow kids to participate in the design of units and curriculum, and let them lead in problem-solving in the classroom and school-wide; teach constructive conflict resolution; encourage individuality and try to move from cliques to community; build lessons and units around real-world problems, community projects & service learning. Parents, students, and teachers should advocate for all of this.
Neighborhood	Neighborhood offers constant closeness with other people, and sometimes there are problems to solve. These are opportunities to practice identifying issues and finding and implementing solutions together. The opportunity for casual discussion about issues small and large also can weave the kind of trust that form the basis for democracy. Neighborhood associations could be ideal places for practicing group discussion and collective decision-making.
City	City government is the government that is closest to the people. Being presumably the most accessible of governments, city leaders should be always seeking and offering ways to engage the broadest public—meaningfully, authentically, and powerfully—in defining problems and solving them, and in creating shared vision. Residents should demand this of their elected officials and voters should demand this of candidates for public office.
Work	Business owners and managers can encourage less "boss," more lead-by-example and empowering others and supporting expression of concerns and shared problem-solving and sharing in success. Employees can learn how to voice ideas or concerns in ways that help both themselves and their employer.
Other Settings?	*Fill in your own*

Ask not only for different leaders, but for a different kind of leadership. We often associate "leadership" with strong or forceful personalities, people with a vision, or people who promise to solve our problems. But commanders or tyrants or bosses don't help us release our full potential, and may in fact lead us in bad directions. Charismatic personalities make us feel comforted, or inspired, but they may not be very wise, and they may not have our best interests in mind. Someone may have an inspiring vision, but it's better to pursue a vision that the people have created together. People who promise to do things *for* us aren't looking for ways to involve We The People in solving problems.

When choosing leaders, look for people who will invite everyone into understanding issues, solving problems, creating vision, and releasing the wisdom of the people. Support those kinds of people if they step forth to lead.

Democracy is a way of life, it's personal, and it takes practice. If you practice it, you are changing the world.

The original unofficial motto of the US, meaning "From Many, One"

7. Watch What Technology Does to You and to Us

When sitting at table with a friend or family member or a co-worker, have you noticed the effect of a phone resting, innocently quiet, on the table? It's a little more vocal than, say, a salt shaker.

Technology is powerful. It's usually helpful, but it can be both helpful and harmful. If you keep an eye on what technology does to you and to the world around you, or what it could do, then you are changing the world.

The Tool Works at Both Ends*

We usually think of our technologies and tools— referring broadly here to anything that humans make use of—as being entirely under our control, and that we are the masters of those things. For example, isn't it you who decides to sit in a chair instead of on the floor? To get in a car and drive instead of walk? To check your phone for notifications or to ignore it?

The reality is that the tools we wield are not neutral. As an extension of us, they become part of us and how we see the world. They have an effect on our minds, our behaviors, and our character.

Some tools do seem to be more "neutral" than others. Take the screwdriver, for example. But even the lowly chair almost "makes" us sit in it if we're really tired of standing. And other tools have a lot more influence on you because they're just so powerful. And because our society gets shaped around their use.

Credit to theartofmanliness.com for this phrase

Watching What Technology Does to *You*

Technologies blend into your life so easily that it becomes hard to notice what they do to you. So you have to make an effort to notice. Why is that worth doing? Because you want to be self-determined. You want to know that you're being effective and that you're not closing opportunities for learning or development. You want to not have negative effects on your physical or mental health, or on your relationships.

For a fairly benign example, can you imagine (or do you remember) travel in the days before Google Maps or even GPS? It's easier to find your way now, and that's a great thing. But there is a price paid. We don't know places and spaces as well. We don't have the opportunity to learn about a place by studying maps in advance. We don't exercise our sense of direction. And we lose the serendipity and social learning that goes with asking strangers for directions.

Now consider the effects of cars, guns, smartphones, social media, and AI programs like ChatGPT. How do they affect your outlook, your behaviors, your relationships?

If you watch what technology does to you and make more conscious choices because of that, you are changing the world.

Watching What Technology Does to *Us*

Us means our relationships, our community, society, and environment. For all of human history technology has been a major driver of culture and society. Consider fire. The wheel. Steel. The compass. Gunpowder. The printing press. Electricity. Farming technologies. The steam engine. The washing machine. The telegraph and telephone. The steamship. The automobile. Antibiotics. The airplane. Nuclear energy. Genetics. Television. You don't even have to remember your World History to know the impact those had.

In your own lifetime, you've seen the effect of computers. The Internet. Cell phones and the smartphone. Social media. And now a new technology is staring us in the face:

Artificial Intelligence. AI is a technology that could have effects at least as profound as any of those earlier ones.

Another dimension of what technology does to us relates to social and economic equity. Does everyone have the same level of access to technologies? Also, technology provides efficiencies, but who benefits from those? For example, self-driving semi-trucks would relieve a lot of people from an arduous job. But do those truck drivers share in the efficiencies created, like they arguably should, or do they just face the problem of unemployment while the owners of the technology get ultra-rich?

Pause Button

Occasionally throughout history, people have paused to ask "How might this technology affect us?" Often the question arose from fear of threat to a way of life or belief. More often recently, the response has come from wisdom—e.g., "Maybe we should limit the spread of these new atomic weapons?" and "Let's ban this pesticide because it's killing our birds." But there's almost always a lag between the introduction of a technology and a cultural response to its effect, so our track record is not so good.

The Amish have a reputation for being anti-technology. But they're actually not anti-technology. They just consider whether a technology might endanger something that they value in their way of life, and if the answer is yes, they reject or limit it. Could we learn something from the Amish?

Asking Questions

When using a tool or technology, even one you've come to use routinely, you might want to ask, "How does this affect me? How does this affect us?" Usually there are pros and cons, right? Technology makes things easier. But there is always a price for that. What are we possibly giving up? What about unforeseen effects (which can be good or bad)?

<u>Activity</u>

Technology	Benefit	What can we lose individually if we rely on it too much?	What can we lose as a community, society, or planet if we rely on it too much?
cars			
smartphones			
A.I.			
Other:			

8. Be a Good Ancestor

People in our culture tend to think short-term. Will we make our investment back within one year? Will I stay popular if I say something unpopular? Will I see the results of my efforts to make a difference before I die? Short-term thinking is usually driven by fear. It often perpetuates bad patterns and hands off to people of the future conditions that are no better, and maybe worse, than the conditions we inherited from our ancestors. **What kind of ancestor will you be?**

If you think about how you can leave things better than you found them, and if you consider what you are giving to the future, you are thinking about being a good ancestor, and that will change the world.

Seven Generations

The Haudenosaunee Confederacy, made up of several native American tribes, is known for their principle of considering the effects of decisions with seven future generations in mind. That means something like 150 years! Of course, we can't predict what things will be like 150 years from now, especially with how fast things change with new technologies. But the "seven generations ethic" isn't about knowing what the world will be like 150 years in the future. It's about *considering whether we are more likely to be putting our descendants in a more difficult position, or in a better position, based on something we decide or do today*.

Learning from the Past: What if…

We can shake our heads at how people did things in the past, especially if what they did left us having to clean up their mess. To be fair, it's hard to know if we can justly criticize or second guess our ancestors if they didn't know better. Even so, it's worth asking *What if?*

- Even after slavery ended, it took another century for full voting rights to be granted to African-Americans. *What if white people of that time had considered the effects of a coming century of institutional racism?*
- More than a century ago, a few people started warning about the potential effect of human greenhouse gas emissions on global temperatures. But fossil fuels were powering a global industrial expansion; no one was about to propose slowing that down. Even 25 years ago, when the alarm bell was being run again,

no one really acted. *What if our government and others around the world took climate change warnings more seriously decades ago?*

- In the first part of the 20th century, our ancestors made decisions that favored suburban sprawl, big roads, and today's dependence on the personal automobile for transportation. *What if people of that day had considered the potential negative future effects of cars and took steps like designing communities to be less sprawling and investing more in mass transportation systems like trains?*

- In the 1970s and 80s, our ancestors in politics and business adopted a theory that if rich people could get richer, that would help lower income people. Today, there are 3,000 billionaires in the world, yet billions of people are still struggling. *What if more people of that time had questioned the philosophy that supporting the rich helps the poor?*

- By the middle of the 20th century our society great experience with progressive educational approaches like learning based around real-world problems, learning across subject boundaries, and a real role for students in designing educational experience. In spite of that experience, the dominant form of public education became teacher-directed, memorization-focused, test-heavy schooling. *What if our ancestors had chosen the path of more meaningful educational experiences rather than industrial-style schooling?*

Imagine if people (whether individuals, companies, or nations) two or three generations ago considered the potential impacts of their decisions and ways of life 50 or 100 years into the future? They might have spared us some of the crises that we're facing today. **Now it's your turn to think ahead.**

Your Lifetime is Not the Horizon of Your Effects

The end of your lifetime is not the horizon of your effects. Like a pebble in a pond, the way you've touched the lives around you, and your society, ripple out forever. This social immortality is real, no matter whether your acts are quiet ones or accomplishments that make you famous.

Young People Are Watching You

If you're a parent, being a good ancestor is very personal. Your job is to lay a groundwork of trust and support on which your children can stand and then grow
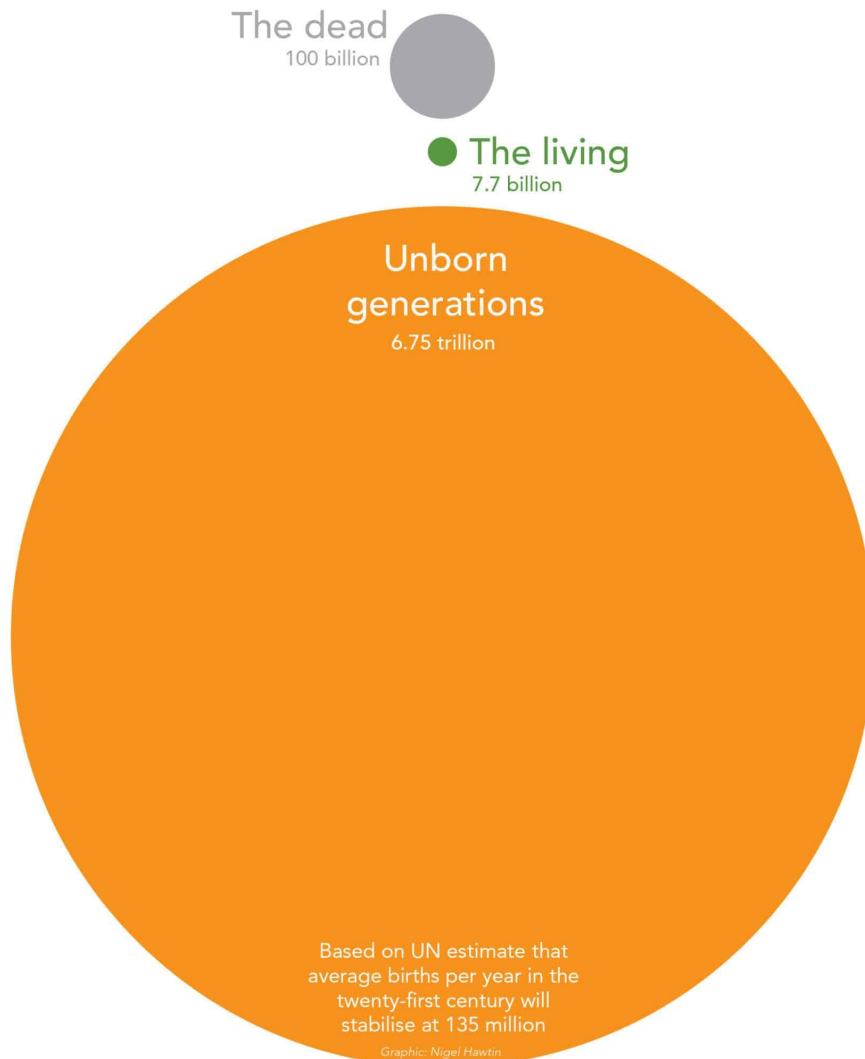
with the least restriction. There's no manual on how to do it, but everyone would agree that good parenting includes providing unconditional love and consistency.

More generally, if you're an adult—whether parent or not—you are a role model to all young people who encounter you and observe you. Being a good ancestor is an inescapable (yet too often ignored) responsibility all grownups.

Be a good ancestor today and future generations will thank you.

The scale of unborn generations

Looking 50,000 years into the past and 50,000 into the future –
assuming that the twenty-first century's birth rate remains constant –
all human lives ever lived are far outweighed by all those yet to come

The dead
100 billion

● **The living**
7.7 billion

Unborn
generations
6.75 trillion

Based on UN estimate that
average births per year in the
twenty-first century will
stabilise at 135 million

Graphic: Nigel Hawtin

9. Practice Idealism and Cultivate Vision

The character and dynamics of our community and society don't just appear. They are the result of patterns. How did those patterns start? Why do they continue? It starts with the ideas at the heart of every system that affects our lives. Whose ideas (and ideals) are they? Do they represent us? Are they based on someone else's vision from a long time ago? Should they continue? Is there a better way? What's the best way? What's *your* ideal?

It might seem that having a vision of a *better*, or of an ideal, is about the future. But the future is only a projection screen. Having a vision of a better, and ideas about what would be ideal is really about your core values and core ideas of what you think is *good*—a good life. A good society. Today. Now.

Idealism and Realism are Not Opposites

You may hear someone say they don't bother trying to imagine what *should* be because they're a "realist." What they may not realize is that much of what we experience as our reality is due to someone else's ideals. Why should we accept those? We live in a time full of possibilities, for more people than ever. It's also a time when we desperately need to find better ways forward. To define what you truly would like to see, and to be, is thus not an impractical luxury; it's essential to opening doors otherwise closed.

> ## Idealism and realism meet in the actual.
> Mary Parker Follett

Admittedly, it's not easy to ignore a current situation and take a moment to define what it is we *really* need, value, and want. It can be harder still to imagine a better community, society, or world. This may be because we've never been asked, or because we've been disappointed too many times, and/or because we see no way to convert ideal into action. **Envisioning and expressing "what should be" takes practice and support, and we don't get that practice and support without opportunity to join with others to design something new. This is where being able to idealize and create a vision is directly related to dialogue, to practicing democracy, and to being a good ancestor.**

Utopian vs. Eutopian

Pursuing a "perfect society" has long been criticized, and rightly so. In fact, utopia literally translates from Greek as "no place." However, H.G. Wells, the science fiction writer (and social thinker) had this response:

> We find a constant use of the word Utopian in contrast to the word practical. There is a certain type of man who, when you talk about a Utopia, leans back at once prepared to smile. Part of that smiling, if I may say so, is sheer stupidity; it is due to the inability to conceive such a thing as change...

Expressing values and ideas about a better community, or a better world, is not about seeking the perfect. It's about seeking the good. There's even a word for this: *eutopia* (which translates in Greek as "good place.") It's also about the journey, not the destination. The destination will change with the journey. Actually, the journey *is* the destination.

How Vision Can Influence Reality

Vision is a picture of a what could be, and the ability to paint a picture of what could be. It is an expression of core ideas and ideals and values. "Where there is no vision, the people perish," goes a Biblical proverb. When joined with an investment of energy, time, and resources, and by a change of habits, vision *can* affect and effect our lived reality.

10. Understand that Deep Down, All People Have the Same Basic Needs and Wants

People around the world, and even in your own community, may face starkly different circumstances. They have different personal histories and may live in different cultures. And we hear all the time about the political disagreements and conflicts out there. Given all of that, it's easy to overlook the fact that **deep down, all people have the same basic needs and want the same basic things.** These include:

- having basic essentials for physical survival—food, shelter, sleep, safety, etc.;
- human contact and love;
- a sense of belonging and significance;
- a sense of self-determination; and
- a sense of effectiveness.

Unpacking this some more, biology and psychology and every kind of social science inform us that the essence of human development and fulfillment is the opportunity to learn, to grow, to become more complex, with and through rich relationships. It also means being "whole" both in an internal sense (in our own conscious and unconscious mind) and externally (relationships with the other people, with society, with nature, and beyond). These are the things we all need in order to thrive.

This set of deeper universal needs applies to the rich and the poor; to the conservative and the liberal; to those living in the country and in the big city; to the young and the old; to people of all genders; to people of all creeds; to people in every nation and culture.

If we all have the same basic needs deep down, why is there so much fighting? Here are a few reasons: (1) Poverty. Not everyone has access to what they need. (2) People don't recognize these universal needs. (3) People don't realize that we can all have these needs met—and that we *can all* thrive. (4) People get stuck defending specific ideologies and strategies about the best way to ensure everyone has their basic needs met and have a path to being able to thrive.

If we did the things talked about in this booklet, it would help us overcome those obstacles to helping everyone live the best lives they can.

<u>Activity 1</u>

For yourself, do you have:

☐ Basic needs met for survival (food, shelter, sleep, etc.)?

☐ Human contact and love?

☐ A sense of belonging and significance?

☐ A sense of self-determination?

☐ A sense of effectiveness at what you work at each day?

<u>Activity 2</u>

Think about someone of a very different background from you, or holding a very different viewpoint from you. Now consider that both you and they may have the same basic needs and wants. Does this change how you see them?

<u>Activity 3</u>

Think about what aspects of our society, culture, or community might be an obstacle to all people having the things they need to thrive. What is one change that could be made to help all people thrive?

Afterword: We Are Living in a Special Time in History

This isn't just another time in history. There is something different going on. It's a time of change, growth, evolution, danger, opportunity, and choice.

- For nearly 99% of human history, almost no one had any opportunity to change culture and society. Things changed slowly. Cultures were more isolated. Most people were busy simply surviving. Very few were in a position to ask the question "What would be a better way of life?", let alone do anything about it.
- About 150 years ago, due to a variety of factors, the world started to change in profound ways. Societies came into close contact; information and ideas spread quickly; people all over could start to reflect on history; people took note of injustice and exploitation; they could expect more; they could expect to have a voice, or at least to fight for one.
- Ever since this modern era began, the overall tide sweeping the world has been one of **liberating all people to be who they need and want to be** and **recognizing the interconnectedness and inter-dependence of all people and things on earth.**
- All of the good movements that have happened in modern times—eliminating slavery; voting rights; equality; protecting the environment; working for peace; demanding democracy—have led to where we are today. **More has changed in the past 150 years than in all of human history before. And it's still changing fast.**
- The problems in our time—including poverty, prejudice and oppression, wars, weakening democracy, environmental destruction and more—are great, but so is our ability to change course.

- *More people have more opportunity, and more access to information and knowledge and the experience offered by history, than ever before. But they need to learn the kinds of things discussed in this booklet in order to turn that information, knowledge, and experience into wisdom and power for positive change.*

Change: Too Slow for Some, Too Fast for Others

For people living in poverty or who experience injustice and unequal opportunity and treatment rooted in old prejudices, and for those alarmed by human impacts on the earth, things have been changing too slowly. For them, the work is both unfinished and urgent. Some other people, however, are uncomfortable with this idea of unfinished work, deny the concerns that are alarming others, and even see the past as a better time. They want to hit the brakes, or even somehow make things the way they think they used to be.

These two opposing perspectives explain a lot of the tension we see in culture today.

While the image below doesn't directly address the conflict between the view that change is too slow and the view that there's been too much change, it offers a perspective that might help reconcile these views.
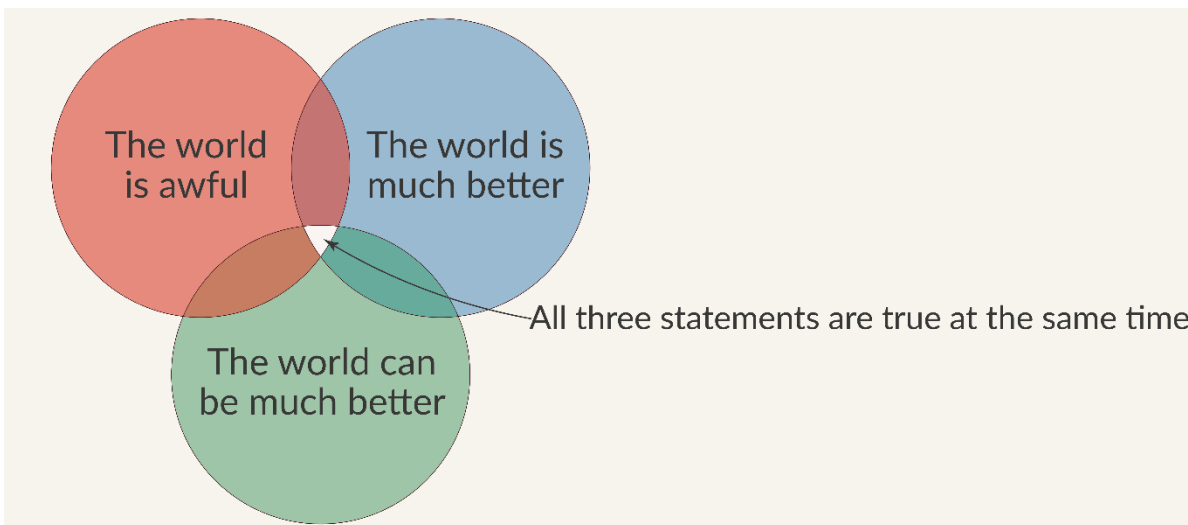

Image from Max Roser, Our World in Data

Your Opportunity

We know these things:

1. Deep down, beneath the level of individual circumstance and personal experience, deeper than culture and politics, everyone has the same basic needs and wants.
2. If everyone sat down and had a good, deep, honest discussion, it would be *possible*—no matter how different their backgrounds and values and beliefs—for to find and create common ground, to create shared vision, and to change things for the betterment of all.

When enough people realize and acknowledge these two things, we will be able to do something for the first time in history: work together to consciously evolve the patterns of society and culture for the benefit of all people and for the benefit of the planet. This isn't just idealistic. It's the direction that things have already been heading in (as hard to imagine as it may be at the moment). And you are needed to help it keep moving that way.

Understand that we are living in a time of transformation, and of generally forward progress—in spite of setbacks that challenge our patience and faith—and you will be changing the world.