

Future Shaping: A Call for Conscious Leadership

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“Future shaping” is a phrase I’ve been using to describe how we all contribute to the future, even if only standing by while others say and do things we don’t like. You cannot be a living human being without having some influence on the future. Some people may have a huge influence on what our collective future will look like while others may make a less noticeable contribution. But we all have some influence – good and bad – on how the future turns out. This means, in the larger sense, that we are all “future shapers” – people who play a role in how the world will be tomorrow, next year and in coming generations.

Since we are all complicit in this causal process, and cannot avoid it even if we try, why don’t we give some conscious thought to what we want rather than passively sitting around while a random or even “accidental future” reveals itself?

Why don’t we stop pretending that what we are doing has no impact on the future? Why don’t we accept responsibility for moving the world closer to the way we would like it rather than living our lives of “quiet desperation” - resigned to the inevitable, wallowing in our powerlessness to do anything about it?

Shifting Our Consciousness

Holding on to the belief that we don’t have the ability to change the future requires effort – effort to seek out any evidence that justifies this belief. Collecting lists of failures to make social changes happen reinforces this belief. However, history has shown that human beings can change anything when there is enough collective will, as long as we believe we can.

The question is: Do we have the collective will to consciously take on our role as architects of the future of humanity? Each of us must answer this for ourselves. So the question then becomes: Do I have the will to work for the kind of future I would like to see? This is a personal inquiry - a “deep dive within” - that requires each of us to listen to what our soul tells us and be mindful and conscious of what intentions we set and what commitments we make.

Such contemplation requires us to grow out of our collective adolescence – our immature attitudes and behaviors that perpetuate all the dysfunction we see in the world. Making this transition can be likened to us as individuals advancing from our teenage years and accepting responsibility as adult human beings, at least in a practical sense. But whether as individuals or as a species, growing up requires us to become adults, intellectually and

emotionally.

Our Legacy

A friend of mine teaches young children to ski at a rather exclusive resort in the Rocky Mountains. The fathers of these children are high-powered CEOs and captains of industry, and each of them has confided to him that they are concerned about the future their kids will inherit. So we know we are making a mess! And it does concern us!

Becoming conscious means waking up and telling the truth about what we are up to and then taking responsible action to fix things. This is how I define conscious leadership.

What kind of legacy do you wish to leave? What kind of world do you want your children and grandchildren to inherit? What are you going to do to help bring about that kind of world?

Asking a different kind of question: Do you think we humans have fully evolved and that our current condition is the culmination of the human experience? If your answer is “absolutely not” then what do you envision?

These questions are particularly pertinent for those who consider themselves to be futurists. Whether you make a living conjuring up predictions or planning possible scenarios, how do you distinguish between simply projecting off the past (predicting) and being drawn by an envisioned future (future shaping)? Are you merely connecting dots based on history and current trends or are you allowing a vision for a better future to influence your thinking?

My Choice, My Heroes

I choose to spend my energies envisioning what futures we can create collectively and helping to shape them. As a result of the inspiration I’ve received from other stand-takers like Buckminster Fuller, Anita Roddick, Willis Harman, Riane Eisler, Warren Bennis, Barbara Marx Hubbard, Peter Russell and others, I’m more interested in participating in the creative process than in analyzing and predicting based on past and current trends. I’ve never felt comfortable spending time guessing about how current trends will play out in the future. It feels passive, without having any creative role in how it turns out.

That’s how I came to start using the term future shaping – the idea that millions of people could be making individual positive contributions toward a sustainable future that will benefit all of humankind while moving us all closer to fulfilling our destiny as a species with a more fully evolved consciousness.

More recently I used the term as the name of a company I cofounded, whose mission is to support executive leaders from a diverse range of enterprises in becoming more conscious so that their organizations can develop conscious cultures. It seems this would be a high-leverage place to start if we want to shift the paradigm of collective thinking since organizations are running the world.

A Whole New World

The physical world is the product of our collective actions. Our actions are the result of our collective consciousness. After all, no other species can control their

destiny and shape their future to the degree we can.

Why settle for whatever happens to unfold and leave our future to chance? Why be content to be simply good guessers? We humans are blessed with consciousness – a power to create what we dare to dream about, to collaborate and intentionally set in motion the forces that will result in a different kind of future than the one for which we appear to be headed. We can choose our future. We can consciously evolve.

Wouldn't it be preferable to see a world in which conflicts are resolved without violence, everyone has their basic needs met, the environment is sustained so it continues to nurture life and people recognize that we are all connected and act accordingly? I do not see this as a pipedream. We have the ability to start creating such a future now! So why not do it.

To achieve this, we need to think differently about the future, following Einstein's advice that we cannot solve our problems with the same consciousness we used in creating them and understanding James' point about our unique ability to create our reality. This doesn't mean we should start thinking about different things but to think from a new place in our consciousness. Part of this new consciousness involves the recognition that we are dealing with an incredibly complex global system where everything is connected to everything else, and where everyone is connected to everyone else. Thinking systemically about how we want to see change happen is absolutely essential.

Clearly, different people have different ideas about what makes an ideal future. These differences have been at the core of many conflicts and the source of so much misery in the world. However, there are a few qualities we can agree upon – qualities that all healthy, mature and well-intended citizens of the world would want for the future of all humanity.

Another piece of the solution is building a new consensus – a society of “stand-takers” who will not settle for resigned or cynical attitudes about the future. It is time to stop settling for incremental compromises that won't make much difference in the long term and start aiming for and devising large scale transformations – really big change, beyond anything we have ever witnessed in human history. After all, we are at a fulcrum in human evolution. Our future is at a tipping point. We have the ability and the power to consciously evolve as a species for the first time in history! Or we can continue on this path of unsustainability and continue moving toward collapse.

The question now is: Do we have the will? Individually and collectively, will we step into the fullness of our humanity? Will we mature and become co-creators with life, bringing all our creativity and awareness, all our intelligence and compassion, to bear on our problems?

I answer “yes” and invite anyone reading this who would like to see a better world shaping up on the time horizon, anyone who can take a stand to work toward this vision, to join me as a global future-shaper. I invite you to embrace a bold vision for a better world and then to act with the spiritual chutzpah consistent with bringing forth your vision.

Getting Started

There's no shortage of places to begin. Many of the large systems we have created seem to be in some stage of collapse, with bureaucracy and organizational dysfunction rampant in our society. There are plenty of places needing a fresh injection of consciousness and responsible action.

Don't know where to start? Look for the fire within – be it excitement or rage - and go to work where that fire leads you. Should you find, distressing as it may seem, that the first place to work is indeed within - on your own intolerance, resignation, unconsciousness or lack of compassion - then start there like so many of us have done. This “inner work” is the foundation for all that you have to contribute. It impacts all the rest of us. Become clear on this and you will be able to work on the things outside yourself.

Vision and courage are both necessary. Not only must we dare to dream the dreams for a better world; we must also rally the willingness and courage to go out on a limb in service to those dreams. This is what it means to be a conscious leader - shaping our future and helping to achieve the next level of human evolution.

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