

# Timeline

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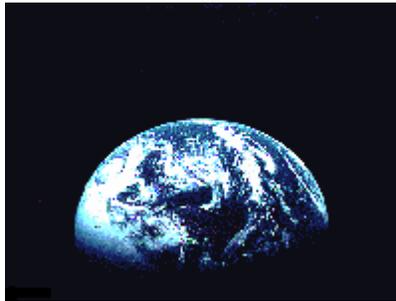
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# Can Humanity Move From Adolescence into Maturity?

## A Talk by Duane Elgin

Reported by Walter Hays

**ASK YOURSELF:** By analogy to the life cycle of an individual human being, where is humanity as a whole in our evolutionary journey—toddler, teenager, adult, or elder? If you answered teenager, says futurist and author Duane Elgin, you agree with the overwhelming majority of people to whom he has put the question. Elgin discussed the implications of that conclusion in a talk as part of the Foundation’s Speaker Series, drawing on his new book, *Promise Ahead: A Vision of Hope and Action for Humanity’s Future*.

What are the qualities we associate with adolescence? According to Elgin, adolescents tend to be rebellious against their parents, inclined toward instant gratification, and cliquish. Similarly, we humans are rebelling against Mother Nature, preoccupied with consumption with little regard for the future, and too inclined to identify with our ethnic group over and against others. While that description is discouraging, Elgin also sees us at a time of “initiation,” when our collective choices will determine whether we evolve into maturity or experience an “evolutionary crash.” He sees hope in the fact that we have at least moved beyond the toddler stage, and discusses the factors we must deal with in order to grow up.

Putting the issue in a deeper context, Elgin likened human evolution to the

three stages of the Hero’s Journey that Joseph Campbell said are common to all cultures: separation; discovery of one’s individual spiritual nature and relationship with the universe; and finally, reconnection with one’s community. Elgin says that humanity has been pursuing the separation stage for 35,000 years—“pulling back from nature, realizing who we are, building up our sense of identity, our distance, distinctness, and separation.” We are now entering the “fire of initiation,” in which we will experience the hard times associated with adolescence, but with the right choices we will reconnect with a new bonding to ourselves and the universe around us.

The choices we face center around how we resolve what Elgin calls four “adversity” trends and four “opportunity” trends, which he predicts will converge around the 2020s.

### ADVERSITY TRENDS

While noting that there are many such trends, Elgin focuses on four:

#### Climate Change

Looking at the last 160,000 years, global temperature averages have fluctuated in perfect synchronism with carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) levels, and the same thing is happening as we move toward doubling the pre-industrial level of CO<sub>2</sub>. And even if the resulting warming doesn’t melt the ice-caps and inundate islands and coastal areas, it will at the very least cause dramatic fluctuations in weather, which Elgin, who grew up on a farm in Idaho, says are alone enough to wreak havoc on agriculture.

This trend is exacerbated by the rapid increase of human population, most of which is occurring in the poorer nations, where people are increasingly concentrating in massive slums surrounding giant cities. To bring that point home, Elgin notes that a person planning for the expected growth in population would have to figure out where to put the equivalent of a new Los Angeles every month.

### **Extinction of Species**

It is estimated that 20 percent of all living plant and animal species will become extinct in the next 30 years, and half in 100 years, and this trend is irreversible in the foreseeable future.

### **Depletion of Resources**

As just one illustration of this trend, it is estimated that by 2020, 40 percent of the world's population will not have access to enough water to grow their own food, and this shortage will necessarily lead to drastic food shortages.

### **Gaps in Income Distribution**

In San Francisco, working people are advocating for the minimum of a “living wage” of eleven dollars per hour, whereas 60 percent of the global population lives on three dollars per day or less, and the gap is growing.

Even with these negative trends, Elgin believes that there is still a fair amount of resilience in the global economy and ecosystem, so it will take another 10 or 20 years before we crash. And whether

we avert that crash depends on how we respond to four opportunity trends.

## **OPPORTUNITY TRENDS**

### **A Shift in Our View of the Universe**

We are shifting from viewing the universe as being dead to its being alive. Elgin gives several illustrations of this changing paradigm, including the following:

- Physicists are now saying that the universe is a unified whole, in that what happens in one part of the world affects everything else. As Elgin puts it, this is not a metaphor, not poetry, but how the universe actually works.
- Consciousness and the capacity for choice exist throughout the universe. Among others, Elgin quotes physicist Freeman Dyson: “Matter in quantum mechanics is not an inert substance, but is an active agent constantly making choices between alternative possibilities. It appears that mind, as manifested by the capacity to make choices, is to some extent present in every electron.

This shift has enormous implications. If the universe is dead, it makes sense to protect yourself from that deadness by consuming as much as you can. But if it is alive, the implication is that we're not “wandering around randomly,” but must have some higher purpose, which we can find by connecting with “the larger aliveness that is the mother universe.”

### **A Shift Toward Sustainable Living**

More and more people are realizing that material consumption does not produce

happiness. In the U.S., for example, while real income doubled between 1960 and 1990, the percentage of people who say they are very happy dropped from 35 percent to 32 percent. The divorce rate has doubled, teen suicide has tripled, and people are beginning to agree with Lily Tomlin, who said that “Even if you win the rat race, you’re still a rat,” and with Will Rogers, who said that “Too many people spend money they haven’t earned to buy things they don’t really want, to impress people they don’t really like.” And according to Elgin, living a simple life does not consist of material frugality alone, but living a life of purpose, which is achievable by everyone, including those who live in places where even simple living is expensive.

Meditation teacher Thich Nhat Hanh makes the distinction between “near” gifts— things we are pretty good at and can use to keep ourselves going—and “true” gifts—the unique talents we can share with the world. Building on that distinction, Elgin says that too many of us are living a life of “distraction” instead of a “soul-growing relationship with the world,” discovering and living out our true gifts. However, at least 10 percent of Americans, or 20 million people, are choosing a more sustainable life.

### **The Communications Revolution**

The average American watches television for four and one-half hours per day, so that our population of 270 million watches over a billion person-hours daily. The average person also sees 25,000 commercials per year, and every commercial is an ad not just for a product but also for a lifestyle, a set of values. So in one sense television could

be viewed as an adversity trend. As Elgin reminds us, however, television has also played a key role in advances in such areas as civil and women’s rights, the anti-war movement, democratic revolutions, and such environmental laws as those protecting dolphins from fishing nets—so it could be an immensely powerful tool for transformation

The potential of the Internet is even more dramatic. By 2010, when a billion people will be connected to the Internet 24 hours a day, we will have “the equivalent of a global brain...a new level of reflective consciousness and capacity for choice.”

### **Reconciliation**

If we are part of a living universe, where we recognize that we are in “a process of soul-growing together,” it is natural to move toward greater reconciliation. We have seen it begin to happen in places like South Africa, Northern Ireland, and Australia, as shown by the reaching out to aborigines demonstrated in the 2000 Olympics. However, many areas of need remain, such as reconciliation between the genders, races, generations, and rich and poor.

The key question is what happens when opportunity meets adversity. Elgin believes that if we wait until the 2020s to respond to the adversity trends, it will be a “dire reflection on our collective intelligence,” and instead of achieving an evolutionary balance, we will experience an evolutionary crash. And the latter would involve more than merely hitting an ecological wall. According to Elgin, if we look at the coming decades solely as a time of material challenge, we are

“missing the big story,” which is whether we will remain adolescents who care only about consumptive pleasures, or are we “en-souled beings who have a higher purpose?” The challenge of growing up as a human family is not so much one of outer technology but rather of inner maturity

There are four factors that are critical to the maturation process in individuals, and therefore to humanity as a whole, and we have much work to do on each. The first is role models, and our current models “blatantly, overwhelmingly reinforce our adolescence.” Second is seeing the big picture—that there is more to life than “my pals and a fast car”—and we are beginning to see that. Third is accurate feedback, and our current feed-back stresses issues like how we look and leaves us in denial about severe adversity trends. Lastly, growing up requires opportunities to experiment, and Elgin recommends the creation of small experiments in sustainable living within cities which, if successful, could spread very rapidly to the world at large.

Pulling all these trends together, Elgin emphasizes that instead of focusing on technology and economics, we need to remind ourselves that the transformative powers of the opportunity trends are “free—because they come from within ourselves.” And he believes that “with these invisible powers, that don’t cost anything, we have the ability to turn this evolutionary corner and grow up as a human family.”

*Duane Elgin is the author of Voluntary Simplicity and Awakening Earth. As a senior social scientist at SRI International, he coauthored numerous studies on the long-range future. He also worked with the*

*National Commission on Population Growth and the American Future, and directed the nonprofit organization, Choosing Our Future.*

*Promise Ahead: A Vision of Hope and Action for Humanity's Future* by Duane Elgin. Harper Collins Publishers, New York, NY, 2000. \$23.00



## Reinventing the Human

### A Book Review by Joe Kresse

In past issues of *Timeline*, we have featured the Universe Story as revealed by contemporary science and told by three close friends who have made communicating its wonder their life’s work: Thomas Berry, a cultural historian and Passionist priest; Sister Miriam MacGillis, a Dominican sister and organic farmer; and Brian Swimme, a gravitational physicist and cosmologist. Thomas Berry’s latest book is his third on this subject. In it he addresses the Great Work of our time which, he says, is “to carry out the transition from a period of human devastation of the Earth to a period when humans would be present to the planet in a mutually beneficial manner.”

Berry asserts that “such a transition has no historical parallel since the geobiological transition that took place 67 million years ago when the period of the dinosaurs was terminated and a new

biological age began. Since we began to live in settled villages with agriculture and domestication of animals some ten thousand years ago, humans have put increased burdens upon the biosystems of the planet. In recent centuries, under the leadership of the Western world, largely with the resources, psychic energy, and inventiveness of the North American peoples, an industrial civilization has come into being with the power to plunder Earth in its deepest foundations, with awesome impact on its geological structure, its chemical constitution, and its living forms throughout the wide expanses of the land and the far reaches of the sea.”

This process is so powerful that cultural selection has superceded natural selection as the decisive force in determining the future of Earth’s biosystems.

“The deepest cause of the present devastation is found in a mode of consciousness that has established a radical discontinuity between the human and other modes of being and the bestowal of all rights in the humans. In this context the other than human becomes totally vulnerable to exploitation by the human, an attitude that is shared by all four of the fundamental establishments that control the human realm: governments, corporations, universities, and religions.”

In reviewing most books, this reviewer attempts to summarize the key points, but in this case, there are too many important points to do so without either making this review overly long or leaving out something important. So I urge you

to read this book if Berry’s thesis, as stated above, interests you.

Here are some examples of his points to further whet your appetite:

“We need to move from our human-centered to an earth-centered norm of reality and value.”

“Education at all levels would be understood as knowing the universe story and the human role in the story. The basic course in any college or university would be the story of the universe.”

“As now functioning, the university prepares students for their role in extending human dominion over the natural world, not for intimate presence to the natural world.”

“(Corporations) have obtained the natural rights of individual citizens without assuming responsibility in proportion to their influence on public concerns....(They) have taken possession of human consciousness in order to evoke the deepest of psychic compulsions toward limitless consumption.”

“The difficulty is that until now the corporations have remained unconvinced of the need to align their own functioning and the limits of their activities to the possibilities of the Earth. Yet even now there is something of a growing commitment to sustainable development. The issue is there for the enduring future. It will not go away.”

“Our traditional spiritual values are disorienting by their insistence on the

unsatisfactory nature of the existing order of things and the need for relief by reference to some transearthly experience. Religious persons are constantly asserting the high spiritual nature of the human against the lack of any spiritual dimension of the natural world. All earthly affairs are considered microphase concerns relative to the spiritual concerns that determine our destiny in some other transcendent world.”

“The human venture depends absolutely on a quality of awe and reverence and joy in the Earth and all that lives and grows upon the Earth. As soon as we isolate ourselves from these currents of life and from the profound mood that these engender within us, then our basic life-satisfactions are diminished.”

“We might describe the challenge before us by the following sentence: The historical mission of our times is to reinvent the human—at the species level, with critical reflection, within the community of life-systems, in a time-developmental context, by means of story and shared dream experience.” (Berry takes an entire chapter to explain what he means by this.)

“We might reflect that a fourfold wisdom is available to guide us into the future: the wisdom of indigenous peoples, the wisdom of women, the wisdom of the classical traditions, and the wisdom of science. We need to consider these wisdom traditions in terms of their distinctive functioning, in the historical periods of their florescence, and in their common support for the emerging age when humans will be a mutually enhancing presence on the Earth.” (A

chapter is devoted to the specifics of how these four wisdoms can guide us.)

“Perhaps a new revelatory experience is taking place, an experience wherein human consciousness awakens to the grandeur and sacred quality of the Earth process. Humanity has seldom participated in such a vision since shamanic times, but in such a renewal lies our hope for the future for ourselves and for the entire planet on which we live.”

“There are cosmological and historical moments of grace as well as religious moments of grace. As we enter the twenty-first century, we are experiencing a moment of grace. Such moments are privileged moments. The great transformations of the universe occur at such times. The future is defined in some enduring pattern of its functioning.”

“But even as we make our transition into this new century, we must note that moments of grace are transient moments. The transformation must take place within a brief period. Otherwise it is gone forever. In the immense story of the universe, that so many of these dangerous moments have been navigated successfully is some indication that the universe is for us rather than against us. We need only summon these forces to our support in order to succeed. It is difficult to believe that the purposes of the universe or of the planet Earth will ultimately be thwarted, although the human challenge to these purposes must never be underestimated.”

This book is a summation of Thomas Berry’s life work. It is a call to action, but much more it is a call to come home

to this wondrous Universe and Earth that have brought us forth.

*The Great Work: Our Way Into the Future*  
by Thomas Berry. Bell Tower, New York,  
NY, 1999. \$12.95



## Love of Farming

**By Donella Meadows**

A while ago, Beth Sawin and Phil Rice, researchers at the Sustainability Institute, put together a graph I can't get out of my mind. It shows Midwest corn yields doubling from about 60 bushels per acre in 1950 to 120 bushels on average today. Despite the doubled yield, gross earnings per acre have stayed essentially constant. The net return to the farmer, after the costs of growing the corn, has also stayed right around zero. If it weren't for government farm payments, the average corn farmer would have been working for decades for free.

My first question on seeing that was: How does the system do that? How does it so infallibly keep farmers from making money? My next question was: Why do farmers put up with it?

Later they showed me some figures that explain how they put up with it. Farm families in two Minnesota counties consistently get more than half their income from off the farm. In recent years, 85 percent of their income has

been off-farm. The farmers are living mainly on subsidies and outside jobs. They are literally farming at night by tractor light.

Why? Two whys, actually. Why do we pay so little to the people who feed us? Why do they keep feeding us?

The proper economic answer to the first question is: There are too many farmers. With those higher yields, they raise more food than the market wants, so prices go down and force some of them out of business. Then yields go up more, prices go down further, more farmers go under. My economics professor taught me that this process is rational and admirable. It's the market weeding out inefficiency. It enables a tiny percent of us to feed everybody else, reducing food costs for all.

Now that I think for myself, I don't see the rationality, and I don't admire the process. Why should yields keep going up when the market is not calling for more food? And what about soil erosion, water pollution, poisoned ecosystems, fossil fuel use, broken communities, shattered lives, dubious food quality? The market makes food look cheap only by not counting all the costs.

The answer to the second question, why farmers keep at it, has got to be, at bottom, because they love it. John Peterson of Angelic Organics in Caledonia, Illinois, explains why he farms: "The land has a feel underfoot that can melt a person to it. There's the rhythm—the barn door opens and closes; the swallows return; the brome grass swishes. I don't stay on this farm because brome grass swishes. That's a fringe

benefit. The closest I can describe my bond to it is a shudder I get...when it's time to work in the fields. My legs take me to the work, put me on the tractor; I am all surrender. And the joy of pushing dirt around, the thrill of organizing little dots of green into straight lines on bare soil—these invoke in me a subtle delirium.

“Fuzzy rows of carrots streak to the west, flanking scalloped tufts of green and red lettuces. Palm-tree-shaped brussels sprouts transform a service drive into The Grand Boulevard. Massive cabbage leaves gradually hug themselves into a big ball. Enormous heirloom tomatoes hang voluptuously on avenues of trellising. To gaze at the lush display of textures, forms, colors, to notice the daily changes, is a privilege of being a farmer.”

Peterson is not farming a monocrop straight to the horizon by tractor at night. He grows organic vegetables for a Community Supported Agriculture farm—a farm that serves nearby subscribers who pick up once a week a bundle of whatever is ripe. Fresh food, straight from farm to kitchen. No chemicals. No subsidies. Payment direct from consumer to farmer, no middlemen, a decent living for the farmer.

That is a food system that works, though many of its benefits are not measured in dollars. Pat Mannix, a subscriber to the Genesee Valley Organic CSA farm in New York state, spent four hours helping out on “her” farm and found a new way of seeing: “I found myself preparing the vegetables in a loving, respectful manner. I planned with a passion so nothing would go to waste. When I ate what I

had harvested, I clearly understood...that the Earth was alive and that it gave and sustained other life....Food would never be the same for me again.”

Wendell Berry said once in an interview: “Farming is a hard life. It's a hard life, therefore nobody ought to live it. What a remarkable conclusion! There are several steps that are left out. What causes the difficulty? Does freedom come out of it? Does family pride come with it, family coherence? Does some kind of idea of community come with it? Some kind of idea of stewardship, does that come with it? Do ideas of affection or love or loyalty or fidelity come with it?”

Freedom, stewardship, fidelity, family, community—all are casualties of a mechanism that selects only for cheapness and a narrowly measured efficiency that turns a living farm into a mechanized, chemicalized, one-product factory.

Here's the good news. A new food system, one that uses dollars but is not ruled by them, is growing so fast that no one can keep track of it. There are at least 600 CSA farms across America; some count as many as a thousand. Sales of organic produce have been growing by 20 percent per year. Farmers' markets, consumer co-ops, and CSA farms practice a new economics, economics as if, as E. F. Schumacher once said, people mattered. As if the land mattered. As if we valued farmers who work with love and beauty to bring forth from the Earth health for us all.

*Donella H. Meadows, a systems analyst, author, director of the Sustainability*

*Institute, and adjunct professor of environmental studies at Dartmouth College, writes a syndicated article each week to “present a global view, a connected view, a long-term view, an environmental and compassionate view.” Meadows can be reached at Sustainability Institute, Box 174, Hartland Four Corners, VT 05049.*



## Chaos and Order

### A Book Review by Sook Holdridge

Who would suspect that a business hall-of-fame banker, and founder of one of the world’s largest enterprises would proclaim, “We are in the midst of a global epidemic of institutional failure.” No, it isn’t a joke. Dee Hock, founder and CEO emeritus of VISA International, is serious. In his book, *Birth of the Chaordic Age*, he writes: “Industrial Age, hierarchical, command-and-control institutions, which have dominated our lives for 400 years, are not only irrelevant to pressing social and environmental problems, they are a primary cause of them.” Ouch!

Hock says they are “out of touch with the natural world, consistently committing atrocious acts with little understanding or concern how they accumulate and combine to affect the planet, our health, and lives of future generations.” He sees “a four-hundred-

year-old age rattling in its death-bed as another is struggling to be born.”

About his own experience in the corporate world, Hock said, “I did not fully realize how thoroughly I was being pulled apart by a society methodically pulling itself apart, or how rapidly society was pulling apart the biosphere.” He felt the pain and saw it everywhere around him. In 1965, at age 35, he wrote, “The heart went out of me.”

Hock observes, “We are locked within our separatist, linear, mechanistic institutions, confined within our ever more isolated specialties, and ever narrowing perspectives.”

Reorganizing, reengineering, and reinventing are just reworkings of what has been. They still reflect old stories that keep playing out—“stories those with escalating power and wealth incessantly pour into us through commercialization of media and every other aspect of life. They are stories designed to arouse greed in the many to satisfy the few; stories that appeal to the worst, not the best in us. They are false stories. Deep inside, we no longer believe them. And, neither do those who tell them, if the truth be known,” says Hock.

A new compelling story is needed—a story of building a livable future for our grandchildren, their children, and their children’s children—one that would capture the imagination of the world. The story that “turned on the light” for Hock, came out of his great love for nature. What if, he pondered, organizations were patterned after nature’s concepts and methods. We are, after all, part of nature.

This idea so inspired Hock that, in 1971, he decided to put it to the test at a new enterprise, VISA International. VISA's success proved that a large organization can be effective without being centralized and coercive. It now has 22,000 owner-member banks, 750 million customers and \$1.25 trillion in transactions annually worldwide. From its inception, Hock turned common notions about institutions on their head. Instead of a typical hierarchical, command-and-control structure, Hock trusted in the blend of chaos and order found in nature as the pathway for a new kind of organization. He coined the word, "chaord" (combining CHAos and ORDer) to describe it. Chaordic organizations are self-organizing and self-governing. They operate not through hierarchies of authority, but through networks of equals.

Alcoholics Anonymous and Alanon are examples of chaordic organizations. It is not power and coercion that make them effective, rather it is clear purpose, ethical principles, and symbiotic relationships.

In chaordic organizations, as in nature and evolution, everything is simultaneously a whole and an important part in a larger, evolving, sustaining whole.

In contrast, failing institutions seek only their own enhancement in a highly competitive world. Toward that end, they acquire the parts (natural and human resources) and efficiently "use" them for their purposes. They also fail to see their responsibilities to the larger whole, society at large, and the natural world.

This fundamental flaw has put us "on the knife's edge between socioenvironmental disaster and a livable future."

In the chaordic concept, all parts and wholes are both independent and interdependent. They both compete and cooperate. They are both separate and aligned, always conscious of the larger whole that sustains them.

In Nature's ingenious complex scheme, countless decisions happen every moment that are beyond the capabilities of command-and-control management. The decision-making process is decentralized to the smallest part capable of making it. Everyone—both leader and follower—all are bound by purpose and principles worthy of pursuit from which all else flows.

Nature and evolution have full trust and confidence in this dynamic, "chaordic" dance of life. Not only is it a compelling story, it is the way things ought to be.

Hock speculates, "If the story of a truly different and better society could be told, no matter how remote, no matter how difficult to realize, or even the story of a path to that end, it would capture the imagination of the world. It would submerge the urge to isolation and destructive behavior in excitement and new hope for the future. People would then see the wisdom of preserving the substance of the past, while enhancing and clothing it in the forms of the future. They would see the wisdom of sustaining the old order of things, even as they assist in its transformation. For the first time in history, we might engage in global evolutionary social and

institutional change without an appalling cycle of destruction and reconstruction.”

*Dee Hock is coordinating director of the Chaordic Institute whose purpose centers on “new concepts of organizations which more equitably distribute power and wealth, release human ingenuity, and are more compatible with the biosphere.” His website is [www.chaordic.org](http://www.chaordic.org)*

*Birth of the Chaordic Age* by Dee Hock.  
Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., San Francisco, 1999. \$27.95

*“We are at that very point in time when a 400-year-old age is dying and another is struggling to be born—a shifting of culture, science, society, and institutions enormously greater than the world has ever experienced. Ahead, the possibility of regeneration of individuality, liberty, community, and ethics such as the world has never known, and a harmony with nature, with one another and with the divine intelligence such as the world has always dreamed.”*

Dee Hock



## The Natural Step

### Combining Wealth, Ecology, & Evolution

*If we and future generations are to live sustainably on this planet, what do we need to do? Individually, we can recycle,*

*buy wisely, live as lightly as possible on the land. But what about the companies who make all the stuff we use? They’re the 900 pound gorillas who take raw materials, use them up to produce things that eventually end up as junk, and pollute our environment in the process.*

*Five years ago, Timeline reported on a workable approach for the corporate world. Called *The Natural Step*, and developed by Sweden’s Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt, it’s a series of four principles to help guide organizations and individuals toward sustainable practices. The approach was well received in Sweden where many companies have used the principles to redesign products and change manufacturing processes to be more benign. But Sweden is a country of 8 million homogenous folks; could the *Natural Step* work in a country like the United States? To find out, Timeline talked with Catherine Gray, executive director of *The Natural Step* in the U.S.*

We’re delighted at how *The Natural Step* (TNS) is being received here. We’ve had our fits and starts as an organization trying to learn what’s the best strategy to offer TNS in a country as diverse as the United States. But we have traction for the first time in five years.

It’s taken a lot of grassroots work, putting up a website, getting our newsletter out, getting videos and CDs done, doing public workshops, and slowly building a presence here, while at the same time growing our organization. A year and a half ago we reached critical mass, and we now have some large companies and interesting communities coming to us and asking us to help them embed TNS into their operations and

general plans and community programs. It's a great situation to be in.

The TNS office is in the Presidio in San Francisco. But our long-term goal is to have a regional presence across the country because a lot of big companies that we need to work with are on the East Coast and elsewhere. Until this year, we've been 100 percent funded by donations from foundations and individuals. People see TNS as a cutting edge idea and a potential catalyst for change, so we've had quite a good reception. Now our goal is to move toward a situation where our work with corporations is supported by income from our company training programs and workshops.

We have a staff of eleven, and our motto is to keep the core relatively small but to really look at who our partners are. So we bring in people by subcontracting and through networks at universities and other nonprofits. In working with large companies, our challenge is to train all of their employees in the TNS framework. There are great technologies like closed circuit TV and the Web which our people can use to do the initial training, always with the goal of having each company build its own internal capacity to do the training themselves. We pick "champions" in the company and work with them and get them immersed in sustainability so that we can stay in an advisory capacity. It's a way to train a lot of people while keeping our staff small.

Companies come to us for three reasons. One is that they've had a crisis—like their source of labor or their use of raw materials—that the public becomes upset about. Another reason they come is

because they see using TNS as a strategic advantage over their competitors. And they come because they see it as the right thing to do. Often it's a combination of all three. In some cases, we work with the senior management who are convinced The Natural Step is the way to go. In other cases, the impetus comes from the bottom up, and sometimes it comes from middle management.

It's interesting that the positive response often comes from engineers. The four system conditions of The Natural Step give them a new set of design parameters, unleashing all this innovation and creativity.

Often when management becomes interested in The Natural Step to solve one problem, they realize that it is a framework in which they can begin to rethink more and more of their operations—the kinds of solvents they use, what kind of pollution they might be causing. The result might be a complete redesign of their product, the materials they use, their methods of production, and so on. Also, companies are beginning to realize that waste is money, so if you're creating a product that ends up in the landfill, that's a waste of money because you can actually reclaim it back into the whole manufacturing process.

We want eventually to work with youth and communities and other very important sectors. But for now, we're focusing on corporations because they have impact upstream that can really affect all the problems we're dealing with downstream. I'm particularly heartened by the commitment and vision I see by people in the corporate world. I really

respect the complexity of the change that's required and all the pressures that are on CEOs and shareholders and employees, with so many NGOs nipping at their heels. It is a time of transformation and change, and it's not easy. It takes hard work and deep commitment, and the most exciting thing to me is that I actually see it happening.

Our approach is that we don't go in pretending to know more about their business than they know. We sit down with the designers and say, "Here's a framework. We think it's useful, other companies think it's useful, what do you guys think?" We give them the TNS framework and it unleashes all the human capital the company has, and they start generating the ideas.

There is a sense in companies of "Aha! this is where we should be heading, this makes business sense." The Natural Step helps them think long term, see the long vision. But the question always boils down to: "How do you shorten the time frame to get there, keeping in mind the bottom line?" Every company that gets involved in The Natural Step is taking a risk, cutting a path.

In the long run, though, the four conditions are an investment in the future. They constitute the hard reality in the sense that companies that do not comply with them will eventually "hit the wall" and suffer the consequences. Conversely, companies that see the wall coming and invest to avoid it will prosper.

## THE FOUR SYSTEM CONDITIONS

1. Nature cannot "take" (i.e. withstand) a systematic buildup of dispersed matter mined from the Earth's crust (e.g., minerals, oil).
2. Nature cannot take a systematic buildup of persistent compounds made by man (e.g., PCBs, dioxins, CFCs).
3. Nature cannot take a systematic deterioration of its capacity for renewal (e.g., harvesting fish faster than they can replenish, converting fertile land to desert or asphalt).
4. Therefore, if we want life to go on, we must be (a) efficient in our use of natural resources and (b) just—in the sense of promoting justice—because ignoring poverty will lead the poor, for short-term survival, to destroy resources that we all need for long-term survival (e.g., rainforests).

*The Natural Step for Business: Wealth, Ecology and the Evolutionary Corporation* by Brian Nattrass & Mary Altomere. New Society Publishers, Gabriola island, B.C., Canada, 2000. \$16.95

website: [www.naturalstep.org](http://www.naturalstep.org)



## Moving Business from Private Greed to Public Good

### A Talk by Anita Roddick

I want to talk about business, how it could be transformed on a wide scale, and how it could affect social change and offer practical solutions to help restore the planet. I'll start by saying that real social change will happen when businesses move from private greed to public good, and when governments measure themselves not on economic values but on how they treat the weak and the frail. And maybe real social change will happen if the media shows some independence, some spark, some rebellion, and the great issues of the day are not thwarted or censored. But none of those will happen unless one thing happens first, and that is real change in our educational system.

I look at our educational system and it really is effective at suppressing the creative spirit of children. I can't speak for this country, but in England they ask kids to listen unquestioningly to authority. Education is just knowledge in facts and in subjects to make productive workers. Make them good little workers that get to work and are employable. But this thinking cancels our sensitivity to others. It cancels out respect, intuition, imagination, and the sense of wonderment and awe. And to make social change, these are precisely the things we must develop. Children have unique sets of potential, and with guidance they can develop the habit of freedom. Rudolf Steiner said, "The need

for imagination, a sense of truth, a feeling of responsibility—these are the three forces which are the very nerve of education." So if we develop a moral sympathy in caring rather than coercion, then maybe, just maybe, child labor, armies turning kids into killers, and the explosion in child prostitution in certain societies will stop. We'll have, as parents and grandparents and as teachers, even as business people, a moral sympathy in everything we do, to nurture free human beings who can develop a sense of purpose, imagination, a sense of truth and feeling and responsibility.

This is what we have to do at the start, and this is not going to be an instant change; this is going to take decades. In business we have to change the entire business education. You can open up any typical management book, and you'll find words like: customer care, corporate culture, team building, total quality management. You never find words like social justice—never. You rarely find community building, local self-reliance, human rights in international trade, and definitely not spirituality. And if you go into management business programs such as those at Harvard or at Stanford, there is a profound lack of dissenting views on economic thinking. For real social change to happen we have to change our business education programs to contain notions of human rights, social justice, action, activism, community economics, and the productivity of the human spirit.

I'm tired of hearing about the manufacturing process or of business being about productivity when most businesses are about the need to develop relationships. What about the productivity of the human spirit? These

are the issues businesses and teachers ignore at their peril. Social change has to start in education, and it has to continue in business education, so that the global incorporates all the viewpoints from around the world, not just ours from north of the equator.

Everywhere I travel (and I travel some six, seven months a year), I see the excluded and the marginalized. I encounter people who instinctively know how to manage the planet but are silenced by a viewpoint which is white, male, and Western educated. I see people who are consistently ignored, and they're mostly women in small grassroots groups struggling against economic devastation and poverty. So any global management education has to learn to lovingly dialogue and engage with all voices. In a global world there are no value-free actions. Everything now is run and controlled by businesses. And for me there aren't any motivating forces more potent than giving people the opportunity to exercise and express their idealism to implement change.

I employ some 15,000 people, mostly female, mostly under 30, whose ethics are "care." They want to go to work not with a sense of a Monday through Friday sort of living/death; they want a Monday to Friday living, and what they want to do is to be part of a social experiment. They want to change the way things are. They want to feel that they are doing something good and they want to be listened to. I've been like a saboteur, a Trojan horse, going into the system of business education. A couple of years ago I set up the New Academy of Business to try and create a new

generation of compassionate business leaders.

Right now the biggest concern that I have is globalization. It is the biggest obstacle standing in the way of social change. It's not easy being a business person and challenging this quasi-religion faith—this economic establishment sacred cow, this unshakable belief in the omnipotence of unfettered free trade.

What I experienced in Mexico with indigenous people was life in the tobacco fields and all the babies that are being born without any genitalia. It's our problem. It's our problem in the West and we have to check this out. I had this rumbling disquiet that what we bought into with this globalization are goods produced by the world's victims—kids and women. This need for cheaper goods does not raise the living standards in most of the world, and what we end up with is poisoned water, poisoned land, and unequal wealth.

Corporations claim that resisting slave labor is a violation of free trade.

Globalization is low-cost, high-profit slavery. The answer is to know the story behind the label. We put up an ad in England recently that said, "Size 12, made in Haiti: 50% cotton/50% polyester; 100% sweat shop labor; 14-hour shifts; 7-day week; \$0.28 per hour and no right to speak out. Know the story behind the label."

The solution is community trade. It is supporting anything locally, anything that gives the community self-reliance. In one of our initiatives we buy from 47 mostly-women's cooperatives around the world, and we pay a 20% social premium

so that Montessori schools can be built, and there can be free education and free transport. Now I am not a big company. I'm a middling to big company, and I have to ask myself "Why in the bloody hell are no other companies doing this?" There is a sense when I go into the business community that there isn't economic poverty—it's a spiritual poverty, the poverty of imagination.

Know the story behind the product. Take hemp. This is one of the most vilified crops on the planet. And I'm for anything that is vilified. I could speculate that growing low-cost, high-yield environmentally sound hemp poses a real challenge to many of the agrichemical companies—the cotton barons and so on. We did an ad that we've been running in Kentucky and Tennessee that reads, "What would you call a farmer who grows a plant that can help solve our energy and deforestation problems?" And across his face is the word "criminal."

I spent about two months traveling in rural America last year. I lived in shacks. I lived outside of prison communities. I saw devastation. I saw the death of the family farm, especially the black family farm. Entire communities across this country face economic ruin on a scale seen nowhere since the depression. Every year—every week—how many family farmers go out of business? How many black farmers go out of business? I think that this is the soul of America; the agricultural small-scale family farms and hemp can solve that problem. We've been supporting all the hemp farmers in Ontario: funding it, supporting it. But now all the birdseed has been seized, all the fiber for the animals, and now potentially my oil by the bloody DEA.

Anyway, for me, supporting the family farm is crucial.

To finish, for me it's all about a revolution in kindness and any one of us can be part of that revolution.

*The 2001 Bioneers Conference will be held October 18-21, at the Marin Center, San Rafael, CA. Contact: Collective Heritage Institute toll-free at 1-877-BIONEER; website: [www.bioneers.org](http://www.bioneers.org)*



## How Will I Know

### By Wileta Burch

How will I know who I am  
 when all around me are signs of who  
 I am not?  
 The noise of trucks, the lure of malls,  
 the push of crowds,  
 the demands on time,  
 the oppression of pollutants,  
 that fill my senses with distraction  
 and pain?

Where is the quietude, the moments  
 for reflection?  
 Where is the desire to retreat within  
 where deep memory resides;  
 where once I knew with  
 unflinching instincts  
 the call of the wild,  
 the assurance of belonging?

Where is the sunrise, the sunset?  
 Hidden from view.

Where are the old ones, those trees so strong and wise?

Where is the surety of knowing my role in the community of life?

Didn't I once pray-up-the-sun without fail every day?

Didn't I once dance to bring the rain?  
Didn't I plant the corn and harvest the grain?

Didn't I weep and cover the bodies with oil when kinsmen passed to the great beyond?

Where is the prayer that acknowledges the gifts of each day?

How do I live in today's world with comforts that dull me?  
with nanoseconds  
and takeouts,  
and ATMs,  
and children carrying guns?

Will I answer the call as others before me have done?  
The call to leave home, to break free from my times,  
to connect to the eternal that always has been and will forever be?

Does a new being await within me for its time to be born?  
A being that recognizes the kinship of all things?  
A being at home with wild ones and yet in harmony with my own kind?  
A being that's trained in compassion and is at peace midst the rush of the day?

A being that strives to restore the damaged, encourages the young, blesses the now, works for the future?

We are told by the Great Ones that it is possible to do if only we will intend, let go, unfold, reveal, practice, pray, detach, forgive, mend.

This I will do.  
Why would I not?



## Blips on the Timeline

*The term "blip" is often used to describe a point of light on a radar screen. Gathered with the assistance of Research Director Jackie Mathes, here are some recent blips which indicate positive changes toward a global community.*

### Traffic Control

In 1996, the city council of Hasselt, Belgium, chose noncar transport options to solve the traffic congestion problems faced by its 68,000 residents and 200,000 commuters. They replaced the ring road that surrounded the city center with a "green boulevard" of trees, new cycling trails, and pedestrian walkways, and made public transportation free. Within a year three times as many buses were making six times as many trips on twice as many routes. Ridership was up 800 percent. Roads into the downtown area were redirected to end at new car parks, with through traffic diverted to bypass the city. Four hundred trees and

thousands of shrubs were planted along the new cycling and pedestrian paths. The new transportation strategy, “Hasselt for the People,” declares environmental health, sustainable economic development, public safety, and increased leisure activities to be the city’s main objectives. As in other cities that have established downtown car-free zones, downtown businesses have benefited and local taxes have been lowered.

### **(Radio) Power to the People**

“Let’s Get Together and Help Each Other” is a 24-hour radio show with a million listeners in Bangkok, Thailand, a city with horrific traffic jams, rising crime, ineffectual government, corrupt officials, and the powerlessness of poverty. Most of the 3000 who call in each day want to know how to connect a telephone or muddle through Thailand’s bewildering bureaucracy. But some calls inspire residents to go to extraordinary lengths to help. When a woman in labor was stuck in traffic, an appeal by the station parted the gridlock all the way to the hospital. Listeners have located stolen cars within a day. Five hundred cab drivers surrounded a building where a rape was reported. When a rebel group stormed the Burmese Embassy in Bangkok, a hostage called the program on his cell phone, the Interior Minister negotiated with the gunmen over the air, and the crisis was ended without bloodshed.

### **NGOs Gain Stature**

NGOs (Non-governmental Organizations) have attained new stature. According to the Christian Science

Monitor, they are now widely perceived as world-transforming, independent, social, political, scientific, and humanitarian entities through the sheer force of their numbers and the instantaneous global communications links they have established. Jessica Mathews, a leading expert on the subject, has written: “The range of these groups’ work is almost as broad as their interests. They breed new ideas, advocate, protest, and mobilize public support; do legal, scientific, technical, and policy analysis; provide services; shape, implement, monitor, and enforce national and international commitments; and change institutions and norms. Their true number—from the tiniest village association in India to large international groups like Amnesty International and Greenpeace—must be counted in the millions.” Adds the Monitor: “They represent a philosophy to improve the human condition at a time when the rights and interests of individuals, or the exploitation of the environment, can fall between international boundaries. Their presence will be felt in the current decade.”

### **Education Alleviates Poverty**

A successful program in Brasilia called “Bolsa Escola” (School Scholarship), whereby families of working children are paid to keep their children at school, has now been implemented in many cities in Brazil, Mexico, and Ecuador. The program is designed to break the generation cycle where children of poor families grow up to be poor adults who raise poor families. Scholarships go to all families who qualify based on a means test, not only those who have working children. To be paid, they must have all

their children in school, and none can miss more than two days a month or the family loses payment for that month. In the Mexican program, the family is required to take their children to a doctor once a month. The program has had unexpected positive impacts on health, empowerment of women, reduction in drug use, and growth of income.

**Suggestions Invited** - We are always on the lookout for interesting subjects for Blips on the Timeline. Readers are invited to send articles or clippings indicating positive change to Jackie Mathes at the Foundation.

If we use your suggestion, we'll automatically extend your subscription for a year.



## What our readers are saying about *Timeline*

"*Timeline* is an uplifting and awesome read." Madison, Wisconsin

"Thank you for this excellent, unique and inspiring publication."  
Washington, D.C.

"I cannot write to you without, first of all, telling you how much I look forward to receiving each issue of *Timeline*."  
Boulder, Colorado

"I love it. Only rarely do I miss reading all the articles."  
Mankato, Minnesota

"An article in your most recent issue was a real wake up call for me. I have sent a copy and letter to about 100 people. I just wanted you to know you all do make a difference."  
Duxbury, Massachusetts

"I consider *Timeline* to be one of the most optimistic publications I receive. It gives me hope."  
Ann Arbor, Michigan

"A wonderful publication!"  
Kailua-Kona, Hawaii

"Inspired thinking and writing. As a teacher, it helps me focus the big picture of a world I dream of for my students."  
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"*Timeline* is an excellent publication-interesting, informative, and readable and, above all, it addresses the 'deep' issues."  
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"I really appreciate your keeping *Timeline* so affordable. The content is excellent, concise, varied. Nice balance of the theoretical and the practical. Sometimes the photos are not up to snuff. Keep up the great work."  
Arlington, Massachusetts

"I enjoy reading your publication and I'm interested that more people may be able to do it, too."  
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"I count on *Timeline* to learn of important viewpoints of those working to create a better, more balanced world in the future. Each new issue contains gems of focus, direction and understanding which I can aspire to

integrate into the action of everyday life.” Willits, California

“I get too much ‘good works’ mail to read, however I find some of your articles unusually provocative. They make me think new thoughts.”  
Springfield, Oregon

“I received a *Timeline* gift subscription and am very impressed. Quite a few of my friends were also impressed and have sent for their own subscriptions.”  
Orange City, Florida

“Thoughtful articles with deep insights. A pleasure to read such beautifully expressed thoughts.”  
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“It is the one publication that I always read cover to cover and insist that my husband do the same. I’ve sent subscriptions to my sister, one of our daughters, and one of our sons-in-law because I have felt that they, too, would find it worthwhile reading.”  
Austin, Texas

“I sent gift subscriptions to our local library and my daughter's school.”  
Chicago, Illinois

“Between *Timeline* and National Public Radio I am given hope in what seems like a very chaotic world.”  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

“An excellent publication.”  
Courbevoie, France

*Obviously, we enjoy receiving comments like these, But our reason for printing them in this issue is to remind you that Timeline is read and appreciated by*

*people in many parts of the world and to encourage you to consider sending \$10 gift subscriptions to your friends and associates in order to expand our circle of readers.*



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Palo Alto, California  
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