

We Need A Vision

Nick Enge

“Arctic Melting Fast; May Swamp U.S. Coasts by 2099,” “The Future is Drying Up,” “World Population Will Explode by 2025.” Each morning when I check the headlines, I expect to finally see the one I know every editor is aching to print: “We’re All Going to DIE.”

By now most people are well aware of the environmental crises facing the world today, and we know what our fate will be if — or as many presume, when — we fail to act. Carbon emissions from our fossil fuel use are causing catastrophic climate change. Deforestation is driving the extinction of tens of thousands of species per year. Pollution of our air and waterways is increasing the prevalence of asthma, cancer and birth defects. The list of environmental tragedies goes on and on.

So what can we do to save our planet in crisis? Look no further than the end of those Doomsday articles, which include such wonderful eco-tips as: turn your thermostat down two degrees, take shorter showers, drive a Prius.

Really? Is that all we’ve got? If it is, we really are all going to die.

It’s true, by turning down your thermostat, you’ll save natural gas, and less gas means less carbon emissions. It is also true that by taking a shorter shower, you’ll waste less water and energy, and by driving a Prius, you’ll use less gasoline. Guess what?! With the media’s helpful eco-tips, you can learn to be less bad!

Don’t get me wrong, I love conservation and efficiency (conservation = doing less with less, efficiency = doing the same or better with less) as much as the next eco-man, and I do everything I can to promote them. But as I do so, I can’t help thinking that maybe we’re going at this the wrong way.

Imagine what would happen if the local weight loss clinic took this same “less bad” approach, running a campaign with the slogan: “In thirty days, we can make you less fat! You’ll still be fat, but at least you’ll be less fat!!!” No one would sign up, because no one wants to be less fat — they want to be thin. Humans, Americans and especially Stanford students aren’t inspired by negatives — we’re inspired by positives.

We are in desperate need of a vision, and not one of environmental doom and gloom, as is reported daily in the media. Rather, what we need is a vision of

environmental hope. A vision of an ecologically sound world that actually works. A world in which there is no waste and no pollution, and in which everyone and everything, human or otherwise, has enough resources to survive and thrive. A world in which all environmental, economic and social indicators are getting steadily better, not worse, and where people are getting happier, not more depressed. What we need is a blueprint for a world of good.

Now, I'm not delusional. I fully understand the gravity of our current situation, and I know just how far we are from this world of good. But I also know that we will never get there unless we start with a vision of where we want to end up.

The good news is that we've been working on just such a vision for over thirty years. Visionaries like Rachel Carson, Amory Lovins, Janine Benyus, Paul Hawken, Bill McDonough and many others in all sectors across the globe have devoted their lives to imagining a greener world. The legwork has been done. Now it's time for the world to come together, and put these ideas to good use.

In the coming weeks, Positive Sustainability will showcase the very best in visionary green thinking, piecing together an overall vision for a better world. It will explore the many options available to us, in buildings (healthy homes that produce more energy than they use), transportation (zero emission electric sports cars) and waste (or rather, the complete elimination of the concept of waste), among many other green topics.

In creating this vision, I will call upon you, the reader, to contribute your own ideas, through comments, email and letters. Together, we can craft a vision for a better world, and set it in motion.

Nick is plotting a world revolution. Send your world-changing ideas to nick@positivesustainability.org.

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