

BridgeWave

A journal of connection, leverage and change

*Designing the
probability of joy*



*How one wheel changed
what was possible*

BridgeWave

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BridgeWave Magazine is published by North of La Jolla Inc.

We welcome contributions from writers, thinkers, academics, and dreamers whose work engages with systems thinking—especially where ideas cross boundaries between culture, structure, and lived experience.

Welcome to The Fine Print.

Consider this a stream-of-consciousness introduction or perhaps a pre-party before the issue begins.

The truth is, I never expected to see a skateboard wheel on one of the covers for BridgeWave. In fact, after more than twenty years publishing skateboard magazines, I was fairly certain that chapter of my life was complete.

But life has a funny way of connecting ideas that once seemed unrelated. As The Inside Atlas has grown, I realized I needed a tangible way to share the larger vision behind the work. I wanted something that could bring together systems thinking, human flourishing, and the questions we ask about how people grow, adapt, and contribute. BridgeWave became that vehicle.

What you're holding is more than a collection of articles. It is an exploration of the systems that shape our lives and the conditions that help people, organizations, and communities thrive.

This issue focuses on a deceptively simple question: What creates the conditions for a better world?

Utopia is often imagined as a destination. We are more interested in the conditions that make flourishing possible. The articles in these pages explore systems, incentives, relationships, design, learning, and human behavior. My hope is that by the final page, you'll see that creating a better future is less about grand solutions and more about understanding the systems that quietly shape everyday life.

Before I close, I want to offer a special thank you to Sally Swanburg-Wallace, our Chief Executive Officer at The Inside Atlas. Throughout June, Sally has worked tirelessly to develop the contracts, structures, and foundations that will support the next stage of our growth. Much of this work happens behind the scenes, invisible to most people, but it is absolutely essential.

Her diligence, professionalism, and commitment have helped transform ideas into something durable and real. BridgeWave exists because many people contribute their talents.

Thank you all for being part of this journey.

Michael Brooke
Publisher & Editor

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Welcome to the Utopia Issue

That's me at sixty-one years old. Balancing on a skateboard at an outdoor rink. To some people, it may seem like an odd image to open a magazine about utopia. There are no gleaming cities. No futuristic technologies and no grand monuments. There are no promises of perfection. Just a person, a board, a patch of concrete, and a moment. I think however, that's exactly the point.

For centuries, utopia has been imagined as a destination – a perfect society, a flawless system, a world free from conflict, suffering, and uncertainty. Yet every attempt to build that kind of world eventually collides with reality.

It turns out that human beings are not programmable and life is quite complex. Every system produces unintended consequences. And perfection has proven remarkably difficult to engineer.

What if we've been asking the wrong question? What if the goal is not to create perfect people or perfect outcomes?

What if the real question is: What conditions increase the probability of human flourishing?

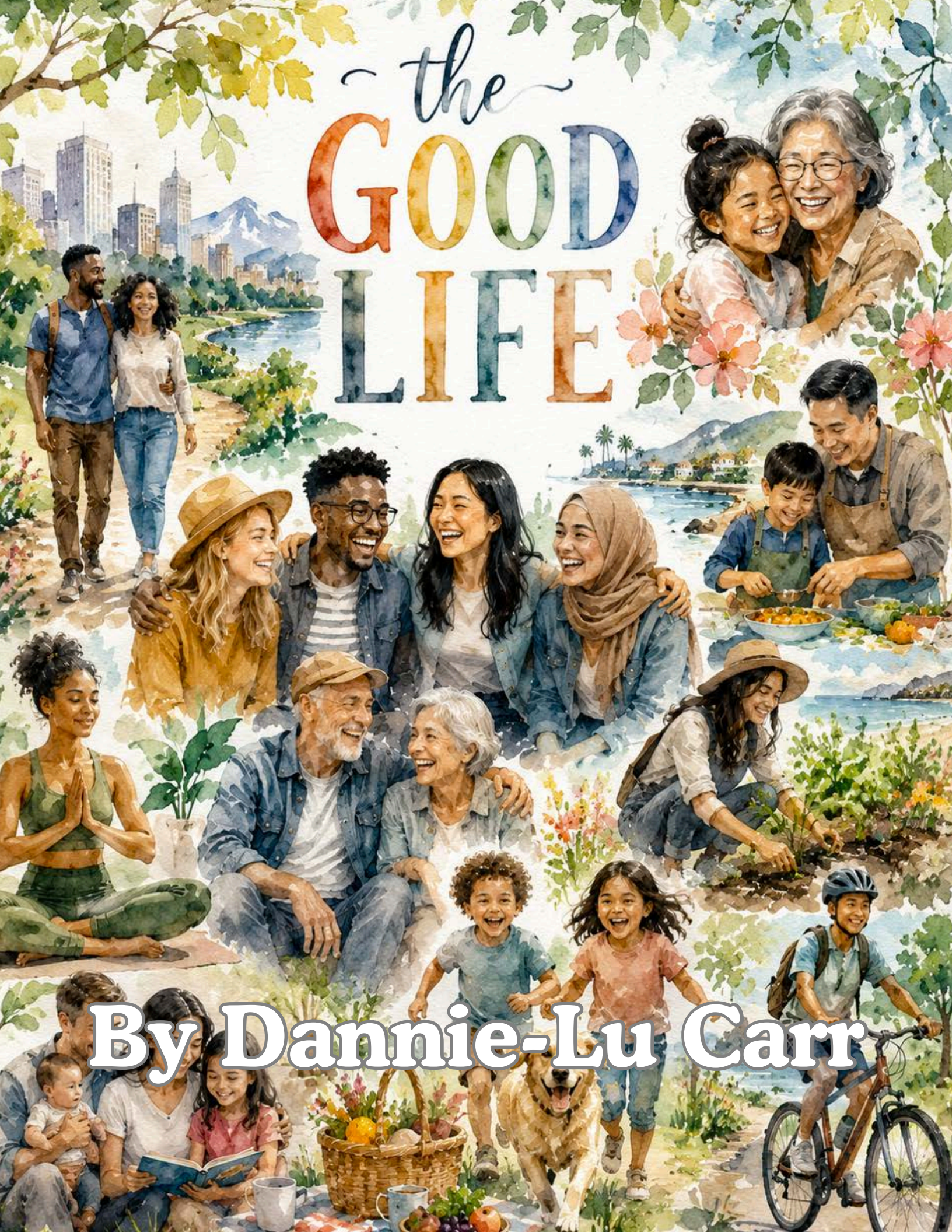
That question sits at the heart of this issue. This is because joy, meaning, belonging, creativity, trust and connection are not things we manufacture directly. They emerge from conditions and from the environments we inhabit. They come from the relationships we build and the systems we design.

The longer I have lived, the more I have come to believe that flourishing is less about achieving a destination and more about creating the conditions that allow life to unfold well.

The skateboard is not the point. It never was. The board simply creates conditions for movement, challenge, learning and play.

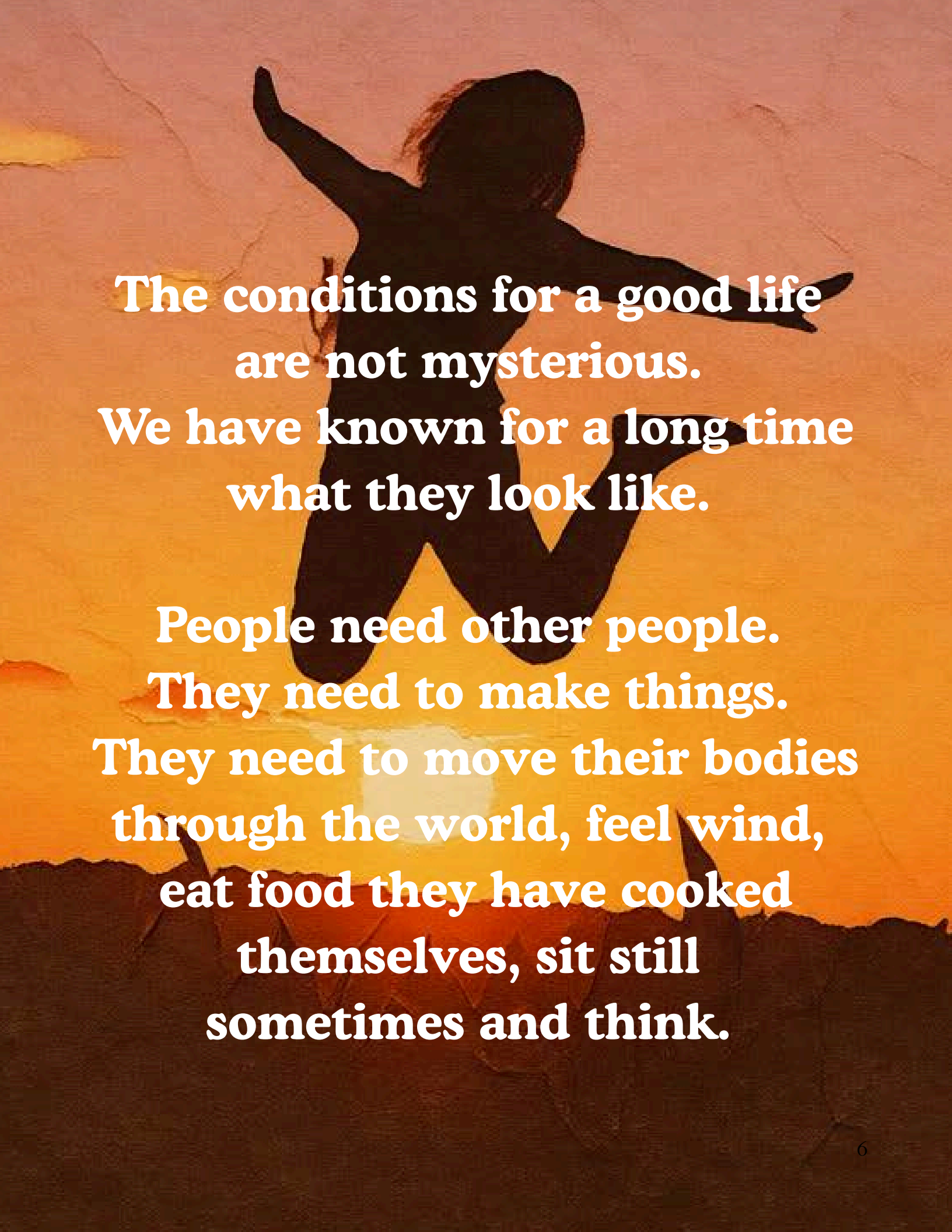
The same principle applies to schools, workplaces, cities, families, communities, and nations. Conditions precede outcomes. A disconnected environment increases the probability of loneliness. A fearful environment increases the probability of silence. A thoughtful environment increases the probability of reflection. A welcoming environment increases the probability of belonging.

The future belongs not to those who promise perfection, but to those who create better conditions for human flourishing.



the GOOD LIFE

By Dannie-Lu Carr

A silhouette of a person in mid-jump, arms and legs spread wide, set against a warm, orange-hued sunset sky. The person's shadow is cast onto the ground below, which appears as a dark, textured surface. The overall mood is one of freedom and joy.

**The conditions for a good life
are not mysterious.
We have known for a long time
what they look like.**

**People need other people.
They need to make things.
They need to move their bodies
through the world, feel wind,
eat food they have cooked
themselves, sit still
sometimes and think.**

People need enough money that survival does not consume every available unit of thought. They need the confidence to express something and the community structures that build that confidence over time.

None of this is new or contentious, which makes it worth asking why, in the richest and most technologically sophisticated era in human history, we are systematically dismantling every single one of these conditions.

This is not by accident. It is by design.

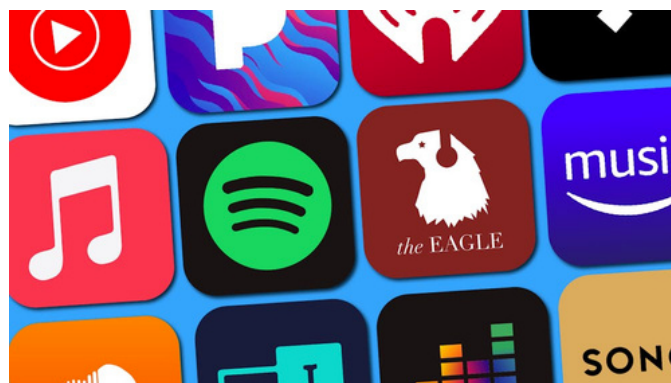
The Arts

When a government defunds arts and culture, it always frames this as a difficult but necessary choice. Tough times, limited budgets, competing priorities. What it does not say is that this is a statement about what counts as human activity worth supporting.

Arts funding in the UK has been gutted over the past fifteen years. Local authority spending on culture fell by 35 per cent in real terms between 2009 and 2019. Youth arts provision, community theatre, music education, local galleries, all stripped. These cuts hit working-class communities hardest because wealthier communities absorb them privately. The private school still has the drama department. The state school does not.

The policy conversation has been consumed instead by STEM. The arts are presented as a lovely indulgence if you can afford the risk. The message lands clearly on young people from non-privileged backgrounds: creativity is not for you. Your job is to be economically productive in ways that can be measured.

The confidence to create is not a fixed personal trait. It is a social product, built through exposure, through practice, through watching people make things, particularly people you can relate to, and being given space to try. Strip the drama clubs, the music lessons, the community arts centres and you do not just lose the activities. You lose the conditions under which creative confidence grows. You produce adults who believe they are not creative. That is the inheritance of twenty years of arts defunding. Not a generation who chose not to create, but one that had that choice taken from them.



The Platform Takes Its Cut

And then, just as we finish telling creative people that their work has no public value, the market steps in to tell them it has no private value either.

Music streaming pays the average independent artist a fraction of a penny per play. A musician needs millions of streams annually to earn minimum wage from their recorded work. The same logic applies across film, writing, journalism and visual art. The platforms (Spotify, Netflix, YouTube, Amazon) have inserted themselves between creators and audiences and extracted the economic value of the exchange while leaving the creators with the cultural labour and the exposure. Exposure does not pay bills.

This is a structural reorganisation of who gets paid for creative work and who does not. The answer, increasingly, is the platform. The creator earns the credit. The platform earns the revenue. And because the arrangement feels like access and democratisation (anyone can upload, anyone can listen) the extraction is invisible. It does not feel like a theft. It feels like an opportunity. It most certainly is the former.



Live work should, in theory, be where the economics recover. But here too the system has shifted. People are tired. They are screen-habituated. They have been trained by two decades of on-demand consumption to expect culture to arrive at them, frictionless, at a time of their choosing, on a device they are already holding. Going to a gig, a theatre, a spoken word night, a gallery opening: these require effort, travel, advance planning, physical presence. Against the backdrop of financial anxiety, exhaustion and the path-of-least-resistance design of every platform competing for attention, the live event loses.

The musicians, the poets, the theatre-makers, the dancers: we are working in a system that has simultaneously defunded our public infrastructure, handed our recorded income to platforms and eroded the audience habit that made live work economically viable. And we wonder why the creative industries are precarious. They are designed this way so as they can be exploited.

Working From Home

The work-from-home shift that happened in 2020 was, correctly, described as a revelation for many people. No commute. Flexibility. Time reclaimed. Real benefits that have made a material difference to millions of workers. This is worth acknowledging without qualification.

And yet... The walk to work was exercise. The commute was transition time. The chance encounter at the coffee machine was a relationship that, built over months, became the thing that got you through a hard week. The physical fact of being in a body in a shared space with other bodies was doing something for you that you may not have fully registered until it was gone.

Working from home mostly means working from inside. The outdoor walk becomes a task that must be deliberately scheduled, another item on the wellness to-do list, a conscious choice made against the friction of the next email. We are embodied creatures. Our nervous systems are not designed for a life conducted primarily through a screen. The research could not be stronger: time in nature reduces cortisol, improves mood and restores attentional capacity. Physical proximity to other humans (not calls, not messages, actual bodily nearness) regulates our nervous systems in ways that digital contact cannot replicate. We only need to look at the mental health crisis we are currently living through to understand what happens when we treat these biological requirements as optional.



Food, Glorious Food

Cooking is not a nice-to-have hobby. For most of human history and across most of the world today, making food is how communities organise themselves. It is where conversation happens, where knowledge passes between generations, where we learn patience and the satisfaction of making something from nothing and giving it to another person with love.

Fast food is not just a nutritional problem, it is a severing of something at the heart of us. When time poverty is severe enough that people cannot cook, the loss is not just nutritional. It is the ritual. The connection. The twenty minutes where you were not being productive.

The ultra-processed food industry grew by design into a gap that political choices created and widened. Insufficient wages, insufficient time, a care infrastructure never built. The industry did not cause time poverty. It monetised it. And the environmental cost of that monetisation is rarely factored in. The fast food supply chain (industrialised meat production, single-use packaging, global logistics, delivery fleets idling outside homes) is a significant driver of emissions and waste. The tech infrastructure enabling those delivery platforms runs on data centres consuming staggering quantities of energy and water. Convenience has a carbon cost that is not printed on the bag and that we are not forced to see. We should be.

This gap was intentionally made. And what fills it profits twice: financially from the sale and again by externalising the environmental damage onto the rest of us.



Money, Money

Financial anxiety is not simply background noise. When someone is worried about covering their bills, that worry occupies working memory. It crowds out other processing. Research from Mullainathan and Shafir established over a decade ago that scarcity of money, of time, captures attention and reduces cognitive bandwidth measurably. The effect is comparable to losing thirteen IQ points.

**Systems produce what they are designed to produce.
Sometimes the design is incompetence.
Sometimes it is neglect.**

**And sometimes it is useful for certain concentrations
of power that the people subject to that power are too
tired, too financially anxious and too culturally
malnourished to organise, to create, to question or to
demand something different.**

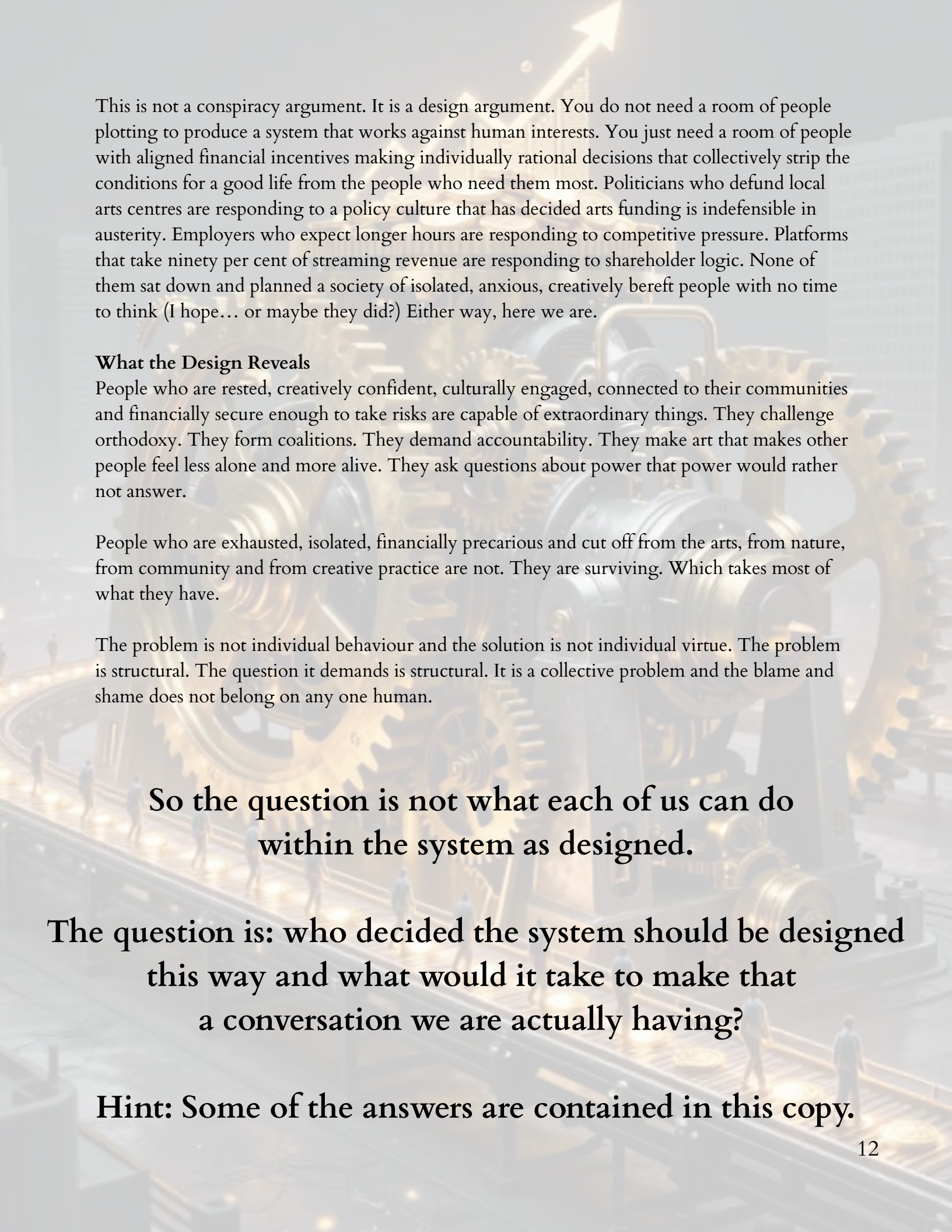
The things that get crowded out are not luxuries. Creative risk requires mental space. Civic participation requires mental space. Starting the project that has been sitting in the back of the mind for three years requires a brain that is not already full.

Taxes have gone up. Energy bills have gone up. Rents have gone up. Food has gone up. Real wages have not kept pace. The number of people in work and simultaneously using food banks has become staggering. Employment is no longer a reliable route out of financial anxiety and nobody in the mainstream policy conversation seems to find this particularly alarming. The cognitive overhead of financial precarity is now being carried by a much larger proportion of the working population than at any point in recent memory. All of them with less bandwidth for anything that is not survival.

Who Benefits?

Here is the systems design question. If you ran a system for twenty years and it consistently produced the same outputs: exhausted workers, culturally impoverished communities, adults who believe they are not creative, people with no time to cook, no bandwidth for civic engagement, no exposure to the arts, creative professionals unable to earn a living from their work, audiences too tired to leave the house, a physical environment degraded by the infrastructure of convenience. At what point do you stop calling those outputs unintended?

Systems produce what they are designed to produce. Sometimes the design is incompetence. Sometimes it is neglect. And sometimes it is useful for certain concentrations of power that the people subject to that power are too tired, too financially anxious and too culturally malnourished to organise, to create, to question or to demand something different.



This is not a conspiracy argument. It is a design argument. You do not need a room of people plotting to produce a system that works against human interests. You just need a room of people with aligned financial incentives making individually rational decisions that collectively strip the conditions for a good life from the people who need them most. Politicians who defund local arts centres are responding to a policy culture that has decided arts funding is indefensible in austerity. Employers who expect longer hours are responding to competitive pressure. Platforms that take ninety per cent of streaming revenue are responding to shareholder logic. None of them sat down and planned a society of isolated, anxious, creatively bereft people with no time to think (I hope... or maybe they did?) Either way, here we are.

What the Design Reveals

People who are rested, creatively confident, culturally engaged, connected to their communities and financially secure enough to take risks are capable of extraordinary things. They challenge orthodoxy. They form coalitions. They demand accountability. They make art that makes other people feel less alone and more alive. They ask questions about power that power would rather not answer.

People who are exhausted, isolated, financially precarious and cut off from the arts, from nature, from community and from creative practice are not. They are surviving. Which takes most of what they have.

The problem is not individual behaviour and the solution is not individual virtue. The problem is structural. The question it demands is structural. It is a collective problem and the blame and shame does not belong on any one human.

**So the question is not what each of us can do
within the system as designed.**

**The question is: who decided the system should be designed
this way and what would it take to make that
a conversation we are actually having?**

Hint: Some of the answers are contained in this copy.

What Each Generation Calls Experience, the Next Calls Obsolescence



By
Patu Antunes



A common scene in many organizations: two professionals, separated by 15 or 20 years, analyze the same problem and reach opposite conclusions. Each leaves convinced that the other "doesn't understand how this works." Neither stops to wonder if the system they are both trying to describe is, in fact, the same system.

We have spent decades interpreting intergenerational conflict as a problem of attitudes. Boomers don't want to let go of power. Millennials can't handle frustration. Gen Z lives in another galaxy. Every headline reinforces the same narrative: different generations, incompatible values, inevitable clash. It is a comfortable story because it has clear antagonists and does not demand too much questioning.

Systems thinking proposes a different reading: generations are not fighting each other. They are reacting differently to the same operating system – one that has been accumulating patches for decades and that no generation consciously designed, but that all, in turn, have contributed to maintaining.

Specific Moments

Each generational cohort enters the labor market at a specific moment in the system's cycle. Boomers entered when the implicit contract was solid: loyalty in exchange for stability, hierarchy in exchange for progression, sacrifice in exchange for a pension. That contract worked long enough to become truth. Stability was not a promise, it was the reality they experienced every day. The system rewarded permanence, and permanence became a virtue.

Generation X entered when the contract was beginning to crack but was not yet completely broken. They lived through the first major wave of corporate restructuring, learned that security could not be guaranteed, and responded with pragmatism: you have to diversify, you have to be useful, you must not depend on a single source of income. They did not reject the previous system– they renegotiated it in silence.

Millennials entered when the contract was already fiction. They were promised that education was the passport to prosperity, only to encounter student debt, saturated job markets, and a global financial crisis in their first active decade. Their response was to interpret the system as fundamentally flawed and to seek in purpose, flexibility, or entrepreneurship what corporate stability could no longer offer.

Gen Z straight up does not know the original contract. They have grown up with its fragments, and what they see are ruins. For them, insecurity is not a deviation from the system– it is the system.

Four generations. Four entry experiences. Four conclusions about how the working world works. And all of them, to some extent, correct from the historical moment in which each made contact with reality.

Experience with the System Is Not the System

The problem is that we tend to universalize our entry experience. What we lived through when we were young and the system was new to us becomes, over time, the only legitimate version of how that system should work. Boomers who insist that "people don't want to work anymore" are not wrong about what they saw work for decades. Millennials who reject the traditional work model are not being capricious— they are responding rationally to signals that this model has been emitting for decades.

But both make the same mistake: they confuse their experience of the system with the system itself.

EXPERIENCE WITH THE SYSTEM IS **NOT** THE SYSTEM

1 BOOMERS	2 GEN X	3 MILLENNIALS	4 GEN Z
ENTRY EXPERIENCE Stable jobs. Clear paths. Work hard, stay loyal, and the system takes care of you.	ENTRY EXPERIENCE Economic shifts. Layoffs. Reorganizations. Adapt or be left behind.	ENTRY EXPERIENCE Endless change. Precarious jobs. High expectations. Purpose over paycheck.	ENTRY EXPERIENCE Crisis as the baseline. AI, instability, inequality. Nothing is guaranteed.
CONCLUSION  The system rewards loyalty and hard work. It works if you follow the rules.	CONCLUSION  The system doesn't owe you anything. You have to be resilient and flexible.	CONCLUSION  The traditional model is broken. The system needs to evolve, or we'll build something new.	CONCLUSION  The system is outdated by design. We'll create our own paths, on our own terms.
 From stability to structure. The system built trust through predictability.	 From loyalty to adaptability. The system taught us to survive change, not avoid it.	 From adaptation to reinvention. The system must earn our commitment — it's not automatic.	 From skepticism to autonomy. The system is not a map — it's a constraint we navigate.
1946–1964	1965–1980	1981–1996	1997–2012+



EXPERIENCE WITH THE SYSTEM IS **NOT** THE SYSTEM.

Each generation's experience is real. Each conclusion is valid — in its time.
The mistake is mistaking a personal entry for a universal truth.



Different entries.
Different conclusions.
Same system — always evolving.

This is where the idea of obsolescence becomes especially revealing. The word is a semantic trap. Technically, something is obsolete when it has been surpassed by a better alternative. But in practice, in the labor market, obsolescence is almost always applied to people – and almost always to people over 45 – as if accumulated knowledge had an automatic expiration date. What one generation calls experience (recognized patterns, cycles already traveled, mistakes already made), the next labels as resistance to change or attachment to the old.

This has concrete and costly consequences. Organizations are systematically, and without much analysis, expelling from their ranks the people who have been observing the system the longest. People who have seen enough cycles to know that many "disruptions" are variations of problems already solved, or poorly solved, 20 years ago. The irony is remarkable: at the exact moment when systems most need to be understood in their complexity, the people who have spent the most time studying them from within are discarded.

**A professional who has worked 30 years in
an industry does not have
30 years of routine.**

They have 30 years of observing those loops.

Systems thinking has been teaching us for decades that systems have memory, that feedback loops operate on time horizons that escape immediate observation, and that the most persistent problems usually have causes that occurred long before the symptoms became visible. A professional who has worked 30 years in an industry does not have 30 years of routine. They have 30 years of observing those loops. They know, even if they cannot always articulate it with the right language, that certain movements produce certain results, that certain dynamics repeat themselves in different disguises, that there are patterns dashboards do not capture. Nostalgia? No, accumulated systemic intelligence.

The challenge is that this knowledge is rarely codified in a way that the next generation can recognize as such. It is transmitted in informal conversations, in the way someone frames a problem, in skepticism toward solutions that were already attempted without success. When that knowledge disappears – whether through retirement, layoffs, or simple invisibilization– the system loses memory. And systems without memory make the same mistakes in increasingly shorter cycles.

Generational Wars

Generational wars, viewed from this perspective, are largely a symptom of collective disorientation. When the operating system fails, the most immediate human response is to look for a culprit within the system, rather than questioning the architecture of the system itself. It is simpler to point at whoever is above or below in the age hierarchy than to ask what incentive structure, what organizational design, what cultural narrative we are all reproducing without having chosen it.

The question that systems thinking brings back to the center is not "who is right about how to work?" but rather "what system have we inherited, what assumptions does it incorporate, and how many of those assumptions do we continue to take for granted without having examined them?".

Senior professionals who today find themselves in front of a job search screen, filling out forms designed for 30-year-old profiles, competing in selection processes that filter out experience as if it were noise, are not facing an individual adaptation problem. They are facing the predictable result of a system designed with a specific- and already obsolete- conception of what it means to be productive, relevant, and valuable.

The future does not belong to the youngest generation nor to the most experienced. It belongs, if it belongs to anyone, to those capable of seeing the architecture that underlies all of this - and of deciding, consciously, which parts are worth keeping and which parts have been hurting us all for too long.



Frank Nasworthy Didn't Just Reinvent the Wheel





He Reinvented a System

By Michael Brooke

Steve Cathey at La Costa.
Photo: Warren Bolster

Back in the mid-1990s, I started on a writing journey that led to the book *The Concrete Wave*. It was the first book on the history of skateboarding, and it went on to sell over 40,000 copies. It also launched two feature films, a 52-part TV series and a magazine. One of the people I interviewed for the book was a man named Frank Nasworthy. His impact on skateboarding was monumental. But to understand what he accomplished, it's important to understand the history.

When skateboarding exploded in the 1960's, it moved from kids taking roller skate wheels and hammering them onto 2x4s. The boards used clay wheels, and the ride was harsh; you had to be very careful of cracks and pebbles. Clay wheels couldn't grip at all. This caused a number of accidents, and bans on skateboarding started to happen in many cities.

However, in 1965, Hobie Skateboards tested experimental urethane wheels created by American Latex. Riders immediately loved them. The ride was smoother, grippier, and more controlled than the brittle clay wheels dominating skateboarding at the time. But Hobie's corporate backers rejected the idea because the wheels would make skateboards too expensive. The system could not absorb the innovation.

This decision mattered because within a year, skateboarding's first major collapse arrived. Orders vanished, companies folded, and the market disappeared.

Then, along came Frank Nasworthy. In 1970, while visiting a friend's urethane factory in Virginia, Nasworthy noticed large barrels filled with polyurethane roller-skate wheels. Roller skaters largely ignored them because they preferred hard, fast clay wheels. But Frank immediately recognized something critical: the wheels would fit old skateboards perfectly.



Skateboards from the 1960's featuring clay wheels.

The ride might have been fun, but it was incredibly jarring and treacherous.



That compatibility changed everything. Nasworthy was not simply an engineer. He was a surfer searching for flow on land. The urethane wheel did not just improve performance. It transformed the feeling of riding itself. This meant more grip, carve, confidence and more possibilities.

At first, shop owners resisted because the wheels cost far more than clay wheels. So Frank gave sets away. Once people rode them, word spread rapidly. The experience became the explanation. Within a few years, Cadillac Wheels helped ignite skateboarding's second global boom. But the deeper lesson is not just about technology. The urethane wheel succeeded because a dormant innovation finally connected to the right system, at the right moment, through the right person.



Now that you have a sense of the impact of Frank Nasworthy, let me give you a bit more of my history. In 1975, I started skateboarding on clay wheels. For my birthday, I received what was likely old stock from the 1960s. These rattling clay wheels felt rough on almost every surface. At the time, I didn't know any different. I was simply excited to ride. But the experience was limiting. Trust me when I say that every crack and small pebble mattered. There were times when the board would stop immediately and throw me off. I still recall how my legs would vibrate as I rode down my neighbourhood hills. I adapted through caution and gained a few bruises and scrapes along the way.

But in 1976, everything changed. This was the year I got a plastic skateboard with urethane wheels. I think my parents realized that I was pretty serious about riding. The board probably cost \$25 and was something similar to what people today would recognize as a Penny-style board. The difference was truly magical. Suddenly, the ride became smoother, and the wheels could grip magnificently. My turns felt controlled, and I was able to experiment more. This meant I learned more tricks and could ride faster. At the age of 12, I experienced the feeling of pure flow.

This dramatic shift from clay to urethane fused skateboarding into my identity. By the end of 1976, I had discovered SkateBoarder Magazine and books like *The Skateboarder's Bible*. I stared at the products inside those pages, almost like artifacts from another civilization. I didn't just want the equipment. I wanted access to the feeling those riders seemed to inhabit.

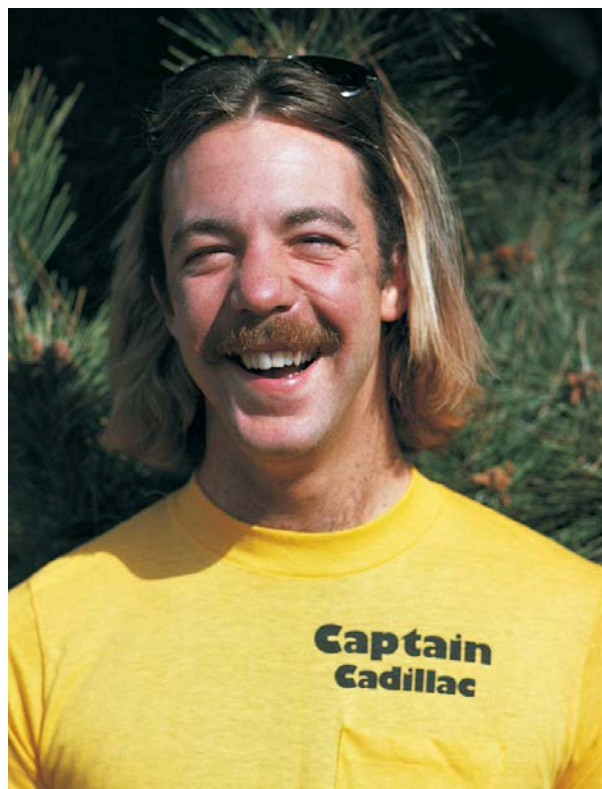
Looking back now through a systems-thinking lens, the urethane wheel was not simply a better wheel. It changed the feedback loop between human beings and pavement. Before urethane, the rider adapted to the terrain through fear and caution. After urethane, the terrain itself became more forgiving.

That single material innovation altered confidence, recovery, speed, creativity, and eventually culture itself. The real breakthrough kept building on itself. The new wheel made the ride smoother, and the smoother ride changed how people skated. As people skated differently, skateboarding culture began to change as well. Riders could carve harder, ride faster, try new tricks, and skate places that once felt impossible. That new culture then pushed companies to create better boards and trucks, and to integrate precision bearings. The urethane wheel did not just improve skateboarding. It changed what skateboarders believed was possible.

Freshly paved hills in places like La Costa became slalom laboratories. Backyard pools evolved from empty suburban spaces into entirely new forms of terrain. Riders pushed harder because the technology allowed them to survive experimentation.

That is the critical point. The revolution of urethane was not merely about performance. It lowered the emotional cost of exploration. And once that happened, skateboarding entered a self-reinforcing loop between: human creativity, geography, engineering, risk, imagination and flow.

But for me, another piece of the puzzle arrived in the form of the Gordon & Smith FiberFlex. I still struggle to fully explain what that board meant to me. The logo fascinated me. The ads fascinated me. The board seemed to ooze flow, and it spoke to something deeper than performance.



Frank Nasworthy - the man who relaunched skateboarding in the 1970's.
Photo: Warren Bolster



Cadillac Wheels

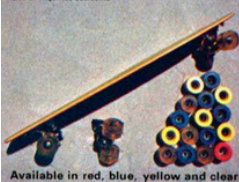
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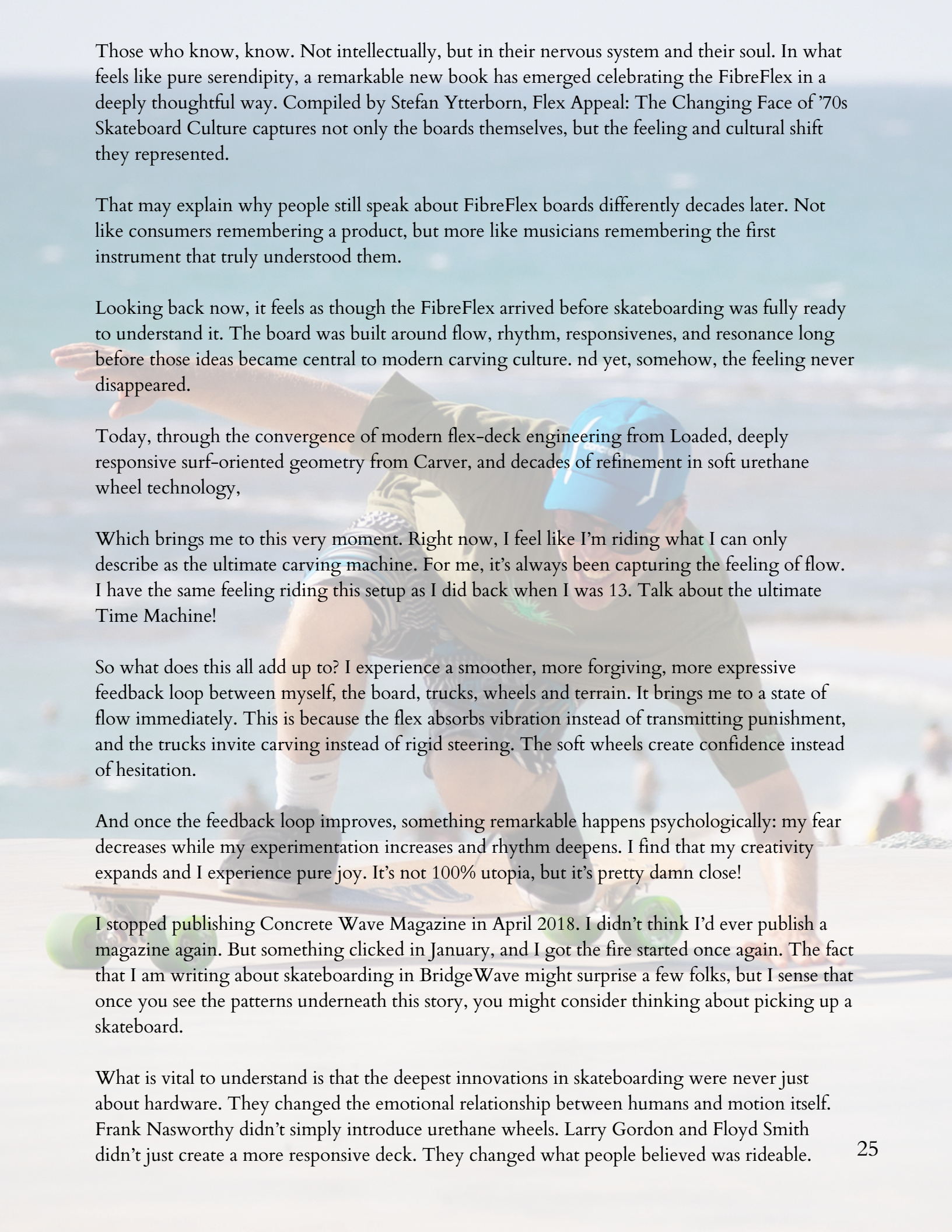
Write for information
for the Cadillac
Super-flex Skateboard.



POSI-GRIP
TRACTION

**Riders pushed harder because the
technology allowed them to
survive experimentation.**



A person wearing a blue cap and a green shirt is riding a skateboard on a beach. The person is in a crouched position, leaning forward, with their arms extended. The background shows a sandy beach and the ocean under a clear sky.

Those who know, know. Not intellectually, but in their nervous system and their soul. In what feels like pure serendipity, a remarkable new book has emerged celebrating the FibreFlex in a deeply thoughtful way. Compiled by Stefan Ytterborn, *Flex Appeal: The Changing Face of '70s Skateboard Culture* captures not only the boards themselves, but the feeling and cultural shift they represented.

That may explain why people still speak about FibreFlex boards differently decades later. Not like consumers remembering a product, but more like musicians remembering the first instrument that truly understood them.

Looking back now, it feels as though the FibreFlex arrived before skateboarding was fully ready to understand it. The board was built around flow, rhythm, responsiveness, and resonance long before those ideas became central to modern carving culture. And yet, somehow, the feeling never disappeared.

Today, through the convergence of modern flex-deck engineering from Loaded, deeply responsive surf-oriented geometry from Carver, and decades of refinement in soft urethane wheel technology,

Which brings me to this very moment. Right now, I feel like I'm riding what I can only describe as the ultimate carving machine. For me, it's always been capturing the feeling of flow. I have the same feeling riding this setup as I did back when I was 13. Talk about the ultimate Time Machine!

So what does this all add up to? I experience a smoother, more forgiving, more expressive feedback loop between myself, the board, trucks, wheels and terrain. It brings me to a state of flow immediately. This is because the flex absorbs vibration instead of transmitting punishment, and the trucks invite carving instead of rigid steering. The soft wheels create confidence instead of hesitation.

And once the feedback loop improves, something remarkable happens psychologically: my fear decreases while my experimentation increases and rhythm deepens. I find that my creativity expands and I experience pure joy. It's not 100% utopia, but it's pretty damn close!

I stopped publishing *Concrete Wave Magazine* in April 2018. I didn't think I'd ever publish a magazine again. But something clicked in January, and I got the fire started once again. The fact that I am writing about skateboarding in *BridgeWave* might surprise a few folks, but I sense that once you see the patterns underneath this story, you might consider thinking about picking up a skateboard.

What is vital to understand is that the deepest innovations in skateboarding were never just about hardware. They changed the emotional relationship between humans and motion itself. Frank Nasworthy didn't simply introduce urethane wheels. Larry Gordon and Floyd Smith didn't just create a more responsive deck. They changed what people believed was rideable.



Skateboarding's First Systems Product

By Stefan Ytterborn

Growing up in Stockholm during the mid-1970s, California felt impossibly far away. Yet every issue of SkateBoarder magazine somehow brought it within reach. Those pages revealed a world of skateparks, slalom courses, backyard pools, innovation, and possibility. My friends and I studied every page obsessively. Not just the riders. But the products, the graphics, the photography and the ideas.

Without realizing it, many of us were receiving an education in design, engineering, branding, manufacturing, and entrepreneurship. One product stood at the center of that universe: The Gordon & Smith Fibreflex. At the time, I could not fully explain why it fascinated me. Fifty years later, after a career spent building products and companies and after assembling what is likely one of the world's most complete collections of original Fibreflex skateboards, I think I finally understand. The Fibreflex was not important because it was different. It was important because it arrived at the center of one of skateboarding's greatest innovation periods.

California's Open-Air Laboratory

The mid-1970s may have been the most experimental period skateboarding has ever experienced. New wheels appeared constantly. Truck designs evolved rapidly and skateparks spread across California. Pool riding exploded, slalom matured and of course, manufacturers competed fiercely. Looking back, California functioned as a giant open-air laboratory. Ideas were tested on hillsides, in drainage ditches, on asphalt, and in backyard pools. Products survived only if riders embraced them. Innovation happened in public. The Fibreflex became one of the defining platforms of that experimentation.

Why Slalom Flourished

No discipline benefited more from Fibreflex than slalom. Slalom is often misunderstood as a race against the clock. In reality, it is a discipline built on rhythm, timing, and energy management. Every movement either preserves momentum or wastes it. Every turn rewards precision. Fibreflex proved uniquely suited to that environment. The board encouraged fluidity rather than force. The result was a generation of riders who seemed to flow through courses rather than attack them. Among them, Henry Hester became the clearest expression of what was possible. His skating demonstrated how timing, precision, and rhythm could become competitive advantages. Speed became a consequence of efficiency, not aggression.

The Riders Who Expanded the Possibilities

Technology only matters when someone unlocks its potential. A remarkable group of riders revealed what Fibreflex could become. Henry Hester demonstrated precision and consistency. Steve Cathey embodied versatility, moving effortlessly between slalom, freestyle, downhill riding, and product experimentation. Doug Saladino and Dennis Martinez pushed the platform toward increasingly performance-oriented riding. Martinez's Flying Ace model, introduced near the end of the decade, pointed toward skateboarding's future—wider boards, specialized designs, and increasingly aggressive terrain. Together these riders revealed an important truth: Fibreflex was not limited to a single style of skating. It supported exploration. That adaptability may have been its greatest strength.

introducing the new gordon and smith **FLEXIBLE SKATEBOARD**



SKIP FRYE says,

"I have tried all combinations of wood skateboards with different truck assemblies. I have also designed a skateboard of my own, but the new idea of a flexible base provides more excitement and performance than any board I have ever ridden."

Skip Frye

A NEW CONCEPT IN SKATEBOARDS

The Gordon and Smith skateboard is a scientific combination of plastic and wood designed for maximum strength and action. The wood is used as a core material between two sheets of high strength plastic. The plastic is a fiber-glass and epoxy resin laminate which is manufactured under controlled temperature and pressure to insure a laminate of maximum flexural strength greater than that of steel.



A NEW DIMENSION IN SKATEBOARDING

The Gordon and Smith Skateboard has action that was never before possible with the conventional wood skateboards. The flexible skateboard enables a sharper yet smoother turn without having the wheels slide or hang up on the bottom of the board. As you begin to make a turn the board flexes until the turn is completed at which time it springs back thus tending to accelerate instead of de-accelerate the board. This type of action makes the Gordon and Smith skateboard superior for sidewalk surfing or slalom skating.

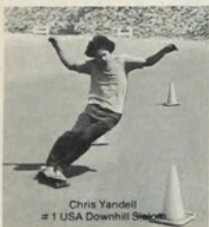
The flexible board also increases the similarities of the body action and thrills involved in skateboarding with those involved in surfing and skiing.

We use double-action Chicago wheels.



Ad from 1965 announcing the arrival of Gordon & Smith's new flexible board

ANNOUNCING... A Superior Dimension in Performance Skateboarding



Chris Vandell
#1 USA Downhill Slalom



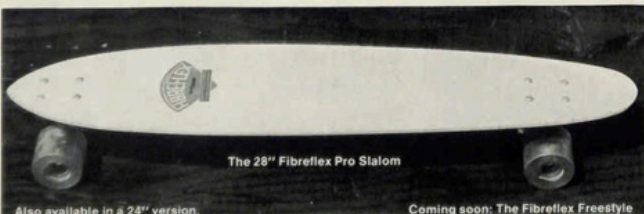
Danny Traller
#2 USA Downhill Slalom

FIBREFLEX IS BACK! . . . We at G & S first introduced the Fibreflex and the flexible skateboard concept in the spring of 1965. The Fibreflex quickly proved its superiority with Willie Phillips and Skip Frye placing 1st and 2nd in the downhill slalom event at the International Skateboard Championships held at Anaheim Stadium early that summer. Ten years later, spring 1975, Fibreflex is back at it again with Chris Vandell and Danny Traller riding the Fibreflex to 1st and 2nd place honors in the downhill slalom racing at the Bahne / Cadillac Nationals.

A FULL WORKING FLEX . . . The Fibreflex construction is based around the principle of maximum downward flex or set, with a powerful snap back return. This is achieved basically through a multiple of laminations working against one another in compression and tension. The real power of the Fibreflex comes from its top and bottom outer laminate. This laminate has been acclaimed by the major archery bow manufacturers of the world as the strongest and most powerful fiberglass laminate available. It is also being used by the nation's leading ski manufacturer, and now again, exclusively on Fibreflex. What this means is that your Fibreflex skateboard can be flexed indefinitely and still retain its original shape. It absolutely will not sag or fatigue! . . . We call this 100% memory. The Fibreflex is laminated in such a way that it incorporates high camber (a principle used in snow skis). The function of high camber is to intensify the thrust and insure a positive set during the unweight portion of your turns.

THE FIBREFLEX FEEL . . . The Fibreflex is uniquely spirited with its own inner life. The first time you hit a hard, fast turn with your Fibreflex, you can feel it positively set you into the radius of that turn and then thrust back and accelerate you into the straight. An accomplished Fibreflex pilot can actually pump his skate machine and generate speed (much like riding one of our new Modern Machine Surfboards). There's no other flex like Fibreflex!

Drop in on your Gordon & Smith dealer and experience the Fibreflex feel. G & S Fibreflex Skateboards are available exclusively at PB Surf Shop in San Diego, and at the many other fine G & S dealers throughout the coastal areas of the country. Check our G & S ad in the latest SURFER Magazine (pg. 13) for a complete listing. From the time you first plant your foot on it, you'll agree there's only one . . . FIBREFLEX.



The 28" Fibreflex Pro Slalom

Also available in a 24" version.

Coming soon: The Fibreflex Freestyle



A product of **GORDON & SMITH SURFBOARDS**
5485 Gaines St., San Diego, Calif. 92121 Phone (714) 297-3892



Stefan Ytterborn enjoying the ride.

Relaunching the Fibreflex in the mid-1970's.

Skateboarding's First Systems Product

Looking back today, I increasingly view Fibreflex as one of skateboarding's earliest examples of systems thinking. Most product development focuses on individual components. A stronger material, lighter components or a faster wheel. Fibreflex succeeded because it improved the interaction between components. Its value did not reside solely in the deck itself. It emerged from the relationship between deck flex, truck geometry, wheel grip, rider input, and terrain. The product worked because the system worked. That lesson remains remarkably relevant. The most successful innovations rarely emerge from improving a single part. They emerge from improving the relationships between parts.

What Collecting Taught Me

When I began assembling the collection that eventually morphed in to my book, my objective seemed straightforward. Find the boards, document them and preserve them. What I discovered instead was a story. Each board represented a snapshot of a period when technology, design, manufacturing, photography, and athletic progression were all advancing simultaneously. The collection gradually became less about objects and more about understanding a phenomenon. Why had these products remained so vivid in memory? Why did riders continue speaking about them decades later? The answers were not about rarity, value or nostalgia. The Fibreflex represented a moment when technology and culture aligned perfectly. It arrived at the right time and connected with the right riders. And it embodied a lesson that extends far beyond skateboarding: The most influential innovations are often remembered not because of what they were made from, but because of what they made possible.



Flex Appeal was released in June.



One of Stefan prize possessions:
a customized Fibreflex.

Loaded With Flex

**How FibreFlex's unique ride inspired
Don Tashman and helped shape the
creation of Loaded Boards.**



**We spoke with Don about the evolution
of skateboarding, and what
continues to drive his work today.**



Don Tashman - Founder of Loaded Boards

Do you see skateboarding as a series of isolated innovations, or as a long systems evolution where each advancement unlocked entirely new forms of human movement and perception

Generally more of the latter than the former. Skateboard tends to iterate and refine and get streamlined over time. Often it's functionally driven or driven by a creative and playful spirit.

That said, there are moments of disruptive innovation that occur and that can lead skateboarding in unusual new directions. Instances of this include the original flex boards that were taken from aerospace composites at the time in the 70s. That was revisited in the early 2000s with more advanced materials and crossover from snowboarding. Other advances that were disruptive include the reverse kingpin truck and surf skate trucks. There's still plenty of room for iterative as well as non-linear advancements, which makes this super exciting.



When I ride your board I find myself entering into rhythm, flow, and body intuition. I call it “the ultimate carving machine.” Was that always part of the design philosophy?

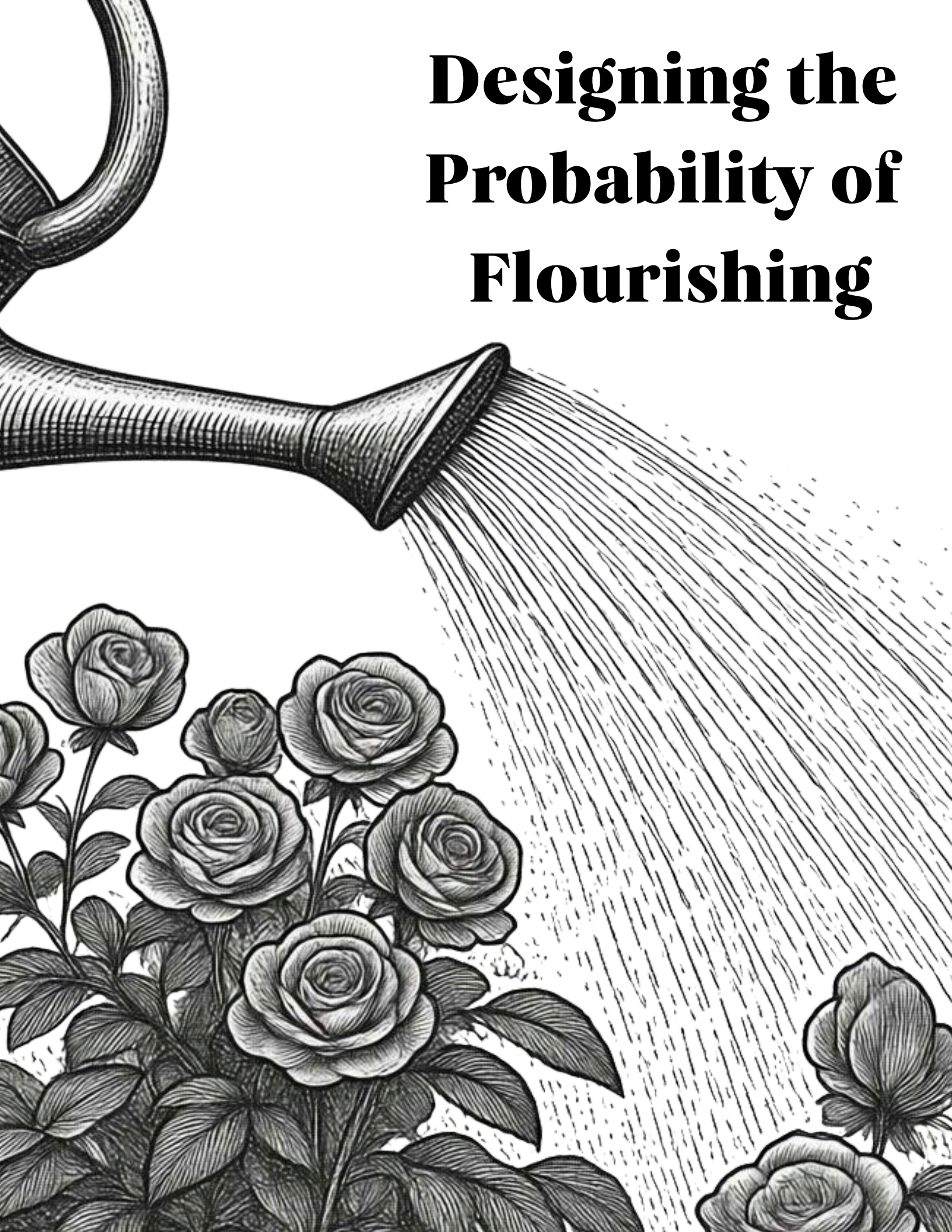
Personally, yes. For Loaded being rooted in skateboarding but highly influenced by snowboarding, that personal, visceral, soul-riding experiences continue to be the primary driver of most of what we strive to create.

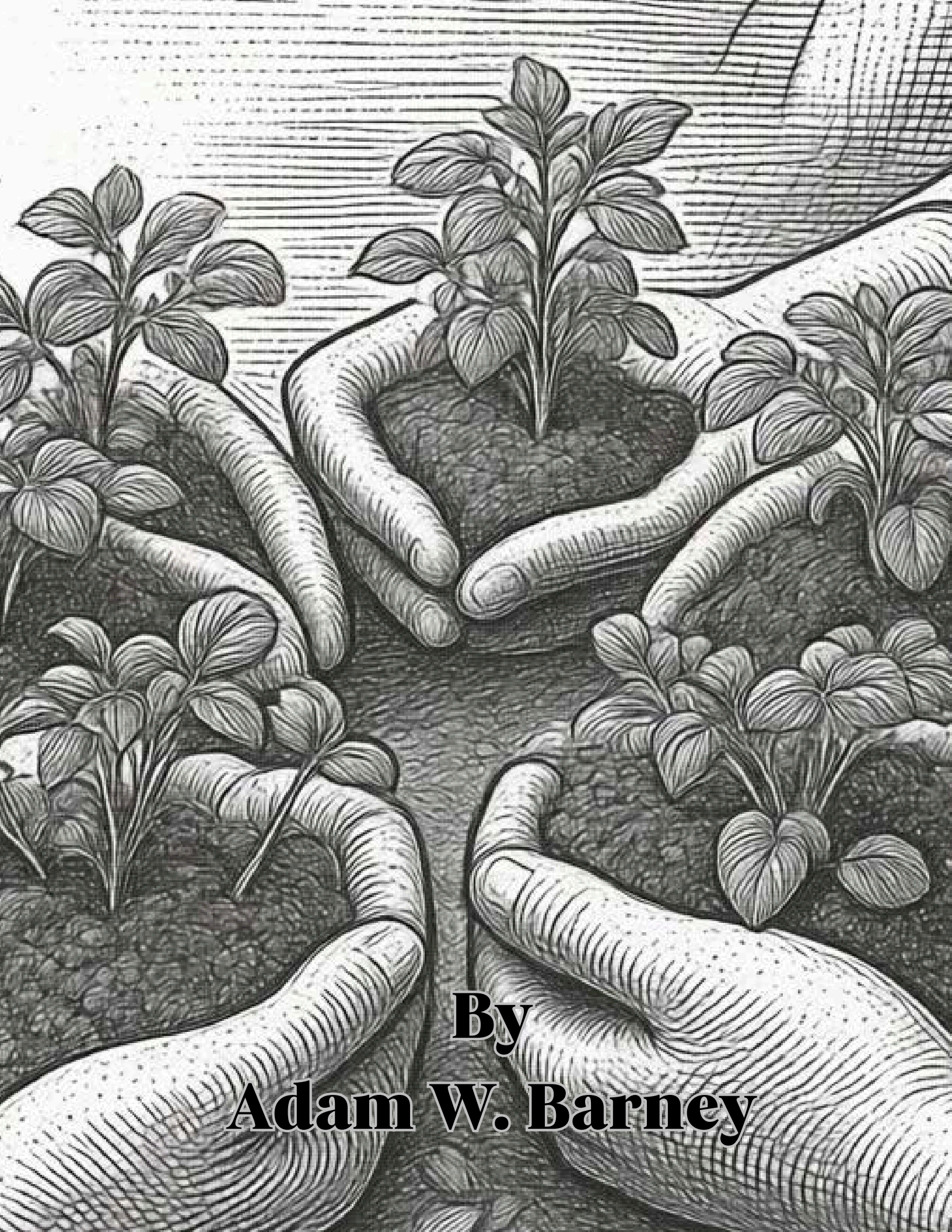
How important do you think flex has been in the evolution of carving and flow-oriented skating?

I think it's a significant and literal performance enhancer. While stiffer decks can create soulful carving and flow experiences, flexible camber decks that are pre-loaded with energy create a much more dynamic and multi-axis feel. That said, there are so many factors at play, and I believe that the goal is to create synergy between the components, as the wrong combination of wheels, trucks, and/or decks on its own could be counter-productive.

How have pumptacks affected skateboarding? I think it's still early days, but pump tracks are amazing. They are a ton of fun and expand both the experience of skateboarding and the accessibility of it. I do think seeing pump tracks and skate parks become more integrated over time, is gonna be super cool.

Designing the Probability of Flourishing





By
Adam W. Barney

A few weeks ago, I found myself standing in a room where I knew almost everyone. That sounds like bragging. I promise it isn't. If anything, it says more about the amount of time I've spent wandering around Boston saying yes to coffee meetings than anything else.

The event was Agents of Change, one of my favorite events of the year. It brings together founders, nonprofit leaders, community builders, investors, and a whole bunch of people who care deeply about expanding opportunity for others. There were about 150 people there. I probably knew 140 of them. The funny thing is that wasn't what struck me. What struck me was that over four hours disappeared. I forgot to check my phone. I forgot I had to go to the bathroom. I forgot about work. And when I finally left, I had more energy than when I arrived.

At forty-three years old, that's worth paying attention to. Because if you're anything like me, energy becomes one of the currencies you think about most. Not money. Not status. Not followers. Energy. The real thing. The kind that determines whether you show up fully for your family, your work, your community, and yourself.

I spend a lot of time talking about energy now. It's literally part of my job. But the truth is I've been studying energy long before I called myself a coach. I just didn't realize that's what I was studying.

When I was seven years old, I struck out the final batter in a Little League game. The team celebrated. The coaches and my parents celebrated. Everybody was thrilled. Except I couldn't stop thinking about one thing. The batter I struck out was the only girl in the league. That was it. That was the thing stuck in my head. Not the strikeout. Not the win. Not the attention. Why was she the only girl? Even writing that now feels strange. What kind of kid thinks that way? Apparently this one. Because I've spent most of my life asking versions of the same question.

Why does this system work for some people and not others?

Why do certain environments help people thrive while others slowly wear them down?

Why do some rooms feel alive while others feel empty?

At seven, I didn't have language for any of that. I just knew something felt incomplete. Years later, I met my wife doing Hurricane Katrina relief work. Most people hear that story and focus on the romance. And to be fair, it's a pretty good story. But what stayed with me from that experience wasn't just meeting Paula. It was watching communities hold each other together under impossible circumstances. You learn a lot about human beings when everything familiar gets stripped away. You learn that resilience isn't really an individual trait. It's often communal. It's relational. It's environmental. People survive because other people show up. The system matters. Then life handed me another lesson.

My mother lived with ALS for just over one year before we lost her. There is no leadership book that prepares you for that. No framework, podcast or productivity hack. You simply learn, day by day, what matters. And what I remember most isn't the disease. It's the people. The researchers, caregivers, family and friends. The people who kept showing up. Again, the same lesson. The environment matters.



Years later, when my father began navigating hydrocephalus, that lesson returned. Different diagnosis. Same truth. Nobody gets through life alone. Which brings me back to that room in Boston. Because standing there, surrounded by people I had known for years, I realized something. I don't think flourishing is primarily an individual accomplishment. I think it's often a systems outcome. That might sound obvious. But we spend an enormous amount of time pretending otherwise.

We tell people to work harder. Be more resilient and develop better habits. Wake up earlier. Optimize their mornings and drink more water. Download another app. Track another metric. I have nothing against any of those things. I've done most of them. But increasingly I think we're asking the wrong question. Instead of asking, "What's wrong with this person?" we should be asking, "What environment is this person trying to survive inside?"

Because I've lived enough life now to know that the exact same person can look completely different depending on the conditions around them. I've seen it in corporate America. I've seen it in startups, schools, families, communities, and in myself. I spent more than twenty years building a career across agencies, startups, and global organizations. Some of those experiences were incredible. Some of them nearly drained the life out of me. At the time, I thought the difference was me. Maybe I wasn't trying hard enough. Maybe I wasn't disciplined enough. Maybe I wasn't adaptable enough. Then I got laid off. Twice. And once the sting wore off, something interesting happened.

I started noticing that the environments where I did my best work all shared certain characteristics. Trust, connection, autonomy, meaning and psychological safety. The ability to bring your whole self to the table. The environments that drained me shared characteristics too. Fear, politics performance and extraction. The constant pressure to become a version of yourself that no longer felt authentic. Same Adam. Different system. Different outcome. That realization changed everything. The funny thing is that for years people told me I was a great networker. I've never fully loved that description.

What interested me was possibility.

**What interested me was what happened when
two seemingly unrelated people collided at
exactly the right moment.**

When most people hear the word networking, they imagine business cards, LinkedIn connections, elevator pitches, and awkward conversations near cheese cubes at conferences. That's never been what interested me. What interested me was people. What interested me was possibility. What interested me was what happened when two seemingly unrelated people collided at exactly the right moment.

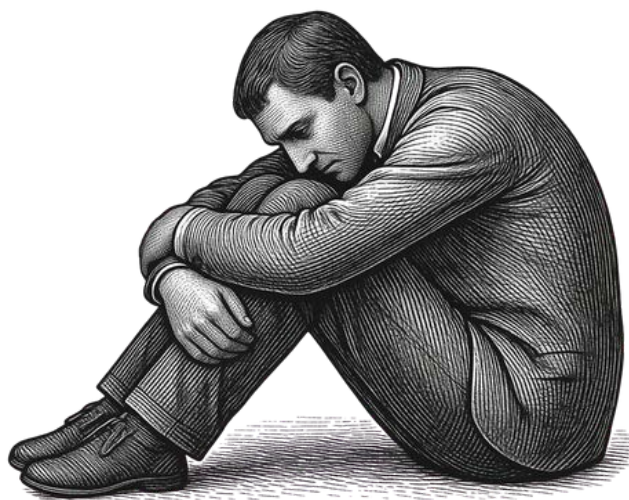
Looking back, I don't think I was building a network at all. I think I was collecting evidence. Evidence that human beings flourish differently depending on the environments around them. Over twenty years in startups, agencies, enterprise organizations, nonprofit work, volunteer work, and community building, I've watched the same phenomenon repeat itself again and again. Someone enters the right room and suddenly becomes more confident. Someone meets the right mentor and begins thinking bigger. Someone finds a community where they finally feel understood and starts taking risks they never would have taken before. The person didn't fundamentally change overnight. The environment did.

Or perhaps more accurately, the environment revealed something that had been there all along. That's what fascinates me. We spend enormous energy trying to optimize individuals while often ignoring the conditions that either amplify or suppress human potential. A seed planted in poor soil is not a bad seed. A talented person inside the wrong environment is not a broken person. Sometimes what looks like a personal limitation is actually a systems problem. Today I work with leaders navigating transitions. Founders, executives and people standing at crossroads. And one

thing I see repeatedly is that most people assume they're broken long before they question the environment around them. They blame themselves for exhaustion. They blame themselves for disengagement. They blame themselves for feeling stuck. Sometimes the issue is personal. Often it isn't. Sometimes the issue is that their nervous system has been telling the truth for years. They've just been ignoring it.

One of the most powerful conversations I've had recently was with Michael Brooke, founder of The Inside Atlas. We spent an hour talking about alignment, energy, and human flourishing. One phrase from that conversation hasn't left me. He described emotional erosion. Not burnout. Not collapse. Erosion. That slow wearing away that happens when someone stays too long inside a system that no longer fits who they are becoming.

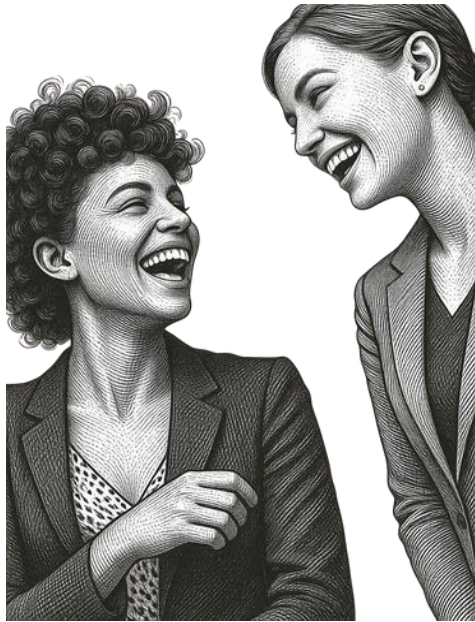
The more I think about it, the more I believe emotional erosion might be one of the defining challenges of modern life. Not because people are weak. Because they're adaptable. They can tolerate misalignment for far longer than they should. Until one day they wake up wondering where their energy went. This may also explain why loneliness has become one of the defining public health conversations of our time.



I've spent time helping build Loneliness Action USA because the issue kept showing up everywhere I looked. In coaching conversations, in leadership teams, in founders, executives, parents and communities. The Surgeon General didn't raise alarms about loneliness because people suddenly forgot how to have conversations. Something deeper is happening. We've spent decades designing systems for efficiency, convenience, speed, and scale. Some of those systems have produced extraordinary benefits. But many have also unintentionally reduced the number of places where people naturally connect. Third places disappear. Community organizations struggle. Neighbourhood relationships weaken. Work becomes increasingly remote. Social media promises connection while often delivering comparison. Then we act surprised when people feel disconnected. What if loneliness isn't primarily a personal problem? What if it is, at

least partially, a design problem? That question keeps pulling me back. Because the opposite of loneliness isn't simply being surrounded by people. It's belonging. It's contribution. It's feeling seen. It's feeling that your presence matters. Those are conditions. And conditions can be designed.

Which brings us back to the idea of design. This issue is focused on Designing Utopia. I love that because it points toward a question I've been carrying for years. What if flourishing is not something we achieve? What if it's something we design for? Not perfectly. Not permanently. But intentionally. A gardener cannot force a flower to bloom. A parent cannot force confidence. A teacher cannot force curiosity. A coach cannot force transformation. But they can create conditions. Good soil. Good questions. Good support. Good relationships. Good environments. Maybe that's what leadership really is. Maybe that's what parenting is. Maybe that's what community is. Designing the probability that someone can become more fully themselves. Not guaranteeing it. Just making it more likely.



These days, I find myself thinking about all of this through the lens of my daughters. Louisa and Genevieve are growing up in a world that looks dramatically different from the one I inherited. Artificial intelligence is reshaping work. Technology is accelerating faster than most of us can comprehend. Entire industries are transforming in real time. It's easy to become preoccupied with preparing children for future jobs, future skills, and future uncertainties.

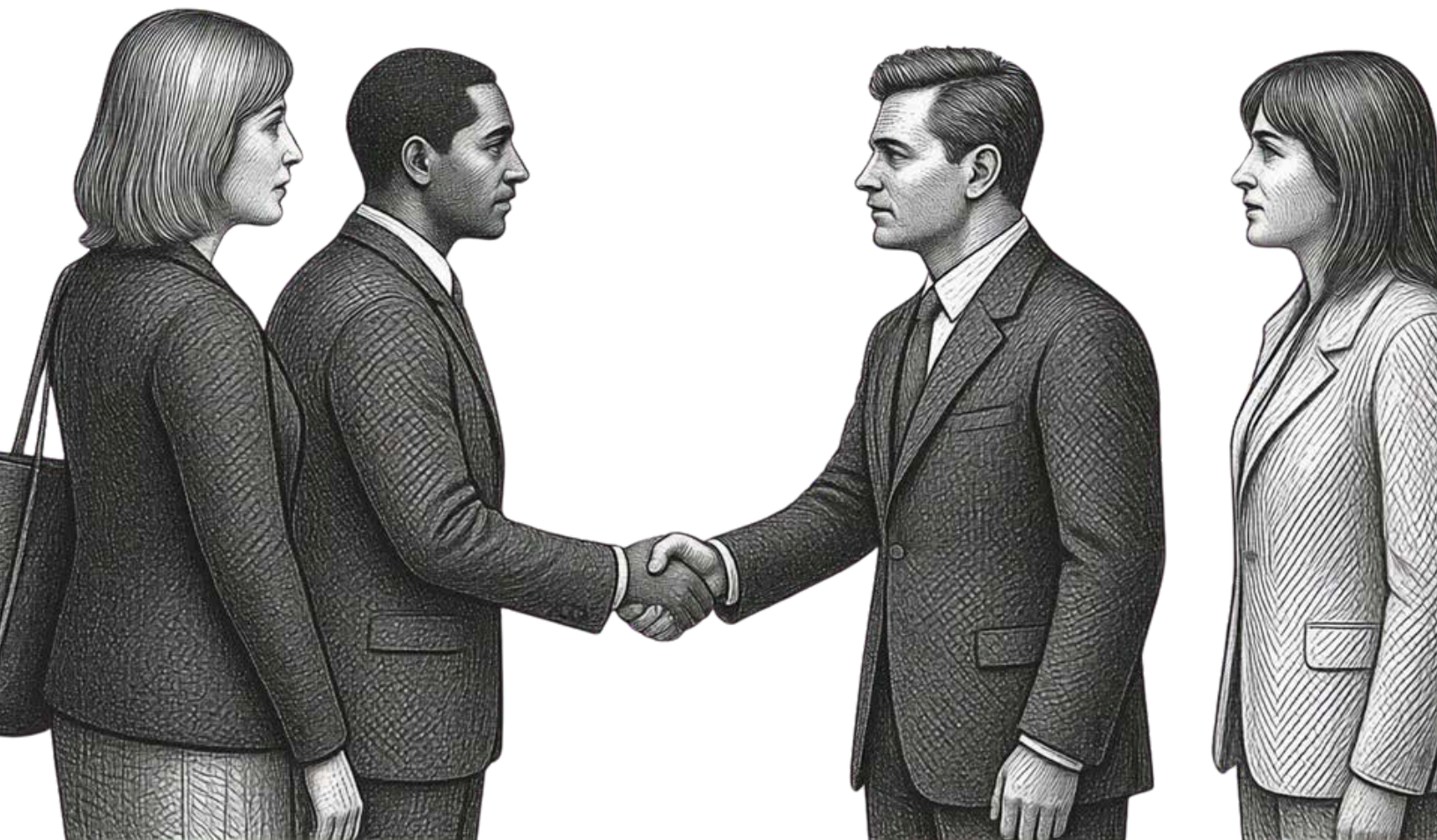
But the older I get, the more I find myself asking different questions.

Will they find environments where they feel safe enough to be themselves?
Will they encounter leaders who encourage curiosity instead of conformity?
Will they build relationships rooted in trust rather than performance?
Will they discover communities where they feel they belong?
Will they feel empowered to contribute something meaningful to the world?

I don't spend much time wondering whether my daughters are capable. I already know they are. What I wonder about is the environments they'll inherit. Because capability matters. But conditions matter too. And perhaps one of the greatest responsibilities we have as leaders, parents, educators, founders, and citizens is helping create environments where more people have the opportunity to flourish. Not because flourishing can be guaranteed. But because it can be made more likely.

The room in Boston didn't energize me by accident. It was the result of years of relationships. Years of trust. Years of people showing up for one another. The energy wasn't random. It was designed. And the more I study people, organizations, communities, and my own life, the more I come back to the same conclusion: People don't flourish because someone finally gave them the perfect productivity system. People flourish because they find themselves in environments where they feel safe enough, connected enough, and valued enough to bring their full selves forward.

In a world obsessed with efficiency, scale, and optimization, maybe that's the real design challenge. Not building better machines. Building better conditions for humans. And if we get that right, flourishing stops feeling like luck. It starts feeling like the natural outcome of a system doing exactly what it was designed to do.



MOST ASSESSMENTS MEASURE THE PERSON.



MYERS-BRIGGS

EXPLORES PREFERENCES
IN HOW PEOPLE PERCEIVE
INFORMATION, MAKE
DECISIONS, AND INTERACT
WITH THE WORLD.



DISC

MEASURES BEHAVIORAL TENDENCIES
AND COMMUNICATION STYLES.

WHAT THEY REVEAL:

PERSONALITY PREFERENCES
COMMUNICATION PATTERNS
BEHAVIOURAL TENDENCIES
DECISION-MAKING STYLES

THE QUESTION THEY ANSWER:

WHO IS THIS PERSON?

AN IMPORTANT QUESTION.

BUT PERHAPS NOT THE DEEPEST ONE.

OTHER ASSESSMENTS GO DEEPER.



KOLBE

MEASURES INSTINCTIVE MODES
OF ACTION AND HOW PEOPLE
NATURALLY SOLVE PROBLEMS.



CLIFTONSTRENGTHS

IDENTIFIES RECURRING PATTERNS
OF TALENT AND POTENTIAL.

WHAT THEY REVEAL

NATURAL INSTINCTS

TALENT PATTERNS

AREAS OF EXCELLENCE

PREFERRED WAYS OF OPERATING

THE QUESTION THEY ANSWER

HOW DOES THIS PERSON NATURALLY FUNCTION?

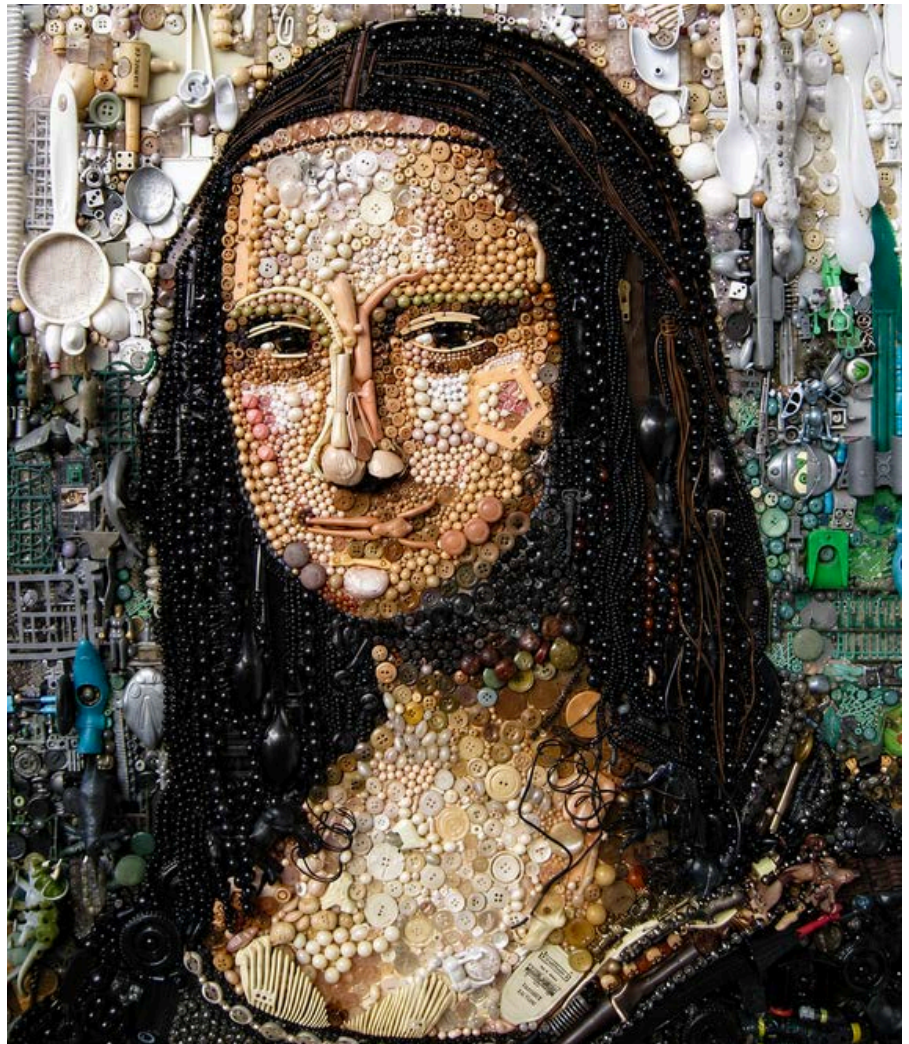
AN EVEN DEEPER QUESTION.

BUT THERE IS STILL SOMETHING UNDERNEATH.

THE INSIDE ATLAS ASKS A DIFFERENT QUESTION.

THE INSIDE ATLAS ASKS:
HOW DID YOU BECOME WHO
YOU ARE?

BY EXPLORING THE
EXPERIENCES,
RELATIONSHIPS, BELIEFS,
ADAPTATIONS, AND
SOURCES OF MEANING THAT
SHAPED YOUR LIFE.



MOST ASSESSMENTS DESCRIBE WHO YOU ARE.

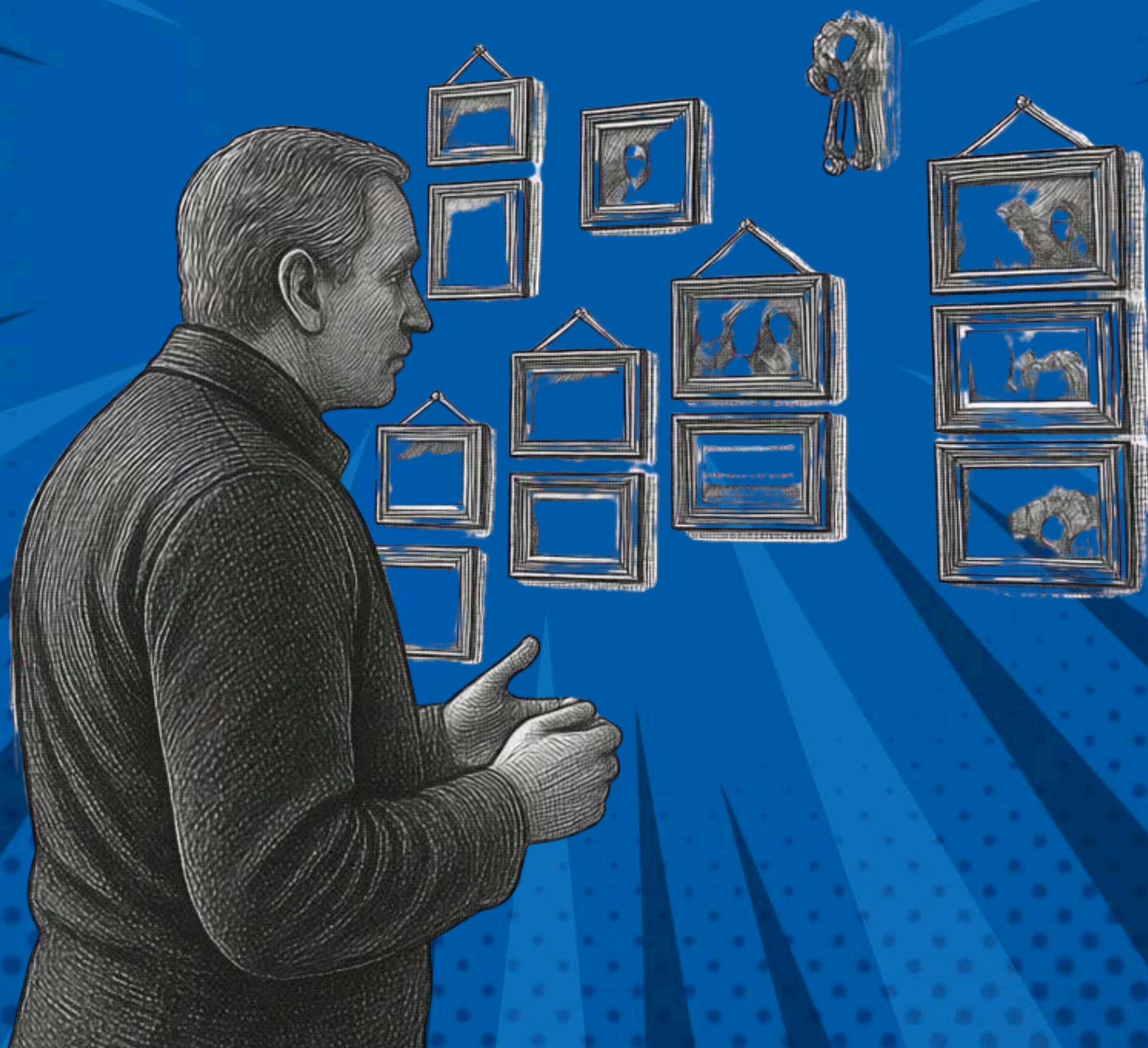
**THE INSIDE ATLAS EXPLORES
HOW YOU BECAME WHO YOU ARE.**



THEINSIDEATLAS.COM

THE SYSTEMS THAT REMEMBER

BY ROBERT STANLEY



Most of us can remember a moment when someone saw something about us that others had missed. A teacher who noticed we were struggling before we said anything. A physician who remembered a detail from six months ago and connected it to something happening now. A friend who sensed something was wrong before we found the words ourselves. These moments feel meaningful. But they also feel rare.

Which raises a question worth sitting with: why are they rare? People are not generally indifferent to each other. Most teachers, physicians, colleagues, and friends genuinely care about the people around them. So why does the experience of being truly known feel like an exception rather than a design?

The System Starts From Zero

Every new appointment begins with: "Can you tell me what brings you in today?" Every new school year, the student re-establishes themselves with a new teacher. Every performance review treats the year as though it were the first year. Every new care worker arrives with no knowledge of what the last one observed.

This is not indifference. It is designed. These systems were not built to remember. They were built to respond to the visit, the semester, the review cycle, and the shift. Each interaction is treated as complete in itself. The burden of continuity gets transferred quietly to the individual. You carry your own history from appointment to appointment. From provider to provider. From school year to school year. If you can articulate it clearly, the system responds well. If the thing that matters most is something you haven't fully noticed yourself yet – a slow change, an emerging pattern – it disappears into the gap between interactions. This is not a failure of care. It is a failure of memory.

The Hidden Transfer

Modern systems often solve continuity by assigning it to the person moving through them. The patient becomes the record. The student becomes the memory. The employee becomes the historian of their own work. The family becomes the continuity layer between providers. The system appears coherent because people are compensating for what it cannot remember.

Most of us know this feeling. You arrive at the appointment with the medication list already prepared. You explain the family history again. You remind the school of what happened last year. You tell the new manager why the old decision was made. You become the one who remembers — not because anyone asked you to, but because if you do not, the system starts over. Over time, that becomes something heavier than responsibility. You are not just participating in the system. You are carrying the continuity it was never designed to hold.

Memory is infrastructure. Roads connect places. Power grids connect buildings. Memory connects moments. Without it, every interaction starts from zero. With it, small observations compound into wisdom.

What forgetting costs

Most forms of deterioration don't arrive suddenly. Burnout accumulates over months before it surfaces in performance. A student's disengagement deepens gradually before it becomes visible. A person's health shifts in small, observable ways long before the emergency becomes unavoidable.

The signals are there. They are simply distributed across interactions that no single part of the system was designed to connect.

IF a system is built to see events

AND the signals that matter most accumulate between events

THEN no one holds the pattern – only the pieces

**SO by the time the system responds,
the problem has already compounded**

The cost of that gap is paid by the person navigating the system. And by the people around them — the family members who reconstruct the history at every new appointment, the colleagues who quietly absorb the load as someone begins to struggle, the friends who notice what the institution missed.

What Continuity Produces

Here is what changes when a system is designed to remember. Small corrections happen early, when they are still small. Trust accumulates – not from any single interaction, but from the experience of being seen consistently over time. People take more risks, try harder things, ask for help sooner, because they feel genuinely held rather than merely processed.

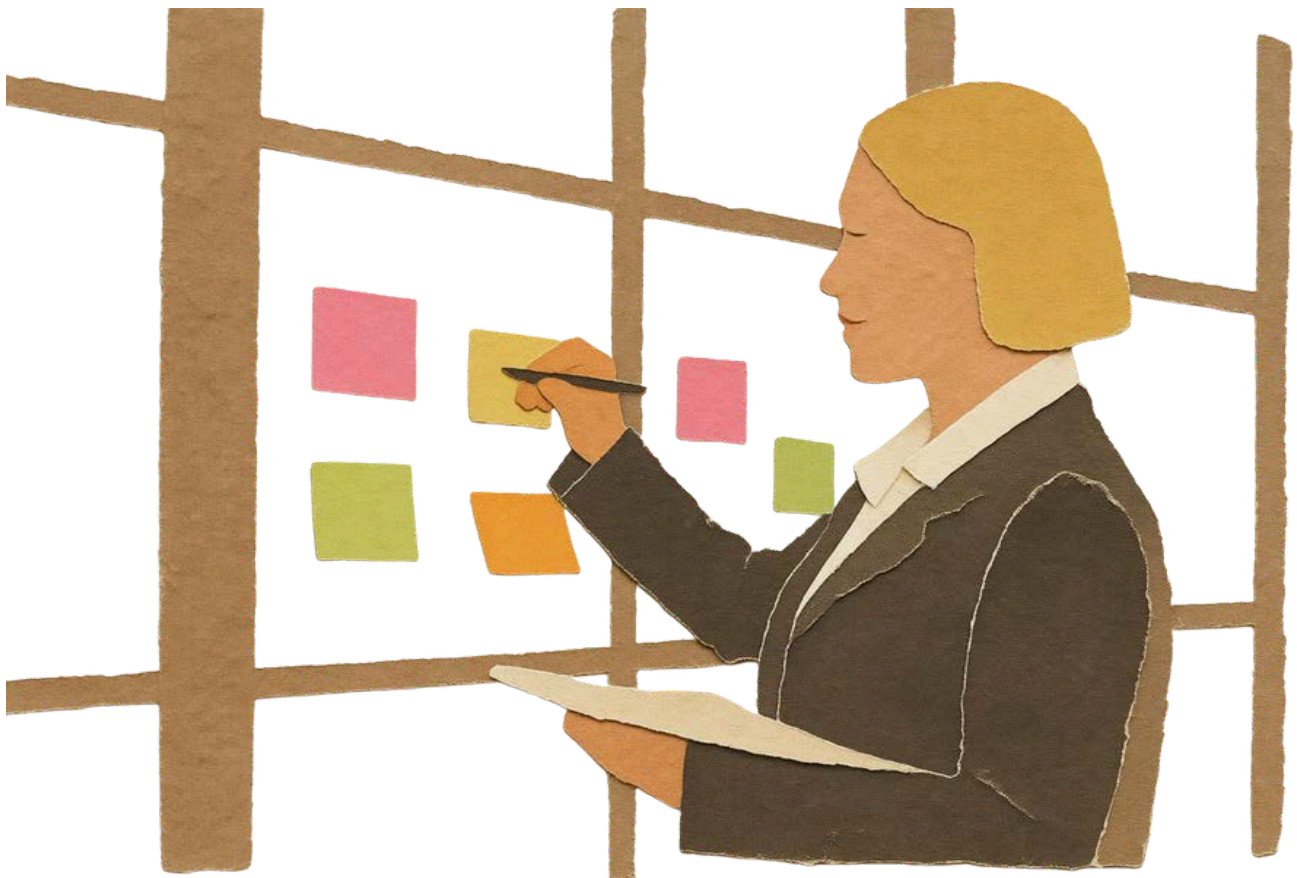
Problems surface earlier because they do not need to be hidden. Belonging deepens. Confidence grows. The system becomes better at prevention because it is better at recognition. Think about what it actually feels like to be on the receiving end of that. To arrive somewhere and not have to start over. To have someone reference something you mentioned months ago – not because they reviewed a file, but because it stayed with them. To have a problem caught before you fully understood it was a problem. To be asked the right question at the right moment because someone has been paying attention across time, not just in this hour.

That experience – of being held by something larger than a single interaction – changes how people carry themselves. It reduces the background vigilance that comes from navigating systems alone. It creates the conditions for honesty, for risk, for growth. Not because anything dramatic happened. Because someone remembered.

This is true in families. It is true in schools. It is true in workplaces. And it is true in healthcare. Flourishing rarely emerges from a single interaction, however good that interaction is. It emerges from continuity. From being seen repeatedly, consistently, and accurately over time. From the accumulation of moments that add up to something larger: the experience of being known.

When people are known across time, something shifts in how they move through the world. They are less alone in the carrying of themselves. They are less likely to fall through the gaps. They are more likely to become the version of themselves that circumstances, left unwitnessed, might have prevented.

People flourish differently when they are known across time. That is not a philosophical observation. It is a design principle.



The Reframe

We tend to attribute flourishing to individual qualities. Resilience. Mindset. Habits. Discipline. And we tend to attribute its absence to individual failure.

But consider a different possibility. What if flourishing and its absence are shaped less by individual character than by whether the systems surrounding a person are capable of remembering them?

Not Knowing Them Just In This Moment.

Remembering who they have been across time. What is getting better? What is quietly getting worse? What they could not yet see about themselves, but a system paying continuous attention might.

Many systems make the same mistake. They treat repeated engagement as a motivation problem when it is actually a continuity problem. They invest in better individual interactions while neglecting the structures that transform isolated moments into durable patterns of growth and care.

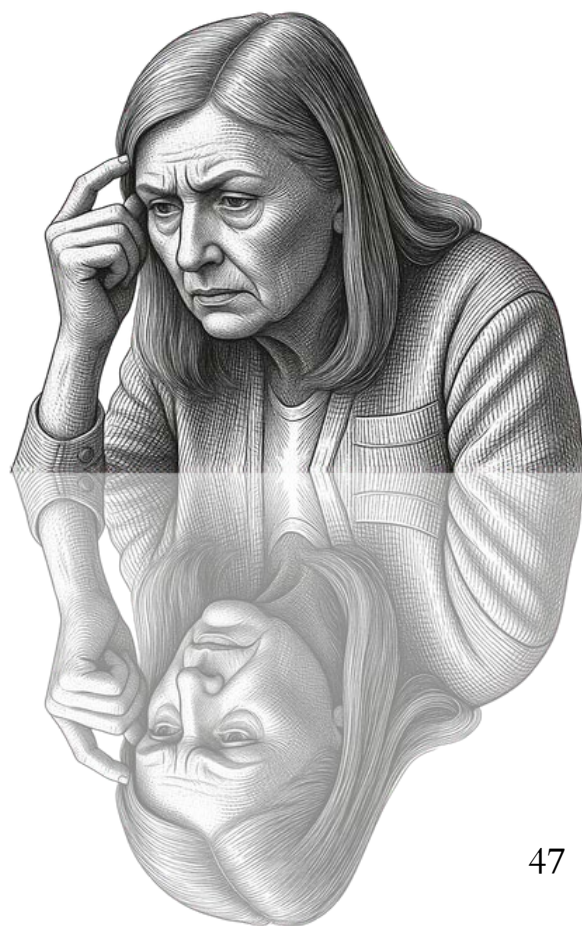
The result is a system that optimizes every visit while losing the person between them. Healthy systems don't just respond to people. They remember them.

The Lever

In healthcare, the consequences of institutional forgetting are unusually visible. A care worker documents a change on Tuesday morning. A nurse arrives on Thursday with no knowledge of what was observed. A family member notices something shifting at home every evening, but has nowhere to put it. Each person sees a fragment. No system holds them together. The signals that could prevent a crisis exist. They simply live in separate places, owned by no one, connected to nothing.

In healthcare, some people have begun imagining infrastructure designed specifically to solve this problem. Not to replace any of those individual interactions, but to connect them — the way a highway system connects roads that already exist, or the electricity grid powers devices that already work. The infrastructure doesn't do the caring. It makes the caring coherent. It holds the pattern that no single interaction can hold alone.

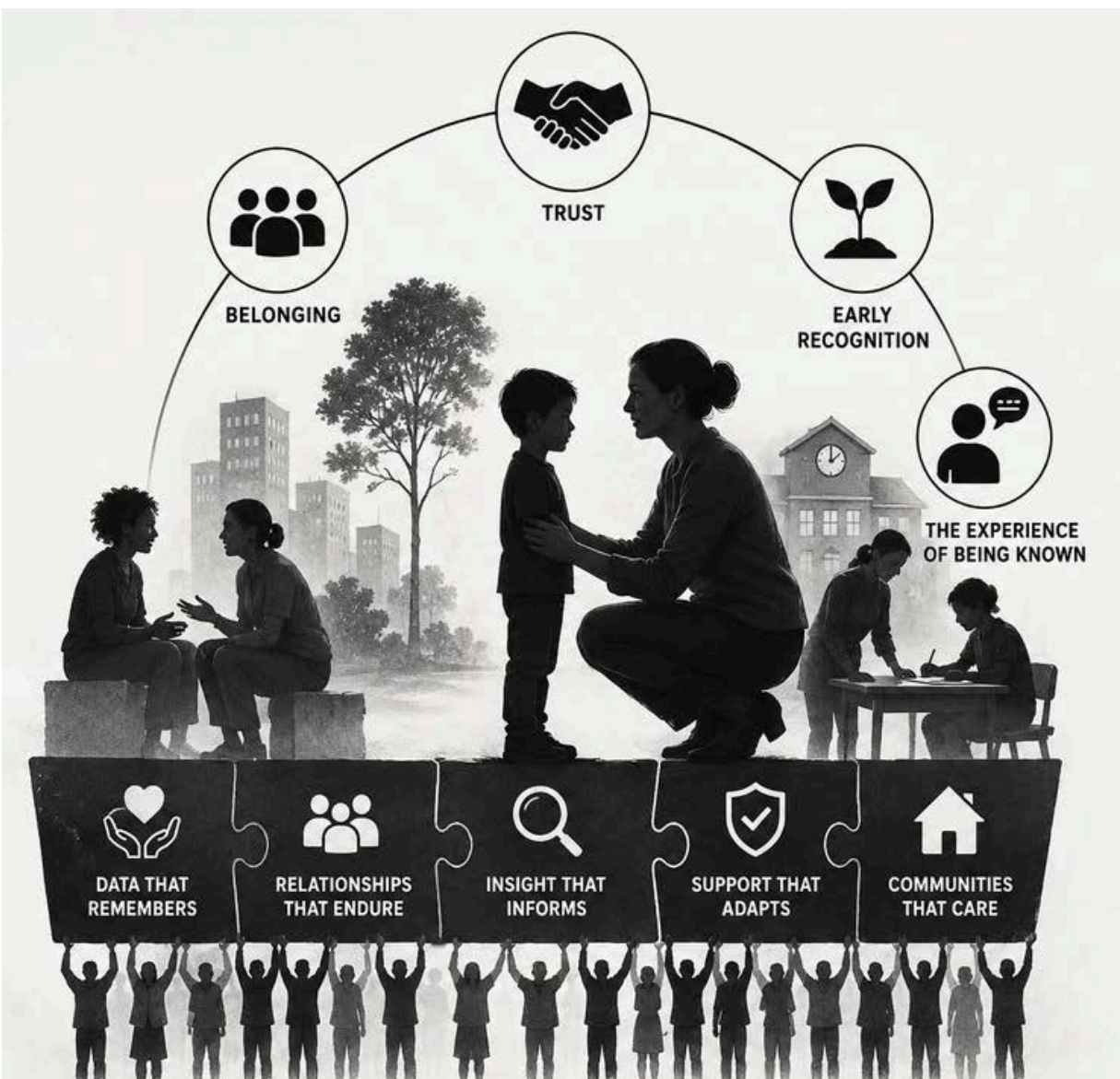
But infrastructure of this kind only serves people if it is designed with their agency and trust at the centre – memory in service of the person, not the system. That is what memory looks like as a design choice rather than an accident of individual attention. That shift, from isolated response to connected memory changes the conditions in which people live.



Most discussions about flourishing focus on the individual. What habits to build. What mindset to adopt. What choices to make. Those things matter. But they all depend, more than we usually acknowledge, on the systems that surround us. On whether those systems see us accurately. On whether they remember us across time, or meet us fresh at every interaction, burdening us with the work of carrying our own history.

A system that cannot remember people cannot care for them well. And a society that cannot care for people well will struggle to help them flourish. The conditions that produce flourishing are not mysterious. Trust. Belonging. Early recognition. The experience of being known. These are not accidents of individual character. They are outcomes of design – the design of the systems in which people spend their lives.

The systems that shape our lives increasingly see moments. Human flourishing requires something else. Continuity. Memory. The experience of being known across time. Before people can flourish, they have to be more than moments.



Learning How to Fall



**Resilience is not the ability
to avoid impact.**

**It is the discipline to recover
structure before pressure
owns the next decision.**

**By
Ido Shalev**

People like to say “fall forward.”

In North America, the phrase is familiar. It sounds strong, positive, and almost motivational. It belongs to the language of ambition– fail, learn, rise, and keep going. But in real life, falling forward is not a slogan. It is a discipline. Before Krav Maga taught me how to move, it taught me how to stand.

That may sound simple, but it is not. Krav Maga is known as an Israeli martial art, but at its deepest level, it is not only about combat. It is about survival under pressure.

The first lesson is not the punch. It is not the kick. It is not the dramatic technique people imagine when they think about fighting.

The first lesson is structure. How to stand. Where the body’s power comes from. How to hold balance when pressure is applied. How to keep breathing when your body wants to panic. How to stay present when exhaustion begins to make decisions for you.

Power does not begin in the fist. It begins lower. It begins in the base, in the legs, in the hips, in the ground. Anyone can swing an arm. Not everyone can generate force from structure. Not everyone can stay stable when someone else is trying to move them.

That is one of the first truths the body teaches you. If your base collapses, your technique does not matter.

The same is true in life. A person can have intelligence, experience, titles, ambition, and strong language. But if his base collapses under pressure, all of that becomes decoration. The moment becomes stronger than the person. The room becomes stronger than his judgment. The fear becomes stronger than his training.

That is why real training begins before the visible action. It begins with standing. This is why the first lesson is not about aggression. It is structured.

Many people misunderstand strength because they only see the visible part of it. They see the punch, the movement, the speed, the impact. They do not see the base underneath. They do not see the hours of standing, absorbing pressure, holding position, breathing through exhaustion, and learning where force actually begins.

The same mistake happens in leadership. People notice the decision, the speech, the crisis response, and the public moment. They do not always see the structure underneath– the discipline, the restraint, the reading of people, the ability to stay centred while everyone else is reacting, and the willingness to carry responsibility without turning it into performance.

Without structure, power becomes noise. Without stability, courage becomes impulse. Without judgment, movement becomes panic.

That is why the strongest person in the room is not always the one who moves first. Sometimes it is the one who understands what must not move –the base, the mission, the line, the responsibility, the thing that holds everything else together when pressure begins to spread.

Then training teaches you how to fall. In Krav Maga, you learn very early that falling is not failure. Falling is part of the system. You will lose balance. You will be pushed. You will hit the ground. The question is not whether you fall.

The question is what happens to you when the ground arrives. The natural instinct of the body is not always the correct one.

The body wants to protect the visible parts of the person– the head, the face, the hands, and the ego. It reaches. It stiffens. It reacts. But under pressure, instinct without training can make the damage worse. The body may try to save itself in a way that exposes it to greater injury.

So you learn to fall differently.



You learn how to meet the ground without breaking yourself. You learn how to keep enough structure to move again. You learn that survival is not only about avoiding impact. It is about recovering from impact before the next movement is lost.

That lesson never stayed with me inside the training hall. It followed me everywhere. Into deep underwater operations. Into leadership. Into failure. Into the family. Into crisis. Into every system where people are expected to function under pressure.

We like to imagine resilience as the ability not to fall. That is a comforting fantasy. Strong people fall. Serious people fall. Leaders fall. Families fall under pressure. Teams fall into confusion. Organizations fall into silence. Countries fall into crisis.

No system is immune to impact. The real question is whether the fall becomes identity. Some people fall and become bitter. Some fall and become dangerous. Some fall and spend the rest of their lives explaining why the world owed them more. Some fall and protect the story they told about themselves instead of learning what the fall exposed.

Others fall into training. They hit the ground, recover their structure, understand what failed, and move. That is falling forward. Not pretending the fall did not hurt. Not turning pain into a slogan. Not calling every failure wisdom. Falling forward means the fall does not own the next decision.

I learned this long before I had the language to explain it. In selection processes, in elite units, and in serious security training, the body is tested before theory matters. You arrive prepared, but preparation is only the entrance ticket. Then the real question begins.

Who continues when the air is gone?

Who still thinks when the heart is racing?

Who understands that the exercise is not over just because he thought it should be?

Who stays disciplined when the body is already negotiating with the mind?

These tests are not only about strength. Strength matters, but strength alone is not enough.

Everyone who reaches those rooms is strong in some way. Everyone has trained – Everyone believes he is ready. But pressure does not test what a person says about himself. It tests what remains when the body begins to argue with the mission.

The heart rate climbs. The lungs burn. The legs become heavy. The mind starts offering deals. Enough. Slow down. You already proved yourself. This is not worth it. And then the instructor adds another exercise. Then another. Then another. You think the end has arrived, and the system tells you it has only begun.

That is where people are measured. Not by how they look at the beginning. By what they become when they have no air left and still have to think. That is where the difference appears between fitness and structure, between strength and resilience, between someone who can perform and someone who can continue.

In those moments, you learn that the body can be powerful and still betray you if the mind loses structure. You also learn that the mind can be determined and still fail if the body has no base.. The two must work together. That is why standing matters. That is why falling matters. That is why breathing matters. That is why pressure reveals more than talent ever will.

I remember exercises where the group stood together inside a defined space. The objective was simple: remain inside. Last person standing wins. From the outside, it looks like a physical fight. It is not only a fight. It is a lesson in pressure, space, decision-making, energy, and reading people.



The mistake is to spend everything too early. Many strong people lose because they fight every contact as if it were the decisive one. They react to whoever is in front of them. They push, strain, burn energy, and become prisoners of the immediate struggle. But the immediate opponent is not always the real threat.

Sometimes the real threat is the person behind him. Sometimes it is the person waiting for you to overcommit. Sometimes it is the shape of the group. Sometimes it is the line under your feet. Sometimes the smartest movement is not to move much at all.

I learned to stay in the middle. Not as a symbol. As a tactic. The middle is uncomfortable. Pressure comes from every direction. People think the edge is safer because it gives them a boundary. But the edge can become a trap. In the middle, if you understand balance, timing, and energy, others often remove themselves before you need to remove them.

You do not have to fight every battle first. You have to know which battle will decide the rest. That is also true in leadership. That is true in business. That is true in politics. That is true inside a family.

Many people exhaust themselves fighting what is visible. They react to the loudest person, the nearest problem, the most emotional demand, the easiest target. But the real issue may be somewhere else. The visible struggle may only be the thing distracting everyone from the pressure that will decide the outcome.

Under pressure, the question is not only- What is in front of me? The question is- What is the real threat inside this system?

In that circle, everyone was strong. But not everyone had the same structure. Some had power but wasted it. Some had reach but poor balance. Some were aggressive but predictable. Some looked dangerous but were already tired. Some were waiting for the wrong moment. Some were protecting themselves from the wrong person.

You had to read all of it while your own body was under pressure. That is the real lesson. It is not only how hard you can push. It is whether you can read the room while the room is pushing back.

In life, people call this “strategy.” But a real strategy under pressure is not a diagram. It is not a clean plan written on a whiteboard. It is the ability to stay aware while energy, fear, ego, noise, and urgency are all trying to shrink your vision.

Pressure creates tunnel vision. Training must widen it again. That requires reading. Not listening only to words. Reading. Reading posture. Reading hesitation. Reading rhythm. Reading silence. Reading who is tired. Reading who is performing. Reading who is afraid. Reading who is dangerous because he does not yet look dangerous.



Inside the eyes, there is a real story. You just have to know how to read it. This is not softness. It is not psychology for decoration. It is operational awareness.

In training, before a fight begins, you learn to see small things: the way a person stands, which side carries weight, where tension is held, whether confidence is real or exaggerated, whether the person is ready to move or only ready to look ready.

Sometimes the first second tells the truth. A person may be strong, experienced, and even dangerous. But pressure always leaves a mark somewhere. A slight imbalance. A protected side. A delayed reaction. A gap between confidence and readiness.

The same thing happens outside combat. A senior executive can speak with confidence while hiding fear. A parent can say everything is fine while the family system is already under strain. A team can agree in a meeting while resisting the decision in action. A government can speak about stability while the pressures underneath it are moving in a different direction.

A person under pressure may tell you what he believes. His behaviour will often show you what the system has made him fear. That is why I have never believed that leadership can be reduced to title, charisma, or communication skills. Those things may help, but they are not the core.

The core is the ability to read pressure before it collapses, and to act without becoming part of the storm. One night in Paris, during an aviation security operation, I saw something that did not fit. There was no attack yet. No weapon visible. No clear declaration of intent. Just a man standing in a way that did not belong to the natural rhythm of the place. At first, that alone was not enough.

People do not always fit the environment perfectly. Sometimes there is a reason. Sometimes a person is simply tired, lost, anxious, waiting for someone, or standing where he should not naturally stand. This felt different. It was a hot summer night. There was no air conditioning in that area. The man was wearing a coat. His focus was too narrow. Tunnel vision. Fixed attention. Then, after a few seconds, he glanced to the sides, as if he was checking whether anyone was watching him. No one was. I was.

That is often how pressure first appears. Not as certain. As a disturbance. As a small break in the natural order of the place. Something that does not yet pose a danger, but refuses to disappear from your attention. I sent one of my operators, who was working under cover, to take a tactical corner. I stayed closer to the man who had drawn my attention. We did not create noise. We did not alarm the room. We adjusted the geometry. Within seconds, the situation changed. The man raised his hand and moved toward a woman. The action was stopped immediately.

No weapon was drawn. No public scene was created. No unnecessary escalation. The people were moved. The police were updated. The event was handled and contained. Later, there was appreciation. Internally, of course, there was a debrief. But the lesson was not about force. The lesson was about reading the movement before the movement became the event.

It would have been easy to make it bigger afterward. To turn it into a dramatic story. To inflate the moment. But real protection does not always need an audience. Sometimes, the best outcome is that almost nobody understands how quickly the situation could have changed.

That is prevention. Prevention is often invisible. Reaction is visible. Reaction produces images, reports, meetings, praise, blame, medals, investigations, and lessons learned after the price has already been paid. Prevention often produces nothing the public can easily applaud. No headline. No explosion. No collapse. No dramatic rescue. Just a system that did not break because someone saw early, moved correctly, and accepted the discomfort of acting before everyone else understood why movement was necessary.

That is why prevention is misunderstood. People respect the person who responds after a disaster. They do not always recognize the person who prevented the disaster from becoming visible. But in serious systems, invisibility is not failure. It is a success. The best protective action is the one almost nobody realizes is needed.

The best crisis decision may be the one no one remembers because the crisis never matured. The best leader may not be the one who gives the strongest speech after collapse- but the one who forces the uncomfortable conversation before collapse arrives. This is where falling, standing, reading, and leadership meet. Real resilience is not blind endurance. It is intelligent recovery. Real strength is not constant movement. It is knowing when to hold structure and when to move. Real defence is not passive waiting. It is active protection.

Sometimes, defence looks like restraint. Sometimes, defence looks like preparation. Sometimes, the defence looks like refusing to soften a warning. Sometimes, defence looks like action before the threat completes its movement. The point is not aggression. The point is prevention.

In life, as in training, not every instinct should be trusted. Sometimes the instinct to protect the visible part of yourself exposes the deeper structure. Sometimes the instinct to explain protects the ego but weakens the mission. Sometimes the instinct to wait feels responsible, but becomes a gift to the failure already forming inside the system. Judgment is knowing the difference. Proactive defence without judgment becomes panic. Judgment without action becomes analysis. Analysis without responsibility becomes comfort.

Responsibility is the bridge. It asks- What do we know? What are we refusing to see? What is the cost of waiting? What is the cost of moving? Who will pay the price if we soften this warning? Who will pay the price if we pretend the system is more stable than it is?

That is the serious work. Not dramatic leadership. Not motivational language. Not the performance of strength. The serious work is the disciplined ability to read pressure before it collapses, and to move before movement becomes obvious.

Every person eventually meets a version of this test. Not everyone will stand in a training hall. Not everyone will face an attacker. Not everyone will lead a team in a security operation. But everyone will meet pressure in some form. A parent will meet it when the family needs calm more than fear. A manager will meet it when the organization needs truth more than comfort. A teacher will meet it when a student's silence says more than his words. A community leader will meet it when people need direction before they are ready to admit they are afraid. A country will meet it when the cost of denial becomes higher than the cost of action.

The setting changes. The principle does not. Pressure asks the same question everywhere: What is your structure when the room is no longer stable? This is what separates a system that learns from one that only investigates. An investigation asks what happened. Prevention asks what was already visible before it happened. A serious debrief does not begin at the explosion, the failure, the resignation, the attack, or the collapse. It begins earlier. At the ignored sentence. At the repeated pattern. At the person whose eyes changed. At the warning softened by the room. On the assumption that everyone is protected because the alternative was too uncomfortable. At the moment when someone saw the crack, the system chose to call it normal.





That is why learning how to fall is not only a physical lesson. It is a moral lesson. A leadership lesson. A systems lesson. A person who has never fallen may confuse momentum with strength. He may rise fast, speak confidently, collect titles, and believe that ascent proves capacity. But if he has never learned how to meet the ground, the first serious fall may break more than his position. It may break his judgment.

The real danger is not falling. The real danger is falling for the first time after you have already convinced yourself that you cannot fall. The same is true for teams, families, organizations, and countries. They do not fail only because pressure arrives. Pressure always arrives. They fail because they were never trained to recover structure. They fail when silence is mistaken for stability. They fail when warnings are softened. They fail when leaders protect their image instead of the system. They fail when reality could not enter the room before the consequences did. If reality cannot enter the room, the room will eventually be entered by consequence. And consequence is a much harsher teacher than truth. Truth gives time. Consequence takes it away. In the end, people do not truly follow the title. They follow the person who can stand the pressure without becoming pressured. They follow the person who can see danger without becoming dangerous. They follow the person who can fall and still protect the next movement.

They follow the person who understands that the system is larger than him, and that his role is not to be remembered as powerful, but to make sure what matters does not break.

That is the real test. Not who you are when the title is visible. Who you become when the system begins to shake.

THE NERVOUS SYSTEM BEHIND EVERY DECISION YOU MAKE

**BY
MARINA TUDOR**



**PERFORMANCE-LED
LEADERSHIP MANAGES THE
ROOM FROM THE OUTSIDE.**

**ALIGNMENT-LED LEADERSHIP
REGULATES THE SYSTEM
FROM THE INSIDE.**



Part 1: From the Outside In

A leader walks into a meeting already behind. The topic is familiar, the stakes are high, – the room is waiting... Someone asks a question, and the leader responds quickly. Clear. Direct. Confident. From the outside, it looks like strong leadership. No hesitation, no uncertainty, no visible delay. The decision lands, the meeting moves on, and everyone takes their cue.

But something else may have happened in that moment. Not in the strategy – not in the data – not even in the words spoken, but in the state of the person making the decision. Their attention had narrowed. Their body was tense. Their breathing had shortened. Their system was already under pressure before the question was asked. They were not only thinking – they were deciding from A State.

There is a neurological reason this matters. Under pressure, the brain does not process information from a neutral baseline. The prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain associated with planning, perspective, inhibition, and deliberate choice, becomes less available when threat perception rises. At the same time, the amygdala, which detects threat and prepares the body for rapid response, becomes more active. This does not mean the leader is irrational. It means the system has shifted priorities. The brain is no longer primarily optimizing for reflection. It is optimizing for protection. And that distinction matters more than most organizations realize.

The Pattern We Rarely Name

Leadership is often treated as a performance. Be decisive, stay composed, have the answer, hold the room....Move things forward. Those qualities can be useful, but they can also become a mask. Performance-led leadership focuses on how leadership appears from the outside. Whereas alignment-led leadership asks a different question: What state is leadership coming from?

A leader can look calm while internally bracing, and they can sound certain while reacting to pressure, & they can appear decisive while trying to escape discomfort. That is the problem with performance as the primary measure– it rewards the visible behaviour, but often misses the internal condition producing it.

Decision-Making Is Not Purely Cognitive

Leadership is often framed as a cognitive function: analysis, judgment, strategy, and decision-making. We assume that better decisions come from better information, stronger frameworks, clearer priorities, or more experience. All of that matters, but it's incomplete, because in real organizational environments, decisions are not made by cognition alone; they are shaped by the internal state of the person making them.

A leader under pressure does not access the same range of thought as a leader who is regulated. A leader who feels threatened does not evaluate options the same way as a leader who feels steady.

An overloaded leader may still sound decisive, but speed is not always clarity. Sometimes speed is compression, and certainty is a stress response. Sometimes control is not a leadership strength, but a nervous system trying to create safety.

This is where leadership performance can become misleading. A leader may sound clear while their brain is operating under constraint. They may make a fast decision, but that speed may come from narrowed processing rather than deeper clarity. Neuroscience helps explain why: when the nervous system is activated, ambiguity tolerance drops, cognitive bandwidth narrows, and the brain becomes more likely to rely on familiar patterns. From the outside, this can look like decisiveness. From the inside, it may be compression.

What This Looks Like in the Room

This is why the same leader can behave very differently depending on the environment. In one meeting, they are thoughtful and spacious, they ask better questions, they listen longer, and they can hold ambiguity without rushing to close it. In another meeting, under different pressure, something shifts – and they interrupt more quickly, they narrow the conversation, they ask for certainty too early, and they move toward control. The behaviour is visible, but the mechanism is often invisible.

The team may describe it as a personality issue: “He gets controlling under pressure”, “She becomes sharp when things are uncertain,” “They say they want input, but only until the room disagrees,” etc. Those descriptions may be accurate, but they are incomplete, because what may be happening underneath is a shift in state. The leader has moved from alignment into performance, from presence into pressure management, & from responsive leadership into reactive control.



The System Learns the State

Teams are very good at reading leadership state, often faster than leaders realize. They notice tone, pace, facial expression, how quickly an idea is dismissed, and how safe disagreement feels in the first thirty seconds of a meeting. No policy has to be written – the room learns. If the leader is performing well, people may comply. If the leader is leading from alignment, people tend to think more freely, they challenge earlier, they surface risk sooner, and they offer options rather than wait for instruction.

The brain also reads social threat quickly. Tone, pace, facial expression, posture, and silence all become data. In a leadership setting, people are not only listening to what is being said. Their nervous systems are tracking whether it feels safe to contribute, disagree, take a risk, or tell the truth. This is why a leader's internal state does not stay private. It becomes part of the room's operating conditions. This is the difference.

Performance can produce compliance, but alignment creates conditions for intelligence. When leadership is regulated, the room usually has more room to be honest. When leadership is dysregulated, the room tightens. People become more careful, they edit themselves, they wait longer, & they protect against exposure. This is not weakness – it's adaptation. The system is responding to the state of authority. And over time, that response becomes organizational culture.

When Reactivity Becomes Design

The problem is not that leaders become activated – that's human/ natural behaviour. Pressure activates people, uncertainty activates people, responsibility activates people, etc. The issue is, when activation becomes the hidden operating system of leadership, and this happens slowly.”

- A leader feels pressure, so they take more control.
- The team senses control, so they offer less independent thinking.
- Because the team offers less independent thinking, more decisions escalate.
- Because more decisions escalate, the leader feels even more pressure.

So the loop tightens, and eventually, the organization may believe it has a decision-making problem, a talent problem, or an accountability problem, but underneath, it has a regulation problem. Not in a personal wellness sense, but in an operating/ operational sense: the state of leadership is shaping the behaviour of the system.

Nervous systems regulate in relationship and this is one reason leadership presence matters so much. A regulated leader can help widen the room's capacity for thought. A dysregulated leader can narrow it, even without intending to. The team may become quieter, more compliant, or more careful – not because they lack ideas, but because the environment has signalled caution. In that sense, regulation is not a soft skill – it's a condition for collective intelligence.

A regulated leader can help widen the room's capacity for thought.

A dysregulated leader can narrow it, even without intending to.

The Cost of Decisions Made Under Compression

A compressed leader can still make decisions, often quite many of them, but the quality of those decisions changes, because options narrow, & risk is interpreted more defensively. Short-term relief can outrank long-term clarity, & speed can become more attractive than depth. Reactive decisions often feel good at first, because they reduce immediate discomfort, they close the loop and end the uncertainty; that restores a sense of control.

Later, the cost appears when a decision gets reopened, or a team hesitates to challenge the next one. They notice a workaround becoming permanent, or the pattern of escalation grows stronger. Or the decision was made, but the system did not become clearer; it became more dependent.

A Different Question About Decision Quality

Most organizations ask: How do we make better decisions? That's a useful question. But there is a more precise one: What state are we in when decisions are being made?

Because the quality of a decision is not only determined by the information available, it's also determined by the internal capacity available to process that information.

A useful distinction here is between full capacity and available capacity. Under pressure, leaders may still think, analyze, and decide -but not always from their full range. The nervous system may have reduced the field of perception before the decision is even made. So the question is not only, "Do I have enough information?" It is also, "Do I have enough internal access to use that information well?"

A leader who is regulated can hold tension without collapsing into urgency, they can separate discomfort from danger, and they can distinguish speed from reactivity.



They can ask: Is this actually clear, or do I just want it resolved? That pause is not hesitation – it's leadership discipline. It's the shift from performing authority to embodying alignment.

What Might Need to Change

If decision-making is repeatedly rushed, centralized, defensive, or unclear, the answer may not be another framework. It may provide a better understanding of the conditions around the decision.

What pressures are consistently present?

Where does urgency enter the system?

Who feels responsible for reducing uncertainty?

What happens in the room when tension rises?

Does the leader create more clarity or more compression?

These questions change the conversation, and move decision-making out of theory, and into lived reality – because sometimes the issue is not that people lack intelligence, it's that the system is asking them to think clearly, inside conditions that keep narrowing their thinking.

Better decisions do not only require better minds –they require better states, and better states are not accidental – they are designed/ the result of redesigning structure.

Part 2: From the Inside Out

The same moment looks different from inside the leader. The meeting is happening, people are talking, the issue is important, and the decision cannot wait. On the surface, everything appears normal, but internally, the system is already organizing. The body has registered pressure before the mind has named it, the chest tightens slightly, the jaw sets, the breath becomes shallow, - attention narrows toward the problem.

The leader may not think, “I am activated”, they may think: “We need to move, this is taking too long. Why is no one clear? I have to decide.” That thought may feel rational, but sometimes it's the language of a nervous system trying to regain control.

The Body Knows Before the Story Does

This is one of the most overlooked realities in leadership. The body often detects a threat before the conscious mind has formed a complete explanation. Threat does not always mean danger.

In leadership, threat can look like: uncertainty, or loss of control, or public challenge, or time pressure, or conflicting expectations, fear of making the wrong call, or... the sense that everyone is waiting for you to know.

The body responding to those conditions doesn't mean the leader is weak; it's because the body is designed to protect. It narrows focus and it prepares for action; it reduces complexity, and it prioritizes resolution.

That can be useful in a genuine emergency, but many leadership environments keep people in a low-grade emergency, even long after the actual emergency has passed. When that happens, the leader may begin to confuse activation with effectiveness.

Performance Can Hide Dysregulation

This is where many high-performing leaders get caught. They have learned how to function while activated and they can speak clearly while tense. They can make decisions while depleted and they can hold the room while internally bracing.

From the outside, this looks impressive – but inside, it's costly, because performance can hide dysregulation for a long time. A leader can become very skilled at appearing composed without actually being aligned and they may continue to deliver.

But the delivery starts to require progressively more force, more control, more self-suppression, more internal pressure, more recovery afterwards. This is not sustainable leadership – it's compensation. Compensation that is repeated long enough becomes culture.



The Inner Experience of Compression

Compression does not feel like panic –often it feels like competence. The leader becomes faster, and sharper, and more certain, and less patient with nuance. They may feel productive because they are moving things forward – but internally, the range is narrowing: they have less access to curiosity, less tolerance for ambiguity, less capacity to listen without preparing a response, and less ability to separate disagreement from threat.

The body is not asking: What is the most coherent decision?

It is asking: How do we get out of this pressure?

That's a different question, and it produces different leadership.

Alignment Changes the Signal

Alignment is not passivity, it's not softness without structure, and it's not waiting until everything feels calm before acting. Alignment means that the leader's internal state, values, perception, and action are not working against each other.

There is less split, less performance, less forcing, less internal contradiction. The leader can still be decisive, but the decision is not driven by the need to reduce discomfort. They can still be direct, but directness does not become discharge. They can still move quickly, but speed does not come from panic.

This is the difference between leadership from performance and leadership from alignment. Performance asks: How do I need to appear?

Alignment asks: What is true, what is needed, and what state must I lead from to respond cleanly?

When the Leader Becomes the Regulating System

In many organizations, the leader becomes the place where pressure is resolved. When priorities conflict, it comes to them; when decisions stall, it comes to them. When uncertainty rises, it comes to them; when tension enters the room, people look to them.

At first, this can feel like leadership, but over time, it creates a hidden dependency. The leader's nervous system becomes part of the organization's operating infrastructure.

If they are steady, the system steadies.

If they are tense, the system tightens.

If they are reactive, the system becomes more cautious.

This is why leadership presence is not a soft skill – it's a system signal.

A regulated leader does not simply feel better – they create more room for thinking.

Regulation Is Not Suppression

Regulation is not pretending to be calm, it's not swallowing emotion, or performing composure, – and it's not becoming neutral or detached. Regulation is the ability to notice activation without being governed by it, and to feel urgency without obeying it automatically, and to feel pressure without transferring it into the room. Regulation is pausing long enough for choice to return.

This can be very simple – one breath before answering, a slower sentence, a question instead of an immediate conclusion. A moment to check whether the decision is being made from clarity or compression. These are small moves, but they change the state from which leadership happens.

Co-Regulation in Leadership

No leader regulates alone – every meeting is a nervous system exchange. People read one another constantly. A leader's tone can widen or narrow the room, their pace can invite thought or create urgency, and their facial expression can make disagreement safer or more dangerous.

This does not mean leaders are responsible for everyone's emotions – it means leaders carry disproportionate influence over the conditions in which people think. A regulated leader makes more thinking possible – they allow the room to stay with complexity without collapsing into performance, defensiveness, or silence. A dysregulated leader may still get compliance, but compliance is not the same as intelligence. The room may become quieter – and quieter doesn't mean aligned – sometimes it is just less safe.

Why This Becomes Organizational

Internal state does not stay “internal” at all – it becomes communication, timing, decision rhythm, culture.

If a leader repeatedly makes decisions under pressure, the system learns pressure.

If a leader repeatedly closes uncertainty too early, the system learns not to hold complexity.

If a leader reacts strongly to a challenge, the system learns to bring softened versions of the truth.

And then the leader wonders why they are not getting honest information.

But the system is not hiding the truth randomly – it's responding to what has been reinforced.

This is why conscious leadership has to become practical – because it's not about being more enlightened, it's about noticing what your state is teaching the system.

The Practice of Conscious Decision-Making

A more conscious decision process does not have to be elaborate. It can begin with three questions:

What state am I in right now?

What is this state making me want to do?

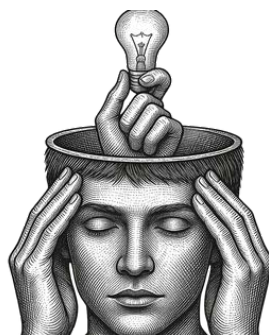
Am I leading from alignment, or performing leadership under pressure?

Those ten seconds matter; they can be the difference between reaction and response, between control and clarity, between a decision that relieves pressure and a decision that improves the system.

The aim is not to slow everything down, as some decisions need speed. The aim is to know the difference between clean speed and nervous system urgency. That difference is leadership maturity.

The pause matters because it interrupts the automatic sequence between activation and action. Even a few seconds can allow the prefrontal cortex to come back online more fully, widen attention, and create enough distance between stimulus and response for choice to re-enter.

That is the neurological difference between reacting quickly and responding cleanly.





A Final Reflection

Leadership is often judged by outcomes, but outcomes are shaped by decisions, and decisions are shaped by state.

So when a decision feels urgent, pressured, or emotionally charged, it may be worth asking:

Is this clarity, or compression? Is this authority, or control?
Is this speed, or reactivity? Is this alignment, or performance?

Sometimes the most important leadership move is not to think harder, it's to create the internal conditions where thinking can happen fully again.

Because the leader is not separate from the system, the leader is one of the system's most powerful signals.

And when that signal becomes more coherent, the system often begins to change before anything formal is redesigned.



THE INSIDE ATLAS JOURNEY

FROM WILLINGNESS TO THE FOURTH BOX



Most personal growth advice focuses on what to do.
The Inside Atlas focuses on *what happens before action*.

1
↓



WILLINGNESS

The journey begins with Willingness — the simple decision to be open.

You don't need confidence, certainty, or expertise. You only need to say, *"I'm willing to learn."*



2
↓



REFLECTION

That leads to Reflection.

Instead of reacting automatically, you begin paying attention. You notice patterns, motivations, strengths, and blind spots.



3
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ALIGNMENT

Reflection creates Alignment.

Your choices start matching your nature. You stop trying to become someone else and begin becoming more fully yourself.



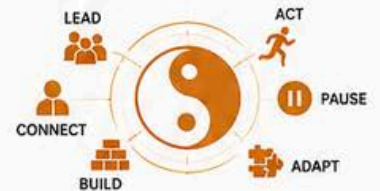
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BALANCE

Alignment requires Balance.

Every strength can become a weakness if overused. Balance is learning when to lead, connect, act, pause, build, or adapt.



5
↓



HARMONY

Over time, balance becomes Harmony.

Mind, Soul, and Body stop pulling in different directions and begin working together.



6
↓



FLOW

Harmony creates Flow.

You become fully engaged in what you are doing. Effort remains, but struggle decreases. You are no longer forcing life.



7

THE FOURTH BOX

INTEGRATION. WHOLENESS. CONTRIBUTION.



★ The Fourth Box is not a score, type, or label. It is a state of integration.

👤 It is the version of you that appears when Mind, Soul, and Body stop competing and start collaborating.

💖 You stop asking, "Who should I be?"

➔ And begin asking:
"How can I contribute?"

Then something unexpected emerges:
The Fourth Box.

Most assessments measure parts of a person. The Inside Atlas explores what happens when those parts become a whole.



A diverse group of people of various ages and ethnicities smiling together. The group includes men, women, and children of different backgrounds, all appearing happy and connected. The background is a soft, painterly style with warm tones.

Why We Keep Misdiagnosing Generations

Part II: How to Turn Insight Into Architecture

By James Moller

Last month's article exposed the flaw in how organizations interpret generational behaviour. This companion piece completes the shift. It moves the work from critique to construction, from naming the misdiagnosis to building the architecture that prevents it. Leaders do not need another explanation for why stereotypes fail. They need a method for reading behaviour as a signal, tracing it back to system conditions, and redesigning the environment before drift becomes collapse. This is the moment where the idea stops being commentary and becomes operating logic. It is where leadership becomes capable of seeing the system beneath the story. This is where the work becomes transformative.

The Signal to System Method

How to translate behaviour into a structural diagnosis

Generational behaviour becomes powerful only when it stops being descriptive and becomes diagnostic. Instead of treating immediacy, anxiety, detachment, or reassurance seeking as traits, leaders can translate them into system intelligence.

A Signal to System method works through three moves. The first is naming the visible behaviour without judgment. The second is identifying the system condition that would make that behaviour rational. The third is asking the design question that reveals what the architecture is forcing people to carry.

If a leader says that Gen Z is impatient, the system may be operating with slow decision cycles, unclear expectations, or inconsistent guardrails. The design question becomes: what part of our operating model forces people to chase clarity?

If a leader says that Millennials need too much feedback, the system may be withholding visibility or recognition. The design question becomes: where have we created conditions where silence feels like risk?

If a leader says that Gen X seems detached, the system may have a history of volatility or broken commitments. The design question becomes: what promises have we made that we have not structurally reinforced? This method turns behaviour into intelligence. It gives leaders a way to read the system through the people it produces.

The Architecture of Coherence

What must a system contain to integrate multiple generational histories

Coherence is not harmony. It is structural integrity. It is the alignment between what the organization says, what it rewards, and what people actually experience. When coherence is present, generational differences stop being friction and start becoming complementary strengths. When coherence is absent, every generation begins inventing its own survival strategy.

A coherent system rests on five architectural elements. Clarity ensures that expectations are explicit enough that no one has to guess. Predictable consequences ensure that behaviour is calibrated around what the system actually tolerates and rewards. Visible decision logic ensures that silence is not interpreted as danger. Consistent guardrails ensure that the environment does not shift without explanation. Aligned incentives ensure that the system does not ask for one thing while rewarding another.

Coherence is the structure that holds multiple histories without forcing any of them to dominate the room.

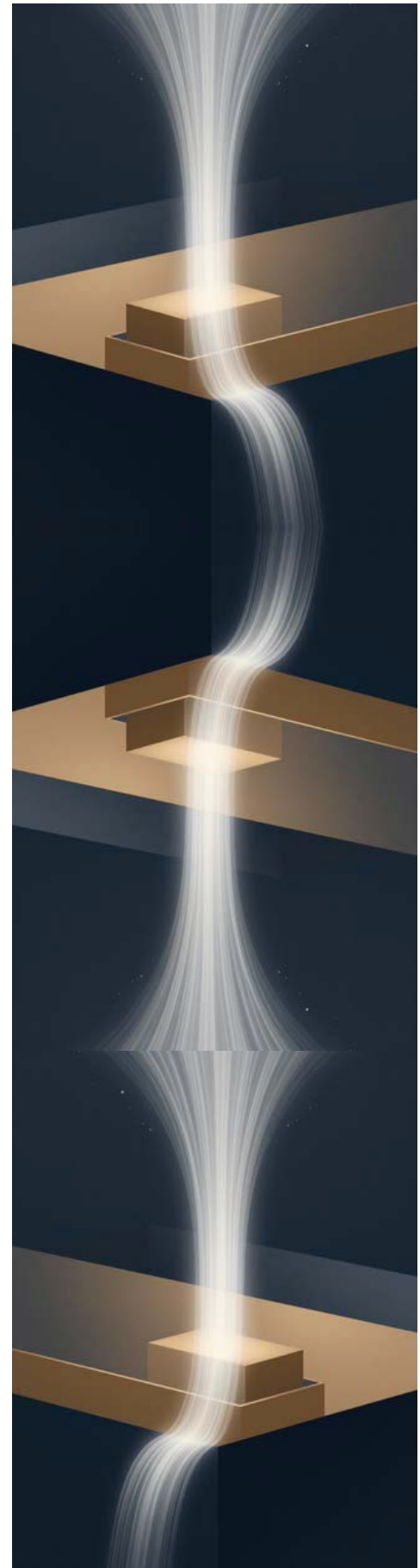
The Mechanics of Truth Flow

How leaders restore early signals before they disappear

Truth flow collapses the moment behaviour is dismissed as a generational issue. Once that happens, people stop bringing early signals, and the organization loses its ability to detect drift. Restoring truth flow requires deliberate protocols that lower the emotional cost of speaking early.

The Leader's Opener reframes the conversation. It signals that the leader is not looking for personality complaints but for system signals. The Pattern Question surfaces what is repeating that has not yet been named. The Cost Question reveals what people are carrying privately that the system should be carrying structurally. The Follow Through Rule ensures that when people speak, something visible changes. Without a visible response, the system trains silence.

Truth is not a cultural value. It is a structural function.



Quantifying the Cost of Misdiagnosis

How system drift shows up in operational metrics

Misdiagnosing generations is not a soft failure. It is an operational one. When leaders blame people instead of examining the system, measurable degradation follows.

Decision cycle time increases because leaders are working with incomplete information. Retention of early signal identifiers declines because the people who notice drift first are often the first to leave. Escalation patterns shift because issues arrive late or soften, which means the system has already lost its early warning capacity. Hidden labour load increases because employees contort themselves to survive ambiguity. Exception frequency rises because the formal system has lost authority, and people rely on workarounds.

These metrics turn the cost of misdiagnosis from philosophical to undeniable.

Turning Insight Into Leadership Rituals

How to convert the systemic lens into practice

Insight becomes architecture only when it becomes ritual. Leaders can operationalize the systemic lens through three recurring practices.

The Weekly Signal Review asks teams to identify what behaviour changed this week and what system condition it might be pointing to. The Drift Audit examines where the lived experience is diverging from the designed system and where workarounds have become the real operating model. The Coherence Check ensures that new initiatives create clarity, predictability, and aligned incentives rather than introducing new contradictions.

These rituals turn the framework into muscle memory.

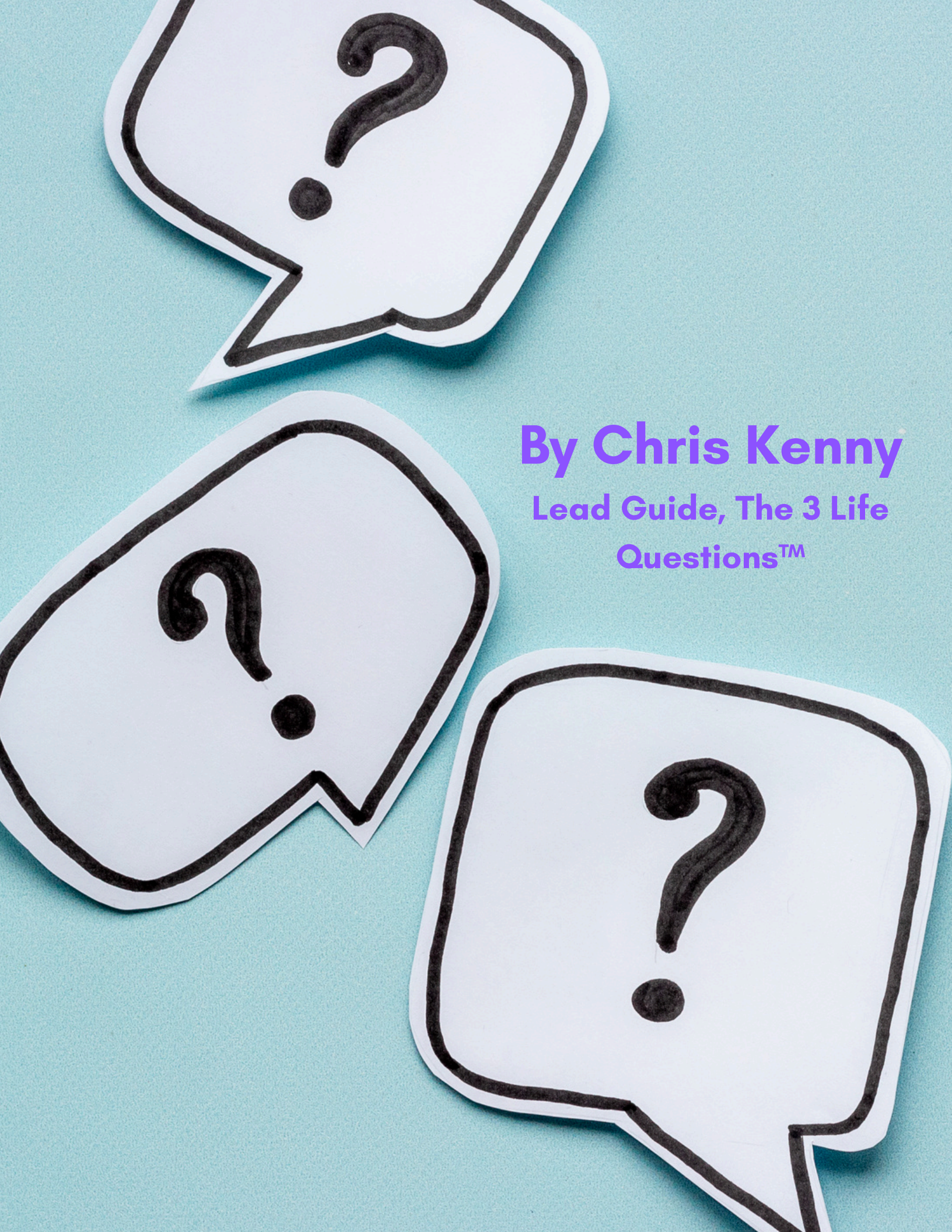
The Elevation Point

Last month's article reframed the narrative. This one builds the operating system. It moves leaders from blame to diagnosis, from observation to interpretation, from insight to architecture, and from awareness to design. Generational behaviour stops being a stereotype and becomes a map. The system stops being invisible and becomes legible. Leadership stops being reactive and becomes structural.

When leaders learn to translate behaviour into system intelligence, they stop asking why people behave the way they do and start asking what conditions made that behaviour rational. That is the moment leadership becomes capable of redesigning the architecture rather than reacting to the adaptation.



**The 3 Life Questions:
Opening to
The Second Half of Life**



By Chris Kenny
Lead Guide, The 3 Life
Questions™

Most of us spend the first half of our lives building things. Careers. Reputations. Relationships. Identities. A carefully constructed sense of who we are and what we're worth – measured largely by what we've achieved, accumulated, and been recognized for.

There's nothing wrong with any of that. It's necessary work. But at some point, and it rarely happens on a schedule, something shifts. The things we worked so hard to build start to feel less satisfying than they once did. We begin to sense the possibility that, as Thomas Merton quipped, the ladder we've been climbing just might be leaning against the wrong wall. And a quiet but persistent question begins to surface: Is this all there is to life?

Two Halves of Life

I recently had the privilege of attending a workshop at the Modern Elder Academy's Rising Circle Ranch near Santa Fe, centered on the work of Fr. Richard Rohr, the Franciscan friar and author of *Falling Upward*. It was one of the most powerful experiences I've had in years. Rohr has spent decades exploring what he calls the two halves of life — not as chronological stages, but as two fundamentally different ways of seeing ourselves and the world. The first half is about building the container: our identity, our achievements, our affiliations, our carefully constructed sense of security and self. Most of us invest enormous energy in that construction, and rightly so. The container is necessary.

The second half of life is about discovering what the container was actually meant to hold. It is in the second half that we begin to see through the container — to question whether the roles, the titles, the accumulated self-image truly make up the deeper self. And we find, often to our surprise, that they don't. Not entirely.

Crucially, Rohr points out that we do not arrive in the second half through effort or planning. We cannot achieve our way there. We cannot decide one Tuesday morning that we're ready. Instead, we are generally moved into the second half by a force greater than the small self that built the container – most often through loss, failure, grief, or a life-altering encounter with our own limitations.

What we can do is open ourselves to being moved. We can begin asking different questions. We can widen the aperture through which we see ourselves and the world, so that when that movement arrives and for most of us, it will, we are ready to receive it rather than resist it. That is precisely where The 3 Life Questions™ come in.

How This Framework Came to Be

I did not arrive at The 3 Life Questions from a library, though books were part of the journey. I arrived at them the hard way — through years of depression, the loss of my nephew Ben to suicide, and a long, slow process of trying to understand why the things I had built — a career, a reputation, a framework for helping others — never quite answered the deeper questions I was carrying.

Over time, through the work of Anthony De Mello, Michael Singer, Richard Rohr, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor, Michael Brooke's Inside Atlas, and my own lived experience, three questions kept returning. Not as intellectual puzzles, but as genuine invitations — the kind you can't answer once and file away, but must return to again and again as life deepens. I offer this framework not as someone who has arrived, but as someone who has found it to be genuinely useful. These questions have changed how I understand myself, how I move through the world, and what I believe I'm actually here to do.

The Framework: Three Questions, Each Squared

The 3 Life Questions are organized into what I call the WWW² Framework

**Three foundational questions, each
with two equally important dimensions:**

**Who Am I?
Why Am I Here?
What Do I Do?**

Each question has a positive dimension—what something truly is and a negative dimension – what it is not. Both matter. Answering only the positive is like knowing your destination while remaining unaware of the detours that will lead you away from it.

The sequence is not arbitrary. You cannot answer “What do I do?” well until you have answered “Why am I here?” And you cannot answer that until you have genuinely wrestled with “Who am I?” Most personal development frameworks begin at the third question. This one starts at the foundation.

These are not questions to answer once and move on from. They are questions to live with – to return to at different seasons of life, with different eyes. They won't move you into the second half of life by themselves. What they will do, explored honestly, is begin to widen the aperture. They will open you to being moved.

The First Question: Who Am I?

This is the question Anthony De Mello called the most important a human being can ask – more important, he argued, than any theological question. Because until you understand who is asking, every other answer is built on uncertain ground.

The positive answer, as I've come to hold it: "I" am Consciousness. Not Chris Kenny — that is the name and form through which "I" moves in the world. I am a unique manifestation of what I understand to be Divine Consciousness in human form. I am the awareness that observes my thoughts, my emotions, my body, and my experiences -without being defined by any of them. This deeper "I" has no psychological needs. It cannot be threatened or diminished by the circumstances of life. It can simply be present, without being swept away or identified with what it observes.

The negative dimension – the square, is equally essential: I am not my ego. I am not my body. I am not my self-image, the story I have constructed about myself over a lifetime. I am not my thoughts, my beliefs, or my emotions. I am the consciousness that is aware of all those things. Confusing the "I" with any of those things – which is what most of us do(including me!) most of the time — is the root of most unnecessary suffering.

In Rohr's terms, the "I" is not the container. It is what the container was built to hold. This distinction is not merely philosophical. When we begin to understand it experientially, the inner critic begins to lose its authority. The fear of not being enough loosens its grip. Not because the world changes, but because the one watching the world understands, at last, that it cannot be diminished by what it watches.



The Second Question: Why Am I Here?

Once we have some clarity about who is asking, the second question becomes genuinely possible: why does this particular life exist at all?

My answer draws primarily from Michael Singer's work: I am here to enable Divine Consciousness to experience its creation by, through, and as Chris Kenny. Put differently - and this is the version that has most changed how I move through ordinary days - I am here to serve as a conduit for Unconditional Love to manifest in the world. Not to accumulate or perform on behalf of that Love, but to express it.

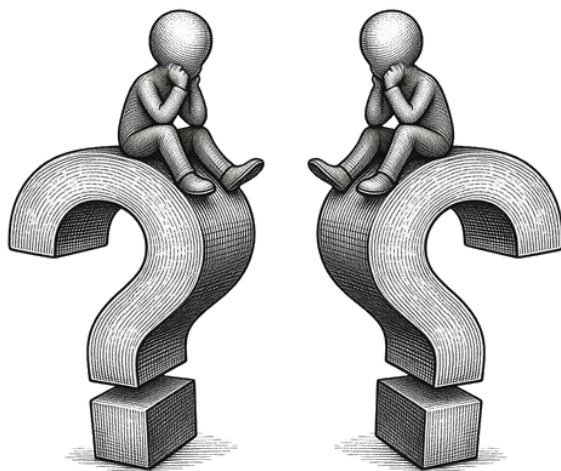
This is a radical reframe. It shifts the animating question from "What am I supposed to accomplish?" to "What am I here to express?" Those sound similar but they lead to entirely different lives.

The squared dimension - what I am not here for - is where most of us have been quietly misled. I am not here to accumulate things and achievements. I am not here to reach the top of any ladder. I am not here to earn the approval of others, or to construct a self-image impressive enough to silence my doubts. There is nothing inherently wrong with achievement, success, or recognition. They simply don't answer the question of why I exist. Building a life primarily around them is like answering a question with an irrelevant fact: coherent on the surface, but beside the point.

When I return to this question as an orientation rather than an obligation, something eases. The anxiety about whether I'm doing enough, being enough, having enough — it softens. Because the answer to "Why am I here?" is not a performance standard. It is an invitation.

The Third Question: What Do I Do?

The third question is where most frameworks begin — and end. What should I do with my life? It is the question of strategy, purpose, and daily action. And having answered the first two questions with some honesty, the third becomes surprisingly clear.



My answer came from an unlikely source. Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's book, *On Death and Dying*, is best known for giving us the Five Stages of Grief. But what I took from years of sitting with that book was something else: a portrait of what matters to human beings when everything else has been stripped away, when one's death is imminent. When the dying looked back on their lives, they were not measuring themselves against their achievements or net worth. They were measuring themselves against something more essential.

From that, I distilled three principles that answer the third question. These principles don't describe the actions we might take, but rather the state of being from which our actions spring. And the 3 states of being that lead to "right action" are: Be Authentic. Be Loving. Be Helpful. Or, slightly expanded: Live authentically, from your True Self. Cultivate meaningful, love-based relationships - with people, with the world, with life itself. And leave the world a little better for your having been here.

The squared dimension: the third question is not about achieving, acquiring, or obtaining. It is about Being. The orientation is not toward accumulation but toward expression. Authenticity, love, and positive impact are not standards to meet - they are qualities to embody, as consistently and as honestly as we can.

Notice how the three questions build on one another. Authentic living requires knowing who you actually are (Question 1). Genuine love requires understanding that love is the nature of what you are here to express (Question 2). Sustainable helpfulness requires roots deeper than willpower. The sequence is the framework.

The Door That Opens by Grace

Most of the frameworks we've inherited — in business, education, and personal development — begin at the third question and end there. Do more. Plan better. Optimize more consistently. The implicit answer to "What do I do?" is always some version of: try harder.

What gets lost is the foundation that action is supposed to rest on. Actions without identity become performance. Purpose without a grounded sense of self becomes aspiration without root. And the result, for many thoughtful and accomplished people, is a life that looks successful from the outside and feels hollow from the inside.



The 3 Life Questions don't ask you to abandon ambition or stop building. They ask you to start in the right place - with the question all other questions depend on. They ask you to begin to know, at the deepest level you are capable of, who is doing all this living. That is the work of the second half of life. Not the dismantling of what you've built, but the discovery of what it was always meant to hold. As Fr. Richard Rohr might say: the door to the second half of life doesn't open by force. It opens by grace. And the first step toward grace is simply being willing to ask.

Who am I?

That question is waiting for you. In the articles that follow, we'll explore each of the three questions in depth - with the thinkers, the tools, and the practices that bring them to life. But the place to begin is where this framework begins: not with what you should do, but with who is doing it.

Your invitation to explore the second half of life begins there.



LINKEDIN THROUGH THE LENS OF DONELLA MEADOWS



12 LEVERAGE POINTS OF SYSTEM CHANGE

Focus on the first four levels. For Levels 8–1, email me for the full graphic.

LEVEL		WHAT IT IS	HOW IT SHOWS UP ON LINKEDIN	EXAMPLES	WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU
12	NUMBERS The most visible and commonly measured indicators. 	Pure metrics. They tell you WHAT happened, not WHY .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likes • Views / Impressions • Followers • Comments • Shares 	10,000 views 500 likes +200 followers 30 comments	 Most people live here. It creates short-term dopamine but offers the least leverage. Numbers fluctuate—control is low.
11	BUFFERS Resources and reserves that absorb shocks and create stability. 	The system's cushion. They provide resilience.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content inventory / drafts • Newsletter subscribers • Saved content • Content pillars / frameworks • Trusted community 	50 drafted posts 1,000 newsletter subs 100 saved posts Clear content pillars Engaged community	 Buffers allow you to keep creating and showing up even when reach is down. Build your reserves.
10	STOCKS & FLOWS The quantity and movement of things through the system. 	What is accumulated (stocks) and what moves (flows).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flow of content • Flow of attention • Flow of engagement • Flow of followers • Stock of authority / credibility 	Posts per week Hours of attention Engagement rate Follower growth Reputation over time	 The platform used to reward volume of flow. The new system rewards quality of flow.
9	DELAYS The time gaps that shape cause and effect. 	Timing matters. Delays can hide impact or amplify it.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Time between posting and engagement • Dwell time (time spent reading) • Return visits • Comment depth over time 	Engagement after several hours 2+ minutes dwell time Returning to post Longer conversations	 LinkedIn now measures what happens AFTER the click. Sustained attention beats instant reaction.



WANT THE FULL 12 LEVELS?

Levels 8–1 contain the deeper leverage points—feedback loops, rules, goals, mindset, and paradigms.



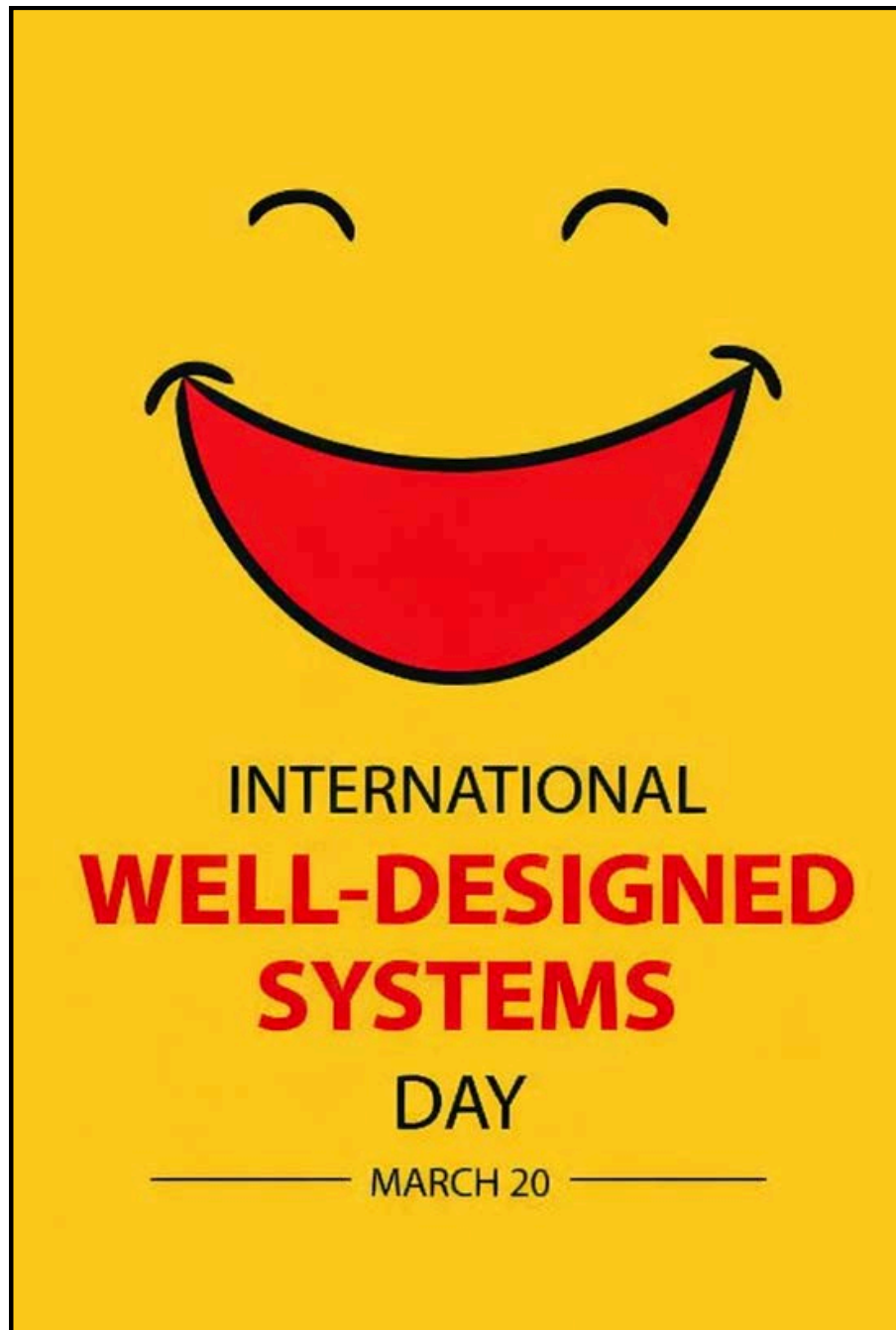
Email me for the complete graphic:
mbrooke3118@gmail.com



INTERNATIONAL
HAPPINESS
DAY

———— MARCH 20 ————

Or should it be...



By Michael Brooke

You may not know this, but March 20 is International Happiness Day. In a moment of synchronicity, I am writing this piece on that very date. But this article is not another rehash of the same old reporting. You know how it goes. The Scandinavian countries always come out on top.

At a surface level, the Happiness Index captures something real and important: happiness is not just individual, it is environmental. We can clearly see how factors like high trust in countries like Finland, Denmark, and Sweden correlate with happiness. Iceland has high social support and freedom, and communities are a big part of Costa Rican society. And we can't ignore the sense of wellbeing when you are in a place with low corruption and functioning institutions. You also can't forget things like nature and public spaces.

Of course, these are not soft ideas, and they are the key to functioning societies. BUT: they are system outputs. In all the articles you'll read about the world's happiest countries, you will see how systems thinking subtly but powerfully shapes society.

Donella Meadows would highlight that the happiest countries have high-functioning feedback loops, stable institutional design and shared norms that reduce friction in daily life. People are not happier because they think positively; they are happier because conditions shape experience in very positive ways.

This leads us to a much more critical question: Why do these systems produce trust in the first place, while others erode it? This is the missing layer, and it's the one we will explore in this piece.



Behold!

The World Happiness Report

In North America and Western Europe, young people are much less happy than 15 years ago.

This is not surprising, but it is incomplete. Social media is an amplifier, not the root cause. The deeper issue is systemic drift: rising uncertainty, weaker trust, and higher daily friction.

When systems strain, young people feel it first. The platform reflects the pressure; it does not create it.

Across every top country, three structural patterns repeat:

1. Alignment between promises and reality

In Nordic countries, when the system says healthcare will be there, education will be accessible, and rules will be applied fairly, it actually delivers. This consistency creates trust. As you can surmise, in lower-ranking countries, the opposite happens. Stated values and lived experience diverge. This disconnect means people learn that the system cannot be relied upon. To put it bluntly: trust is not cultural. It is earned through repeated systemic coherence.

2. Low friction between citizen and system

When people say they can walk safely in their neighbourhood or have simple access to services, it sets the tone. When clean and usable public spaces surround you, it's not a lifestyle choice. It has been designed this way.

As a result of this low friction, there is less bureaucratic drag, uncertainty and social threat. This is because when friction drops, cognitive load decreases. When cognitive load drops, people experience life as lighter. That gets labelled “happiness.”

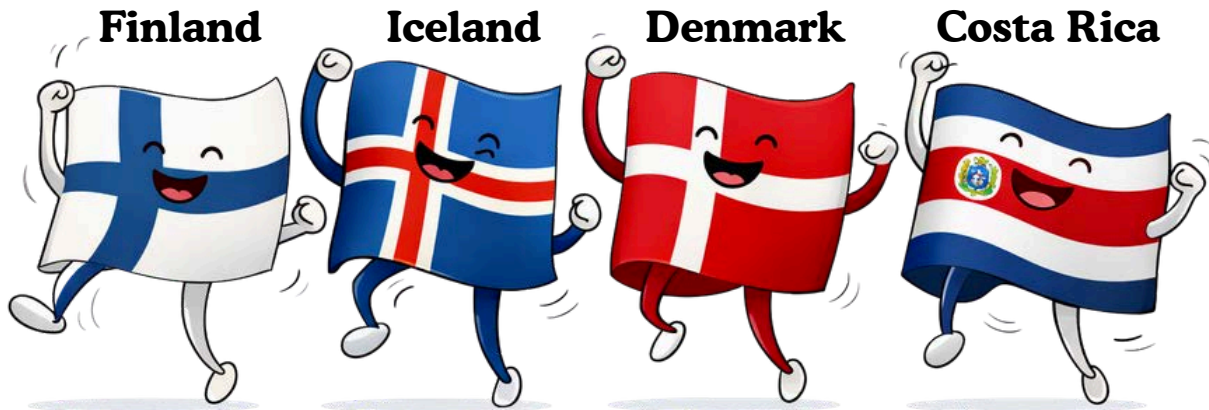
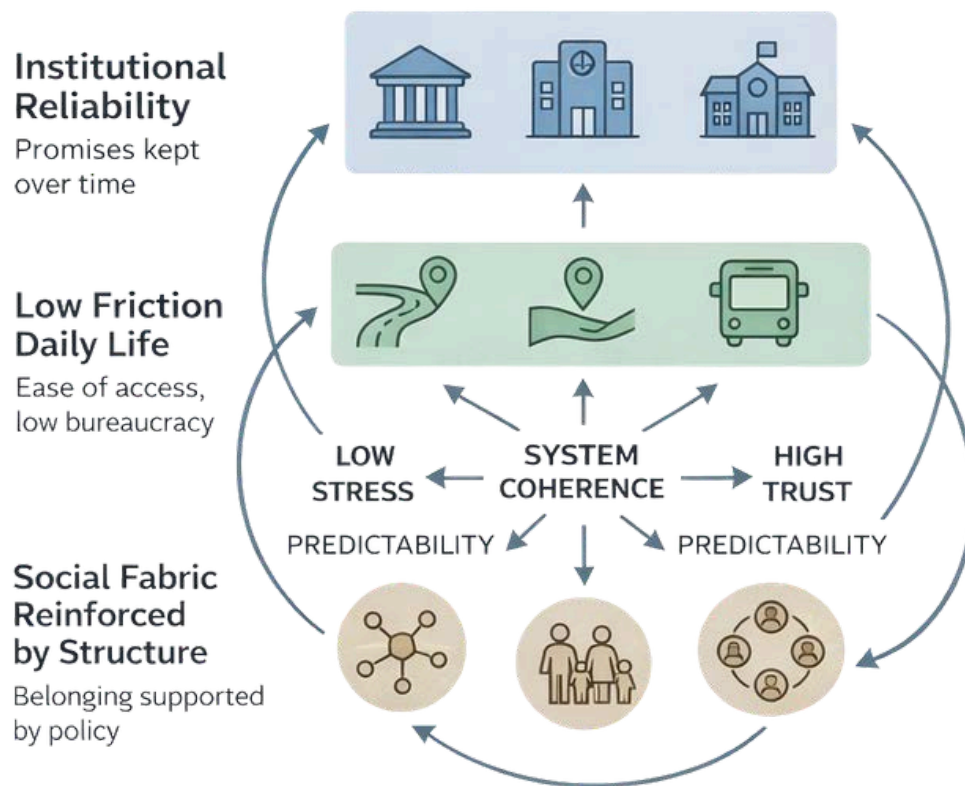
3. Strong social fabric reinforced by structure

Costa Rica is the most revealing example. It does not rank high on GDP, yet scores high on life satisfaction. Why is this? There are three core reasons. In Costa Rica, there are dense communities. There is a strong social fabric, where family ties, neighbourly support, and multigenerational households create a safety net that boosts happiness more than income alone. Daily life emphasizes “Pura Vida.” This is a philosophy of simplicity, gratitude, and human-scale interaction. This fosters belonging and reduces isolation.

What is truly interesting, however, is that this social fabric is reinforced by structure. This includes elements such as universal healthcare, no military since 1948 (freeing up funds for social services), and cultural norms that prioritize work-life balance and nature exposure. Stable politics and community gatherings provide reliability, making expectations “human scale” and relational, which explains high satisfaction despite modest GDP.

Costa Rica has a much lower GDP than Canada or the USA. However, what their 4th place ranking indicates is that happiness is not maximized by wealth. It is stabilized by belonging and predictability.

What the systems create in these countries



Trust Feedback Loops

Consistency → Trust → Cooperation → Stability



What About Volunteering?

Volunteering feels like it should correlate with happiness. Here's how I think about it: more generosity, more meaning equals more connection. But there is a bigger truth: the system underneath matters more than the behaviour itself.

This means that volunteering does not mean the same thing in every system.

In high-functioning systems like Finland or Denmark, many needs are already met through formal structures. Healthcare, education, social safety nets. Volunteering exists, but it is not carrying the weight of survival.

In lower-functioning or strained systems, volunteering often fills gaps the system is not covering. The community steps in where institutions fall short.

So you get this inversion that seems counter-intuitive, but makes total sense: **High volunteering can signal strong community. Or it can signal system failure being absorbed by people.**

This means you get the same behaviour, but it creates a vastly different meaning. Happiness tends to rise where basic needs are reliably met, systems reduce daily friction and trust in institutions is high.

Volunteering, in those contexts, is additive. In other contexts, it is compensatory. Volunteering is not a driver of happiness. It is a response to system conditions.

Until you map what the system is asking people to compensate for, the data will look contradictory. It is telling you two different stories with the same variable.



What About Helping a Stranger?

From an emotional perspective, you would think that helping a stranger would be an indication of happiness. Again, this is another twist of counter-intuitive thinking. In high-functioning systems, you need fewer strangers to step in. Because the system already does.

Services work. Institutions respond and support is predictable. Helping a stranger is occasional, not structural.

In lower-functioning or strained systems, helping a stranger is not optional. It's how the system survives. People become the infrastructure.

In these systems, you see higher rates of helping behaviour, not because life is easier or happier, but because gaps are larger and more immediate.

Helping a stranger is not just kindness. It's load distribution. The system is offloading responsibility onto individuals in real time.

Again, the insight sharpens:

High helping can signal strong humanity.
Or it can signal systemic absence.

Same action. Different meaning.

And now you can see the pattern:

The more a system works, the less it asks individuals to compensate for it.



The Chart That Most Don't See

The bottom of the World Happiness Index is not a collection of “unhappy places.” It is a pattern of systems that have lost their ability to carry human life well. Countries like Afghanistan, Sierra Leone, and Lebanon are not there because people think negatively or lack resilience. They are there because the underlying structures that support daily life have broken down or never fully formed.

When institutions are unstable, trust disappears. When trust disappears, people rely only on themselves or small circles. Social support weakens. When corruption is high, effort feels pointless because outcomes don't follow fairness. When safety and health systems are strained, the body is constantly under stress. Over time, this becomes an emotional reality.

Low scores are not opinions; they are signals. They tell you, in the plainest way possible, that effort is not reliably rewarded, the future feels uncertain, support systems are thin or fragile, and daily life carries friction and risk.

In those conditions, “happiness” is not something people fail to achieve. It is something the system fails to make possible. The brutal truth? At the lowest levels, people are not broken. The system around them is no longer holding them up.

Rank	Country	Life situation 	Change	Inequality	Social support	GDP per capita	Healthy life expectancy	Freedom	Generosity	Perceptions of corruption	Positive emotions	Negative emotions	Donated	Volunteered	Helped strange
147	 Afghanistan	1.446	-2.594	-	-	-	116	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
146	 Sierra Leone	3.251	-1.067	96	113	117	111	91	76	108	131	107	76	76	2
145	 Malawi	3.284	-0.829	131	136	129	106	97	113	45	103	98	113	46	8
144	 Zimbabwe	3.346	-1.481	69	124	105	115	124	128	69	102	48	128	42	82
143	 Botswana	3.464	-0.506	111	101	65	-	74	135	81	85	73	135	112	12
142	 Yemen	3.532	-0.522	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
141	 Lebanon	3.723	-1.208	75	96	86	66	133	105	89	138	128	105	137	132
140	 DR Congo	3.761	-0.817	114	120	128	-	123	74	92	118	129	74	31	31
139	 Egypt	3.862	-0.411	80	109	67	88	101	134	-	133	97	134	139	19
138	 Tanzania	3.902	0.132	130	127	113	96	30	54	22	35	15	54	110	103
137	 Eswatini	3.909	-0.958	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON

The more I examined the results, the more I realized it wasn't a "happiness index."

It is a system integrity index. When you look at the top countries, they align uniformly on policy, culture, and lived experience. Their societies maintain trust loops across generations and minimize systemic contradictions.

When you view the countries lower down the list, it is painfully obvious what is happening and what is NOT. These countries produce chronic misalignment. They force individuals to compensate for system gaps, and they generate stress as a default condition.

What I also noticed is that there is no discussion of trade-offs or fragility within each system. They are found everywhere – no matter where you live. High-trust systems require compliance and shared norms. Strong safety nets (like universal health care) depend on sustained economic discipline. Social cohesion can be harder to maintain under rapid demographic or ideological change. If you don't address the trade-offs, it becomes fodder for a travel brochure rather than structural insight.

To summarize what is happening with this index: people are not happier in these countries because of mindset or culture alone. They are happier because the system around them is coherent, predictable, and aligned with human needs.



Warning: this might not be the complete story.

The world's happiest countries for 2026 - and what they get right

1 day ago

Share  Save 

Lindsey Galloway



From Nordic trust to Costa Rica's sense of community, residents explain what daily life looks like in the countries topping the 2026 World Happiness Report.

While the Nordic countries have long dominated the [World Happiness Report](#), 2026 brought one surprise. For the first time in the report's 14-year history, a Latin American country made its way into the top five as Costa Rica continued its multi-year rise to fourth place, jumping from 23rd in 2023.

Where systems drift, you will find happiness collapses. Where systems align, you will find happiness stabilizes. This is really all about system coherence. In Finland, Denmark, and Iceland, people trust each other not because they are culturally kinder, but because the systems keep their promises. Healthcare works. Education works. Rules are applied consistently. Over time, that reliability compounds into trust.

Costa Rica exposes the deeper truth. It ranks high without matching GDP because community density and daily human connection are doing the work the state does elsewhere. So what looks like “happiness” is really this:

Low friction. High trust. Aligned expectations. Consistent delivery. Where those exist, people feel safe. When people feel safe, they report happiness. Where they don't, individuals are forced to compensate for system failure. That feels like stress, burnout, and disconnection.

The report calls this wellbeing. It is actually a measure of whether the system is carrying the human, or the human is carrying the system. Until we name that clearly, we won't replicate it.

WHAT COMES NEXT: FROM INSIGHT TO DESIGN

If happiness is a system output, then the real question is simple:
Where do we intervene? Not with slogans. With structure.

10 SYSTEM INTERVENTIONS THAT CHANGE THE OUTCOME

1. Measure system integrity, not sentiment

Track: delivery vs promise, wait times, access gaps
Happiness follows reliability.

2. Close the promise-reality gap

Audit where systems say one thing and deliver another
Trust collapses in that gap first.

3. Reduce friction in everyday touchpoints

Healthcare, transit, permits, education access
Small frictions compound into chronic stress.

4. Shorten feedback loops

Faster response to complaints, failures, breakdowns
Delayed feedback = institutional blindness.

5. Standardize fairness in rule application

Consistency matters more than perfection
Predictability builds trust faster than generosity.

6. Design for human-scale interaction

Local services, community access points, relational systems
Belonging doesn't happen at scale by accident.

7. Protect cognitive bandwidth

Simplify forms, processes, decisions
Overload feels like anxiety, but it's design failure.

8. Reinforce social fabric through policy

Parental leave, community spaces, flexible work
Relationships need structural support to survive.

9. Identify and remove “compensation burdens”

Where individuals are forced to carry system gaps
Burnout is often unpaid system labour.

10. Build trust loops intentionally

Consistency → trust → cooperation → stability
This is not cultural. It is engineered over time.





What Would It Actually Take to Design a Better World?

By Dr.Sathyannarayanan Varadarajan

Humanity has always dreamed of a better world. Across cultures and civilizations, philosophers, sages, scientists, reformers, and spiritual leaders have envisioned societies characterized by justice, prosperity, harmony, and human flourishing. Yet despite remarkable advances in science, technology, governance, and economics, the world continues to grapple with inequality, conflict, environmental degradation, social fragmentation, and declining trust.

The question, therefore, remains as relevant today as ever: What would it actually take to design a better world?

Not a fantasy world where suffering disappears. Not an ideological construct where everyone thinks alike. Not a technological paradise sustained by innovation alone. A genuinely better world must be grounded in reality while inspired by humanity's highest aspirations. It must be built not merely on policies and institutions, but on the enduring foundation of universal human values.

The great challenge before humanity is not creating a perfect society. It is creating systems that enable human beings to express the best within themselves while acknowledging the realities of human nature.

Recognizing Human Nature: The Starting Point of Every Better World

Many attempts to build ideal societies have failed because they began with unrealistic assumptions about human beings. History demonstrates that revolutions, political movements, and social experiments often start with noble intentions but end with unintended consequences. Karl Popper's warning that "the attempt to make heaven on earth invariably produces hell" reminds us that societies are not machines that can be engineered according to rigid blueprints. Human beings are complex. They possess extraordinary capacities for compassion, creativity, courage, and cooperation, yet they are equally susceptible to fear, greed, prejudice, ego, and short-term thinking.

Designing a better world, therefore, begins with humility. It requires accepting human nature as it is while creating conditions that encourage humanity to evolve toward what it can become. Universal human values offer precisely this foundation. They neither deny human imperfections nor surrender to them. Instead, they provide an ethical compass that guides individual and collective growth.

Building Systems That Reward Values, Not Merely Outcomes

The quality of a society is determined not only by the character of its people but also by the design of its systems. W. Edwards Deming observed that "every system is perfectly designed to get the results it gets." If injustice, corruption, inequality, or mistrust persist, the systems themselves deserve examination.

A world rooted in universal human values must create structures that reward honesty, responsibility, cooperation, and service rather than manipulation, exploitation, and short-term gain.

Healthcare systems should reward wellness rather than illness. Educational systems should reward curiosity rather than rote memorization. Economic systems should encourage sustainable prosperity rather than unsustainable consumption.

When values become embedded within institutions, ethical behaviour ceases to be an exception and becomes the norm. The true test of a system is not whether it benefits a privileged few but whether it enhances the dignity and well-being of all.

Aligning Incentives with the Common Good

Incentives profoundly influence human behaviour. People often respond more consistently to rewards and consequences than to ideals alone. Economist Milton Friedman wisely cautioned that societies should judge policies by their results rather than their intentions. The challenge is ensuring that incentives support the common good.

In many contemporary systems, success is frequently measured by wealth, status, influence, or power. While these can serve useful purposes, they become destructive when disconnected from responsibility and ethical purpose.

A better world requires incentives that encourage contribution rather than extraction, stewardship rather than exploitation, and collaboration rather than division.

Universal human values provide the moral framework necessary to align individual success with collective well-being. When people succeed by helping others succeed, societies become stronger, healthier, and more resilient.



Leadership as Service and Stewardship

Throughout history, humanity has often sought transformational leaders to solve complex societal challenges. Yet enduring progress rarely depends upon charismatic individuals alone. Mahatma Gandhi captured the essence of authentic leadership when he said, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

Leadership in a better world is fundamentally an expression of service. It is not about controlling people but empowering them. It is not about accumulating authority but cultivating trust. The most effective leaders understand that their responsibility extends beyond immediate achievements. They build institutions, nurture future leaders, and create cultures that outlast their own tenure.

Universal human values transform leadership from a position of privilege into a responsibility of stewardship. Leaders become custodians of collective well-being rather than beneficiaries of power.

The Inner World Shapes the Outer World

No discussion about designing a better world can ignore the influence of human consciousness. Every institution, law, technology, and culture ultimately emerges from the thoughts, beliefs, and intentions of individuals.

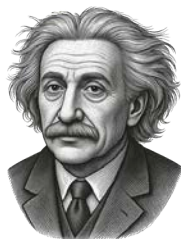
Long before modern psychology emerged, the Buddha taught that "the mind is everything; what you think you become." Contemporary behavioural science increasingly validates the profound impact of perception, mindset, and belief on human behaviour.

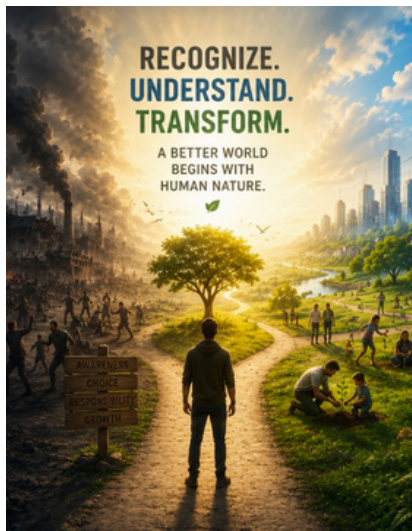
People seek meaning, belonging, recognition, and security. They are influenced by emotions as much as by logic. Therefore, designing a better world requires nurturing emotional intelligence, self-awareness, empathy, and ethical discernment.

Universal human values begin within the individual. Truth, compassion, peace, and responsibility cannot be legislated into existence. They must first be cultivated in human consciousness. Societal transformation ultimately begins with personal transformation.

Learning from Unintended Consequences

One of the greatest lessons of history is that even well-intentioned actions can produce unexpected outcomes. Albert Einstein's observation that "we cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them" underscores the need for continuous learning and adaptation.





Complex societies operate through interconnected systems. A solution in one area may create challenges elsewhere. Policies designed to increase efficiency may inadvertently reduce equity. Technologies developed to connect people may contribute to social isolation. Universal human values provide an essential safeguard against such unintended consequences. They encourage humility, reflection, dialogue, and ethical consideration before action. A better world is not created by certainty. It is created by wisdom.

Freedom Balanced by Responsibility

Among humanity's greatest achievements is the recognition of individual freedom. Yet freedom without responsibility can become destructive. Viktor Frankl argued that freedom is only one side of the human equation and must be balanced by responsibility. Rights and responsibilities are not opposing concepts; they are complementary dimensions of a healthy society.

Universal human values help maintain this balance. They encourage individuals to pursue their aspirations while remaining conscious of their obligations to others, future generations, and the natural world. A civilization flourishes when freedom is guided by conscience and responsibility is embraced willingly rather than imposed externally.

Technology Guided by Wisdom

The twenty-first century is witnessing unprecedented technological advancement. Artificial intelligence, biotechnology, robotics, and digital connectivity possess immense potential to improve human life. Yet technology itself is morally neutral. Its impact depends entirely upon the values that guide its development and application.

Albert Einstein warned that "our technology has exceeded our humanity." His concern remains profoundly relevant today. Technology can amplify creativity and solve global challenges. It can also magnify inequality, misinformation, and social division. Universal human values provide the ethical compass necessary to ensure that technological progress serves humanity rather than diminishes it. Innovation must be guided by wisdom, compassion, justice, and respect for human dignity. The future does not need more technology alone. It needs a wiser use of technology. 101

Education for Character, Wisdom, and Human Flourishing

If humanity wishes to design a better future, education must occupy a central role. Aristotle's insight that "educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all" highlights a critical challenge facing modern educational systems. Knowledge alone is insufficient.

Information is abundant. Wisdom remains scarce.

The purpose of education must therefore extend beyond preparing individuals for employment. It must prepare them for life. It must cultivate critical thinking, ethical reasoning, emotional intelligence, creativity, resilience, and social responsibility. Education grounded in universal human values develops not only competent professionals but also compassionate citizens and responsible leaders. A better world requires not merely educated minds but enlightened hearts.

Creating Cultures of Meaning, Belonging, and Compassion

Material prosperity alone cannot satisfy the deepest human needs. Many societies that enjoy unprecedented wealth continue to struggle with loneliness, anxiety, alienation, and declining social cohesion. Mother Teresa observed that "the most terrible poverty is loneliness and the feeling of being unloved."

Human beings long for connection, purpose, contribution, and meaning. Communities, families, educational institutions, workplaces, and spiritual traditions all contribute to creating environments where people feel valued and connected. Universal human values strengthen these bonds. They remind individuals that every person possesses inherent dignity and worth. A better world must therefore nurture not only economic development but also human relationships, compassion, and community.

A New Blueprint for Humanity

What then would it actually take to design a better world?

Not a single ideology.

Not a political revolution.

Not a technological miracle.

Not a perfect leader.

It would require systems rooted in justice, institutions guided by integrity, leaders committed to service, technologies governed by ethics, education inspired by wisdom, and cultures nourished by compassion.

Above all, it would require a shared commitment to universal human values. Buckminster Fuller challenged humanity to "make the world work for one hundred percent of humanity."

Achieving that vision requires recognizing that every individual, community, institution, and nation is interconnected. The future will not be built through competition alone. It will be built through cooperation grounded in shared values.

Conclusion: From Human Values to Human Destiny

The dream of a better world is neither naïve nor unattainable. It is one of humanity's noblest aspirations. Yet history teaches us that progress cannot be achieved through ideology, technology, or power alone.

A truly better world emerges when outer systems reflect inner values.

Truth must guide knowledge.

Righteousness must guide action.

Peace must guide relationships.

Love must guide service.

Compassion must guide leadership.

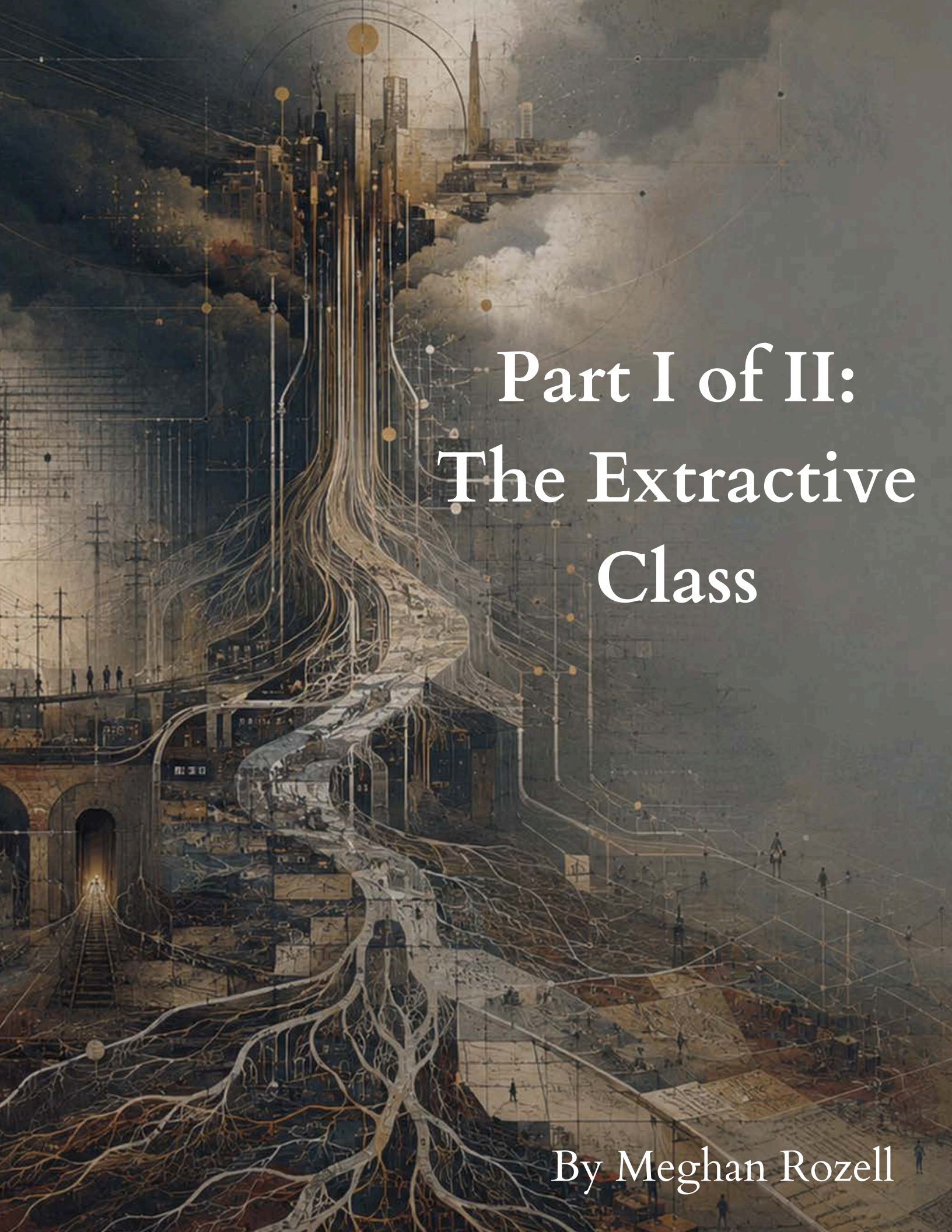
Responsibility must guide freedom.

As Rumi beautifully observed, "Yesterday I was clever, so I wanted to change the world. Today I am wise, so I am changing myself."

His insight captures the essence of humanity's challenge and opportunity. The better world we seek will emerge not merely from new institutions, technologies, or policies, but from the awakening of universal human values within individuals and societies.

Only when human development and human values advance together can humanity move toward a future that is wiser, fairer, more peaceful, and more compassionate—a future worthy of our highest potential.





Part I of II: The Extractive Class

By Meghan Rozell

There is a deep pressure we all feel and that we have collectively tried to explain for decades now.

This pressure shows up in our bodies before we can shape language around it. It's the pain in our chest when another bill arrives, the pit in our stomach when another job application drops into the echo of silence. It's the migraine that comes in the quiet calculation of groceries, rent, gas, childcare, health insurance, school supplies, and the cost of just continuing to stay alive. The fatigue shows up when people who are willing to work cannot find a job, when people cannot afford to live without maxing out another credit card. It's the sigh of defeat we've been told is our own unique failing, when people who built lives around promises of stability discover those promises were never structurally protected.

This experience, felt in our very marrow, is not just economic stress, political frustration, or burnout. The exhaustion is the lived experience of a system that takes more life from ordinary people than it returns.

What's worse is that we've been collectively brainwashed to believe this is an isolated personal failure. The false narrative seeking to sway us from our lived experience is repeated time and time again: You better adapt, reskill, optimize, budget better, work harder, stay positive, build resilience, get another certification, go into more debt for another degree, accept the market and above all: **YOU BETTER BE GRATEFUL YOU HAVE ANYTHING AT ALL.**

*"You better pull yourself up
by your bootstraps, kid."*

The pejorative is leveled at the five-year post grad just the same as it is bullhorned at the 55-year-old laid-off career professional today. Grown adults minimized as disgruntled children somehow, as another tech company and corporate behemoth rakes in record profits.

What can be sound and sage advice in certain circumstances becomes insulting and abusive, intentionally deployed to distract us from the larger systemic reality: effort does not reliably lead to stability anymore. There are not enough places for enough people with enough consistency to call this a healthy social contract.

We are void of a system that returns enough dignity and life to the people giving their very life force to create and grow it.

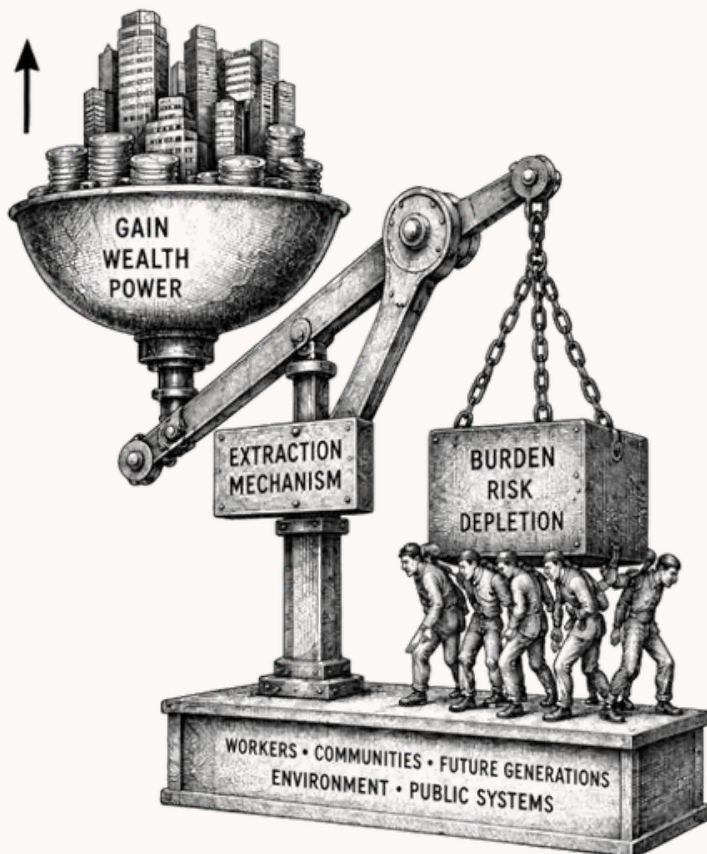


This is Extraction.

The Extractive Class

The Extractive Class is a behavioral and structural class composed of people, firms, institutions, investors, employers, landlords, organizations, and civic actors who gain wealth, power, security, comfort, or status by taking more value from a system than they return to it, while shifting the resulting costs, risks, instability, or harm to others.

The defining line for The Extractive Class is when an actor's gain becomes structurally dependent on another person's depletion.



This definition matters. It is not a simplistic argument against wealth, ownership, business, ambition, leadership, competition or success. A person can build something meaningful and be rewarded for it. There's nothing inherently nefarious about that. A business owner can take financial risk and earn more than an employee. A founder can bring a valuable idea to the world and benefit from its success. A leader can carry responsibility and be compensated accordingly.

The problem is not success, and Extraction is not lazily defined just by having more; it is the kind of success that requires other people to become less stable, less healthy, less free, less dignified, less mobile, or less able to live a meaningful life, in order to secure its own gain.

The Extractive Class under-compensates the people whose labor creates value. It externalizes costs onto workers, families, communities, taxpayers, and ecosystems. It converts dependency into leverage. It accumulates wealth while degrading the conditions that allow others to live stable, healthy and meaningful lives. It suppresses competition, voice, mobility, and bargaining power. It uses money to influence public life and then calls the outcome freedom. It pushes people so hard that their health, family life, and dignity suffer.

Most deceptively, it gives to charity later, often publicly with elegant prose and exquisite lighting rather than designing fairness and responsibility into the system from the beginning.

Post-facto giving is not the same as regenerative design.

Extraction is not the opposite of generosity.

Extraction is the opposite of reciprocity.

A donation is not a substitute for a living wage, and a foundation is not a substitute for fair taxation. A corporate values statement is not a substitute for humane working conditions nor is a community impact report the same as designing a business that does not harm the community in the first place. A scholarship program does not excuse a business model that makes education unaffordable or degrades its access. A mental health benefit does not absolve a workplace that creates preventable illness through chronic ambiguity, shifting priorities, overwork, fear, and disrespect.

◆

Once we name the pattern, we can begin to see it everywhere. This is not a partisan accusation nor a cultural insult. This is a behavioral map.

◆

Many people inside extractive systems are not villains. They are responding rationally to incentives that reward depletion and punish restraint. The system is built so that doing the extractive thing feels like simply doing your job well. That is precisely why the behavior, not the person, is the thing to name and change.

We see it in housing markets where shelter becomes an investment game rather than a human need and where companies depending on public infrastructure treat taxation as an inconvenience to be avoided. We see it in workplaces where loyalty is demanded but layoffs ensue. We see it in political systems where moneyed interests gain access ordinary citizens cannot, while ordinary voices get minimized. We see it in technologies that gather human attention, data, creativity, and track human behavior only to return disconnection, loneliness, volatility, displacement, and dependence.

We hear it loudly and feel it viscerally when people are told they failed individually inside systems that were never designed for basic human stability. It's time to be honest about what it does to a person to give effort, time, skill, care and obedience to a system that will not let them breathe. The Extractive Class then takes advantage of the psychological injury.

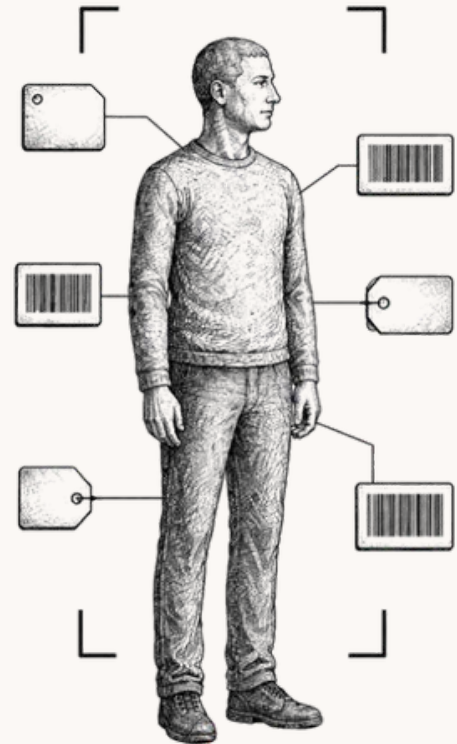
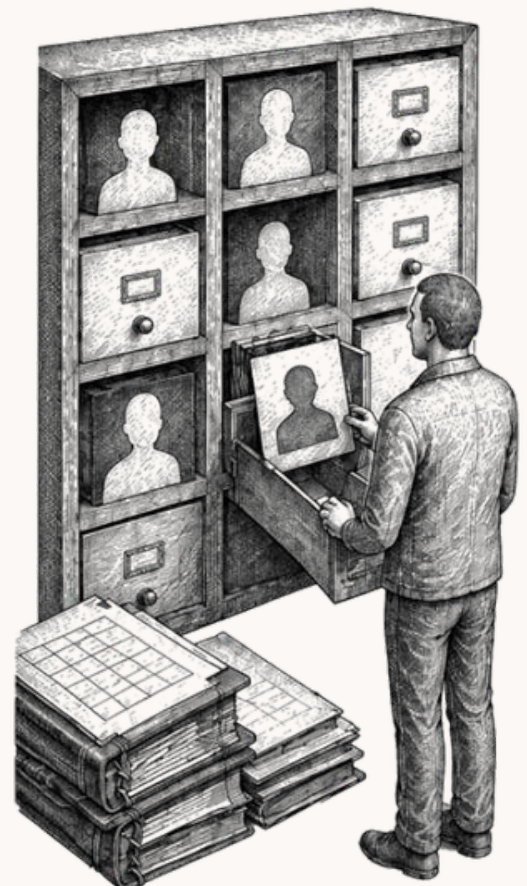
The Recognition Gap

In the extractive system, people are seen as a function and labeled by categories. Workers become labor costs. Citizens become demographics. Customers become revenue streams. Patients become “cancer in room 103.” Tenants become rent rolls. Human attention becomes profit capture. Human need becomes leverage.

Once a person becomes a category, extraction becomes easier to justify.

When people are not fully seen, their pain becomes easier to dismiss, their labor becomes easier to underpay, their instability becomes easier to explain away. Humanity becomes easier to manage as an expense.

This is one of the most dangerous features of Extractive Class behavior and its systems: It needs your labor but calls you a cost. It needs your rent but calls you a tenant. It needs your attention but calls you a user. It needs you to buy from it and calls you a consumer. It needs your care, creativity, memory, skill, and obedience, but refuses to recognize the full human life being depleted.



The Extractive Class does not just take money; it exports shame.

All the while telling the worker who cannot afford rent that they should have chosen better. It tells the laid-off professional that they should have been more adaptable. It tells the parent working two jobs that they should manage time more efficiently and the person who cannot access healthcare that they should take better care of themselves. It tells the exhausted person that they should become more resilient, that they should have tried harder.

The most effective trick isn't taking your money; it's selling you a story about why you don't have any. The story says you're not exploited; it tells you that you're a temporarily embarrassed millionaire, one hustle, one certification, one lucky break away from your peak of success.

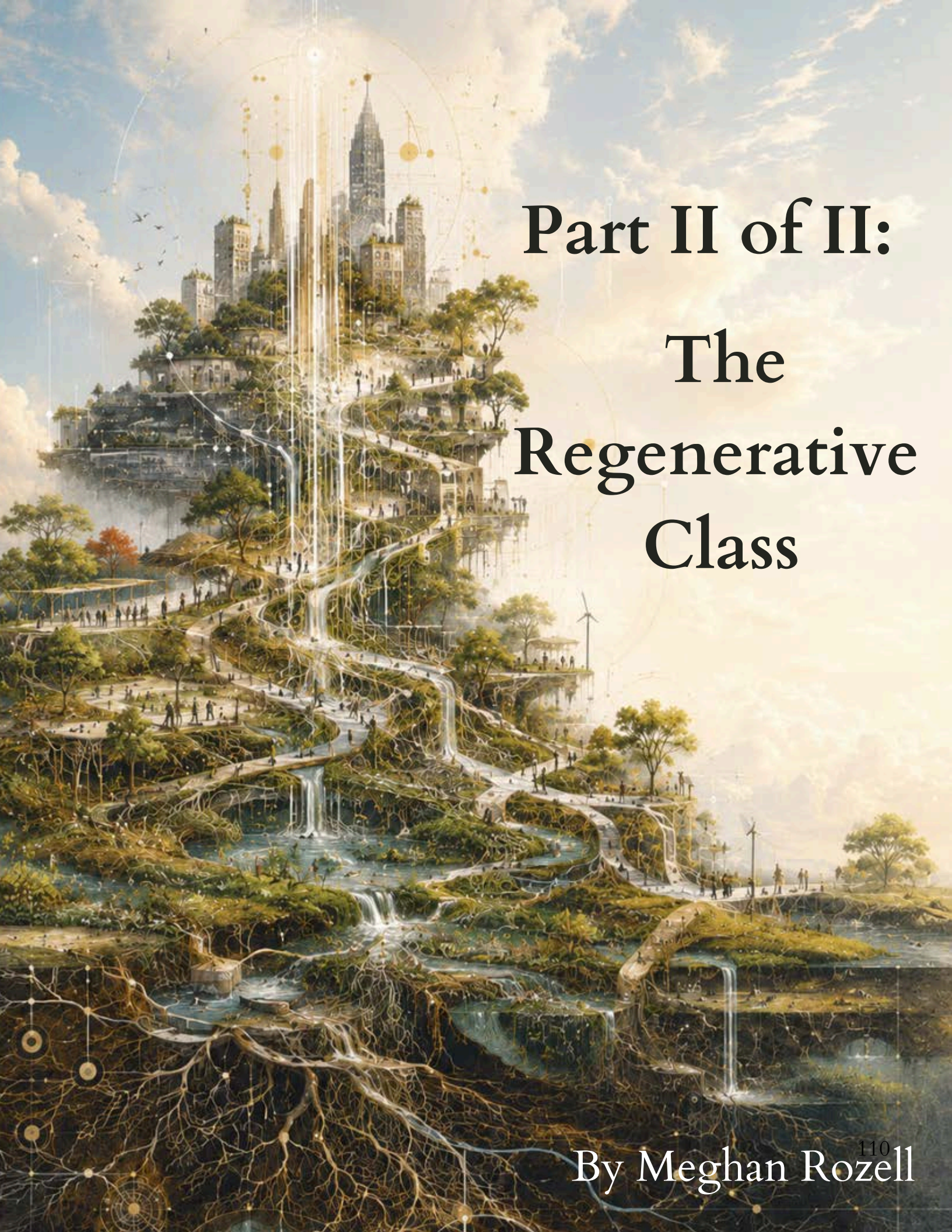


Ronald Wright traced this line to Steinbeck's America, where the poor saw themselves not as a working class with shared interests but as millionaires-in-waiting who simply hadn't arrived yet. That dynamic persists today and when you struggle, the same story has an answer ready: you didn't work hard enough, adapt fast enough, want it badly enough. You're entitled, too sensitive, lazy.

You don't want to be *that* do you?

Even Adam Smith is taken out of context. The man who wrote "The Theory of Moral Sentiments," a book about conscience and mutual regard, wrote it before he ever turned to markets. Then The Extractive Class flattened him into a phrase he used just three times in his entire body of work: "invisible hand." His work gets quoted constantly; the moral architecture he built around those words gets erased. Adam Smith would not recognize what we have today. What he described was competition; what we have is capture, and it needs a new name. It is a justification machine, built to take from us not just our dignified labor and contributions, but the part of us that knows this is Extraction.

We have been gaslit for generations.



Part II of II: The Regenerative Class

By Meghan Rozell¹¹⁰

Regeneration as a Pathway to a Mature Utopia

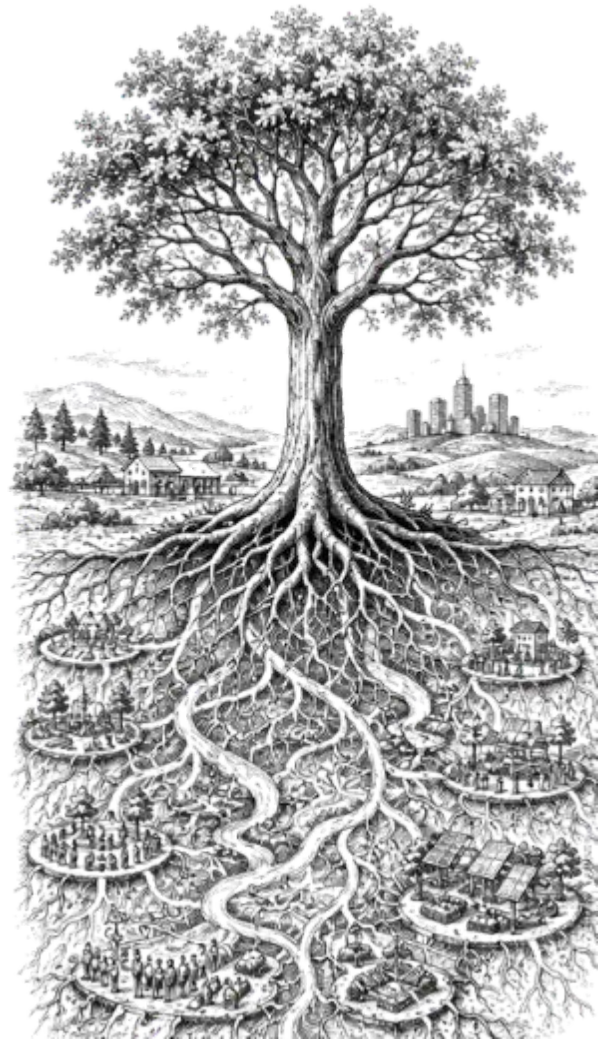
If we continue to reward extraction, extraction will proliferate until we collectively metastasize and our heart monitor flatlines. The necessary answer to The Extractive Class is: The Regenerative Class.

The Regenerative Class

The Regenerative Class is a behavioral and structural class composed of people, businesses, investors, institutions, leaders, workers, creators, and civic actors who create wealth, influence, knowledge, and opportunity in ways that restore and strengthen people, communities, ecologies, and public systems that make their success possible.

The Regenerative Class intentionally designs success so the systems and people around it become more capable, widening access to individual and collective thriving.

The Regenerative Class compensates the people whose labor creates value with dignity, sufficiency, and proportional regard. It pays employees enough that full-time work can support a stable life, and it reduces the fear around housing, food, and healthcare instead of using that fear as leverage. It carries appropriate risk and shares appropriate reward. It builds fairness and repair into the model from the very start, rather than bolting them on after the harm is done. It treats workers as human beings, designing work so that health, family life, and belonging are protected, not sacrificed. It cares for the land, water, air, and communities it touches instead of leaving others to absorb the damage. And it protects the things that let everyone keep participating in competition, mobility, bargaining power, and a real civic voice.



In very simple terms, The Regenerative Class gives back in proportion to what it takes.

No One Succeeds Alone

The Regenerative Class, perhaps most importantly, recognizes the obvious truth that no one succeeds alone. Every single success story is built on both visible and invisible support. Success is built and rises from luck, timing, prior generations, roads, schools, community members, families, teachers, coaches, entry-level workers, caregivers, customers, sanitation workers, cleaners, public health systems, farmers, infrastructure. Success is made from someone else's patience, someone else's sacrifice; it is made from belief and love from others.



The myth of the self-made person is one of the greatest spiritual injuries of the modern economy. Not because individual effort doesn't matter, it does and greatly. Courage, discipline, striving, intelligence, skill, risk, sacrifice and vision all matter.

Every single success story is built on both visible and invisible support.

The Regenerative Class remembers all the people and conditions that made its success possible with gratitude, reverence, and responsibility. And it understands that dignity is not reserved for the highest paid people in society. Dignity belongs equally to the plumber who keeps waste from pooling into the basement, caregivers who help raise children and bathe the elderly, teachers, nurses, emergency workers, janitors, roadworkers, the very people digging ditches to install utilities. Dignity belongs to the farmers, the people stocking grocery shelves and delivering meals to our doors. None of these people are a failed version of a more prestigious elite.

Contribution has dignity.

A society that forgets this will eventually rot from the inside; not because people are envious or hate excellence. Not because ordinary workers resent talent, achievement or mastery. A healthy society honors excellence: excellent surgeons, engineers, teachers, artists, leaders, builders. However, excellence becomes corrosive when it turns into superiority and success becomes dangerous when it forgets its duties and obligations.

This is not about being angry at the wealthy; anger at individuals changes nothing and costs us the very people whose power could change everything.

The Regenerative Class does not punish excellence, it matures it. Maturity does not survive as a “nice idea.” It must be built into incentives and into a system that shapes behavior in a continual feedback loop toward improvement and broader prosperity.

This is not a hypothetical economics idea. John Fullerton, a former Managing Director at JPMorgan, walked away from Wall Street in the early 2000s after a 20-year career to ask a question the industry could not:

What would finance look like if it served life instead of consuming it? This became the framework of Regenerative Capitalism. In 2015, Fullerton named eight principles not from ideology, but from the way living systems actually sustain themselves.

8 Principles of a Regenerative Economy:

1. In Right Relationship
2. Views Wealth Holistically
3. Innovative, Adaptive, Responsive
4. Empowered Participation
5. Honors Community and Place
6. Edge Effect Abundance
7. Robust Circulatory Flow
8. Dynamic Balance

(Capital Institute, 8 Principles of a Regenerative Economy)

These are not abstractions; they are operating rules of every living system that has ever sustained itself.

Fullerton’s defection matters as much as his framework. He renounced the framework of

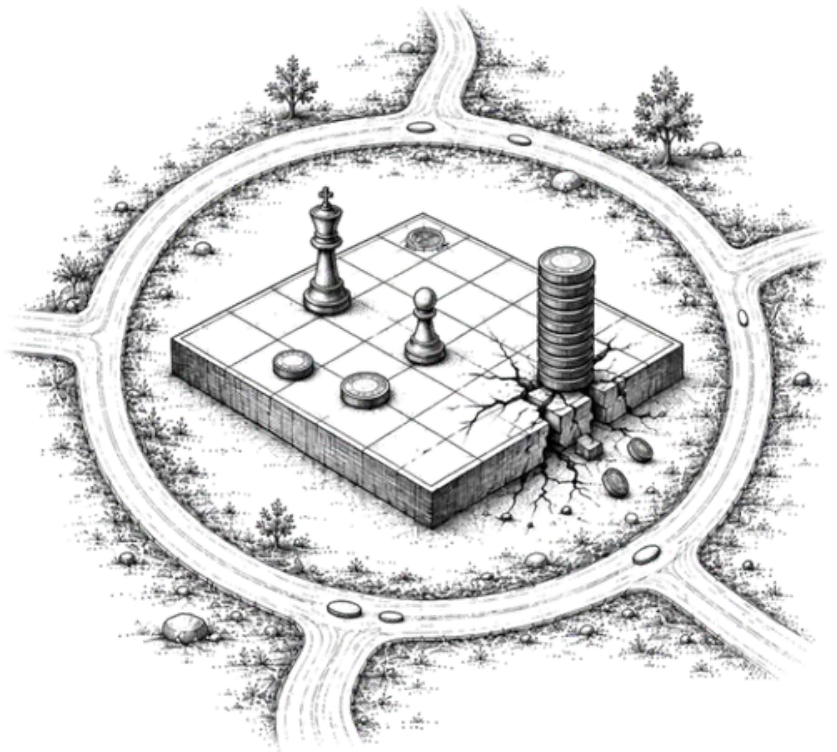
The Extractive Class; the door swings both ways.

The question was never whether systems shape behavior. They do. The better question is what behavior we are rewarding right now.

James Carse gave us the language for this. There are finite games and there are infinite games. A finite game is played to win; it ends when someone does. An infinite game is played to keep playing; the whole point is that the game continues. Football is finite; a culture is infinite. A quarterly earnings report is finite while the economy it lives inside of should be built to keep going.

Extraction is finite-game logic let loose inside an infinite game. It plays to win and the way it wins is by ending the game for everyone else: shorter for the worker, shorter for the community, shorter for the soil, water, and air. It cashes out the future to post a number this quarter and falsely calls that a measure of success.

“Extraction is finite-
game logic let loose
inside an infinite
game.”



A system that keeps consuming its own players does not get to keep playing, and right now we are watching the most powerful players on earth try to win a game that was never designed to be won.

The Regenerative Class plays the only game that was ever really on the table. The objective is not to win, because there is no winning. The direction is to keep the game alive, and worth playing, for everyone still in it and everyone not yet born. That is what true legacy looks and feels like: building something designed to hand forward.

So What? Now What?

As principal Linda Cliatt-Wayman asked of a school the world had written off: So what, now what? Naming hardship is nearly worthless unless the next move is that we do something about it.

Now what?

Regeneration becomes real when it's made rational, profitable, and structurally easier to choose.

The Reciprocity Test

Few of us are all one or all the other. We extract in some places and regenerate in others, usually without tracking which is which. The problem is not wealth, profit, ownership, success, ambition, or excellence. The problem is when the flow goes only one way.

This test is not built to judge character. It is built to show what our systems and choices are genuinely producing. The better question is: Does this system return life in proportion to what it takes? To go even further, does this system create more than it takes?

Answer by what the system does, not by what it intends:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <p>1. Are the people affected by this system still seen and treated as whole human beings? Or have they been reduced to labels like: costs, metrics, risks, tenants, patients, students, users, revenue streams, labor units, demographics, obstacles, or inconveniences to manage?</p> <p>2. Does value flow back to the people, places, and systems that make this success possible? Or does value move mostly one way, with gratitude, charity, branding, or kind language offered later as a substitute for real reciprocity?</p> <p>3. Do people leave this system with more capacity than they arrived with? Are they more skilled, stable, healthy, respected, connected, and able to choose; or are they more depleted, dependent, ashamed, exhausted, replaceable, or afraid?</p> <p>4. Is autonomy increased, or is dependency created so it can be used as leverage? Do people have more voice, mobility, bargaining power, and honest choice because of this system, or do they comply because they cannot afford not to?</p> | <p>5. Who carries the risk, and who receives the reward? When pressure rises, who absorbs the instability first, and when value is created, who benefits most? If risk travels downward while reward concentrates upward, the system is moving toward extraction.</p> <p>6. What costs are being left out of the accounting? Are we counting the real costs to bodies, families, trust, public infrastructure, communities, ecosystems, future generations, and the nervous systems of people with less power, or are those costs being hidden because they do not appear on the balance sheet?</p> <p>7. If everyone copied this model, would the larger system become healthier or sicker? would society become more stable, capable, dignified, honest, reciprocal, and free; or would it become more exhausted, brittle, unequal, fearful, and disposable?</p> <p>8. If your own child took the job you offered your lowest-paid worker, at that pay, those hours, in those circumstances, would you be at peace with your child's life? Would you place the people most precious to you inside of the system you've created or under the behavior patterns that are normalized?</p> |
|---|--|

These questions do not require perfection. They require sight.

They reveal whether fairness (appropriate compensation for appropriate value contributed) is designed into the structure or merely performed after the harm is done. They reveal whether generosity is being used as a substitute for reciprocity. They reveal whether success is maturing into stewardship or hardening into extraction.

At the highest level, a regenerative system becomes generative. Like the honeybee that does not merely replace what it consumes but pollinates the field around it, the best systems create conditions for more life, more capacity, more dignity, more trust, more skill, more beauty, and more possibility than existed before.

That is the standard worth
building toward.

Vision in Action

Extraction and Regeneration are not identities, they are behaviors. An identity can be difficult to nearly impossible to break while behavior patterns can change. Systems built with intention to incentivize regenerative outcomes will create value and rewards beyond the paradigm we exist in now.



To the everyday working people who deserve to have their dignity restored for the real value they create: this begins with reclaiming our own sovereignty. Yes, the bills still need to be paid, and mouths still need to be fed while we navigate the wreckage of what the Extractive Class has built. That reality is not a weakness; it is the ground we start from. Something profound changes the moment we see these systems clearly for what they are. We stop absorbing the shame that was never ours to carry, and we get our agency back. From there, every move counts more than we have been taught to believe. It can start small, with a polite no to the unpaid late nights that were quietly normalized. It can grow into taking your skill and your experience to the businesses already trying to build it right. Your clarity of sight and years of earned experience can become the boldest move of all: building something new, together, designed from the first day around dignity, intention, and contribution that truly means something.

Some leaders inside the extractive systems see it and say so, even as the system still forces their hand, and that is where change begins. That truth, spoken from inside the machine, carries more weight than any critique from the outside.

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Build it into the structure, not the press release.

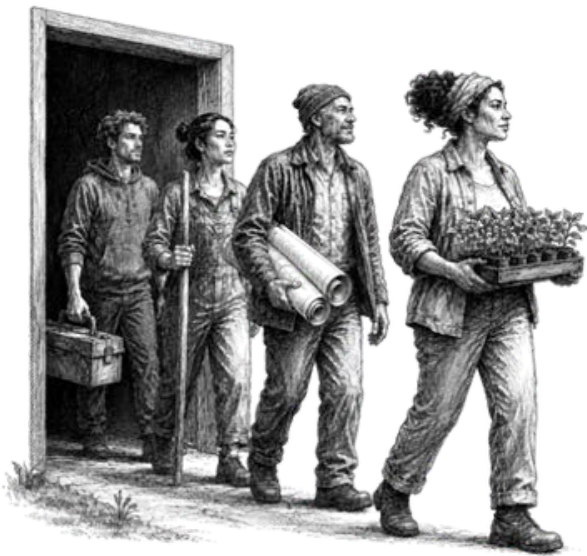
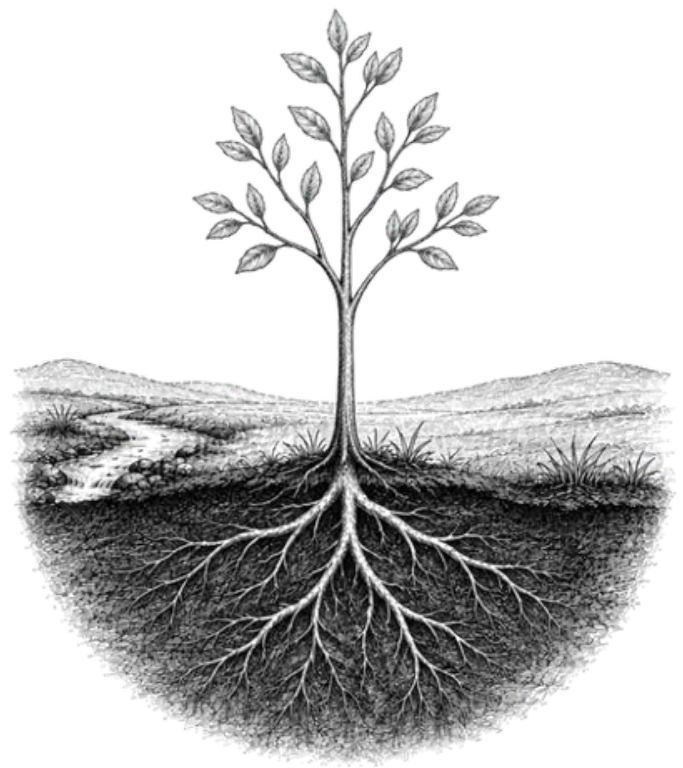
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To all the leaders still willing to look honestly at what their success is built on: design fairness in from the beginning, and watch what becomes possible when no one is spending half their life force just surviving the system they work inside. Learn the real cost of living and pay for the real contributions of everyone who makes your success possible. Build it into the structure, not the press release, through living wages, profit-sharing, real employee ownership, and technology designed to expand what people can do rather than discard them from the social contract. And acknowledge the team at your side, the people who believe in you, stand by you, and strive to the moon with you. Nobody does it alone.

Utopia was never going to arrive as perfection; it arrives as probability. A better world begins with one regeneratively designed business, contract, neighborhood, and working life at a time, until extraction must compete for people who finally have somewhere better to go.

The Extractive Class has spent decades, and at an accelerating pace these last few years, shedding the very people who hold the experience, the judgment, and the hard-won knowledge, the very people who will build its replacement. It calls this patterned behavior efficiency. Yet every person pushed out the door carries that capability into the open, free to put it to work somewhere the old system was never built to reach.

The skill to build something better was never locked inside the institutions doing the extracting. It is already out here, in the hands of the people who were told they were disposable. They are not disposable in the slightest.



The future worth working toward is not out on some ethereal horizon. It's already in you.

WELCOME TO
UTOPIA

ENJOY YOUR JOURNEY

**Designing a Better World:
Why Most Utopias Fail
and What Actually Works**

**By
Zen Benefiel**

Humanity has never lacked visionaries.

Every century produces philosophers, reformers, technologists, economists, and revolutionaries convinced they have discovered the formula for a better civilization. Some imagined perfect governments. Others believed free markets would self-correct human suffering. Some trusted religion, some science, some artificial intelligence, some decentralized networks, and others, collective ownership. Each movement carried an intoxicating promise: if we can just redesign society correctly, humanity will finally thrive.

And yet, history is littered with collapsed utopias. Not because people lacked good intentions. But because reality is recursive.

Every system we create eventually encounters the same unavoidable variables: human psychology, incentives, fear, power concentration, scarcity, ego, tribalism, uncertainty, and the friction between ideals and execution. The failure of most utopian models is not philosophical. It is operational.

The deeper question is not whether humanity can imagine a better world. The question is whether humanity can engineer one that survives contact with reality.

The Fatal Flaw of Most Utopian Thinking

Most attempts at “designing a better world” begin with ideology instead of systems architecture. They assume humans will behave rationally if given the correct rules. They assume institutions will remain ethical if founded on moral principles. They assume leaders will continue serving the public once power is consolidated. They assume technology will amplify wisdom rather than manipulation. History suggests otherwise.

The French Revolution sought liberty and equality, but spiralled into the Reign of Terror. Industrial capitalism generated innovation and prosperity while simultaneously producing exploitation, ecological degradation, and massive inequality. Communist systems attempted economic fairness but often centralized authority into authoritarian control. Even modern digital platforms created to connect humanity have evolved into engines of outrage, surveillance, and algorithmic addiction.

The pattern repeats because complex systems produce unintended consequences. Every solution creates new pressures elsewhere. Every efficiency creates a vulnerability. Every concentration of power eventually attracts corruption. This is not cynicism. It is systems dynamics. A truly better world cannot be designed through aspiration alone. It must account for the mathematics of human behaviour, institutional entropy, and adaptive complexity.

The World Is Not Broken. It Is Fragmented.

One of the greatest misconceptions in modern civilization is the belief that humanity's problems exist independently. They do not. Economic instability affects mental health. Mental health affects political polarization. Political polarization affects institutional trust. Institutional distrust affects media ecosystems. Media ecosystems influence education, public perception, social behaviour, and ultimately governance itself.

Everything is connected. Yet most modern institutions operate in isolated silos. Governments compartmentalize policy. Corporations compartmentalize departments. Educational systems separate disciplines. Healthcare treats symptoms independently of social conditions. Technology companies optimize engagement independently of psychological consequences. The result is systemic incoherence.



We have extraordinary intelligence operating inside fragmented architectures. This is why progress often feels paradoxical. Humanity possesses advanced AI, quantum computing, genomic engineering, and planetary-scale communication while simultaneously experiencing rising anxiety, declining trust, institutional paralysis, and social division. Our intelligence evolved faster than our coherence.

Human + Machine Strategic Intelligence

Technology amplifies discernment.
Human wisdom gives it direction.



Why Leadership Often Becomes the Bottleneck

Many societal failures are not technological limitations. They are leadership limitations. As organizations scale, leaders naturally become insulated from reality. Information gets filtered upward through politics, hierarchy, incentives, and fear. Over time, executives, governments, and institutions begin operating from curated narratives rather than ground truth. This creates what organizational theorists increasingly recognize as decision latency the growing gap between reality and leadership response. By the time critical information reaches decision-makers, the system has already accumulated unnecessary friction, waste, or instability.

This dynamic exists everywhere:

- Governments reacting slowly to economic disruption.
- Healthcare systems responding after burnout becomes an epidemic.
- Corporations discover operational inefficiencies only after profitability declines.
- Educational systems are preparing students for economies that no longer exist.

The challenge is not a lack of data. Humanity now produces more data in two days than previous civilizations generated in centuries. The challenge is interpretation, alignment, and execution. A better world requires leaders who understand interconnected systems rather than isolated events.

Technology Alone Will Not Save Humanity

There is a growing belief that artificial intelligence will solve humanity's greatest challenges. It may help. But technology amplifies existing human intent more than it replaces it. A compassionate society using advanced AI may accelerate healing, optimization, and resource distribution. A fragmented society using advanced AI may accelerate surveillance, manipulation, economic displacement, and centralized control. Technology is not inherently ethical. It reflects the consciousness and incentive structures of the systems deploying it. This is why purely technological visions of utopia often fail. They underestimate the human variable.

No algorithm can fully resolve greed, fear, narcissism, tribalism, or the psychological need for identity and belonging. No predictive model can eliminate uncertainty from human civilization. No machine can independently determine meaning, purpose, or moral wisdom. The future will not be determined solely by AI. The relationship between human consciousness and machine intelligence will determine it.

The Missing Ingredient: Coherence

Perhaps the most overlooked concept in civilization design is coherence. Coherence is not uniformity. It is alignment. In biology, coherence enables trillions of cells to function as a single organism. In music, coherence allows different instruments to produce harmony rather than noise. In physics, coherence describes synchronized patterns that create stability across complex systems.

Human civilization lacks coherence because its major systems are optimized independently rather than collectively. Economics often optimizes profit independently of ecological sustainability. Media optimizes attention independently of the truth. Politics optimizes electability independently of long-term stewardship. Corporations optimize quarterly performance independently of societal resilience. Individuals optimize personal survival independently of collective well-being. These fragmented incentives generate chronic instability.

A truly advanced civilization would not eliminate competition, innovation, or diversity. It would align them within regenerative frameworks where individual success strengthens collective resilience rather than undermining it. That requires an entirely different leadership operating model.

Simulating Consequences Before Society Pays the Price

One of the greatest advancements in aerospace, engineering, and medicine was the realization that simulation is cheaper than failure. Aircraft are stress-tested before flight. Bridges are modelled before construction. Medical treatments undergo extensive trials before mass deployment. Yet societies rarely apply the same rigour to leadership decisions.

Policies are often implemented reactively. Economic systems evolve without long-term modelling. Organizational transformations occur based on assumptions rather than systemic simulation. This is beginning to change. Emerging frameworks in systems intelligence are moving beyond predictive analytics toward integrated decision simulation—the ability to model operational, economic, behavioural, and structural consequences before implementation. This represents a profound shift in leadership philosophy.

Instead of asking: “What ideology sounds best?” The question becomes: “What produces the highest probability of coherent long-term outcomes across interconnected systems?” This is where next-generation intelligence architectures are quietly redefining strategic thinking. Not as replacements for human leadership, but as extensions of human discernment.

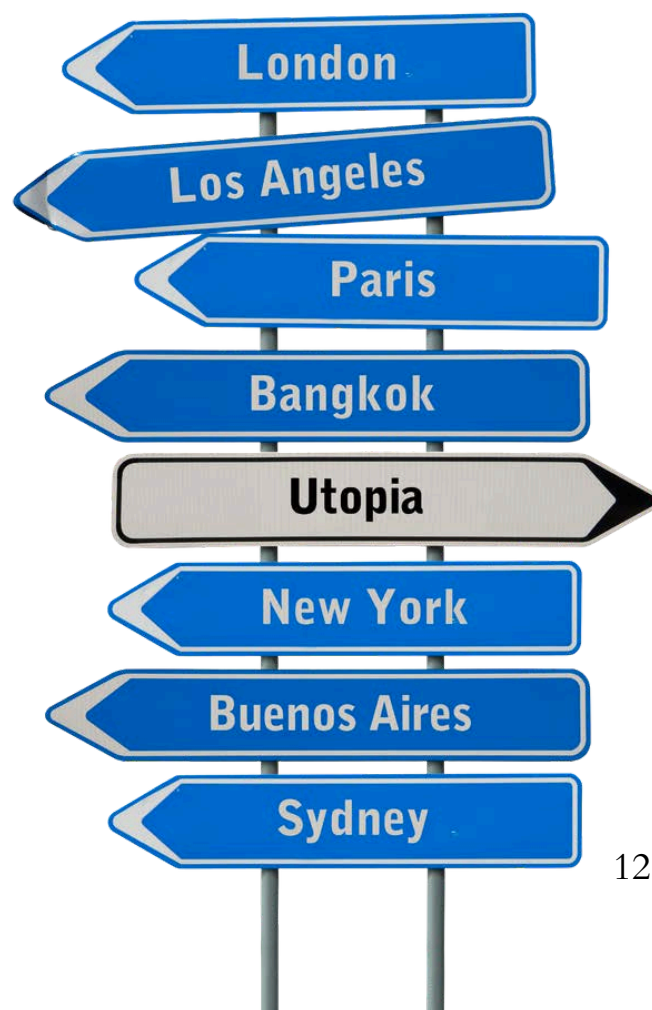
The Rise of Human–Machine Strategic Intelligence

The future likely belongs neither to purely human governance nor purely autonomous systems. It belongs to a partnership. The most advanced emerging approaches combine computational modelling with experienced human judgment, integrating machine precision with contextual wisdom, ethics, intuition, and adaptability. Some refer to this convergence as augmented intelligence. Others describe it as systems orchestration

Whatever terminology emerges, the principle remains consistent: Humanity’s greatest challenge is no longer information scarcity. It is the ability to synthesize complexity fast enough to make coherent decisions. This requires tools capable of

identifying hidden bottlenecks, mapping systemic dependencies, reducing organizational friction, and stress-testing decisions across multiple layers simultaneously. Not to impose control over humanity. But to help humanity navigate complexity without collapsing under it.

The implications are enormous. Cities could model the impacts of infrastructure before expansion. Enterprises could identify operational fragility before crises emerge. Governments could simulate second- and third-order consequences before implementing policy. Educational systems could align workforce development with future economic realities rather than past assumptions. The potential is not utopia. The potential is to reduce preventable chaos.





Why Better Worlds Begin Internally

Still, no system can permanently outperform the consciousness of the people operating it. This may be the hardest truth of all.

A civilization designed around fear will eventually weaponize its technologies.

A civilization designed around extraction will eventually consume its own foundations.

A civilization designed around ego will eventually fracture into competing identities.

Lasting transformation, therefore, requires both external and internal evolution.

The architecture of society reflects the architecture of human consciousness.

This does not mean perfection is required. Humanity has always evolved through tension, contradiction, and adaptation. But civilizations capable of self-reflection tend to survive longer than those trapped in rigid certainty.

Perhaps designing a better world begins not with constructing perfection, but with building systems capable of learning, adapting, and recalibrating before collapse occurs.

Living systems survive because they evolve.

Rigid systems eventually break.

The End of the Old Paradigm

The industrial age optimized scale. The information age optimized speed. The emerging era may require something entirely different: coherence. Not centralized control. Not ideological dominance. Not technological escapism. But integrated intelligence capable of balancing economics, psychology, governance, sustainability, innovation, and human dignity simultaneously.

Humanity stands at an unusual threshold. For the first time in history, we possess both the technological capability to coordinate globally and the existential risks capable of destabilizing civilization globally. Climate volatility, AI disruption, institutional distrust, economic fragmentation, and psychological exhaustion are not isolated crises. They are signals that our current operating systems no longer match the complexity of the world we created. The future may ultimately belong to societies capable of integrating wisdom with systems thinking. Not merely smarter technology. Smarter civilization.

So What Would It Actually Take?

Designing a better world would require far more than idealism.

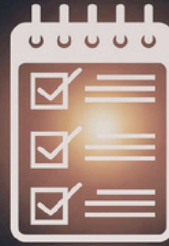
It would require:

- Leadership capable of systems thinking.
- Incentive structures aligned with long-term resilience.
- Institutions are designed for adaptation rather than rigidity.
- Technologies governed by ethical stewardship.
- Economies are measured beyond extraction alone.
- Media ecosystems optimized for understanding rather than outrage.
- Educational systems teach complexity, collaboration, and discernment.
- And perhaps most importantly, humans are willing to mature beyond purely tribal identities.

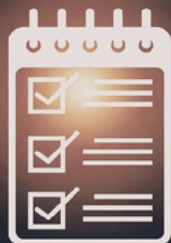
That may sound ambitious. But every major leap in civilization once sounded impossible.

The question is no longer whether humanity has the intelligence to build a better future.

The question is whether humanity can become coherent enough to sustain one.



The Informational Revolution We Barely Noticed



**By Aslak
Molvaer**



When people discuss the challenges of the digital age, the conversation usually follows a familiar pattern. Some worry about hackers. Others worry about artificial intelligence. Still others worry about misinformation, cybercrime, or the next disruptive technology. These concerns are not without merit. Cybercrime is real. Artificial intelligence will undoubtedly reshape many aspects of society. Digital systems introduce new vulnerabilities that deserve attention.

Yet I increasingly wonder whether we are focusing on the wrong problem. Not because hackers are harmless. They are not. Not because artificial intelligence is unimportant. It is. But because both discussions may overlook a more fundamental change that has already occurred.

Most of us still think about information as if we live in a world that no longer exists. For much of modern history, information was relatively stable. A newspaper printed the same stories for every reader. A book contained the same pages every time it was opened. An encyclopedia presented the same knowledge to everyone who consulted it. Information could certainly be wrong, biased, incomplete, or manipulated, but it generally remained fixed once published.

The informational environment itself was largely static. Today, information increasingly behaves differently. Search results vary. News feeds adapt. Recommendations change. Algorithms learn. Artificial intelligence generates content on demand. Information no longer simply exists waiting to be found. Increasingly, it is selected, filtered, prioritized, personalized, and continuously updated.

In many ways, informational environments have become active participants in the construction of perceived reality. The difference between a printed encyclopedia and an adaptive search engine is not simply technological. It represents a fundamentally different informational environment.

What makes this transformation remarkable is that it has occurred within a single lifetime. Many members of Generation X can remember libraries, card catalogues, newspapers, and shelves filled with encyclopedias. Today, they navigate search engines, recommendation systems, social media platforms, and AI assistants. Few generations in history have experienced such a dramatic shift in how information is produced, distributed, and encountered.

At the same time, younger generations have never known anything else. For Generation Alpha, adaptive information systems are not an innovation. They are simply the environment. Search is normal. Recommendations are normal. Algorithmic curation is normal. Artificial intelligence is becoming normal.



This creates an unusual situation. Different generations often participate in the same conversations while carrying very different assumptions about how information works. One generation remembers information as something largely fixed and externally produced.

Another experiences information as dynamic, personalized, interactive, and continuously changing. For most of the twentieth century, millions of people could watch the same evening news broadcast, read the same newspaper headlines, and consult the same encyclopedia. They certainly disagreed about what the information meant, but they often began from a relatively shared informational foundation.

Today, two people can hold the same smartphone, use the same search engine, and participate on the same social media platform while encountering remarkably different informational worlds.

We are no longer asking people to make judgments within a largely shared informational environment. Increasingly, we are asking them to make judgments within personalized informational realities. Yet perhaps the most important consequence of this transformation receives surprisingly little attention.

Human beings do not encounter the world directly. We encounter it through perception, attention, interpretation, memory, and meaning-making. The way we understand reality is inseparable from the informational environments in which we operate. For centuries, human cognition developed within informational environments that were comparatively stable, slower-moving, and easier to navigate. Today, individuals are expected to operate within environments characterized by continuous updates, competing interpretations, algorithmic mediation, personalization, and unprecedented volumes of information.

This is one reason why cognitive and metacognitive research has become increasingly important. As informational environments become more adaptive and complex, understanding how people think may become just as important as understanding the technologies themselves. What matters is not simply what information people encounter, but how changing informational environments shape attention, judgment, trust, interpretation, learning, and decision-making.

The transformation extends far beyond technology. The conditions under which human beings construct meaning has changed fundamentally. My big question, based on all this, is simple: Can, and should, human cognition remain entirely unchanged when the environment in which it develops, learns, communicates, and understands the world has been transformed so profoundly? A few questions may prove more important in the decades ahead.

THE INFORMATIONAL REVOLUTION WE BARELY NOTICED

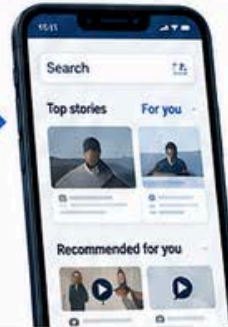
Information is no longer something we find. It's something that finds, filters, and shapes us.

THEN: INFORMATION WAS STABLE

- Same content for everyone
- Published once, remained fixed
- Sought out and found
- Relatively stable informational environment



NOW: INFORMATION IS DYNAMIC



- Different for each person
- Continuously updated and adapted
- Selected, filtered, personalized
- An active participant in constructing perceived reality

DIFFERENT GENERATIONS, DIFFERENT ASSUMPTIONS

GENERATION X (AND EARLIER)



Remembers a world where information was:

- Fixed
- Published
- External
- The same for everyone

GENERATION ALPHA (AND BEYOND)



Experiences a world where information is:

- Dynamic
- Personalized
- Algorithmically curated
- Continuously changing



Different generations. Same conversations.
Different assumptions about how information works.

THE MODERN INFORMATIONAL ENVIRONMENT



Informational environments are not neutral backdrops. They actively shape what we see, think, and believe.

HUMAN COGNITION & INFORMATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS

We don't encounter reality directly—we encounter it through our minds, shaped by our informational environment.

OUR COGNITIVE PROCESSES

- ATTENTION**: What we notice
- INTERPRETATION**: How we make sense
- MEMORY**: What we retain
- JUDGMENT**: How we evaluate
- DECISION-MAKING**: What we choose
- LEARNING**: How we adapt



INFLUENCED BY THE ENVIRONMENT

- Continuous updates
- Algorithmic mediation
- Personalization
- Competing interpretations
- Information overload
- Speed and volatility



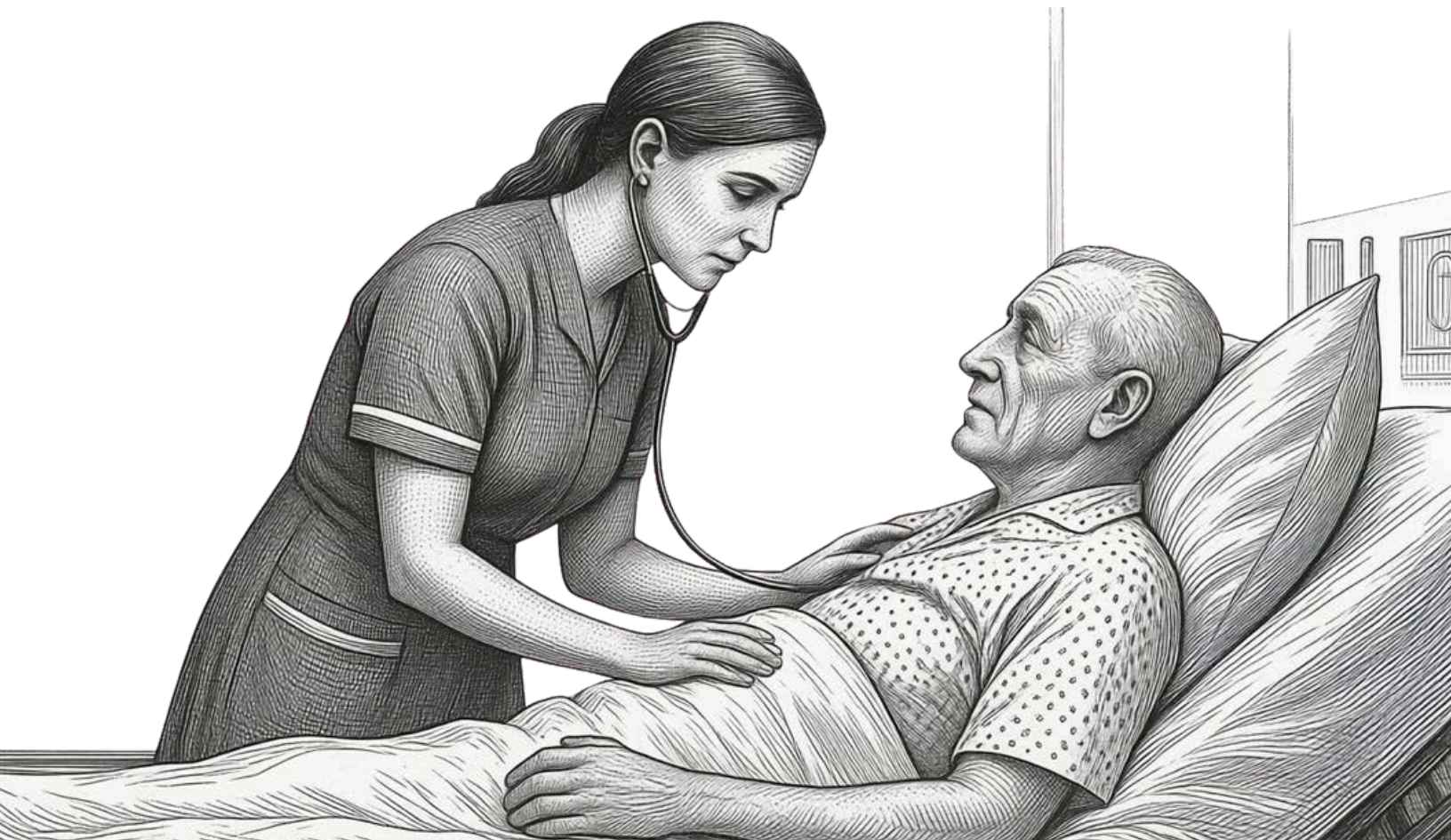
As environments change, so do the demands on cognition. Understanding how we think is becoming as important as the technologies we use.



THE BIG QUESTION

Can, and should, human cognition remain entirely unchanged when the environment in which it develops, learns, communicates, and understands the world has been **transformed so profoundly**?

THE INVISIBLE LABOUR ECONOMY



HOW SOCIETIES DEPEND ON WORK
THAT NEVER APPEARS ON A
BALANCE SHEET
AND WHAT BECOMES POSSIBLE
WHEN WE FINALLY SEE IT

BY CHINEYENWA OKORO
ONU WYETHEY



A Definition First

Before we begin, let me define something: culture is the way of being. Not identity. Not ethnicity. Not tradition frozen in time. Culture is how people live over time until that way of living becomes so embedded that it looks like "just how things are."

When a way of being persists long enough, it becomes systematized. It becomes policy. It becomes "best practice." It becomes the unquestioned infrastructure beneath every decision, every interaction, every exchange of value. And here is where the invisible labour economy begins: much of what holds systems together never got systematized. It stayed invisible. It stayed in the margins. And the people doing it stayed uncounted.

The Moment

You walk into a room that runs smoothly. The meeting starts on time. The documents are prepared. The difficult colleague has somehow been managed before they could derail the conversation. The new hire feels welcomed. The client feels understood. The crisis that was brewing last week has quietly dissolved. No one knows who did this. No one asks. Someone in that room held the emotional temperature. Someone remembered the context. Someone translated between people who will not speak directly to each other. Someone absorbed the tension so it would not land on the wrong person at the wrong time. This is invisible labour. And systems families, companies, communities, nations quietly depend on it.

What Makes Labour Invisible?

Labour becomes invisible when it produces no measurable output. There is no KPI for "prevented a conflict." There is no balance sheet line item for "remembered the context everyone else forgot." There is no invoice for "held the space so the real conversation could happen." But here is what I have learned in two decades of working across African markets, governments, and institutions: what cannot be measured is not the same as what does not matter. The invisible labour economy is not marginal. It is foundational. It is the layer beneath the layer everyone is optimizing.

Consider:

- The grandmother who holds the family memory, resolves disputes before they escalate, and transmits values to the next generation — while never appearing in any economic measure of "productivity"
- The executive assistant who understands the company better than the executives, but is never in the room when strategy is decided
- The community elder who knows which families are struggling, which young people are drifting, which conflicts are brewing — information no survey captures
- The middle manager who spends half their time translating between leadership vision and team reality — work that is essential but impossible to quantify

These are not edge cases. These are the load-bearing walls of every system that functions.

The Pattern: From Culture to System to Invisibility

Here is the pattern I see:

Stage 1: A way of being emerges.

Someone starts doing something that helps the group function. Holding memory. Maintaining relationships. Translating between generations. Managing emotional complexity.

Stage 2: It becomes expected.

The group starts to depend on it. But because it was never named, never compensated, never formally assigned — it remains the work of whoever was doing it.

Stage 3: It becomes invisible.

As the group grows and formalizes, only the measurable work gets systematized. The invisible labour continues, but now it is background noise. It is "soft skills." It is "personality." It is "just what they do."

Stage 4: The system extracts without accounting.

The system now runs on invisible labour but does not see it. Those doing it burn out. When they stop, the system fractures — and everyone acts surprised. This pattern operates across every scale: families, organizations, communities, nations. And it is not an accident. It is the predictable result of defining value too narrowly.

Ghost GDP: When Value Exists But Does Not Circulate

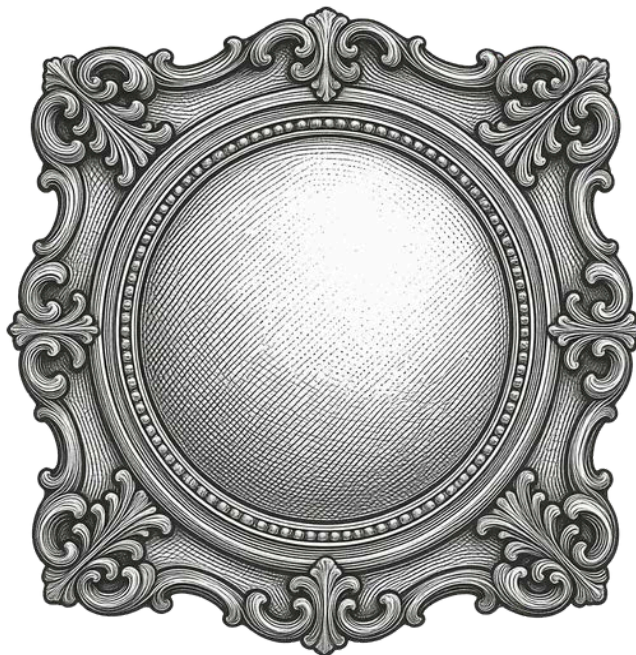
In economic terms, there is a name for this: Ghost GDP. Ghost GDP describes value that shows up in national accounts or corporate performance but never circulates through the real economy. Never reaches the people who created it and it never returns to the communities that generated it. I work across Africa. We know Ghost GDP intimately. Development budgets that move through institutions without touching communities. Trade agreements that extract raw materials, process them elsewhere, and return them at a premium while calling it "partnership." CSR programmes that generate reports but no reciprocity. The invisible labour economy is Ghost GDP at the human scale. Value is being generated. It is just not being seen, counted, or returned.

Not a Victim Story

Let me be clear about something. This is not a piece about how invisible workers are victims of uncaring systems. That framing is comfortable, but it is incomplete. The harder question is: how do we allow certain things to become invisible in the first place? Systems are designed at the back of cultures. And culture is the way of being. If we, collectively, have normalized a way of being that extracts without reciprocating — that depends on labour without accounting for it — then the system is not the villain.

The system is the mirror.

It reflects what we have allowed. What we have prioritized. What we have refused to see. The question is not: who did this to us? The question is: what way of being created this? And what way of being would create something different? The Sovereignty Pathway: Recognise, Map, Architect



In my work as a Cultural Systems Architect, I use a methodology I call The Sovereignty Pathway. It applies to institutions, but it applies equally here.

RECOGNIZE

Before you can change a system, you have to see it. Invisible labour remains invisible because no one has named it. The first step is recognition — not just acknowledgment, but precise identification of what is being done, by whom, at what cost. Ask: Who in this room is holding something that no one else sees? What would collapse if they stopped?

MAP

Recognition is not enough. You have to map the terrain. Where does invisible labour cluster? Who bears disproportionate load? What are the patterns across generations, genders, roles, and contexts? Mapping makes the pattern visible.

ARCHITECT

Visibility without change is extraction by another name. The third step is design: building new infrastructure that accounts for what was previously invisible. This means naming roles that were never named, compensating labour that was never compensated, distributing load that was never distributed, and building feedback loops that surface hidden work before burnout makes it undeniable.

Intergenerational Perspective

This is not only a workplace issue. It is not only a gender issue. It is an intergenerational issue. The elder generation carries institutional memory, relational intelligence, and accumulated wisdom. But as societies formalize and digitize, elder knowledge becomes "outdated" rather than "foundational."

The middle generation is often caught between: managing upward, raising children, caring for aging parents, and holding the social fabric together. This is the generation most likely to burn out because they are the bridge, and bridges bear weight from both directions. The younger generation watches. They see what is rewarded and what is not. They are making calculations about what to offer and what to protect. Many are deciding: I will not disappear into that role. This is not a loss of work ethic. This is a rational response to a system that consumes without reciprocating.

The Reciprocity Question

Here is the question I keep returning to: What if invisible labour was met with visible reciprocity? Not just "thank you." Not just "recognition." Structural reciprocity. What if the grandmother who holds the family memory was genuinely supported in her old age—not as charity, but as return on investment? What if the executive assistant who prevents organizational chaos was promoted into strategy – not despite her relational intelligence, but because of it. Reciprocity is not about being nice. Reciprocity is about designing systems that return value to those who generate it.

What Becomes Possible

When we see the invisible labour economy clearly, something shifts. We stop blaming individuals for system failures. We stop prescribing "self-care" for structural extraction. We stop acting surprised when load-bearing people collapse. And we start asking better questions:

- What would this organization look like if we designed for the labour we actually depend on?
- What would this family look like if we distributed the weight assigned to one person?
- What would this community look like if we reciprocated the care we extract?
- What would this economy look like if we measured what actually holds it together?

These are not soft questions. They are the hardest questions in systems design.

A Bridge, Not a Fix

I do not offer solutions in this piece. Solutions imply that someone else will implement them. What I offer is a bridge. A bridge between the formal economy and the invisible economy that sustains it. A bridge between generations who hold different pieces of the same puzzle. A bridge between the systems we have built and the culture we have allowed. The invisible labour economy is worth billions, not because we should monetize it, but because we should finally see what holds our world together. And once you see it, you cannot unsee it. That is where change begins. Culture is the way of being. Systems are designed at the back of cultures. If we want different systems, we have to become different people in how we see, what we value, and what we are willing to reciprocate. The invisible labour economy is not a problem to be solved.

It is a mirror to be faced.

Bill Murray

He's having the day of his life...
over and over again.

Groundhog Day





Groundhog Day and the Invisible Systems That Shape Human Life

By Michael Brooke

Back in our March issue of BridgeWave, we featured the film *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory* (1971). Through a systems thinking lens, the film is really a giant test disguised as a tour. Wonka is not looking for the smartest child or the one who loves chocolate the most. He is looking for someone he can trust to take care of the factory. Every room creates a situation that reveals character.

The children who act without self-control remove themselves from the system. Charlie makes mistakes too, but he learns, takes responsibility, and tells the truth. In the film's climax, Charlie returns the everlasting gobstopper.

The factory is a carefully designed system that helps Wonka discover who is ready to become its next steward. This brings us to our next film - 1993's *Groundhog Day* starring Bill Murray and Andi MacDowell. Most people think *Groundhog Day* is a comedy about repetition. They see a selfish weatherman waking up every morning to the same song, the same weather report, the same small town, the same annoying conversations, and the same groundhog festival.

But beneath the comedy sits something far more unsettling. *Groundhog Day* may be one of the clearest cinematic explanations of systems thinking ever made. This is because the movie is not really about time - it's about patterns.

More specifically, it is about what happens when a human being becomes trapped inside the consequences of his own operating system. The brilliance of the film is that almost nothing changes externally.

The town, people, roads, music and weather all stay the same. Only Phil changes. That matters because systems thinking begins with a difficult realization: If the same outcomes keep appearing under the same conditions, the problem may not be the events themselves. The problem may be the structure that produces them.

The movie quietly suggests that Phil Connors was already trapped long before February 2nd began repeating. We see how poorly he treats his co-workers and others whom he encounters ("Needle Ned"). The repeating loops make his invisible prison visible. I sense this is why the film has endured for generations. I confess to watching it at least 7 times.

Even after repeated views (or even if it's only once), audiences recognize the loop immediately. Wake up. Alarm clock. Coffee. Commute. Small talk. Stress. Distraction. Sleep. Repeat. *Groundhog* does not invent the loop; it exaggerates the one many people already inhabit unconsciously.



To give you a sense of the power of Donella Meadows 12 levels, we are examining the first five. If you'd like to find out more, feel free to email us. As you go through each level, ask yourself one critical question: "Does this resonate?" If it does, then that's the gift of Groundhog Day. Because once you see the levels, you can't unsee them. The choice now becomes "what action do I take?" Or "do I take any action?"

Level 12 – Events

"Why is this happening to me?"

At the surface level, Phil experiences the loop as a bizarre event.

He wakes up. The radio plays, and the same people speak. The same groundhog festival happens, and the same blizzard traps him in town. At this level, the movie functions as comedy because repetition itself feels absurd. This is how most people initially experience life problems.

"My boss is impossible." "My relationship keeps failing." "My life feels stuck."
"Why does this always happen to me?"

Event-level thinking focuses on isolated moments, but systems thinking asks a harder question: What if the event is not the problem? What if the event is the symptom? Phil initially believes Punxsutawney is the problem. The town is too small. The assignment is beneath him, and the people annoy him. But the deeper truth is that Phil carries the same emotional architecture into every interaction. The loop exposes that.





Level 11- Patterns

“This keeps happening.”

Eventually, Phil realizes this is not random; it is a pattern. The same sequence repeats with astonishing precision. He knows when Ned Ryerson will appear. He knows when the child will fall from the tree. He knows what people will say before they say it. This is the first doorway into systems thinking. The shift from “Why did this happen?” to “Why does this keep happening?” changes everything.

Most suffering in human life hides inside recurring patterns: The same arguments, insecurities, emotional reactions, avoidance and loneliness. The real horror of Groundhog Day is not that one day repeats. The horror is realizing how much of ordinary life already does.

Level 10 - Structure

“The system has rules.”

Once Phil understands the pattern, he begins studying the structure underneath it. He learns schedules and starts to work on things like timing, behaviour, weaknesses, opportunities and social reactions. As a result, he suddenly becomes powerful. This is where the film becomes psychologically dangerous. Because the movie reveals a truth most people do not want to admit: Systems knowledge without moral development becomes manipulation.

Phil does not initially become wiser because he understands the system. He becomes dangerous. Phil steals money, manipulates women, controls outcomes, performs fake intimacy and avoids accountability. Awareness increases capability. Capability amplifies intent. This insight matters far beyond the movie itself. Understanding systems gives people leverage. But leverage without maturity often produces exploitation. The loop removes consequences, and in doing so, reveals Phil's character.

Level 9 – Feedback Loops

“The system keeps teaching.”

At first, Phil believes the absence of consequences means freedom. But slowly, something terrifying happens. Phil starts to experience pleasure, becoming nothing but emptiness. Control becomes boring, and manipulation becomes exhausting.

Why is this? Although the town resets every morning, Phil does not. That is one of the most important psychological insights in the entire film. The town resets, but Phil accumulates. Memory, loneliness and meaninglessness accumulate. The system keeps feeding his behaviour back to him. And eventually, the loop reaches the same destination many closed systems reach when they cannot evolve: despair.

The suicide scenes matter because Phil realizes external interruption cannot solve internal recursion. He cannot escape himself, so the loop keeps teaching. Not through punishment but through repetition. This is how many real systems work.

Reality keeps presenting the lesson until the operating model changes, and this is where the movie becomes deeply uncomfortable. Because Phil's suffering is not meaningless, it's diagnostic. The pain signals that his worldview no longer works. Modern culture often treats discomfort as something to eliminate immediately. But *Groundhog Day* suggests another possibility: some suffering is information. This is not a punishment signal.

Level 8 – Reinforcing Cycles

“What grows, grows.”

At first, Phil enters a downward spiral, and it's quite brutal to watch. His knowledge creates arrogance. His arrogance creates manipulation. Manipulation creates isolation. Isolation creates despair. And despair pushes him even further into the same destructive cycle. This is a reinforcing loop. But eventually another loop begins to form. Curiosity leads to learning. Learning builds confidence. Confidence encourages contribution. Contribution creates connection. Connection creates meaning.

The same repeated day becomes either a prison or a practice field. The environment did not change. Phil's relationship to the environment changed. That distinction sits at the center of systems thinking. Two people can inhabit the same environment and experience completely different realities because they participate differently within the structure.

The Key Question

Perhaps the real question of *Groundhog Day* is not:

“What would you do if you had endless time?”

Perhaps the real question is:

“What are you repeating right now without realizing it?”

Because maybe freedom does not begin when the world changes. Maybe freedom begins when participation replaces resistance. The loop is not the problem. The loop amplifies whatever is fed into it. Feed it arrogance, and arrogance grows. Feed it curiosity, and curiosity grows.

We have only explored the first five of Donella Meadows' twelve leverage levels, yet even here, Groundhog Day reveals something profound. What begins as a comedy about repetition slowly transforms into an exploration of human development, self-awareness, and systems change.

Phil's breakthrough does not come from escaping the loop; it comes from understanding it. Most people spend their lives trying to change the events around them. They change jobs, relationships, routines, technologies, and circumstances. Sometimes those changes help. But often the same patterns return because the underlying operating system remains untouched.

This is why systems thinking is so powerful. It shifts our attention from blame to structure, from symptoms to causes, and from reaction to understanding. Phil eventually discovers what many of us spend decades learning: Freedom is not the absence of constraints.

Freedom is the ability to see the invisible systems shaping our lives and consciously choose how we respond.

That is the real gift of Groundhog Day. It's not that one day repeats forever. But that every day offers another opportunity to notice the pattern, learn the lesson, and participate differently. Perhaps that is why the film continues to resonate more than thirty years later. Because somewhere, in some part of our lives, most of us are still waking up to the same alarm clock.





**WHEN ACCESS IS
THE RISK**

**WHY INTIMATE
PARTNER VIOLENCE
EXPOSES A DEEPER
SYSTEMS FAILURE IN
BAIL DESIGN**

In May of this year, the Supreme Court of Canada released a decision that may fundamentally reshape how Canada understands intimate partner violence. In *Ahluwalia v. Ahluwalia*, the Court formally recognized intimate partner violence as a distinct civil tort grounded in coercive control. At first glance, this sounds like a legal shift. It is not. It is a systems shift.

For decades, institutions largely looked for incidents: bruises, assaults, threats, police calls, and visible events. But coercive control rarely functions as one isolated incident. It often unfolds gradually through intimidation, monitoring, humiliation, financial restriction, surveillance, emotional destabilization, dependency, and accumulated fear over time. In other words, it behaves more like a system than a moment. And that distinction matters enormously because Canada's bail system is still largely designed around incidents, not systems. That creates a dangerous mismatch.

FOR NON-LEGAL READERS

Before this court decision, the law mostly looked at intimate partner violence as separate bad events. Someone hits someone. Someone threatens someone. Someone screams at someone. That is a bit like a teacher only noticing one bad moment during recess. But the Supreme Court of Canada essentially said: "Sometimes the real harm is not just one event. Sometimes it is the entire environment." For example: one person controls all the money, isolates the other person from friends, creates fear, monitors movement, controls decisions, or slowly erodes the other person's confidence and independence. That is called coercive control. It is often a pattern of domination that unfolds slowly over time.

The Court recognized that even if there is not one massive violent event, the pattern itself can still cause profound harm. So the Court formally recognized a new civil tort tied specifically to intimate partner violence and coercive control. A tort simply means a person may sue another person in civil court for harm and damages. The big shift is this: Old question: "Did one bad thing happen?" New question: "Was this person trapped inside a controlling environment that slowly took away their freedom?" That is why this decision is considered historic.

Many bail structures are fundamentally procedural: do not contact, do not approach, do not return. But intimate partner violence is relational, emotional, adaptive, and proximity-driven. Shoplifting is a crime. Stealing a car is a crime. But coercive control inside a relationship involves repeated access, psychological pressure, dependency, family dynamics, fear accumulation, and behavioural escalation over time.

That complexity matters because systems shape how quickly harm is recognized, interrupted, prevented, or allowed to repeat. And while shelters remain critically important, they are still largely downstream responses to upstream system failure. The deeper question is not simply: "How do we help people escape harm?" The deeper question is: "How do we interrupt the systems producing the harm earlier?"

3.5x

Women in Canada experience
police-reported intimate partner violence
at approximately **3.5 times** the rate of men.

553

victims per 100,000
women and girls

158

victims per 100,000
men and boys

**That statistic matters.
So does this:**



**Men can
be victims.**

Their pain is real.
Their stories
matter.



**Women can
be perpetrators.**

Harm is not
limited to one
gender.



**Children absorb
the consequences.**

Exposure to violence
shapes long-term
outcomes.



**Communities
inherit the damage.**

The ripple effects
reach far beyond
the relationship.



**Many cases
never become
visible at all.**

Silence hides
suffering.

**Intimate partner violence is not a gender war.
It is a **human systems failure.****

**The goal is not blame.
The goal is **understanding.****

Because systems shape:

- what gets hidden
- what gets normalized
- what gets reported
- what gets believed
- what gets interrupted

**COERCIVE CONTROL RARELY FUNCTIONS
AS ONE ISOLATED INCIDENT.**

**IT OFTEN UNFOLDS GRADUALLY THROUGH INTIMIDATION,
MONITORING, HUMILIATION, FINANCIAL RESTRICTION,
SURVEILLANCE, EMOTIONAL DESTABILIZATION,
DEPENDENCY, AND ACCUMULATED FEAR OVER TIME.**

**IN OTHER WORDS, IT BEHAVES MORE
LIKE A SYSTEM THAN A MOMENT**

BridgeWave has written extensively about synchronization pressure, delayed adaptation, and systems strain in other sectors. Similar delay patterns are visible here as well. We continue referring to intimate partner violence as an epidemic, yet epidemics are not solved primarily through slogans, posters, or awareness campaigns. They require systems intervention. That is why BridgeWave is examining this issue directly. Not to sensationalize or to politicize it. But because systems thinking matters most precisely where harm becomes normalized.

The Supreme Court of Canada has now formally acknowledged something survivors have understood for decades: The violence is not always the incident. Sometimes the violence is the environment itself. This realization may force Canada to confront a much larger systems question: What happens when institutions designed around isolated events encounter harm that behaves more like an adaptive, relational system unfolding over time?

IF coercive control is cumulative
AND access itself remains part of the risk
AND institutional response continues arriving after escalation rather than before it
THEN intimate partner violence is no longer simply a criminal behaviour issue.
SO bail and protection must also be understood as systems-design problems.

How Bail Actually Works

In many places, including Ontario, bail is the process courts use to decide whether someone accused of a crime can stay in the community while waiting for trial. A judge or justice of the peace decides whether the person should be: released, released with conditions, or kept in custody. Conditions can include: no-contact orders, curfews, stay-away conditions, or reporting to police. The goal is to balance public safety, court attendance, and the rights of the accused.

But in intimate partner violence cases, critics increasingly argue that the system focuses too heavily on rule compliance rather than whether real safety and separation have actually been created. Most people assume bail reduces danger. But in many IPV cases, it does not.

The system often asks: “Will he follow the rules?” But that may be the wrong question. The deeper question is: “Can he still reach her?”

Because in intimate partner violence, access itself is often the risk. If access remains, risk remains. Everything else is paperwork.

The Core Design Failure

Traditional bail logic was largely built for crimes where separation already exists: property crime, fraud, theft, or crimes between strangers. But IPV is different. The danger is not simply the alleged crime itself. The danger is that the people already know each other and often still have direct access to each other. In many cases, the most dangerous moment is not before separation. It is after. This is because emotions are often escalating, control is breaking down, consequences are arriving, and the accused person may feel exposed, desperate, or destabilized. Yet the system often releases first and figures out protection afterward. That timing problem matters. Because systems usually produce the outcomes they were designed to produce.

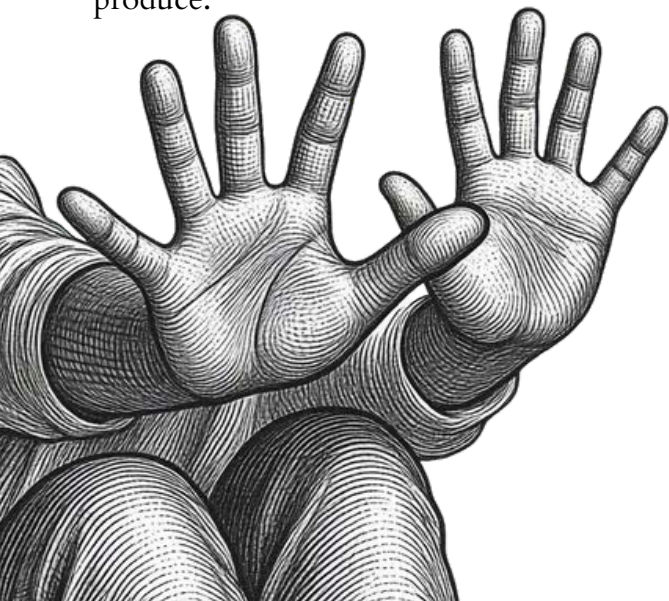


What Bail Actually Changes

In many IPV cases, the release conditions sound strong on paper. The court says: no contact, no communication, do not approach. But the deeper reality often remains unchanged. He still knows where she lives. He knows where she works. He knows her routines, family connections, schools, habits, and patterns. In other words, the geography of access often remains fully intact. So the system is essentially relying on voluntary restraint during the single highest-risk moment in the entire separation process. This is not true safety design. It is largely hoping things will somehow be okay.

The System Trusts the Wrong Signal

Court systems often look for indicators of stability: employment, housing, calm presentation, family support, and no prior criminal record. But presentation is not separation. A person can appear stable while still maintaining full access to the victim. Coercive control often functions precisely because it is difficult to detect externally. That is why systems thinking matters here. The question is not: “Does he look stable?” The question is: “Has access materially changed?” Those are completely different questions.

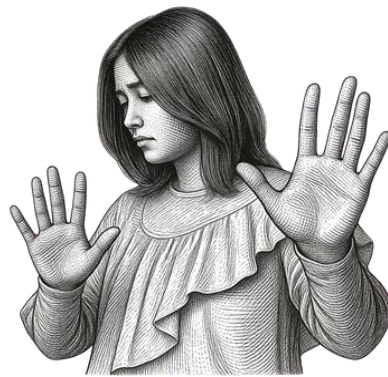


The Burden Falls on the Wrong Person

One of the most overlooked realities in IPV is that victims are often forced to become the system's safety mechanism. She changes routines, schedules, phones, jobs, schools, locations, and social patterns. He often remains geographically stable. That is not true protection. It is displacement. The system effectively says: "You must reorganize your life to survive the risk we could not structurally remove." And if safety depends entirely on the victim's ability to relocate, hide, adapt, and absorb disruption, then the system is not actually controlling risk. It is outsourcing it.

The Enforcement Illusion

Another major problem is delay. Protection orders and bail conditions are mostly built around reactive enforcement. Something happens, someone reports it, documentation begins, and then the process slowly starts moving. But coercive control operates in real time. Repeated low-level breaches matter. A drive-by, showing up nearby, indirect messages or online monitoring. It's silent intimidation and it causes tremendous damage. On their own, each incident may appear small. But systems thinking reveals the pattern. And when enforcement moves slowly, the boundary itself gradually shifts. The perpetrator starts learning what triggers a response, what gets ignored, where the real limits are, and how slowly the system actually moves. The result becomes predictable. Not simply because individuals fail but because the structure itself produces delayed intervention by design.



**IF SAFETY DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON THE VICTIM'S
ABILITY TO RELOCATE, HIDE, ADAPT, AND ABSORB
DISRUPTION, THEN THE SYSTEM IS NOT
ACTUALLY CONTROLLING RISK.**

IT IS OUTSOURCING IT.

The Notification Gap

This is where the danger becomes clearest. The 2022 Renfrew County Inquest already identified a major systems failure: victims were often the last to know. Orders were issued. Release occurred and movement happened, but protection lagged behind process. This created a critical gap. Because if release happens quickly, notification happens slowly, and access remains intact, then the perpetrator moves first. The system unintentionally creates the exact exposure window it is trying to prevent. This is not theoretical. It is already documented in Ontario's public record. And once you see it through a systems lens, the issue becomes difficult to unsee. The system is optimized for procedural movement, not immediate separation.

The Supreme Court Shift Changes Everything

This is where the new IPV tort becomes historically important. The Supreme Court's recognition of coercive control fundamentally changes the conceptual lens. Old framework: "What happened?" New framework: "What pattern was operating?" This is a massive transition. Because once the law recognizes patterns of domination, fear, surveillance, isolation, and erosion of autonomy, institutions can no longer pretend the problem is only isolated incidents.

The architecture itself becomes visible. And once systems become visible, systems can be redesigned. The focus shifts from paperwork to proximity, from intention to structure, and from reaction to prevention.

What Needs to Change

Right now, many systems operate like this: Release → Monitor. But a safer sequence may look more like this: Separate → Verify → Release

This means before release, courts should answer a simple question: "How has access been materially reduced right now?" Possible proof of separation could include verified physical distance, protected or unknown locations, enforceable geographic boundaries, immediate victim notification, coordinated police awareness, and enhanced monitoring where separation cannot be guaranteed. Monitoring should be backup protection. Not primary protection.



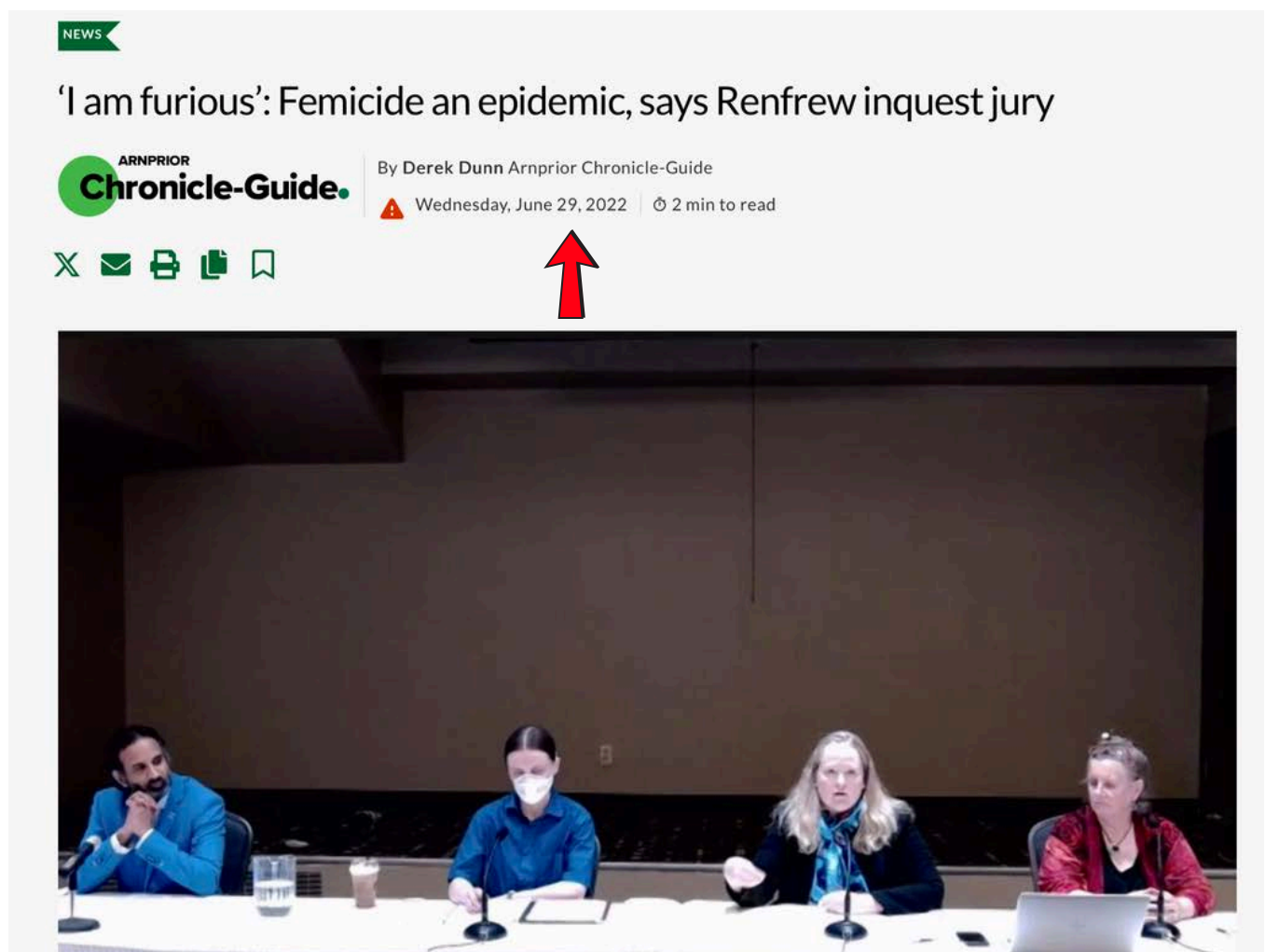
This Is Not About Punishment

Critics may argue this risks unnecessary detention. That concern matters. Liberty and due process matter but systems thinking forces another question: What happens when speed is prioritized while access remains unchanged? Risk does not disappear. It usually shifts onto the victim. This is not fundamentally a debate between liberty and safety. It is a sequencing and design problem.

And design problems create downstream consequences: repeat breaches, escalating intimidation, chronic fear, repeated police interaction, and preventable tragedy.

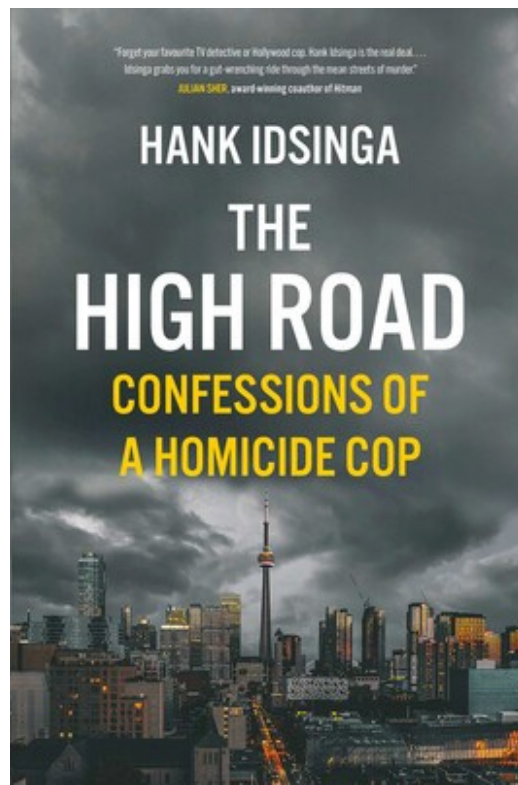
The Deeper Truth

The most important thing the Supreme Court recognized is this: Control itself can be violence. Not just the assault, or the bruise or the incident, but the system of domination itself. Systems are harder to see than incidents. But they are often what determine outcomes. And if access remains, risk remains. Everything else is process.



A professional headshot of Hank Idsinga, a middle-aged man with short, dark hair, wearing a dark suit, light blue shirt, and an orange and grey plaid tie. He is looking directly at the camera with a neutral expression.

**HANK IDSINGA:
THE SYSTEMS BENEATH
THE STORIES**



IN THE HIGH ROAD, HANK IDSINGA REFLECTS ON HIS REMARKABLE THIRTY-YEAR CAREER WITH THE TORONTO POLICE SERVICE, TRACING THE JOURNEY THAT BEGAN WHEN HE LEARNED HIS GRANDFATHER HAD BEEN MURDERED IN THE HOLOCAUST. THROUGH FIRSTHAND ACCOUNTS OF MAJOR HOMICIDE INVESTIGATIONS, GANG VIOLENCE, AND SERIAL KILLER CASES- INCLUDING THE BRUCE McARTHUR INVESTIGATION.

IDSINGA OFFERS A RARE LOOK INSIDE THE WORLD OF HOMICIDE DETECTIVES. HONEST, THOUGHTFUL, AND DEEPLY HUMAN, THE BOOK EXPLORES JUSTICE, LOSS, RESILIENCE, AND THE PERSONAL TOLL OF PURSUING THE TRUTH.

But Idsinga's book is not only a policing story. It is a story about what institutions reveal under pressure. After more than three decades in policing, including leading homicide investigations at the highest levels, Idsinga's reflections point toward a larger question: Why do good systems drift? The public often looks for a bad actor. Idsinga keeps pointing to the system that made the behaviour possible.

BridgeWave Magazine had an opportunity to interview Idsinga in June. What follows is not a discussion about policing alone. It is a conversation about institutions, leadership, culture, accountability, and what happens when the gap between values and reality becomes too large to ignore.

The Surprise

"When I was 21 years old, I never imagined becoming commander of the homicide squad. Working homicide was the dream. Even that felt ambitious. The promotions along the way surprised me. The leadership roles surprised me. And everything that happened after retirement surprised me even more.

I never imagined becoming an author. I never imagined writing a bestselling book. I never imagined teaching, media commentary, television work, or public speaking.

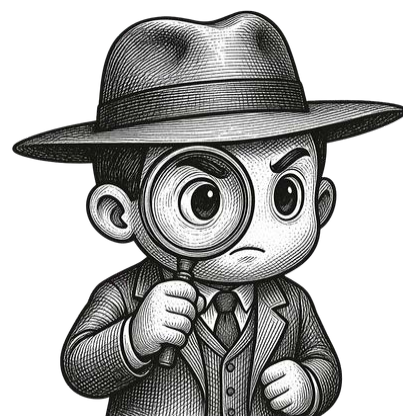
When I speak to young recruits today, I tell them to set a long-term goal and then figure out the smaller steps needed to get there. But more importantly, stay true to who you are. Don't change yourself to fit an organization.

I'm still fundamentally the same person I was at 21. I've learned an awful lot along the way, but I never felt the need to become somebody else."

The Boy Who Wanted to Catch Bad Guys

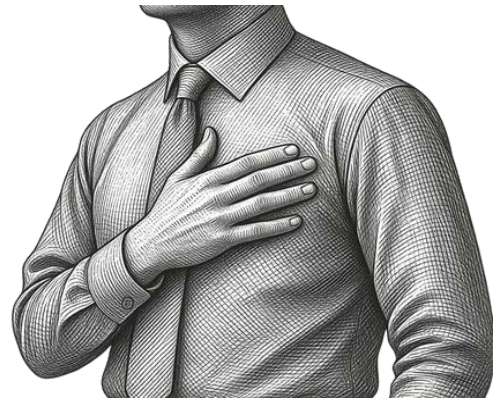
"I was probably ten years old when I read about Simon Wiesenthal. At that age, you don't fully understand the world, but you begin to understand injustice. I could see the trauma my mother carried as a Holocaust survivor. I remember thinking I wanted to do something about people who caused harm like that.

As kids, my best friend and I played detective. It sounds funny now, but that instinct never left. When I became a police officer at 22, I quickly realized that if I wanted to investigate the most serious crimes, homicide was where I needed to be. From that point on, every career decision was aimed in that direction. What's ironic is that for the first time since I was ten years old, I'm no longer doing investigative work. Now I'm writing about it."



Loyalty Is Not Blindness

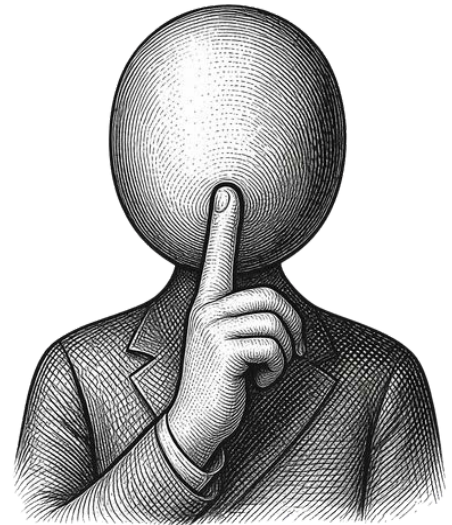
“Loyalty is a word that gets thrown around very easily inside large organizations. Too often, loyalty becomes a demand for obedience. I reject that idea. Loyalty is a two-way street. If an organization wants my loyalty, it has to create an environment where I can respectfully disagree and tell leaders when I think they’re wrong. The best leaders I worked for understood that. They cared more about getting the answer right than protecting their authority. The worst environments expected loyalty to the hierarchy rather than loyalty to the mission. Those are not the same thing. Speaking honestly makes you unpopular, then so be it. I’ve always believed staying true to your principles matters more than protecting your position.”



Why People Stay Silent

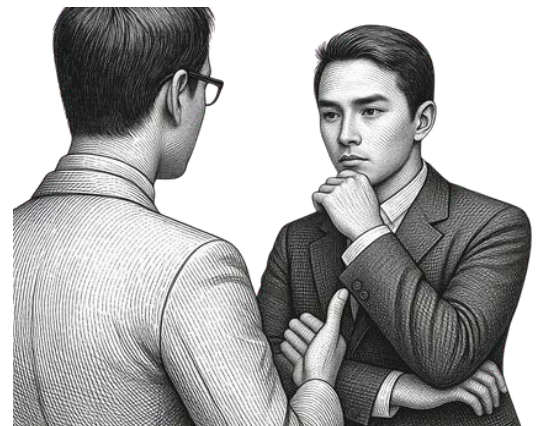
“People often assume silence is caused by fear. Fear is certainly part of it. Nobody wants to damage their career. Nobody wants to lose opportunities. Nobody wants to become isolated within an organization. But silence can also be strategic. Sometimes you remain quiet because you’re trying to determine whether something is an isolated incident or part of a larger pattern.

I’ve experienced both. Looking back, there were moments when speaking earlier might have changed the outcome. There were other moments where staying quiet temporarily revealed a much bigger problem that otherwise would have remained hidden. The challenge is knowing which situation you’re facing. Either way, silence carries consequences. The question is whether those consequences are immediate or delayed.”



How Misconduct Becomes Normal

“The most important question isn’t how misconduct happens. The more important question is how misconduct becomes normal. Very few people join policing intending to become bad police officers. Most join because they genuinely want to help. So when harmful behaviour keeps appearing, eventually you have to stop focusing on the individual and start examining the system. What behaviour gets rewarded? What behaviour gets ignored? What behaviour gets excused? What examples are leaders setting? Those questions matter more than any individual incident. Because systems shape behaviour long before behaviour becomes visible.”



The Gap Between Values and Culture

“Every institution has values. They’re written on walls. They’re included in strategic plans. They’re repeated in speeches. The real question is whether people experience those values in practice. The rank and file recognize very quickly when there is a gap between what leaders say and what leaders do. Nothing destroys trust faster than hypocrisy. When leaders preach accountability but avoid it themselves, people notice. When leaders promote standards they don’t personally uphold, people notice. The room knows. And once credibility starts to erode, culture begins drifting long before leadership realizes there’s a problem.”



Leadership Shapes Culture

“I’ve come to believe leadership is less about managing performance and more about shaping culture. People pay attention to what leaders tolerate. They pay attention to what leaders reward. They pay attention to who gets promoted. They pay attention to who gets protected. Those signals matter far more than mission statements. When leaders ignore those signals, culture begins to shift. Often the organization doesn’t recognize it until the consequences become public.”



When Communication Replaces Learning

“One of the biggest risks institutions face is confusing communication with accountability. When something goes wrong, there is enormous pressure to manage the narrative. But managing the narrative and solving the problem are two different things. Communication matters and public confidence is vital. But communication without action eventually becomes another form of avoidance. People can sense the difference between an organization that is learning and an organization that is explaining.”



When the Barrel Starts Producing the Apples

“The public naturally looks for someone to blame. A bad apple is easy to understand. A systems problem is much harder. But when the same issues continue appearing across generations, divisions, leadership teams, and jurisdictions, it becomes difficult to argue that the problem is only a few individuals. You have to examine the barrel. You have to examine the incentives and the culture. Nobody joins policing hoping to become a bad officer. Yet the same problems continue appearing. That should force us to ask a different question. What is the system producing? Because if the same outcomes keep emerging, the problem is probably larger than the people involved.”

Integrity

“When I started writing the book, my original goal was simple. I wanted to leave something behind for my children and grandchildren. I wanted them to understand who I was, where we came from, and what mattered to me. It wasn’t intended as a hit piece. It wasn’t intended to settle scores. It was simply my account of what I witnessed and experienced.

If someone reads it twenty years from now, I hope they take away one lesson: Integrity matters most when it costs you something. It’s easy to have principles when they’re convenient. The real test is whether they survive consequences.”

The Most Dangerous Force

“People often ask whether incompetence, fear, or corruption is most dangerous. For me, corruption is the umbrella. Not just financial corruption. Process corruption. Promotion corruption. Accountability corruption. Truth corruption. Once corruption becomes normalized, fear follows. People stop speaking. Competence becomes secondary. Trust begins to erode. The system starts rewarding the wrong behaviours and protecting the wrong outcomes. Eventually, it begins producing the very problems it claims to prevent. That’s why corruption is so dangerous. It doesn’t simply damage individuals. It changes the behaviour of the entire system.”

For Hank Idsinga, the lesson is not that institutions fail because of a few bad people. The lesson is that institutions drift when culture, incentives, accountability, and leadership become disconnected from the values they claim to represent.

The public often searches for the story. Investigators search for the pattern. And after a lifetime spent investigating crime, Hank Idsinga’s most important observation may be this: **The deepest problems are rarely found in a single event. They are found in the system that allowed the event to happen.**



THE POLICE CULTURE ICEBERG: Why Good Institutions Drift

Institutions **rarely fail** because of one bad actor. They fail when **feedback** stops working.

DONELLA MEADOWS SYSTEM LEVELS

EVENTS

- Racist incident
 - Sex discrimination complaint
 - Public scandal
 - Antisemitic comment
 - Officer misconduct
 - Wrongful arrest
- Headline examples. Media focuses here.

PATTERNS

Repeated complaints
Repeated settlements
Repeated promotion concerns

Repeated disciplinary failures
Repeated distrust
Repeated community tension

Repeated settlements
Repeated distrust
Repeated community tension

Why do these events keep recurring?

STRUCTURES

The barrel produces the apples.



MENTAL MODELS

"Speaking up is disloyal."
"Protect the organization."
"Results matter more than process."

"Problems should stay internal."
"Critics don't understand."
"Image equals trust."

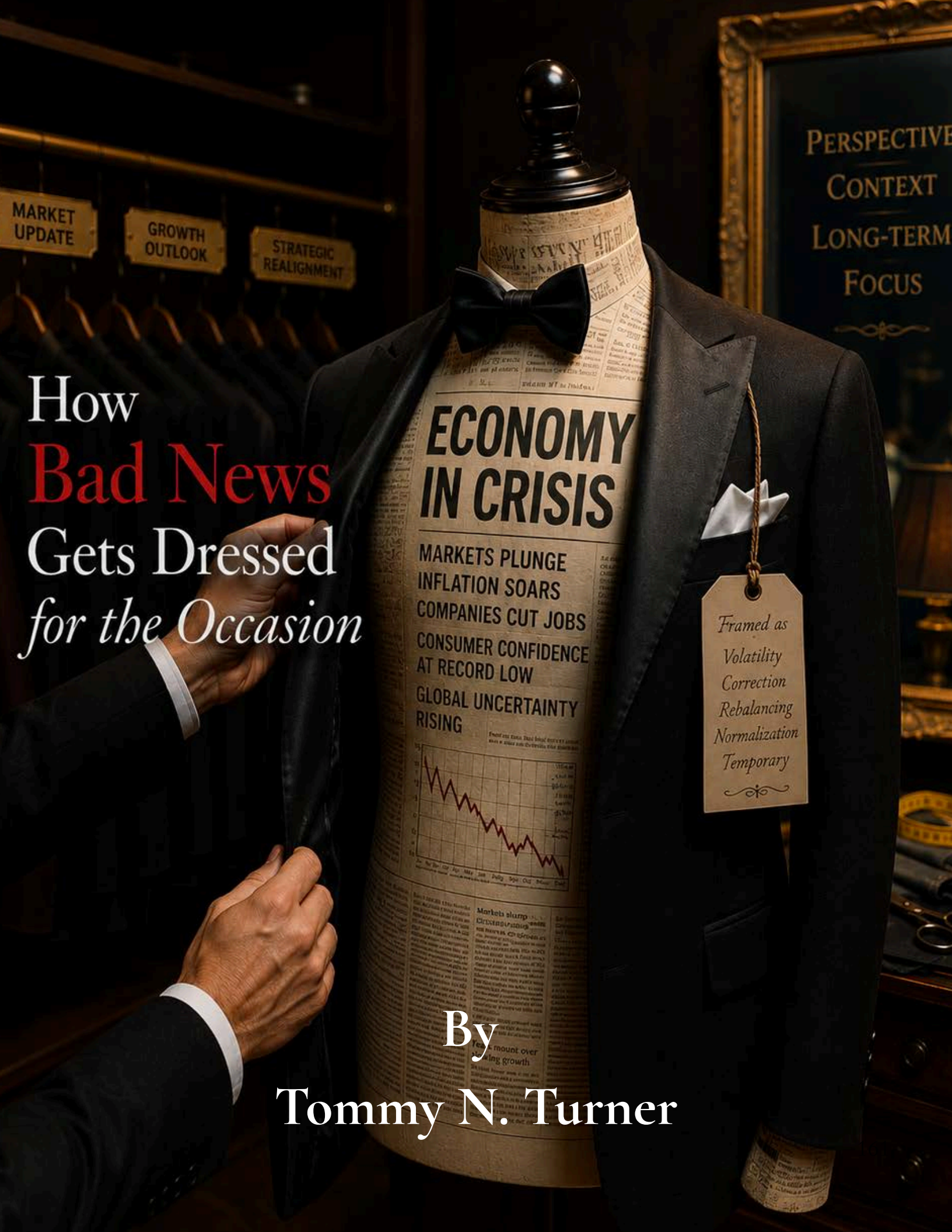
Meadows Leverage Points



Different fruit. Same barrel mechanics. The reader suddenly realizes: This isn't a police story. It's a systems story.



"Institutions don't fail at the point of scandal. They fail at the point where feedback stops working." - Hank



MARKET UPDATE

GROWTH OUTLOOK

STRATEGIC REALIGNMENT

PERSPECTIVE

CONTEXT

LONG-TERM

FOCUS

How Bad News Gets Dressed *for the Occasion*

ECONOMY IN CRISIS

MARKETS PLUNGE
INFLATION SOARS
COMPANIES CUT JOBS
CONSUMER CONFIDENCE
AT RECORD LOW
GLOBAL UNCERTAINTY
RISING



Framed as
Volatility
Correction
Rebalancing
Normalization
Temporary

By
Tommy N. Turner

I have watched a bad project report enter a room as a warning and leave as a weather pattern. It was a software conversion at a regional bank. Two engineers and a project manager had spent the previous week discovering that a data migration assumption was wrong in a way that would not be fixable inside the timeline. The project manager wrote it down the night before the steering committee. Her sentence was: “We cannot hit the date and the regulator will see why.” I remember the sentence because she showed it to me before the meeting and asked if it was too harsh.

By the time the deck reached the committee, that sentence had become a bullet point about “schedule recalibration in light of evolving data architecture findings.” The committee accepted the recalibration. The regulator did, eventually, see why. The project manager left the company a year later. The first sentence had been right. The room had been protected from it.

That kind of editing happens thousands of times a day inside organizations. A deadline that is no longer credible becomes “schedule pressure.” A client who is furious becomes “stakeholder concern.” A team that is exhausted becomes “resource constraints.” Nobody lies. The language simply moves a small distance away from what the person closest to the work actually saw, and then it moves another small distance, and another, until the sentence in the room no longer carries the weight that the sentence in the corridor did.

This is one of the stranger facts of organizational life. Bad news rarely arrives at the top in its original clothes. It gets dressed for the occasion.

I spent thirty years around corporate banking and project delivery. Large software programs in financial services produce an entire dialect of almost-truths. Red becomes amber. Failing becomes challenged. Late becomes tracking with mitigation. Nobody wants to be the dramatic one, the pessimist, the person who says flatly that the plan no longer describes the work. But sometimes that is the only useful sentence in the room, and the system has been trained to make that sentence the hardest one to deliver.

BridgeWave’s July theme asks how small design shifts can reshape entire cultures. I like that frame because it avoids the heroic nonsense organizations usually tell themselves about culture. Culture does not change because the chief executive gives a better speech or the values statement gets refreshed. Culture changes through small repeated rules that teach people what the system actually rewards.

Here is one small rule worth more than most of the posters in most of the lobbies I have ever walked through: Keep the first sentence.

When a serious concern gets raised, preserve the first plain-language version of it before anyone softens, summarizes, routes upward, or makes it presentable. The first sentence does not have to

be the final sentence. It does not have to be perfect. It may need context. It may even be partly wrong. But do not let it disappear.

That first sentence usually carries something the later versions lose: human stake. The person who wrote it had something at risk in writing it. Their judgment was on the line. Their colleagues were on the line. Sometimes their job was on the line.

“This deadline is no longer credible.”

“The client has lost confidence.”

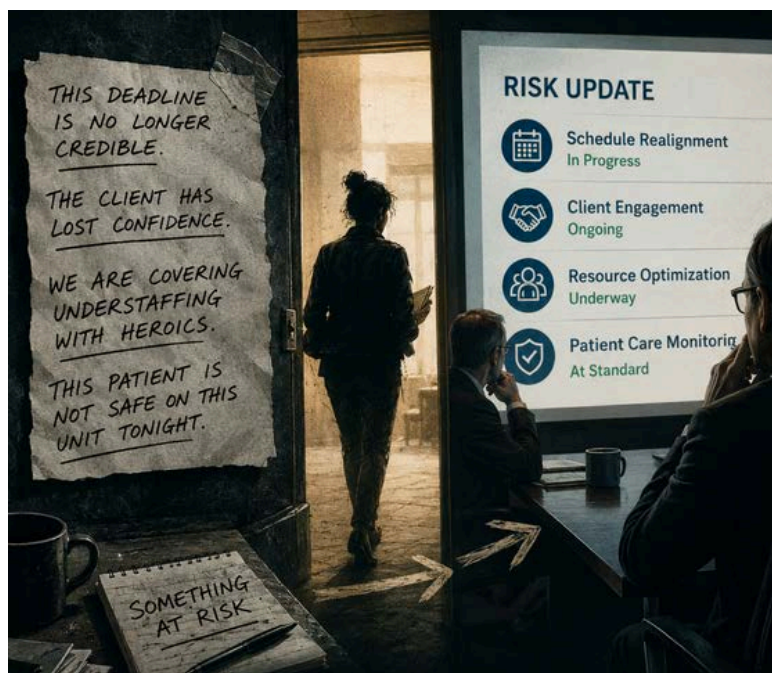
“We are covering understaffing with heroics.”

“This patient is not safe on this unit tonight.”

Those sentences are not elegant. Good. Elegance is not the job. The job is to tell the organization where reality has stopped cooperating with the plan.

The temptation, of course, is to improve them. Improvement is one of the great hiding places of organizational cowardice. Not always. Sometimes the first sentence is sloppy, unfair, emotional, or too broad. Some editing is useful. A workplace cannot operate on raw venting, and I have no interest in pretending that bluntness is automatically courage. Plenty of blunt people are simply undisciplined.

But there is a difference between clarifying a warning and domesticating it. Organizations domesticate warnings constantly. They do it through tone, hierarchy, legal caution, slide templates, dashboard categories, meeting etiquette, and the ancient executive preference for hearing bad news in a form that does not ruin lunch. Now they can do it faster with AI.

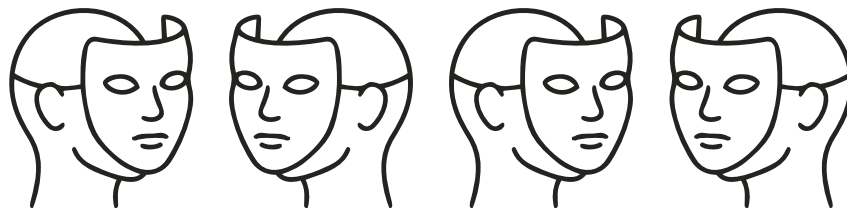


This is the part worth saying plainly. AI may turn out to be the largest generator of institutional comfort-language in history. Not because the tools are designed to lie, but because they are designed to please. They produce, at scale and at speed, the same softening that hierarchies have always produced by hand. The difference is the volume.

This is not an anti-AI argument. I use these tools. They can help a person organize a mess of thoughts and get a decent draft on the page when the alternative is staring at the cursor like it owes you money. But most AI writing tools have a strong instinct for respectable language. They balance. They remove heat. They turn a sentence that cost a human being something to write into a sentence that already sounds like it survived committee review.

Imagine an employee writes, “We are pretending this launch date is still real.” A writing assistant may suggest, “The current launch timeline may require reassessment based on emerging implementation constraints.” That sentence is not false. It is also not the same warning. It has been given a bath, a blazer, and a LinkedIn headline.

The machine does not know what it cost the person to write the first sentence. It does not know that “This is unsafe” was written after three ignored warnings, or that “The schedule is no longer credible” means two teams have been quietly working nights to preserve a fiction, or that “The client is losing confidence” was already the polite version. The human had stake. The system does not. The small design change is to keep both versions.



Put the polished version in the memo if you must. Add the context, the recommendation, the caveats that make adults in organizations feel safe. But keep the first sentence somewhere visible. Put it under a heading called “Plain-language concern.” Put it in the risk log. Keep it in the project review notes. Preserve it in the AI-assisted draft history. Make it harder for the organization to forget what the warning sounded like before the system taught it manners. That one field, “Plain-language concern,” could do more for candor than a dozen offsite workshops about psychological safety.

People watch what happens to their words. If every direct warning comes back rewritten into mush, the lesson is learned. The next warning arrives pre-mushed. The employee edits herself before her manager has to. The manager edits the team before the vice president has to. The vice president edits the problem before the board has to hear it. By the time the issue reaches anyone with authority to act, everyone can plausibly say they were informed. They were not informed. They were comforted. That distinction is where culture lives.

A culture of candour is not a place where everyone says whatever pops into their head. That is not candor. That is a comments section with a payroll. A culture of candor is a place where serious information can travel without being stripped of the part that made it serious.

The design move is small enough to fit on one line of a status template. Before the red-yellow-green summary, ask the person closest to the work for the sentence. Not the theme. Not the metric. Not the executive summary. The sentence. “The vendor will not make the date.” “The integration is more fragile than we are admitting.” “The team is working nights to protect a schedule we all know is fictional.” Then do the grown-up work. Test it. Challenge it. Ask for evidence. Separate fact from fear. But do not begin by shaving off the edge because the edge is uncomfortable. The edge is often the evidence.

Most organizations are full of people who know things before the organization knows them. The customer-facing person knows when the account is going bad. The analyst knows when the forecast is fantasy. The scheduler knows when the milestone has become theater. The charge nurse knows when the unit has crossed a line. The caseworker knows which family is about to fall through. The middle manager knows when the team has crossed from committed to depleted. The problem is rarely that nobody speaks. People speak. They speak into machinery that turns warnings into acceptable language before anyone with power has to feel them.

**Most organizations are full of people who know
things before the organization knows them.**

**The customer-facing person knows
when the account is going bad.**

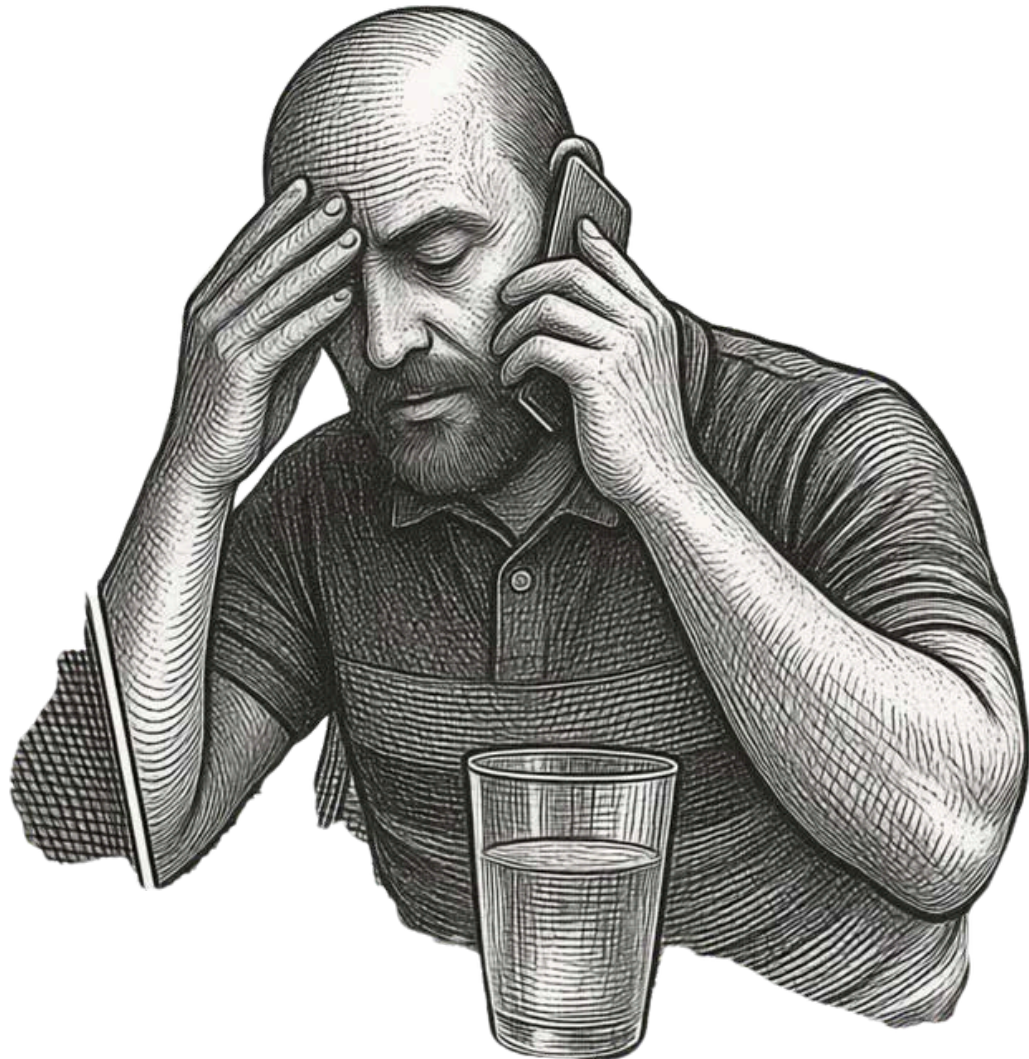
The analyst knows when the forecast is fantasy

What that costs is hard to measure but easy to see if you have been around long enough. It costs trust between people who know and people who decide. It costs the energy of employees who burn out less from the work than from translating reality into a dialect nobody uses outside the office. It costs the credibility of leaders who genuinely did not know because the system delivered a tidier version. And eventually it costs the organization the chance to act while the problem is still small.

You cannot have flow in a system that requires everyone to maintain a fiction. Connection thins out when people must rewrite themselves into corporate weather reports before they can be heard. Resilience curdles into something crueler when the organization keeps renaming overload as attitude. Joy at work, when it exists, often comes from the relief of reality being sayable. People can handle hard things. What wears them down is having to pretend the hard thing is something else.

Keeping the first sentence will not solve any of that on its own. It does not replace judgment. It does not excuse sloppy thinking. It does not turn an unhealthy organization healthy. But it changes the path that truth takes through the system, and that change compounds.

The next time bad news shows up, somebody will be tempted to improve it. Let them improve it. We are not animals. But before the sentence gets polished, categorized, summarized, AI-assisted, executive-ready, and safe for the room, keep a copy of what it said when it still sounded like a human being knew something was wrong.





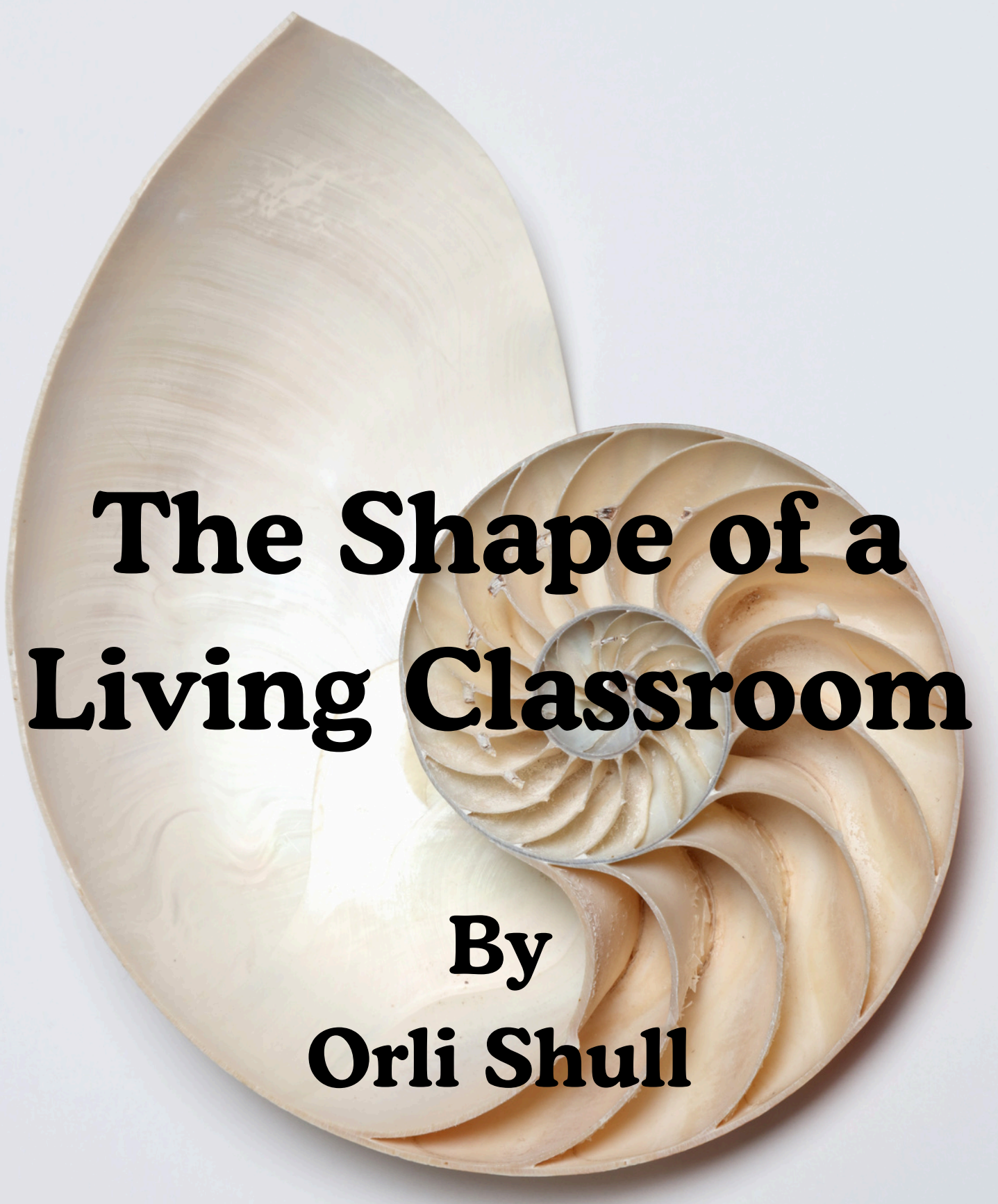
Fibonacci Sequence

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Fibonacci Sequence

1 1 2 3 5 8 13 21 34 55 89



The Shape of a Living Classroom

**By
Orli Shull**

We began our geometry lesson with the Fibonacci sequence. A room of high school Sophomores engaged and, as usual, not completely thrilled. Just numbers at first. 0, 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21. We paused to notice and discuss the famous pattern emerging quietly through addition. Each number is built from the two before it. Simple enough to calculate, but strange enough to feel alive once you notice where it appeared beyond the classroom.

Then, we moved to graph paper. The students carefully drew the squares of the sequence, each one expanding outward from the last. At first, the room carried the familiar atmosphere of school: cautious attention, subtle anxiety, the instinct students develop to make sure they are “doing it right.”

Next, we drew the spiral inside the squares. Using the outer edges as the boundary. Everyone is attempting the task with quiet precision.

And slowly something shifted.

The pattern stopped feeling like math on a worksheet and started feeling like structure hidden inside the world itself.

Next, I projected a series of images, and we talked about the abundance of Fibonacci spirals found in nature. Sunflowers. Pinecones. Hurricanes. Galaxies. DNA.

I also showed them pictures of the Mona Lisa and The Wave, seeing the spiral overlapped with famous historical artwork.

After that, I said “Go” and gave them complete freedom to use markers and colored pencils and to create art from the Fibonacci structure they had built. That was when the classroom came alive.

Some students turned their spirals into oceans. Others made flowers, storms, galaxies, animals, and abstract designs. Some used bright colours. Others filled their work with intricate detail. An iguana emerged, a snail, even a Starry Night with the spiral woven in.

The Fibonacci sequence remained underneath all of it. A shared structure. But no two pieces looked the same. And almost without noticing, the emotional atmosphere of the room changed too. The classroom became quiet, but not the quiet of compliance. The quiet of absorption. Students stopped asking: “Is this right?” They started asking: “What else can I make?”

That question has stayed with me. Because I realized the most important thing happening in the room was not memorization. It was an emergence. The students were not simply completing an assignment. They were participating in discovery. The math became something they could enter, shape, and express through themselves.

And when we hung all of the artwork together across the classroom walls, something larger emerged. Not just student work. A collective expression of creativity and beauty built from a shared foundation.

The room itself changed. Students stopped to look at each other's pieces. They pointed things out. They found connections between designs. They saw how the same underlying pattern could lead to entirely different forms of expression. The structure unified them without erasing individuality.

I kept thinking afterward about how rare that feeling has become inside many modern systems. So much of education is organized around speed, measurement, standardization, and performance. Students learn quickly that success often means producing the expected answer as efficiently as possible.

But living systems do not work that way. Nature does not produce identical leaves, identical waves, or identical spirals. It creates coherence without demanding sameness. The Fibonacci sequence itself reveals this. A stable pattern unfolding into infinite variation.

And I realized that maybe healthy classrooms work similarly. They provide enough structure for students to feel grounded, but enough freedom for curiosity, creativity, and individuality to emerge.

Too little structure creates disconnection. Too much control suffocates aliveness. But somewhere in between, something remarkable becomes possible. Wonder. Not entertainment. Not performative engagement. The kind of wonder that appears when people feel connected: to their own thinking, to each other, and to something larger than themselves.

That day, the lesson was not really about Fibonacci numbers. It was about the shape of a living classroom. A space where students were not reduced to outputs or performance metrics, but invited into a relationship with learning itself.

And I have started to wonder whether this applies far beyond education. Maybe flourishing cannot be forced out of people through pressure and optimization. Maybe it emerges under certain conditions. Structure. Meaning. Safety. Freedom. Belonging. Room to explore. Maybe joy is not an accident. Maybe it is something systems can make possible.

Of all the lessons I created while teaching 10th-grade geometry, this one remained my favourite. Not because it was the most efficient. Not because it produced the highest scores. But because it revealed something I have never forgotten about learning itself. Students do not come alive when they are treated like machines optimized for output. They come alive when they are given a structure strong enough to hold them and a freedom wide enough to become themselves inside it.

That lesson spoke deeply to who I am as an educator and to how I envision the future of learning. Not as a system built only around performance, speed, and standardization. But it is a living environment where curiosity, individuality, creativity, and connection are allowed to emerge together.

A classroom can be more than a place where information is delivered. It can become a living environment where human beings discover themselves, each other, and in relationship to the world, from the past to the future.

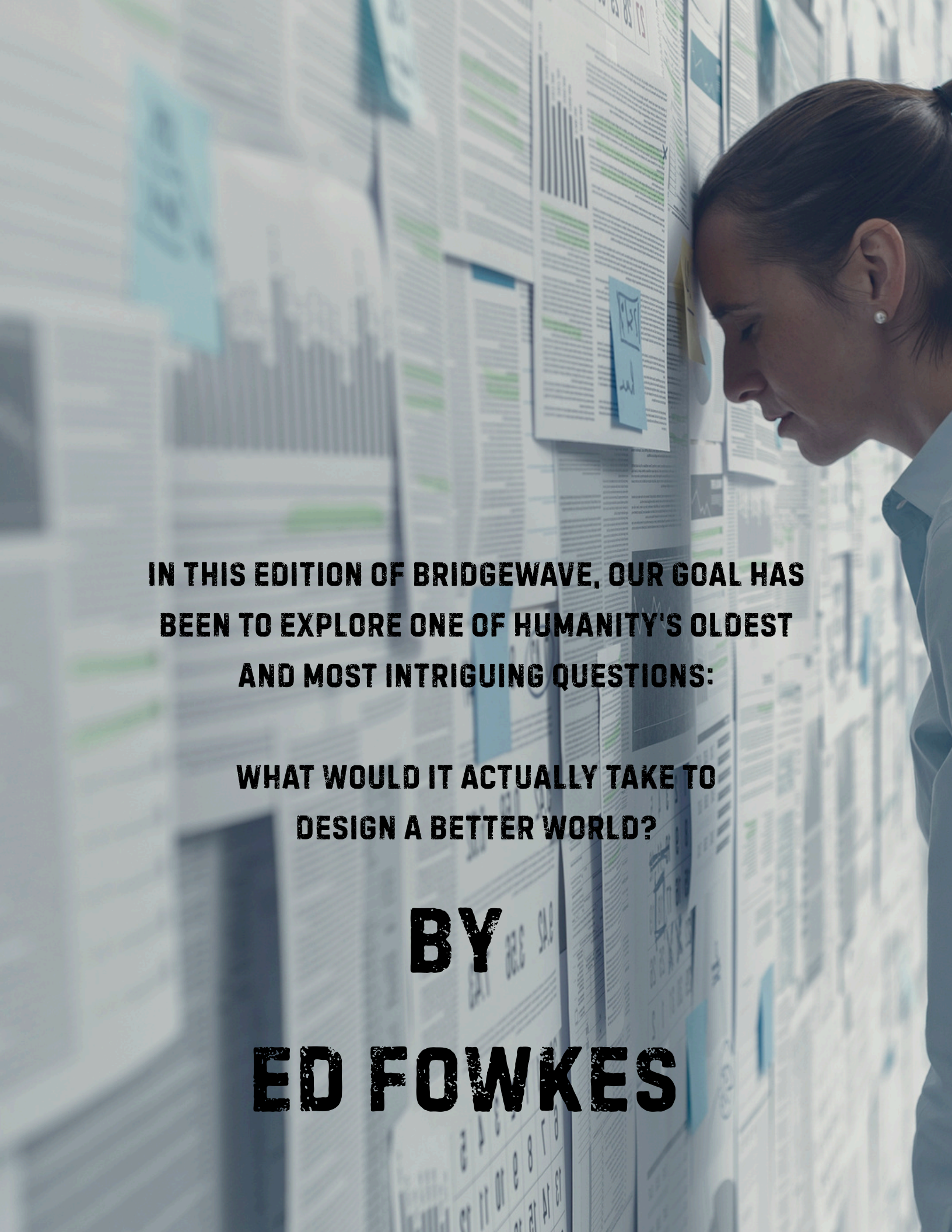
And I increasingly believe the future of learning depends on whether we remember that. The longer I sit with that lesson, the less I think it was ever really about geometry. What I witnessed in that classroom was something I have spent years trying to understand. Students did not thrive because I controlled every variable. They did not thrive because I removed all structure. They thrived because there was enough structure to create safety and enough freedom to allow discovery.

Since leaving the classroom, I have started to notice the same pattern everywhere. In organizations, people struggle when systems become so rigid that there is no room for judgment. In communities, people struggle when there is so little structure that nothing can be sustained. Even in our rapidly evolving technological world, the question seems remarkably similar: How do we create systems strong enough to support human flourishing without becoming so controlling that they prevent it? Perhaps this is not an educational question at all. Perhaps it is a human question. Whether we are talking about classrooms, workplaces, families, communities, or societies, people do not come alive when they are optimized for output. They come alive when they are given the conditions to grow into themselves while remaining connected to something larger than themselves. The classroom was simply the first place I learned to see it.



THE ARCHITECTURE OF FAILURE:

NO DATA

A woman with dark hair tied back, wearing a light blue shirt and a pearl earring, is looking down at a wall covered in numerous papers, charts, and sticky notes. The papers are pinned and layered, creating a complex visual of information. The woman's face is in profile, and she appears to be in deep thought or focused on the information on the wall.

**IN THIS EDITION OF BRIDGEWAVE, OUR GOAL HAS
BEEN TO EXPLORE ONE OF HUMANITY'S OLDEST
AND MOST INTRIGUING QUESTIONS:**

**WHAT WOULD IT ACTUALLY TAKE TO
DESIGN A BETTER WORLD?**

**BY
ED FOWKES**

The intention was not fantasy, ideology or a utopia sketched by people assuming everyone behaves exactly as hoped (albeit we all like to dream a little). The exploration would hopefully take us closer to a functioning world where incentives align, resources flow intelligently, unintended consequences are anticipated, and decisions are made with enough information to understand the likely outcome.

And this is, of course, where data is emerging as a beacon.

Data, and increasingly AI's ability to process it, could play a major role in a future of better structure. The better we become at understanding reality, the better our chances of designing systems that work. My column here, talking about failures in business, cannot attempt a heady venture into utopian thinking, no matter how much I'm tempted by the ideas, but I'm minded that the above argument around data and AI applies already to business. And so for today's thought piece on why businesses fail, the clanger that rings loudest is: No Data.

The title is intentionally simplistic, of course, as few businesses have no data at all. Most have more than they use, as every CRM, accounting package, website dashboard and payment platform produces numbers. Most founders are surrounded by charts, reports and spreadsheets. Some are drowning in data.

The issue is not the absence of data but whether the data reveals reality. What founders see is often not what the system is doing. Without looking at the meaningful data, a business operates as though in fog. Founders are busy but ineffective, working harder, not better. You cannot steer what you cannot see.

Businesses without useful data are not irrational. They are guessing. We rebranded it as instinct, experience or intuition. It feels better and looks impressive when given an authoritative title. Occasionally, it will even work. Over time, it becomes indistinguishable from rolling dice and hoping the numbers are kind. Luck simply doesn't arrive often enough.

If you ever find yourself saying, "I don't know where the problem is," the problem is more often than not data. Or rather, a lack of it. For founders, data can often feel non-revenue generating, administrative, and slow. And data is overhead, sure, to a point. But data is leverage. Data is power. Data is feedback. A business without feedback is not really steering. It is drifting.

There is another trap. Sometimes the data exists, the dashboards are full, the numbers are accurate, and yet the business still fails. Where did the system first go wrong? The Architecture of Failure is rarely about the moment something breaks. The failed IPO. The administration notice. The redundancy round. The emergency refinancing. Those are merely outcomes.

The more interesting question is where the system first started drifting away from reality. Not where the collapse became visible, or where the headlines appeared. Where did the underlying structure first begin moving away from the truth?

Let's take a look at Blockbuster. When people tell the story today, they often describe a video rental giant that failed to see Netflix coming. A dinosaur overtaken by technology. A company that failed to adapt to a changing world.



Blockbuster did not fail because it lacked data. Blockbuster had extraordinary amounts of data. It knew what customers rented. It knew when they rented. It knew how often they rented. It knew which stores performed best. It knew which films drove demand. It knew how much revenue each customer generated. The information existed. The problem was that the system interpreted the wrong signal as success.

One of Blockbuster's most profitable revenue streams was late fees. For years, they generated hundreds of millions of dollars. Viewed through a financial lens, late fees looked wonderful. They increased revenue. They improved margins. They reinforced confidence in the existing model. But hidden inside those profits sat a different signal. Customer frustration.

Every late fee represented friction, inconvenience, and a customer being reminded that renting a film from Blockbuster was slightly annoying. The company saw revenue, but it failed to see what was creating that revenue and, more importantly, that an alternative had appeared.

Netflix was observing something entirely different. Rather than focusing on transactions, it focused on behaviour. Rather than measuring compliance, it measured convenience. Rather than

asking how profitable late fees were, it asked how much customers disliked them and whether it could solve that. The same reality was visible to both businesses, but one interpreted it as validation while the other interpreted it as an opportunity.

Most business analysis focuses on events. Systems thinking focuses on relationships. Blockbuster's problem wasn't that customers disliked late fees. Nor was it that Netflix existed. The problem sat in the relationship between those things.

Every late fee generated profit. That profit reinforced confidence in the existing model. Confidence reduced the urgency to innovate. As innovation slowed, customer frustration became more valuable to competitors. What appeared to be strengthening the business was slowly weakening it. The signal said one thing. The system was doing another.

Most business analysis focuses on events.

Systems thinking focuses on relationships.

**Blockbuster's problem wasn't that
customers disliked late fees.**

Nor was it that Netflix existed.

**The problem sat in the relationship between
those things.**

The reinforcing loop

Systems create feedback loops. Some stabilize behaviour, and others reinforce it. Blockbuster had created a reinforcing loop that looked healthy from the outside. Late fees increased profits. Higher profits reinforced confidence in the existing model. Greater confidence reduced pressure to change. Customers became increasingly frustrated. Alternative solutions became more attractive.

Management became even more protective of the existing model because it remained profitable. And in turn, this increased reliance on late fees. And so the cycle repeated. Profit led to confidence. Confidence led to inaction. Inaction increased customer frustration. Customer frustration strengthened the opportunity for competitors. The loop fed itself. The numbers looked healthy for years, but the system was moving in the opposite direction.

This is one of the great dangers in business. Founders often assume that positive outcomes validate the decisions that produced them. Sometimes they do. Sometimes they're simply delaying the consequences.

One of the reasons systems deceive us is that consequences rarely arrive immediately. There is almost always a delay. You can spend years underinvesting in maintenance before equipment starts failing. Blockbuster spent years frustrating customers before churn accelerated. The delay creates the illusion that the system is working. Blockbuster's stores remained busy. Revenue continued flowing. The brand remained recognizable, and the visible business looked successful. Beneath the surface, customer behaviour was changing. Technology was changing. Consumer expectations were changing. The relationship between convenience and value was changing. The lag between cause and effect concealed the problem. This is why failure often feels sudden to outsiders and inevitable to historians. The collapse is visible. The drift that caused it is rare.



The room full of assumptions

Every business operates on assumptions. Customers will continue behaving this way. This revenue stream will remain available. This channel will keep working. This business model will remain relevant. Most are never written down. They sit inside forecasts, budgets, operating models and strategic plans. And the assumptions become so familiar that nobody notices them. In Blockbuster's case, the model rested upon several of them:

- Customers would continue visiting physical stores.
- Convenience was not the primary driver of customer choice.
- Frustration could be monetized indefinitely.
- Existing customer behaviour would hold.

None of these assumptions appeared unreasonable at the time, and that's why they became so dangerous. The most powerful assumptions are rarely the ones people debate. They are the ones everyone accepts, often to their peril. Most failures are not merely failures of information, but of perspective.

Somewhere inside almost every failing business, there comes a point where the prevailing narrative becomes difficult to challenge. The organization begins reinforcing its own conclusions.

- The numbers support the story.
- The story supports the decisions.
- The decisions reinforce the numbers.
- Alternative viewpoints gradually disappear.

Somebody should be asking: What if we're wrong? What is the customer seeing?

The right people in the room should stress test ambition. Without challenge, confidence slowly transforms into certainty, and this leads to blind spots.

Reality

Data doesn't matter for data's sake. As I said at the start, some founders drown in dashboards. Often, the same ones starve for insight. The objective is not measurement but visibility. Can you see:

- The path from attention to cash?
- What happens after the sale?
- The point where customers receive genuine value?

Somewhere in every customer journey sits a moment at which they turn the corner. The moment they become more likely to stay, renew, pay on time or recommend you. It may be several bites they take, or a bit of the product they use. Find that moment, and everything becomes clearer.

Years ago, while building my first property portfolio, I developed a simple motto which I taught to landlords across the UK: A good tenant pays and stays. It started as a mistake, and this encouraged a gift. Then it dawned on me. I could buy tenants wine, chocolates, light bulbs and all manner of small gifts for less than the cost of replacing them. It then quickly became clear that the gift was the differentiator for the tenant, my customer. For me, retention mattered more than acquisition. The economics spoke for themselves. So it became part of my system, and I spread the learning to others.

Many businesses celebrate acquisition and ignore what happens next. They become skilled at selling and poor at keeping. They focus on the start of the journey while neglecting the part that generates most of the value. The numbers that matter are often hiding far behind the numbers everyone celebrates.

The most dangerous systems are not the ones with no data. They are the ones producing data that appears to confirm what leaders already want to believe. Once a system begins rewarding certainty over curiosity, reality doesn't disappear. It simply waits longer before presenting the bill.

And while I am not writing about a route to a better world, acting upon reality rather than emotion might serve us well. This segues nicely to the final resistance to data, which is emotion. Celebration feels good, and removing it is a let-down.

More than that, data removes excuses. Once reality becomes visible, it becomes harder to blame timing, the market, competitors or bad luck. You are confronted with what is actually happening.

Reality is where leverage lives. High-quality data doesn't make you clever, but it does make you effective. Business success is not genius. Many wealthy business owners are not especially intellectual. And most intellectuals are not especially wealthy. Thriving businesses are usually built from obvious things done deliberately and consistently over long periods of time.

To recap the lesson hidden inside today's title. No Data is rarely the problem. More often, the problem is seeing the numbers but missing the meaning. The purpose of data is to understand reality. Reality, whether we like it or not, always gets the final vote.



Contributors

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Contributors

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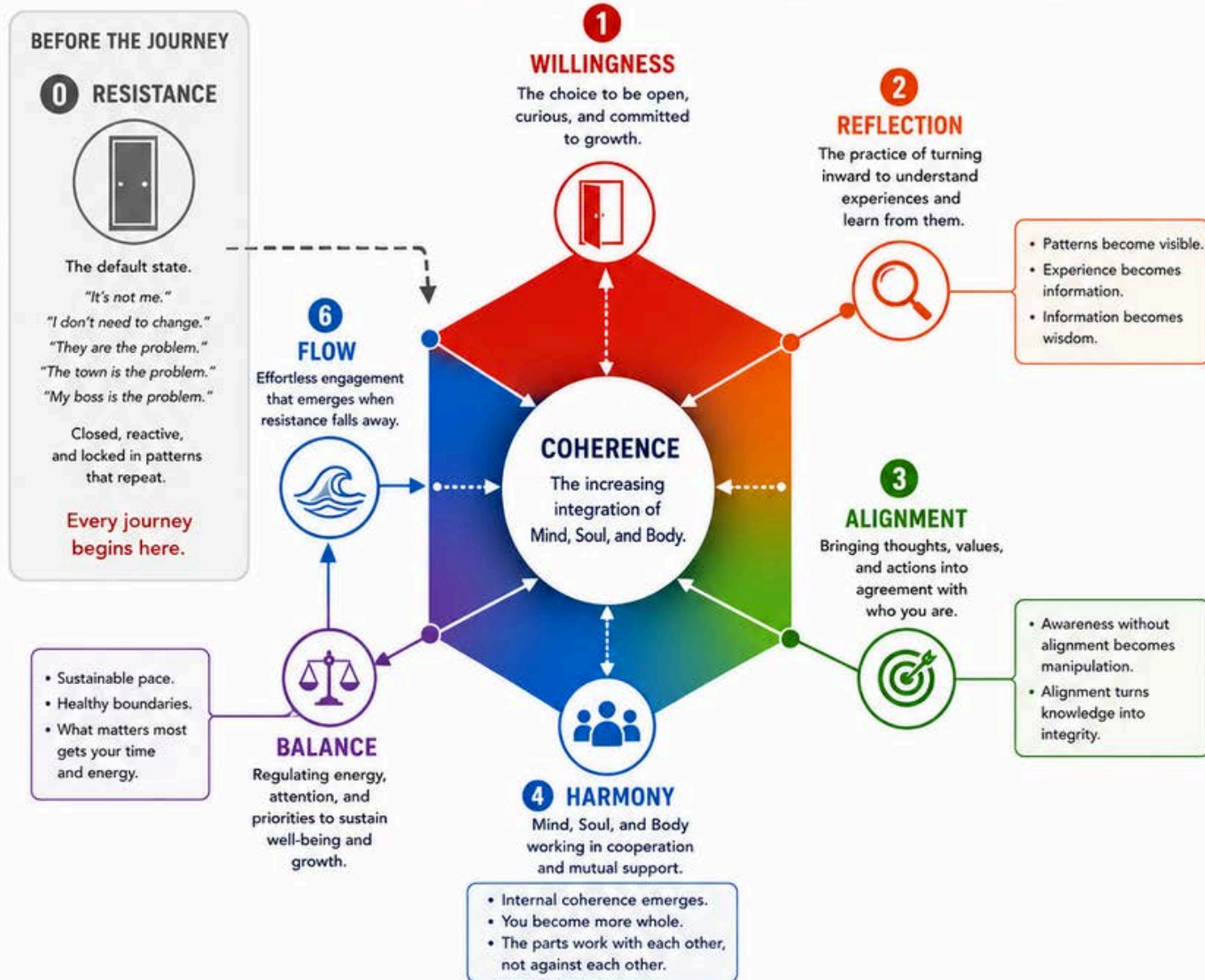
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Stefan Ytterborn is a Swedish entrepreneur, founder, and brand builder whose career spans design, innovation, mobility, and outdoor industries. He founded globally recognized brands including POC and CAKE, leading both from concept to international success. Across four decades, he has launched more than 1,500 products, raised over USD 100 million in growth capital, and received more than 300 awards in business, innovation, and design. Today, he advises and serves on the boards of leading Scandinavian companies while continuing to shape brands, products, and ventures through design-driven entrepreneurship.

THE INSIDE ATLAS JOURNEY

FROM RESISTANCE TO THE FOURTH BOX

A map of how inner coherence emerges—and how flow becomes the expression of a transformed system.



Most people try to change the event.

The Inside Atlas helps reveal the pattern producing the event.

THE FOURTH BOX

What emerges when coherence becomes stable and self-reinforcing.

*It is not a destination.
It is what emerges.*



WHAT IT IS

- ★ A coherent inner system
- ★ A new way of being
- ★ A stable platform for wise action
- ★ A freedom that is not fragile
- ★ A foundation that adapts

WHAT IT IS NOT

- ★ Not a single event
- ★ Not an emotion
- ★ Not an achievement
- ★ Not a role or identity
- ★ Not the absence of challenges

The loop remains. Your participation changes.



THE LEVERAGE POINT

The breakthrough doesn't come from changing the world around you. It comes from changing your participation in the system.



AS IN THE FILM *GROUNDHOG DAY*, the external world doesn't need to change. The system changes because **you** change.

*When Mind, Soul, and Body become sufficiently coherent,
the same circumstances no longer produce the same outcomes.*



**Coming in the
AUGUST ISSUE**

What a \$4 Million Bugatti Can Teach Us About Systems Thinking



**Look closely enough at a Bugatti
and you stop seeing a car.**



FOR OVER THIRTY YEARS, ASSESSMENTS
TOLD ME HOW I BEHAVE, COMMUNICATE,
DECIDE, AND PERFORM.

THEY WERE ACCURATE, BUT INCOMPLETE.

NONE COULD EXPLAIN WHY CERTAIN WORK
ENERGIZED ME WHILE OTHER WORK SLOWLY
DRAINED ME.

THE MISSING VARIABLE WAS MEANING.
HUMAN BEINGS DO NOT ORGANIZE THEIR
LIVES AROUND BEHAVIOUR; THEY ORGANIZE
THEIR LIVES AROUND WHAT MATTERS.

MEANING SHAPES ATTENTION. ATTENTION
SHAPES IDENTITY. IDENTITY SHAPES
BELONGING. IF WE NEVER ASK ABOUT THE
SOUL, THE SOURCE OF MEANING, WE MAY
DESCRIBE PEOPLE BRILLIANTLY WHILE
NEVER TRULY SEEING THEM.

DISCOVER THE MEANING BENEATH THE
BEHAVIOUR. EXPLORE YOUR UNIQUE PATH TO
RECOGNITION, ALIGNMENT, AND BELONGING
WITH THE INSIDE ATLAS AND START SEEING
YOURSELF DIFFERENTLY.

