

# **The Future We Choose**

# **What's in it for me? Be inspired to choose a sustainable future.**

Today, in 2020, we find ourselves in the middle of a crisis. Planet Earth is heating up, and we're running out of time before we reach the point of no return. Not all of us witness the direct effects of climate change on a daily basis, but most of us are aware that the world today is quite different to how it was just a few decades ago: there are fewer species of wildlife, the seasons are warmer, and forests everywhere are burning. The next ten years are absolutely critical if we want a fighting chance of saving humanity from the worst effects of climate breakdown. By 2030, we must reduce our emissions by at least 50 percent. And by 2050, we must be at net-zero - meaning we don't release more greenhouse gases into the atmosphere than the earth can naturally absorb. There are only two choices: do something or do nothing. Whichever path we take, our actions will impact us and all generations to come. We must act now. In these blinks, you'll learn

just how hot our world could get by 2050; how to stop thinking of life as a zero-sum game; and why non-violent protests are so important.

## **Unless we act now, we are on the path to an unlivable world.**

Picture this. It's morning, and you wake up and check your phone. You do this every day, not to respond to your text messages, but to read the air quality report and see if it's safe to go outside. Through the window, you can see it's a clear, sunny day, but your app tells you that air pollution and ozone levels are high. You will have to wear your specially designed face mask at all times. You'll also have to cope with the intense heat. The world is much hotter now than it was when you were young, and there's no longer anything that can be done to change that. The year is 2050. In another 50 years, many areas of the planet are likely to be uninhabitable. The key message here is: Unless we act now, we are on the path to an unlivable world. We'll end up living in this hypothetical world even if we can reduce greenhouse gas emissions and keep global warming to under 2 degrees Celsius. In other words, this is our future, regardless of whether we achieve the main target of the 2015 Paris climate agreement. And once we reach a point where we can no longer control the warming, other tipping points follow. The melting of the Arctic ice sheets is one of the most critical. Since this white ice is responsible for reflecting large amounts of the sun's heat away from earth, its melting proves utterly disastrous. Sea levels rise, and without the ice, we are now even more defenseless against hotter and hotter temperatures. The rising seas also bring major flooding. Coastal cities across the globe have their infrastructure devastated, and while they flood, inland areas dry up. Heatwaves create deserts out of once-lush areas, and many places can no longer support any form of life. Extreme weather events, like hurricanes and tropical storms, are also more common than ever. The resulting destruction kills or displaces millions of people and creates a massive refugee crisis. Even the surviving cities aren't exactly pleasant places to live now. In Paris, summer temperatures regularly hit 44 degrees Celsius or 111 Fahrenheit. And that's nothing. In central India, temperatures reach 60 degrees Celsius (that's 140 Fahrenheit) for 45

days of the year. It's fair to say that everyone is suffering deeply, enraged at the politicians and citizens of the past who refused to act in the face of the climate crisis.

## **We can create a sustainable future, but it will require major shifts in the way we do almost everything.**

Now imagine a different future. You wake up on an average day in 2050 and walk outside to breathe in the fresh, moist air. Your city is covered in trees, there are gardens on every rooftop, and every formerly vacant lot has been converted into a shady grove or play area for children. Globally, forest cover is at 50 percent. There aren't very many wide open plains left, and new electric railways mean cities are more connected than ever. In the United States, the days of flying from the east to the west coast are long gone - now, you can travel from New York City to Los Angeles in a high-speed bullet train. The key message here is: We can create a sustainable future, but it will require major shifts in the way we do almost everything. In our sustainable future, we've had to make some big changes. The first has been to cut our carbon emissions by half every decade starting in 2020 so that in 2050, we're at net-zero. We now have a fighting chance of staying below the crucial 1.5 degree Celsius threshold for global warming and avoiding the worst outcomes of climate change. It's not been easy, and many things we used to take for granted have changed. For instance, on the roads, you no longer see vehicles powered by high-polluting internal combustion engines, and we no longer burn any fossil fuels, having switched entirely to electric cars and renewable energy. New technologies and energy production methods have been especially important for developing countries. At the start of the twenty-first century, a billion people in remote areas were still living without electricity. Now, they can produce their own, enabling them to make improvements to education, healthcare, and sanitation. Everywhere, cultures have shifted so that people are more focused on their local communities. Neighborhoods buy food together as a unit, signing up for weekly drop-offs from local farms. They distribute the food between them, but it's expensive, so most places also have shared gardens where they grow their own crops. Thanks to the healthy, plant-based diets people have adopted, collective rates of heart attack, stroke, and other conditions have all dropped. If we take the right steps now, this bright and livable 2050 world could be ours, but we must act decisively. And, as we'll see in the next blink, that won't happen if we don't first change our mind-set.

## **To solve the climate crisis, we must believe, wholeheartedly, that it's a problem we can fix.**

Are you an optimist or a pessimist? The truth is, your answer might not matter much. That's because, according to psychology, you can change your attitude to the future by challenging your current thought patterns and building better ones. All of which means that even if you feel like a pessimist right now, you can talk yourself into becoming an optimist! And in order to face the climate crisis and take on the challenges it presents, we all need a heavy dose of optimism. Many of us fall into the trap of viewing climate

change as unavoidable – an issue so large that we’re powerless to prevent it. But the fact is, this pessimistic attitude is not only based on false assumptions, it’s also irresponsible. The key message here is: To solve the climate crisis, we must believe, wholeheartedly, that it’s a problem we can fix. World news, statistics, and predictions regarding climate change can be disheartening. When you’re feeling particularly low about the world’s prospects, it can help to recall some of the positive progress we’ve already made. In the United Kingdom, for instance, more than 50 percent of energy now comes from clean power. And the story is even better in Costa Rica, which is 100 percent clean! At an individual level, reducing emissions won’t have as much impact as large, country-wide reductions, but don’t let that stop you – any reduction at all is a contribution to the larger goal. Of course, optimism isn’t always easy. Even the authors haven’t always been able to maintain sunny attitudes when things have gotten tense. In fact, in 2010, at a press conference in Bonn in Germany, author Christiana Figueres was asked if she thought a global climate agreement would ever be possible. Her response? “Not in my lifetime.” As soon as she spoke those words, the author knew that her attitude was the wrong one. If she gave up, it would mean accepting an unlivable future. She walked out of that press conference determined instead to become stubbornly optimistic and to believe so fervently in a better future that others would believe in it too. And it worked. Figueres’ optimism was the seed – and first step – on her path to lead the global fight against climate change that culminated in the 2015 Paris Agreement. No matter how challenging things may seem, we too must adopt an attitude of stubborn optimism.

## **If you can adopt a mind-set of abundance and collaboration, you’ll see that there is often enough for everyone.**

Picture yourself on any given weekday morning. You’re waiting for your bus or train to arrive to take you to work. Finally, it sidles up, and you rush to board the crowded vehicle. How do you feel? You probably experience a sense of urgency – you must nab the best seat, and it doesn’t matter what you have to do to get it! This sense of competition is everywhere in our society. All too often, we see everything in life as a zero-sum game, where if you’re not winning, you’re losing. But what if, instead of feeling like you “lost” by failing to get a bus or train seat, you actually “won” because you ended up having a great conversation with someone nearby? The key message here is: If you can adopt a mind-set of abundance and collaboration, you’ll see that there is often enough for everyone. The zero-sum-game worldview is uninspiring. Not only that, it also creates scarcity where there isn’t any. And, just like bus seats, Earth’s resources aren’t all scarce. Take the case of Tucson, Arizona, which only gets 28 centimeters of rainfall each year. Because there is so little rain, water is thought to be in short supply. As a result, over the years, the local population has frantically pumped as much water from the ground as possible. Of course the kicker is that Tucson actually uses less than 28 centimeters of groundwater each year. Despite the perception of scarcity, there is more than enough water to go around. And by overreacting to the fear that there’s a shortage, the people of Tucson have actually made their situation worse. The story is a little different in other parts of the world where there is real scarcity, resources are becoming depleted, and there are fewer wildlife species and less forest cover than there was just 50 years ago. To address this, the authors suggest that we adopt an attitude of abundance and shift our focus toward collaboration. Abundance means recognizing that

there are lots of ways in which everyone's needs can be satisfied so that we all "win." After all, if one group "loses" in this climate battle – say, if the Amazon burns – we all lose, not just the people living in Brazil.

## **It's not too late to restore the world's natural resources, but we must embrace a regenerative way of life.**

The instinct to strive for more has been a part of human society for centuries. As a species, we're accustomed to constantly taking – from the land, from the sea, and from the indigenous populations that have been colonized over the years, to name just a few examples. But many of our planet's resources are finite, and we're approaching a point where just taking will no longer be possible. Now is the time to replenish what we use and connect with nature so that future generations can experience the same abundance that we enjoy today. The key message here is: It's not too late to restore the world's natural resources, but we must embrace a regenerative way of life. In many ways, we already display a regenerative and caring attitude toward our friends and family; we look out for their well-being and do our best to help them bounce back from life's challenges. But, curiously, we don't often apply that same attitude to ourselves. To start the shift toward a regenerative mind-set, you should first focus on replenishing and nourishing yourself. One of the best ways to do that is through meditation, which can help you maintain a sense of calm and become more resilient to bad news and events. If meditation isn't your thing, don't worry – just identify whatever it is that nourishes your well-being and be sure to do that regularly. Once you've made this behavior a habit for yourself, it's time to turn your attention toward nature. Regeneration in nature is a process that allows a species or biosystem to heal and recover from human extraction, pressure, or influence. Regenerative policies can make huge differences to our environment. Take, for example, the case of gray and humpback whale populations. In the nineteenth century, these whale species were decimated by commercial whaling, but since whaling was banned, their populations have recovered almost completely. Unfortunately, just removing human pressure won't be enough to repair all the damage we've done to global ecosystems. In many cases, we'll need to rewild forests and oceans by actively reintroducing native species and planting trees and shrubs in deforested areas. We may never be able to restore all of our ecosystems to their former glory, but our lives depend directly on Earth's survival – and we need to stop taking it for granted.

## **To create a livable world, we must take brave steps forward and turn away from the past.**

The year is 2015, and the negotiations leading up to the Paris Agreement are nearly at an end. The authors are in their office, working on the final arrangements. Suddenly there's a knock at the door and in walks the head of UN Security. He announces the unthinkable: a bomb has been found at Le Bourget subway station, the closest stop to the conference. In that moment, the authors faced a choice: to go ahead despite the risk that another bomb might be planted, or call everything off and potentially destroy their



best chance of reaching an international agreement on climate change. They decided that the conference should go on as planned. The key message here is: To create a livable world, we must take brave steps forward and turn away from the past. Your own choice to fight climate change probably won't ever be as dramatic as the authors', but there is one thing that could hold you back from forging a new future: nostalgia. Nostalgia is an extremely powerful force. It prevents us from working toward change and makes it difficult to let go of our old habits. Unfortunately, the power of nostalgia often bleeds into politics. In the United Kingdom, for example, many rural farmers want to preserve the old look of the countryside and resist efforts to put wind turbines on their land. They also tend to support Conservative Party politicians who, in 2015, changed planning laws to make it more complicated and expensive to build wind farms, leading to an 80 percent reduction in new turbine capacity. When it comes to the climate, we all need to acknowledge an important truth: that fossil fuels have contributed greatly to human progress, but that their continued use is no longer sustainable. It may be extremely difficult to challenge our nostalgia. Imagining major changes to our way of life can create a deep sense of grief – but if we can accept this grief, it will help us shape a better vision for the future. With key targets to work toward, the prospect of a sustainable future is within our grasp, no matter how unrealistic that vision might seem right now. After all, in 1961, when President John F. Kennedy announced his goal of putting a man on the moon, not many people thought it could happen – and we know how that turned out!

## **Technology is a massive benefit – maybe even necessary for ending the climate crisis – but we must use it responsibly.**

Nature and technology don't normally go hand in hand, yet technological advances could prove an excellent tool in the fight against climate change. Take self-driving electric cars. They produce lower emissions than traditional cars and may end up reducing private ownership since you could simply call one up like an Uber – just without the driver. Or take plant-based and lab-grown meat alternatives. By switching production from the land to the laboratory, you could greatly reduce the impact of agriculture on global emissions. The possibilities are endless, but there are some things to bear in mind. The key message here is: Technology is a massive benefit – maybe even necessary for ending the climate crisis – but we must use it responsibly. Technologies always have their downsides. Self-driving cars might make it easier for governments to track their citizens. And in Brazil, where more than 20 million people work in agriculture, a switch to lab-grown meat could put huge numbers out of work. The key is to be sensible. Artificial intelligence is likely to play an important role in almost every sector. In the case of renewable power, one of the current drawbacks is its dependence on external factors, like whether it's sunny or windy. But an AI-informed energy grid could sense these conditions and decide when energy should be stored and when it should flow. An intelligent grid would mean energy is always available, whatever the weather. In some areas, AI has already made a big impact. In 2016, engineers at Google applied algorithms to their data centers and found they could improve the energy flow through the system so much that their cooling bill was reduced by 40 percent. But while investing in new technologies is exciting, it's equally important to re-establish our connection with nature. After all, our current way of life involves lots of time indoors looking at screens, and studies tell us this leads to obesity, loss of physical strength, and

depression. One way to get a dose of nature and contribute to fighting climate change is to go outside and plant a tree. You don't need any fancy technology to take advantage of trees' and plants' natural ability to absorb carbon dioxide from the air and release oxygen. Through the simple action of planting more trees, we can help large parts of the earth achieve stable rainfall, more fertile soil, and increased production from farmland.

## **It's time to change your consumption patterns.**

Consumerism is running rampant. Products and brands are designed so that buying them is what marks you out as part of a tribe of like-minded people. Year after year, your identity and the products you consume become more and more entwined. In particular, the fashion industry is a problem because of its enormous carbon footprint – second only to the oil industry. Textile production adds more greenhouse gases to the atmosphere than all international flights and maritime shipping combined! If you can break free of this consumer cycle, you'll find that it's an extremely powerful way to fight climate change. The key message here is: It's time to change your consumption patterns. Buying lots of things is not only extremely addictive; it's psychologically unhealthy too. Mass consumption creates a void in our minds that drives us to build our sense of identity by spending money. At the same time, our leaders measure society's progress in terms of GDP – a numerical, economic measure that ignores our well-being and our happiness. The good news is that we can push back against these factors. Of course, you won't be able to stop spending money entirely. But you can choose to spend it more wisely. In terms of fashion, that might mean buying better-quality clothes made from organic cotton, instead of cheaply made ones that you'll throw out in a few months. Be sure also to withdraw your financial support from companies with poor production processes, and instead buy from those that are committed to sustainability. You can vote with your money in other ways, too. Next time you need to replace your car, consider going electric. Or commit to changing your methods of heating and cooling your home. Give your house an energy audit, and time your transition to electric heating for when you'd need to replace your old boiler anyway. With these changes, capital will begin to flow away from the unsustainable consumer model of the past and toward the sustainable, clean economy we need for the future. And by challenging the idea that more stuff equals a better life, it's likely you'll also feel significantly happier.

## **We must seek out the truth in order to fight climate change through political action.**

It's no secret that the internet is rife with misinformation, and social media isn't helping to correct the problem. In fact, a recent MIT analysis of Twitter concluded that – on average – lies spread six times faster than the truth. Some people have gone so far as to name our current world a post-truth era. And that does seem to hold some weight because, even though our political leaders freely spread lies and deny science, we still choose to believe them. That's because each of us is subject to something called confirmation bias, in other words: the desire to have our own beliefs proven right. The key message here is: We must seek out the truth in order to fight climate change

through political action. It might feel good to read “evidence” that supports your side of a debate. But if you can make an effort to sort facts from pseudoscience, you can engage in political action that contributes to a better future. Politicians have their own reasons for spinning the truth about climate change. It’s easy to see why. Over many years, corporate interests have poured money into politics, effectively buying influence over our elected representatives. Governments across the globe still subsidize the fossil fuel industry to the tune of \$600 billion a year. What can regular citizens do against such massive political forces? The most powerful way to inspire change is through non-violent political protest. Throughout history, change has always occurred when around 3.5 percent of a population has joined in non-violent protest for a specific cause. In the United States, that would mean eleven million people demonstrating, marching, and demanding policy reforms on climate change. Another powerful way to contribute to fixing the climate crisis is by supporting more women leaders. Despite increasing equality in many aspects of life, the majority of leaders are still male. Yet evidence shows that when institutions have lots of women in charge, those organizations are more likely to act on climate change. On top of that, women legislators typically vote for climate action almost twice as often as men – so consider voting for a woman the next time you’re at the ballot box. Most importantly, don’t worry if you feel overwhelmed by the challenges we’re facing. Things are going to get difficult, but it isn’t too late to choose a better future.

## Final summary

The key message in these blinks: We find ourselves at a unique crossroads in history: one where we can choose to actively and aggressively fight climate change for a sustainable future, or one where we do nothing and significantly worsen the lives of future generations. Hope is not yet lost, but we will need to make big changes if we are to prevent Earth from becoming irreversibly warmer by 2050. Whether you take political action, change your consumerist mind-set, or go and plant some trees – anything you do to reduce your carbon footprint, no matter how small, is an important contribution. Actionable advice: Adopt a more plant-based diet. Vegetarian and vegan diets may be growing in popularity, but most people still aren’t ready to quit meat cold-turkey – no pun intended! To start a slow transition to a plant-based diet choose just one day of the week to eat meat-free. If that works, over time you can add more meat-free days. By doing so, you’ll decrease your carbon footprint and maybe even notice some health benefits too. Got feedback? We’d love to hear what you think about our content! Just drop an email to [email protected] with The Future We Choose as the subject line and share your thoughts! What to read next: *The Necessary Revolution*, by Peter Senge, Bryan Smith, Nina Kruschwitz, Joe Laur, and Sara Schley It’s no secret that climate change will affect every population in every corner of the globe. This means that beating climate change will require individuals, corporations, and governments worldwide to find ways to work together. If you’re interested in finding out what you or your organization can do, check out our blinks to *The Necessary Revolution*. You’ll learn why companies should adopt corporate social responsibility, and how, as an individual, you can develop and maintain an empowered mentality to help you keep up the fight for a sustainable future.