



# THE INNER REVOLUTION



## To engage or to alienate? The way we communicate with others has an impact on how the environmental community and its message is perceived. Self-confidence, a positive outlook and 'being the change' is the way to get results, says **Nick Kettles**

**B**e the change you want to see in the world.' For every pair of sneakers it sells, emblazoned with Gandhi's immortal words, shoe company TOMS will buy a pair of shoes for a shoeless child in the developing world. Such compassion in action helps ensure this most powerful rally cry amounts to more than just an overworked aphorism on a postcard, button badge, t-shirt or tattoo.

But how often do we take the time to actually consider the real implications of what Gandhi meant?

Is it possible that what he really meant was not only to act in the direction of our dreams, but also to consider that it's who we are – who we are being – when we act that actually creates the conditions in which a better society can grow? If so then we must by default also consider which parts of the environmental movement itself represent the change we want to see in the world.

To what extent does the embittered vengefulness of some globalisation protesters, whose violence steals the headlines and skews the public image of a movement otherwise committed to non-violence, reflect the change we want to see? Not to mention the environmental campaigners who still so often describe their struggle in the discourse of war, where battle lines must be drawn between good guys and hated vested interests to be vanquished, in service of rescuing the fair maiden, Mother Earth.

There's no doubt that it's better to live in a society where people are awake and taking action rather than inert and unconscious, but the ability of any movement to define itself – or indeed, be defined by non-participants – by its conduct determines its ability to engage or alienate.

Are we really at war (trying to force others to agree to our values) or is the environmental and sustainability movement part of a much larger shift in consciousness, one that also embraces our inner lives, the ability to self-manage our emotions, align our actions with heartfelt values, and form authentic and lasting relationships with others?

As Satish Kumar, founder of Schumacher

College and editor of *Resurgence* magazine, succinctly puts it: 'Many environmentalists are just focusing on outer change, and outer change is only one of two legs – we have to walk on two.'

James Thornton, CEO of law firm Client Earth, is more pointed in his view. He believes that without addressing the internal pain and suffering that created this external mess in the first place, we'll just find something new to project our malaise on. 'Without making the internal switch, it's going to be difficult to make any outer change we are seeking permanent,' he says.

### Cultural creatives

Some hardened greens who have been committed to the cause for a long time may dismiss this literal reading of Gandhi as just a bunch of hippy nonsense; the fringes of the green movement exploring the acausal, quantum relationship between our inner and outer worlds. And yet it might behoove them to consider the growing number of people who recognise that the key to creating and maintaining the sustainable society we want to see might just lie within.

Narrowing the gap between inner and outer self means much more than paying lip service to the ideals of social justice, while relying on the 'them' of governments to change.

Indeed, at the turn of the millennium, Drs Paul Ray and Sherry Ruth Anderson coined a new phrase to describe a growing group of people in the West. They called them 'cultural creatives' – people who combine a serious concern for their inner life with a strong passion for social activism.

In researching this group they found cultural creatives cared deeply about the destruction of nature; were willing to pay higher taxes or spend more money for legitimate green goods, but at the same time

also had an intense interest in spiritual and psychological development; in the importance of maintaining relationships, and in helping others to develop their unique gifts. Estimates suggest this group of people amounts to well over 130 million in the US and Europe.

It is not just that cultural creatives understand the problems we face; they also recognise that an interest in personal development can be put in service of creating a more sustainable society. Self and society, they believe, are not separate interests, but intimately entwined.

Likewise, in his 2008 book *Karma Queens, Geek Gods and Innerpreneurs*, marketing writer Ron Rentel identifies a cultural creative subculture in business he calls 'innerpreneurs'. They possess, he says, the same drive and business acumen as entrepreneurs, but instead use their business to fulfil their potential and create social change rather than simply to make money.

### Change from the inside out

Much of what's been happening in the green movement to date has focused on 'problem definition' and explication, both of which are essential and necessary steps. To the cultural creative, however, who has already decided to focus on the positive, the excessive focus on the doomsday scenario of what will happen if we don't take action can be as alienating as it is to the average climate-change denier.

As Michael Braungart, co-author of *Cradle to Cradle*, says: 'For years environmentalists have invited us to think about the environment from a guilt perspective. Being told to reduce our carbon footprint is like saying "it's better if I'm not here". Guilt-management has turned into an obsession for eco-efficiency'.

A lot of environmental NGOs are already reaching this ontological edge, according to David Key of Footprint Consulting and WWF

**'To what extent does the embittered vengefulness of some protesters reflect the change we want to see?'**

## An interconnection with nature

For more than 30 years, deep ecology, first articulated by writers such as Arne Naess, has challenged so-called shallow environmentalism to invite people to consider themselves as much a part of nature as any 'wildlife'.

Satish Kumar, says the implications of such a shift are fundamental: 'It just takes one letter to move from egocentric - with an individual worldview, where I am separate from you, and my need is more important than yours - to ecocentric, with a relational worldview, where my comfort doesn't come at the expense of another'.

Eco-psychologist Joanna Macy claims that our pain and despair for the world is in fact evidence of our interconnectedness in the web of life, and hence our power to act on its behalf and take part in its healing.

Deep ecology, of course, requires a fundamental shift in the way we view nature, from a more paternalistic view as something to be saved to accepting it as our 'teacher'. This might be troubling to some who doubt the leading-edge science deep ecologists cite to prove our a-causal relationship with the world.

And yet David Key of Footprint Consulting says the purpose of the Natural Change project he developed with WWF is to invite people to have their epiphany with nature first, so they no longer need to be browbeaten with science.

'Our premise is that time in nature, in solitude for a significant period of time, can help to knock the egoic self off orbit,' he says. 'Through contact with the wild many people experience a shift of perspective that can be profoundly transpersonal, and results in a significant increase in their enthusiasm for change.'

Clearly, there's not enough wilderness for all six billion of us to have this kind of experience, but where the focus is on working with key change agents the impact can be profound.

Others, such as The Wild Peak, a transformational coaching company, are offering a similar process to the corporate world. They assert that true creativity and transformation rarely occur in the office, where it's all-too-easy to remain consumed by the day-to-day concerns of meeting targets and protecting your position. Instead, they argue, it's in nature that business leaders can discover the reverence and integrity required to align business objectives with planetary needs.

## From carbon footprints to contribution footprints

Dr David Ellis is one of the founding members of Transition Cambridge. He left his high-powered parliamentary lobbying work when he realised the burn-out he felt was antithetical to the sustainable society he wanted to create. 'I knew I had to engage in a way that nourished me,' he says.

David is one of many who believes that how we engage with environmental issues is just as critical as what we do. The premise is that we cannot ask governments to adopt clean, renewable energy if we are still fuelling ourselves with resentment, anger and exhaustion; we cannot expect to create a world we want to live in until we also become the kind of people others want to live with.

As coaches and other psychology of change experts, we are supporting individuals with these internal shifts. My work centres on alerting individuals to their own significance in these significant times, and helping them to find and act upon what I call our unique 'contribution footprint'. Fundamentally, this approach holds that the self is the solution.

When Penny Askew began having coaching, environmental issues weren't on her agenda. She simply knew she was stuck in a safe zone, unhappy and unfulfilled, and that something needed to change: 'I wasn't engaging with anything. Then I had someone who helped me believe that I was capable of doing the things I dreamed of, and that if I did follow my passion it could and would make a difference.'

She says it was crucial that the other person didn't judge or criticise her existing choices, but encouraged her to see her own

potential. This emboldened her to connect with Transition Cambridge and with her local carbon-reduction group, becoming involved with their awareness-raising activities. 'I've gone from feeling alone and full of hopelessness to being confident I can give absolutely anything a go,' she says. 'And I do!'

When individuals are encouraged their gifts are of benefit to their community, they tentatively step forward; in return, their action and engagement bolster self-esteem. The local format of a Transition Town supports individuals in finding and following their contribution footprint because it repositions us as one in a few thousand, not one in six billion. It depends on each person's unique response as one part of a collective jigsaw. It also enables us physically to experience our contribution, making a difference that quiets those internal demons that tell us we are not important and cannot effect change.

It becomes an antidote to low self-esteem and depression, as Nicky Smith found: 'I was circling round in my little world, feeling boxed in. My focus was on what I could take from life that would make me better. My experience shifted when I changed my perspective and adopted new questions: What purpose can I be? What can I do, what can I give? What talents and strengths do I have that enable something bigger than myself to take place? The more I did that, the better I felt. It was an escape from the narrow parameters I'd set.'

There are great challenges when we put the self so squarely in the equation. We are more visible and more vulnerable. We run the risk

of despair they feel about the issues we collectively face. For others, more explorative personal development work might appeal. The human potential movement, which has tapped our yearning for more meaningful and fulfilled lives, includes a vast range of therapies and learning resources. These focus on everything from addressing low self-esteem and despair to forming better working relationships with others, through to so-called positive psychology, focused on developing our hidden potential and creating a more authentic expression of who we are, and what we do in the world.

Perhaps cultural creatives' focus on the role of personal development as an agent of change might just offer a third way for engaging the less motivated. Just how many more people would we inspire if being the change we want to see were actually a pleasant and fulfilling experience?

But what exactly does inner change mean?

For some, embracing the idea of 'voluntary simplicity' through actions such as making their own bread can nourish the self sufficiently to help them detach from the

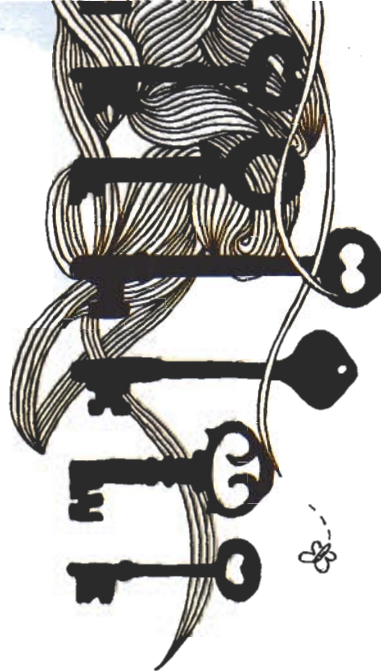
initiative Natural Change. 'They are realising that presenting frightening images of ecocide to induce shock and awe in viewers is having a net negative effect on people's environmental behaviour,' he says. 'They either become numbed out and immune to new information, oversensitised and reactionary, or take the middle road of "what can I do?" indifference.'

It's what you do with these tools that matters, of course. Such techniques can, and often are, used in service of grossly materialist objectives completely incongruent with sustainable living.

But not always. Human potential has become an integral part of the Transition Towns movement's 'toolkit for change'. As Corrina Gordon-Barnes' work as a certified professional co-active coach within Transition Cambridge shows, this can help people move beyond despair to recognise their own significance (see box, above). The result of such work is that people want to increase

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of offering skills and ideas and having them rejected or laughed at. This is where specialist support can make the difference between taking the contribution footprint path or not.

It helped Jacky Sutton-Adam clearly to articulate that she was developing her foraging venture, WildFoodie, as a means of following her passion, not merely achieving a particular outcome. 'This perspective means I can continuously try out new ideas, and when things don't go to plan I don't throw out the baby with the bathwater,' she says. 'I regroup, reprioritise based on what is most important to me, and remember this is about offering something that nourishes me and others.'

This is the contribution footprint journey

we each can take. If we do, we are asked to confront our deep fear: that we don't matter; and our great longing: that we do. This inner transition requires us to be braver, yet there is less of a fight. We're no longer trying to change the outside by shouting about it or scrubbing at the mirror to create a different reflection. Our enemies are those inside that swallow our self-esteem and paralyse us. It takes strength to dismantle self-imposed limitations, courage to say, 'I matter'. Here in Cambridge, as elsewhere, individuals are having a meaningful impact on the world as a result of finding both.

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their contribution, with as much zest and enthusiasm as they might otherwise seek to reduce their carbon footprint.

## The ecology of relationships

Taking care of our own inner needs is also an essential step in reframing the way we relate to others, including how we view the people we are trying to hold to account.

'In more than 29 years of working in the environmental movement, I have found that at their core, environmental problems are essentially problems of understanding,' says James Thornton of Client Earth. 'As a younger lawyer, it was a surprise to meet the executives of the companies I was suing and find they were all nice people. They were not the enemy.'

Louise Romain, a certified trainer of non-violent communication, says our favoured method of blaming and criticising simply doesn't work. 'Blame and criticism is a well-exercised human muscle, and the more we use it, the more it perpetuates the defence and self-justification we are trying to break down,' she says. 'A judgement is a tragic expression of someone's hidden needs; tragic because it stifles the actual human connection we need for real dialogue to happen.'

'I'm convinced, if environmental activists themselves got enough support for their own pain and despair about the current crisis, and having been fully heard themselves, that they could come from the still and powerful place of really listening and connecting to the person they are trying to hold accountable.'

If non-violent communication can succeed in bringing Rwanda's Hutus and Tutsis to a place of understanding, surely it can play a role in helping mediate the conflict of interests at the heart of climate change.

But can you really be empathic and still hold someone accountable?

It's always going to be easier to empathise with a company whose products you admire.

## For more information

- The Center for Nonviolent Communication [www.cnvc.org](http://www.cnvc.org)
- [www.footprintconsulting.org](http://www.footprintconsulting.org)
- [www.naturalchange.org.uk](http://www.naturalchange.org.uk)
- [www.thewildpeak.com](http://www.thewildpeak.com)
- [www.centerforrightrelationship.com](http://www.centerforrightrelationship.com)
- [www.thecoaches.com](http://www.thecoaches.com)

For example, when Greenpeace held the computer industry accountable for creating so much electronic toxic waste, it specifically appealed to Apple, first by acknowledging the company for what Greenpeace loved about its designs. It shifted tack from shaming and blaming, and instead challenged Apple to lead the industry as an innovator. It resulted in Steve Jobs' 'A Greener Apple' policy announcement, which, although still far from perfect, represented a big step forward.

Indeed, it's important not to confuse empathy and understanding why someone acts a certain way with a moral endorsement of their actions. The shift is simply one of perspective, from a punitive to a more restorative one. This is the same humanistic view adopted by Earth Jurisprudence or Wild Law. It's not a process of attrition, but a process of educating a complex institution in better conduct through legal discourse.

## A shift in narrative

The human story is constantly evolving, and today, with the environmental movement so at risk of being marginalised as extremists by governments and security forces, we have the opportunity to change tack about the kind of narrative we want to tell.

This is not about being a Pollyanna – indeed, any attempt to use wellbeing as a replacement for economic growth as a new measure of success, must be viewed with suspicion, lest it mutates into some kind of Orwellian measure of the nation's national average happiness, broadcast daily like a weather forecast. As Dr Nick Baylis, author of *The Rough Guide to Happiness*, says, such boundless optimism can easily backfire: 'The "just-be-positive" rhetoric is fast creating a culture of "just do it, to hell with the consequences!" junkies'.

Nor should it be mistaken for an invitation to waste precious time indulging in navel-gazing while the ice caps continue to melt. The shift in narrative we are talking about here is what happens to the environmental movement when we reframe our ideas of happiness and self-worth based on our contribution and ability to connect with others.

The environmental movement no longer becomes consumed by its basic survival needs – the lower levels of Maslow's hierarchy of needs – and instead provides an invitation to experience the role a sustainable society could play in living a more fulfilled life. We deepen people's engagement by offering them an opportunity to live a future-self now, a future-self that offers a deeper acceptance of our humanity. Perhaps all of it, in all its richly complex, deeply feeling, brilliant beauty.

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