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INCREMENTALISM MUST DIE.
NOW. ERIC LOWITT



Our future is bright, but to capture the light we must embrace change. If we ignore or fail to embrace change, our future will be doomed.

The outcome depends on how we address our most vile, insidious, and common enemy: incrementalism. There are massive opportunities out there, requiring BOLD responses, and one change that must be made now:
WE MUST ERADICATE INCREMENTALISM.

I want to work with you to change this.

Are we Tinkerers...or Visionaries?

Imagine being whisked between large cities in a fraction of the time it takes today... potentially at a fraction of the cost too. When Elon Musk launched his vision for his Hyperloop concept, he provided society with a BOLD vision of tomorrow's travel system. Move from San Francisco to Los Angeles faster *and* cheaper than ever before.

The inspiration for the Hyperloop vision was the large investment the state of California plans to make in bringing to life a high-speed rail. The problem Musk (and others, including me) has with California's vision is that it is not BOLD *enough*. The change planned does not meet the change needed. And the benefits from the incremental change effected by the new railway are DWARFED by its price tag.

Musk's brilliance can be boiled down to two separate ingredients. One part is his unique mind. The other part is that he is only one of a handful of people willing to think and communicate BIG thoughts for all to see. He is not competing with seven billion other people for attention from society. His brilliance is viewable because we limit ourselves from striving to achieve leapfrog greatness. We're content with incrementalism from others and ourselves.

Incrementalism leads us to an incrementally better future, at best. But our challenges cast a MASSIVE shadow over these small improvements. Our future is threatened as a result.

Bringing a Knife to a Gunfight

Math best conveys the extent of our massive challenges. So chew on these numbers:

1. Our population will grow by more than 30 percent over the next 35 years. In absolute terms, global population will swell from 7 billion today to 9.5 billion by 2050. For context on our pace and scale of global population growth, consider this: it took from day 1 to the early 19th century to go from zero to a billion and within 200 years we have gone from a billion to 7 billion)
2. Our Earth's volume (and useable land for agriculture, housing, energy, landfill, etc.) will expand by 0 percent by 2050. Stress on our land will expand exponentially; nature's reaction won't be positive.
3. Our global food system fails two out of every seven people worldwide today. One billion citizens are malnourished. Astonishingly our global food system wastes between 30 and 50 percent of produced food annually.
4. Another one billion citizens suffer from lifestyle afflictions, such as obesity, diabetes, and coronary artery disease. In the U.S. alone, citizens spend almost \$200 billion annually on healthcare services to treat these lifestyle afflictions.

5. Our global infrastructure requires \$45 trillion in investment by 2030 just to keep global trade alive as it is today, according to forecasts by the Organisation for Economic Co-Development (OECD). That's four percent of every country's GDP invested in infrastructure every year between now and 2030. For comparison's sake, the U.S. government invests about two percent of GDP today.
6. Our global infrastructure requires an additional \$50 trillion investment to "green" global infrastructure by 2030, another four percent of GDP. The last time the U.S. invested nearly four percent, Eisenhower was in the White House and the Federal Interstate Highway Bill was being enacted.
7. Our average temperature is forecast to rise by as much as 4 degrees Celsius by 2050. The impact of such a dramatic increase is, frankly, frightening. Models show a range of dire consequences from such a temperature surge, including significant rise in sea levels (as high as three feet by 2100, a catastrophic increase), resulting in widespread coastal flooding and erosion, increased incidents of drought causing extensive starvation and numerous other unacceptable outcomes. As the UN's International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) will likely confirm in its next report, due out at the end of September 2013, the human hand is clearly and predominately responsible for climate change.

These are MASSIVE challenges. Don't kid yourself; don't sleep well at night. For, left unchecked, any one of these challenges ALONE can greatly disrupt YOUR life, our livelihoods, and YOUR children's future. But the frustrating truth is that these set of challenges are also dangerously intertwined.

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For example, to feed our growing population, we must provide the food system with more food. This entails reducing our percent of produced food that is wasted, increasing crop yields, and ensuring that the economics of food supply and demand are balanced. Reducing our food waste is dependent on our ability to convince a critical mass of consumers that their nutrition behaviors have at least an equal impact on their health as do the healthcare services they acquire each year (this is a little recognized fact today). Increasing crop yields at the farm level is contingent on farmers having access to and employing the latest technologies, fertilizers, and best practices.

Environmental, social, and economic interests need to be balanced and thought about as a system; one cannot rightly change one part of the system without affecting change in the other parts of the system. For example, the more food that hits the market at the same time, the more pressure is placed on local food prices. The more food that we produce, the more water we need to consume for agricultural purposes. The more water we consume in farming, the more stress our water system will be under.

To counter these alarming and intertwining numbers, our private, public, and civil sector leaders plan a series of steps, all small in scope and secular in execution. Consider this set of illustrative, real life goals set by major private and public sector organizations:

- Our company will decrease water consumption within [our] manufacturing plants by seven percent.
- We will lower waste by twenty percent by 2018.
- [Company's name] will reduce our carbon emissions by ten percent, relative to aggregate emissions in 2007.

Our leaders are bringing a butter knife to a machine gun fight. And citizens, managers, leaders, and we readers continue to accept this lack of vision and intestinal fortitude to face down the historic challenges staring at us from the abyss.

Shame on us. Our acceptance of incrementalism must die. NOW.

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Time to Change This

Assuming you want to change this, you and I need to answer two questions:

1. How do we get our private, public, and civil sector leaders to act to eradicate our challenges, not merely play pat-a-cake?
2. What are the BOLD responses that are required NOW from these three sectors?

We need BOLD goals, proposed by and committed to by leaders with a figurative set of balls. It seems to me that, the more relatable to their own situations we can make the challenges for leaders, the more likely they are to respond BOLDLY.

So answering question number one comes in the form of getting a mass group of leaders to adopt this thought:

What if each challenge was a living, breathing embracement of developing a better future for your family? What would you respond to—the status quo of a dying ecosystem or the embracement of change that would seek to ERADICATE each threat from the face of the planet?

There is precedent for our leaders of commerce to take this view. Henry Ford. Thomas Edison. Akio Morita. Steve Jobs. In their own way, each visionary lived by the unwavering belief that incrementalism must be eradicated. Henry Ford proved the process of, and viability of, mass production of desired luxuries. Thomas Edison's creation of the residential light bulb provided the light and inspiration for Ford's mass production factories and workers to see. The concept of small, cool, and powerful was set first by Akio Morita through Sony's push to disrupt the personal entertainment market with the Walkman. And what would our lives be like without iPhones and related smart devices?

Certain companies are also committed to ending incrementalism, even if it disrupts their own business. Consider Novo Nordisk. The pharmaceutical company is dedicated to the purpose of “defeat[ing] diabetes.” Doing so would adversely disrupt its own pharmaceutical business in diabetes treatment. In its own way, Novo Nordisk is working from within the industry to change the modus operandi from pharmaceuticals for treatment to pharmaceuticals for prevention of disease.

Public sector leadership has also exhibited the ability to dream BIG and enact BOLD solutions. At the height of the Cold War, the domestic ramifications stemming from the possible loss of American technology leadership when the Soviet Union launched the first human into orbit alarmed U.S. President John F. Kennedy. So he set a goal to leapfrog Russia’s breakthrough accomplishment by placing a man on the moon by the end of the decade (achieved by the endosymbiosis of the single cell in the primordial soup). His goal was revolutionary for two reasons. First, it set in motion a process that employed millions of Americans, ignited the imagination of even more people, and led to the confluence of events that fueled Silicon Valley to its place in the fabric of our recent commercial and technological history.

So there are precedents of leaders leading with grand vision. And we are capable of answering question one: how do we inspire more leaders across the private, public, and civil sectors? Platforms such as ChangeThis, TED, and other premier social media outlets are effective ways to get conversations going.

But then the question becomes, “How do we turn these conversations into action?” This is one place where we all need to come together to enact change. I don’t have the entire answer, though I do believe the key—collaboration by entities across the private, public, and civil sectors—resides within my vision for the collaboration economy, an economic model where growth occurs as the outcome of BOLD actions that address our most vexing challenges.

What are these BOLD actions?

COMPANIES | Let’s challenge companies to **publicly commit to being net water positive in every community in which they operate** by a pre-determined date. In other words, the presence of a company in a local community would ensure that the community has access to more clean and useable water than if the company was not in the community. This BOLD action will greatly help the effort to de-stress water worldwide. No longer should we accept corporate goals of merely reducing water consumption by a percentage rate.

Let’s challenge companies to **publicly commit to sending zero waste to landfill, period**. Not only will this commitment and subsequent activity greatly reduce waste in all forms, it will also inspire the employees on the manufacturing floor to share their best thoughts and best practices to reduce costs, accidents, and absenteeism on the shop floor.

CITIZENS (YOU AND ME) | Let's challenge citizens to **publicly commit to sending zero waste to landfill in our daily lives.** In the U.S. alone, sending re-useable materials to landfill robs our country's GDP of \$20 billion every year. The depressed amount of re-useable materials available as a result of our actions provides companies with a ready excuse to source virgin materials, causing significant environmental damage.

Let's **challenge citizens to publicly commit to being net energy positive in their daily lives.** Homes with smart renewable energy technology that produces an equal or greater amount of energy than the occupants consume, cars with solar panels/electric fuel sources to power the car and recharge electric devices and behaviors that only consume energy when required would be among the set of actions citizens would take to make good on this commitment. Funding for the residential and automotive technology, economies of scale to make the technology more affordable, and housing/public utility regulations should be enacted by the public sector to **require net energy positive actions** if we choose not to do so on our own.

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ELECTED GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS | Let's challenge our democratically elected officials to **act in the best interests of their constituents**. This doesn't deserve a place among BOLD goals, as this is the current expectation, but the sad truth is our officials don't behave as if they believe in this goal. Perhaps **it is time to legally bind elected officials** to not only act in the best interests of their constituents but also explain how every one of their decisions was in fact (intended to be) additive to their constituents. It's time for public sector transparency, not just to see within the actions of agencies, but also the hearts and minds of the elected officials installed to act as our agents.

Let's challenge our public sector to **modernize certain regulations to allow for deeper collaborations among organizations** that are designed to affect great and BOLD change. Consider the U.S. anti-trust regulation. As constructed, the regulation is intended to protect consumers from monopolistic pricing. But in the process, it makes joint procurement efforts, aimed at reducing water or energy or resource consumption by suppliers in common, too complicated to be worth the effort. In essence, anti-trust regulations now pit the interests of consumers against the interests of citizens. And the frustrating truth is that the consumer and the citizen is the same person.

COLLABORATION ACROSS INDUSTRY AND PRIVATE, PUBLIC, AND CIVIL SECTORS | Being BOLD comes with massive financial costs. Collaborative **financing in the trillions of dollars is needed to provide an opportunity to all invest in our future**. For example, infrastructure

(e.g., roads, bridges, ports, airports, railways, energy grids, access to the internet, etc.) will require far more funding than our governments are willing to or capable of investing. The private and civil sectors will need to pitch in too. But altruism can be the enemy of progress. The promise of a return on investment will be needed to get each sector to participate at massive levels. The financial markets have a leadership role to play here in organizing and distributing such financing from which we can benefit as long as we have a true system of impartial, independent and transparent ratings with companies not hiding behind 1st Amendment Rights.

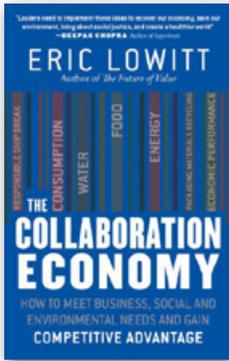
Our global infrastructure, as Musk's Hyperloop concept suggests, **desperately needs a generational leapfrog** in efficiency and effectiveness over today's pitiful state. An energy system that generates more one hundred percent renewable energy to meet the needs of 9.5 billion people by 2050 is possible. An energy grid that smartly distributes such renewable energy is also possible. Both would greatly reduce our anthropogenic contribution to climate change (through the elimination of the reliance on hydrocarbon fuel sources) and significantly lessen the demands placed on our land (land access is needed to extract materials for power generation). Step-change technology coupled with ample investment dollars holds the key to achieving this BOLD goal. We can make this happen. But we need to embrace a positive systematic change for it to happen. All three sectors must provide each in abundance.

As humans, we have the right to be healthy. But health doesn't come free; we need to make healthier foods less expensive than unhealthy foods. Price greatly reduces access to health supporting calories. So **let's set the goal of making healthy choices easily accessible to all.** This goal needs to be shared by everyone throughout the food chain: from farmers (e.g., pesticide and GMO usage), to food producers (e.g., additives and packaging), to retailers (e.g., foods they choose to sell), to consumers (e.g., higher volume of demonstrated purchase of healthy food choices, higher supply of healthy food options, lower food prices, growing our own food in gardens, on roofs, in window boxes, on allotments, etc.), and to the public sector (e.g., proper and objective evaluation of and conclusions about links between additives and lifestyle).

The above is but an illustrative example of the BOLD goals that our current and future generations need us to achieve. There's no doubt many, if not all, of these and other BOLD goals will meet significant resistance. But we must remember this: while we debate, and parties with threatened interests seek ways to morph BOLD into incremental, the pace of the erosive effects of our current actions is far faster than the pace of the beneficial adjustments currently underway.

We must CHANGE THIS! 📢

Info



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR | Eric Lowitt is a premiere strategy and sustainability advisor to CEOs and corporations worldwide. He is the author of *The Collaboration Economy* and *The Future of Value* and writes regular columns for *The Guardian* and HBR.org. Lowitt is the founder of Nexus Global Advisors, a leading strategy, collaboration, and sustainability advisory firm.

For more information visit [EricLowitt.com](#).

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