

HOW TO
CREATE A
HAPPY
PLANET

Overview

We hear a lot at our conferences about how to create happy people. Experts in meditation, positive psychology and neuroscience come from far and wide to teach us about mindfulness, love and brain plasticity. Using the tools and techniques they describe, we discover it is possible to change ourselves for the better.

Obviously this is great news, not just for us but for the rest of the planet too. Because when we're wiser, more content, more aware, have purpose and feel connected, we're less likely to indulge in selfish and harmful behaviours that impact negatively on our environment. Rainforest destruction, pollution of our waterways, depletion of our natural resources: none would exist without human hatred, greed and ignorance.

On the other hand, when we prioritise personal growth and greater self-awareness, we just naturally start looking for ways to tread more lightly on the earth, leaving the smallest ecological footprint possible. Given the astronomical number of problems, there's no shortage of things we can do.

That's why we thought it was about time we brought you an eBook on this very subject. Again, drawing on all the wonderful material in our *Think & Be Happy* blog, we have sourced eight articles that discuss how you can make a difference, both in helping to mitigate environmental damage that's already been done as well as preventing any more from occurring. We hope you feel inspired.





Stay local

Helena Norberg-Hodge is an author and filmmaker who argues very compellingly why society must make the shift away from globalising to localising economic activity.

Considered the founder of localisation, Norberg-Hodge has been an activist for the last 35 years, ever since spending time in Ladakh and Bhutan. In both places, she witnessed firsthand the devastation that ensued to the local environment, people's livelihoods and their relationships with each other when – having been cut off for centuries – these two remote Himalayan countries opened up to the outside world.

According to Norberg-Hodge, governments are pursuing an economic model that doesn't work, and the globalising of economic activity just leads to what she calls the "drone economy" where long distances create "a blindness, a heartlessness and an impossibility in terms of ethics. How can we be ethical ... when we don't see our impact?"

The good news is that many folk around the world share her sentiments and are joining what's become a movement towards localisation. The local food movement is one inspiring example where many communities have transformed their towns into foodie heavens. Click [here](#) to read about one such town in northern England.

Having struggled under the constant pressure to harvest more standardised products from larger and larger monocultures, many farmers are now seizing the opportunity to return to more traditional methods of growing food, to diversify, reduce chemical usage, make more money (in the supermarket economy farmers pocket a measly 10 percent) and actually have regular personal contact with their consumers.

Norberg-Hodge is adamant that as we shorten the distances involved in the production of our basic primary needs for food, clothing and shelter, we increase prosperity while reducing our ecological footprint. And because the effect of this is to rebuild the fabric of community between people and their local environment, we're all a lot happier.

Read the full blog post [HERE](#).



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Create a positive vision

Feeling extremely pessimistic about our future prospects, many environmentalists are resorting to end-of-the-world scare tactics as a last ditch effort to persuade an apathetic population to take action.

[Nic Marks](#), founder of the Centre for Wellbeing, at the UK's New Economics Foundation (nef) and a presenter at *Happiness & Its Causes 2013*, isn't so sure this is the right approach, preferring social change activists to focus less on doom and gloom and more on redefining progress and ways we can improve our human lot. He says, "I think we have to work very hard to try and have a positive vision of the future. We all know these situations are going on. Most of us would rather be part of a solution than a problem."

Marks believes "change happens a lot by conversation", and that one conversation our politicians and business leaders urgently need to have concerns our current economic system, which prioritises infinite growth in a finite world. Marks says government's other problem is it "thinks of human resources as an input into the economy and measures output in terms of economic growth. Yet the output should be about people's quality of life and whether or not growth produces that."

Here quality of life means improving social justice, promoting sustainability and prioritising people's wellbeing. Certainly it's well established that people consistently rank happiness for themselves, their loved ones and community much higher than they do earning bucket loads of money.

Which is why Marks developed the Happy Planet Index – the subject of this earlier [blog post](#) – which measures "how much wellbeing we get from our planetary resource use" bearing in mind the planet is "the ultimate scarce resource."

Marks is confident change will happen, and that when it does transformation will be swift. "Just like no one saw the Berlin Wall coming down quite so quickly. Change happens quickly when it's ready to happen and things adjust. I believe that sometime in the future a very rapid change will happen."

Read the full blog post [HERE](#).



Feel the fear

Paul Gilding, an independent writer, activist and adviser on a sustainable economy predicts the end of civilisation as we know it due to our having used up all of earth's resources. But – and here his main message is one of hope – whether this proves catastrophic or paradigm shifting in the most positive sense, is ultimately up to us.

Gilding says, “the earth is full”, that “we’re living beyond our means” and that “we need about 1.5 earths to sustain this economy.” In other words, “our economy is unsustainable.” Why? “Because it is based on a crazy idea – the crazy idea being that we can have infinite growth on a finite planet.

“[That] nine billion people can live in 2050 a life of abundance and digital downloads is a delusion ... is just wrong, and it's dangerously wrong because it means we're not getting ready for what's really going to happen,” he says.

Gilding doubts very much we'll get our act together in time to prevent our system from collapsing. Not because we can't but because we haven't even tried, despite decades of warning signs. He attributes our collective failure to appreciate the seriousness of our predicament to how “we tend to look at the world, not as the integrated system it is, but as a series of ... individual problems to be solved. In fact, it's the system in the painful process of breaking down – our system of debt-fuelled economic growth, of ineffective democracy, of overloading planet earth, is eating itself alive.”

Having painted a fairly dismal picture of how living conditions for many of us will markedly deteriorate in the next few decades, Gilding then asks us to consider the great possibilities inherent in this future scenario. Granted, the new world he describes is scary. But then he says, “We should feel a bit of fear. We are in danger, all of us.”

But the upside is that “we've evolved to respond to danger with fear to motivate a powerful response, to help us bravely face a threat.” In other words, it's good to be scared “because if we wait until the crisis takes hold, we may panic and hide. If we feel it now and think it through, we will realise we have nothing to fear but fear itself.”

Gilding is confident that we humans have what it takes to survive and even thrive despite the immense challenges that are coming, if only because we have shown ourselves to be extremely resourceful in previous times of crisis. “When we feel fear and we fear loss, we are capable of quite extraordinary things.

“Sure, if we get it wrong, we could face the end of this civilisation. But if we get it right, it could be the beginning of civilisation instead.”

Read the full blog post [HERE](#).



Change what and how you eat

Michael Pollan is a journalist and the author of several books including *The Omnivores Dilemma* and *Food Rules*. In many of his writings, his main thesis is that we need to eat less, and our diet should be plant-based.

Pollan doesn't just advocate eating less meat – for our own good as well as the planet's – he's a strong advocate for home cooking, arguing that preparing a meal is not as big a challenge as many of us think. In fact, it probably takes us more time to buy fast and/or processed food: to shop for it, wait for it, then microwave it at home, than it does to whip up something from scratch.

Then there's the fact that many of us consume concoctions prepared by others without ever bothering to find out where what we're putting in our mouths actually comes from.

The good news is, to counter this very dismal culinary trend, a new political force is emerging, arguing in support of simpler, healthier food; less processing, more sustainable agriculture and more locally grown produce.

Slow Food, part of a much larger movement promoting a more considered way of living, is just one example of this. You can read about it in a these two blog posts: [Go slow](#) and [Slow down, you move too fast](#). One of its major proponents, [Carl Honoré](#) presented recently at our [Happiness & Its Causes 2013](#) and [Young Minds 2013](#) conferences. Footage will be available for sharing shortly.

Meanwhile, begin to change your own approach to dining by following Pollan's rules for wise eating. These include:

- Don't eat anything your great grandmother wouldn't recognize as food. "When you pick up that box of portable yogurt tubes, or eat something with 15 ingredients you can't pronounce, ask yourself, "What are those things doing there?" Pollan says.
- Don't eat anything with more than five ingredients, or ingredients you can't pronounce.
- Stay out of the middle of the supermarket; shop on the perimeter of the store. Real food tends to be on the outer edge of the store near the loading docks, where it can be replaced with fresh food when it goes bad.

Read the full blog post [HERE](#).



Stop global warming

Our recent event, [Young Minds 2013](#), was all about maximising the potential of today's young people. Indeed, how we raise, educate, influence and inspire today's youth will shape humanity's immediate future. A sobering thought given the myriad problems in store for tomorrow's generations, most notably around violent disruption of a climate that's remained stable and relatively benign for the last 10,000 years, the time taken for civilisation as we know it to rise.

That today's children and teens face certain upheaval due to extreme and unpredictable weather is the reason NASA scientist James Hansen continually speaks out about climate change. In one of his many clarion calls to action, Hansen explains that in the first part of his career at NASA, after observing the effects of carbon dioxide on Venus, he then became far more interested in studying the effects of global warming on earth "because a planet changing before our eyes is more interesting and important."

Ever since, Hansen has been analysing earth climate observations, publishing papers, testifying in congress, and getting arrested for going public about the challenges the global community faces – more drought, the erosion of ice sheets, rising sea levels, mass species extermination – if governments don't implement appropriate energy policies, including pricing carbon emissions to ensure fossil fuels pay their true societal cost.

Tragically, despite the efforts of Hansen and others like him, the response of world leaders has been woefully inadequate. Hence a crisis that could be averted looms ever larger, threatening the very existence of each and every one of us, especially our progeny. Hansen says he doesn't want his grandchildren in the future to say "Granddad understood what was happening but he didn't make it clear". So for decades, he's been doing everything within his power to help stave off catastrophe.

Read the full blog post [HERE](#).





Buy less stuff

We hear it again and again, that the best things in life aren't things. Yet we keep buying stuff. So much stuff that to contain it all Australian homes – at typically 215 square metres – are now the biggest in the world, even bigger than the average sized pad in the US. Not only that, some of us own such an excess of worldly possessions that our McMansions are no longer large enough to store them all and we need extra space from the personal storage industry.

So says writer, designer and Treehugger founder Graham Hill. According to Hill, our obsession with ownership leads to burdensome debt and an unsustainable ecological footprint. It also does little to enhance wellbeing since once our basic needs are met, more stuff and more money, for which there's a price to pay in stress, time, and work, don't actually make us any happier or more satisfied.

Hill goes on to say that there's a better way, indeed that most of us at some stage have experienced the joy of having a lot less, for example, when we've been on holiday and camped or lived on boat. Also, many of us were more carefree and frugal when we are younger, usually because we were broke.

Hill's point is that when we live this way, without the pressure to earn and consume, the planet benefits and we get our lives back. Hence his mission: to advocate less stuff and smaller spaces via his LifeEdited project, an open challenge to designers several years ago to design for an ultra low footprint space. Hill has since applied the winning concept to renovating his own 39 square metre New York apartment to stunning effect.

Hill confesses he “wanted it all” – a home office, dinner seating for 12, room for two guests to stay over, lounge space for eight and somewhere to put his kite surfing gear.

It was a BIG ask but as Hill proves here compellingly, it is possible to “live little” yet still have it!

Read the full blog post [HERE](#).

Download our *8 steps to de-clutter your life* eBook [HERE](#).



Choose role models like Jane Goodall

[Dr Jane Goodall](#) DBE, an internationally acclaimed primatologist, environmentalist, UN Messenger of Peace, and presenter at *Happiness & Its Causes 2011*, has learnt a lot from her own life and work about happiness, not just the contentment experienced by homo sapiens but by other species as well.

Having worked for so long and so closely with chimpanzees, “a wonderful species in which to learn a little bit more about these things because biologically they’re so like us,” Goodall doesn’t doubt for a moment their capacity for joy as well as “sadness, fear, anger, despair, rage, guilt and so forth ... I think anybody who’s spent a meaningful time with animals understands that we’re not alone in having emotions,” she says.

Goodall is equally convinced that chimps and most probably all other animals too, just like us, don’t merely feel but also desire happiness. Yet as she points out, chimps along with many other species on the planet are now suffering due to the selfish actions of humans. Indeed, loss of chimp habitat through logging means their numbers have plummeted from nearly two million 100 years ago to 30,000 today.

“I think one of the big tragedies is that so many people feel that with money, they can buy happiness but it doesn’t work that way,” says Goodall. On the contrary, our materialism is “destroying our only home. This is about the destruction of rainforests, the spreading of the desert, the shrinking of freshwater supplies, the terrible pollution, climate change, the loss of species, loss of biodiversity, along with all the human suffering [and] the social problems that go with that.”

Amazingly despite all this, Goodall remains hopeful about the future, not least because she has, like many individuals, discovered that the secret to happiness is to give. “It’s giving that seems to make people feel really good, feel happy.” Which is why she established her global environmental and humanitarian youth network Roots & Shoots.

Today, the organisation has grown to where it has groups in 127 countries, each one concentrating on three different projects to help “make the world better for people, for the other animals ... and for the environment that we all share.”

Read the full blog post [HERE](#).

We were delighted to have [Natalie Houghton](#), CEO of the Jane Goodall Institute Australia join us at *Young Minds 2013* where she presented a conference session as well as a workshop on humane education. Footage available shortly.



Do the best you can

Who doesn't on occasion feel completely overwhelmed by the world's colossal problems? Climate change, the GFC, political instability, religious extremism ... the list is endless. As is, thankfully, the number of people out there doing what they can to make the world a better place.

One such individual was Kenyan environmentalist and political activist Wangari Maathai (1940-2011), winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 2004. In an excerpt from *DIRT! The Movie* about the wonders of soil – and how human beings in their selfish short-sightedness are degrading it – she tells a story about a hummingbird to both explain why she dedicated her own life to social change (which included founding the Green Belt Movement focused on planting trees, environmental conservation and women's rights), and to spurring us on to doing good and helping others.

Here's her story:

The story of the humming bird is about this huge forest being consumed by a fire. All the animals in the forest come out and they are transfixed as they watch the forest burning, and they feel very overwhelmed, very powerless, except this little hummingbird. It says, 'I'm going to do something about the fire', so it flies to the nearest stream, takes a drop of water and puts it on the fire ... and goes up and down, up and down, up and down, as fast as it can.

In the meantime, all the other animals, much bigger animals like the elephant with a big trunk which could bring much more water, they are standing there helpless and they are saying to the hummingbird, 'what do you think you can do, you're too little. This fire is too big. Your wings are too little and your beak is so small. You can only bring one small drop of water at a time.' But instead of feeling discouraged, the hummingbird replies, 'I'm doing the best I can.'

Read the full blog post [HERE](#).

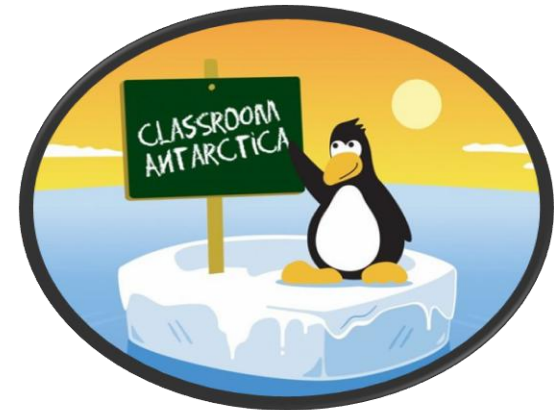
Resources

VIDEO PRESENTATIONS

- Prof Marc Cohen: Wellness, mindfulness and sustainability [LINK](#)
- Dr Rosemary Stanton, Maggie Beer, David Gillespie, Dr Felice Jacka and Madonna King: Panel: We are what we eat [LINK](#)
- David Gillespie: Eating your way to health and happiness [LINK](#)
- Jane Hanckel: Eco-parenting and growing greener children [LINK](#)

ORGANISATIONS/WEBSITES

- Happy Planet Index [LINK](#)
- Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities [LINK](#)
- SMH Environment News [LINK](#)
- ABC Environment [LINK](#)
- CSIRO [LINK](#)
- Environment Australia [LINK](#)
- Tackling the Challenge of Climate Change [LINK](#)
- Climate Change in Australia [LINK](#)
- Jane Goodall Institute Australia [LINK](#)
- Life Edited [LINK](#)
- National Geographic [LINK](#)
- Ecological Footprint Calculator [LINK](#)
- WWF Australia [LINK](#)
- Earth Day [LINK](#)
- Australian Conservation Foundation [LINK](#)
- Greenpeace [LINK](#)
- Australian Centre on Quality of Life - Australian Unity Wellbeing Index [LINK](#)



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