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Stickiness: Building up cumulative impact

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Those of us who have lived in snow country will recall rolling balls of snow to make snowmen. The wet snow sticks, and the ball becomes larger.



Such snowmen can last for weeks after the weather gets warmer, whereas a single snowball will melt right away.



This illustrates what I call *stickiness*. Stickiness is about building up cumulative impact. It is analogous to adding energy to a flywheel. Many small inputs can add up to massive momentum.

Most events put on by the environmental/progressive movement have little stickiness. For example, I imagine that you have been to brilliant talks about environmental and social issues. I observe

that most people who come to such talks are already *au fait* with the topic. The presenters are 'preaching to the converted'. The audience may be temporarily inspired or edified, but in terms of catalysing transformative cultural change there is little cumulative effect.

Giving a talk to thirty or a thousand people in a city of say four million people has relatively little effect, unless there is some way to align it with a larger initiative to shift public consciousness. The talks produce just a ripple, when we need to build a tidal wave.

There is a great wave of positive change already going on. Some call it the Great Transition. The tidal wave we need to build is inspired, intelligent, passionate mainstream commitment to accelerating the Great Transition to a life-sustaining society. People who intentionally work at this are Great Transition Champions. I regard myself as a Great Transition Champion and encourage you to become one as well.

Marketers sometimes comment that people need to hear a new idea seven times before it begins to register with them. And business leaders are advised to constantly reiterate the company's purpose to their staff. At the point where the leader is tired of saying it, the staff are beginning to hear it. Constant repetition from many different voices builds stickiness.

The elite certainly have stickiness in [their media campaigns](#). When they are running a communication blitz, many different voices all use the same language to make the same points. Thus the public hears the message from many different sources, and this affects public attitudes.

Perhaps the stickiest of all power structure messages is the mantra *economic growth, economic growth*. It is so sticky that almost everybody takes it for granted, and many people are surprised or frightened when growth is questioned. The importance of growth is reinforced by daily reports on the stock market on air and in newspapers, and through regular political calls for jobs and growth.

Compared with how effective the power elites are at creating stickiness to affect public attitudes, we are such amateurs! We have such a diversity of organizations, each with its own brand and message. Our diversity is a great strength, but we need a way to align to shift mainstream consciousness in a way that benefits us all.

Making communication sticky

What might stickiness look like in terms of catalysing a cultural shift to a life-sustaining society? I think:

- Top level: we would embrace a common meme.

The meme I propose, which many people in the environmental/progressive movement are already using independently, is variations on the theme '*We are transitioning to a life-sustaining society, rather than continuing on our present course of ecological self-destruction*' and '*We are in a Great Transition (or Great Turning) to a life-sustaining society*'.

Transitioning to a life-sustaining society is an umbrella term that can encompass a multitude of the diverse specific projects that people in the environmental/progressive movement are working on. It provides a counter to the mainstream mantra of *economic growth, economic growth*, and indeed articulates a goal that our entire global civilization should be working towards.

- We would see not just a few organisations, but hundreds of thousands of organisations and their members championing *the Great Transition* (the Great Turning) *to a life-sustaining society*. People would see it everywhere.
- At the end of presentations, panel discussions, and workshops presenters would assert that *we are in a Great Transition to a life-sustaining society, and we need to greatly accelerate it*. They would encourage members of the audience to communicate with people they know and their wider networks about the Great Transition. Members of the audience would be referred to the GreatTransitionInitiative.net website for ready-to-use communication tools.

Perhaps only a few people would respond actively to such calls at first. But everybody in the audience would be introduced to the idea that we are in a Great Transition to a life-sustaining society. And they would hear the call to lift their game and become active communicators, even if at first they do not pick up on it. In time many more will respond.

- Writers who post blogs and articles analysing environmental and social issues would conclude by encouraging their readers to communicate with their networks about transitioning to a life-sustaining society.

Summary

An event has *stickiness* to the extent that it contributes to building momentum for large-scale transformative social change. In other words, an event has stickiness to the extent that:

- Listeners hear the common message '*transitioning to a life-sustaining society*'
- And to the extent that some members of the audience are moved to act as Great Transition Champions in their own right.

The great challenge of our time is to transition to a life-sustaining society, rather than continuing on our present course of ecological self-destruction.

Aligned we can become far more influential than we ever imagined. So I urge you to personally embrace the goal of transitioning to a life-sustaining society, and to communicate about the Great Transition at every opportunity.

Learn more at www.GreatTransitionInitiative.net

The MAHB Blog is a venture of the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere. Questions should be directed to joan@mahbonline.org

MAHB Blog: <http://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/stickiness/>