

# Becoming a Transition Leader

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Some of us are acting as Transition Leaders ourselves, and we hope that you will join us.

Transition Leaders devote part of their efforts (not necessarily full time) to catalysing the changes needed for Australia to become viable. By viable we mean ecologically sustainable and socially healthy.

We think the needed changes are not small. In fact, we think they involve changing the direction of our whole society.

Our loyalty and commitment is to the *goal*: transitioning to a viable society. You can act as a Transition Leader entirely independently of us or any organisation. We encourage you to think through what is needed for Australia (or your own country) to become viable, and to initiate your own action through your own inner enthusiasm.

We do this because we care about the wellbeing of humanity, and we have not given up on life.

What will it take for Australia, or any nation, to evolve to be a viable society?

We can approach this by turning the question inside out: *What factors in the way our society is currently organised operate to make global warming and other environmental and social issues worse?*

It turns out that economics, industrial design, consumerism, personal psychology and international trade currently operate in ways that accelerate global warming and other environmental deterioration. The more industrial production, the more CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. We could change this with advanced industrial design, but we haven't. We can also change this if people become happy in themselves, and stop buying excess stuff they don't necessarily need or enjoy.

This whole system must change if we are to achieve the twin goals of ecological sustainability and social justice that are the basis of long-term viability. Just *moving towards* sustainability, without the expectation of getting there, is a recipe for large-scale societal collapse.

So our goal is a whole system change to viability.

We think achieving this goal will take a massive self-education movement throughout Australia. As concerned citizens we need to understand what changes are necessary and how we can carry them out. Since the needed changes are sweeping and reasonably complex, we need to think this through for ourselves. Then we (meaning everybody) need to actually make the changes.

We have no illusions that what we are undertaking will be easy. Attempting to evoke a change of this magnitude – to make our whole society viable – will challenge many of us both intellectually and emotionally. Guidance and support can help, and Transition Leaders offer this.

## A path of development to become a Transition Leader

### Caring and a sense of urgency

The path of self-development to become a Transition Leader starts with caring – and a sense of urgency. Many of us feel that we are in a global emergency, and that we have only a short time at best to turn things around.

Some of us may whinge or feel despair. These reactions, understandable in the face of the magnitude of what we are dealing with, are actually signs of our deeper caring. If we didn't care we wouldn't react.

### Commitment

Whingeing and even protest are ultimately dead ends (although protest is sometimes useful). It is time, not to fight the system, but to *change* it. The way out of the cul-de-sac of despair is to be clear that we care, and to commit ourselves to doing what we can, within our sphere of influence, to make things come right. When we decide to take a proactive approach toward making things come right, despair has little purchase on our souls

I have two commitment statements. A lovely one, consistent with the Pachamama Alliance, is:

*I commit myself to contribute to the evolution of a society that is ecologically sustainable, spiritually fulfilling, and socially just.*

The other is technical but extremely useful. It opens up practical vistas about what to do.

*I am committed to catalysing a whole system change to a society that is ecologically sustainable and operates on partnership values.*

### Self-education

Many people who may become Transition Leaders have already done valuable work across a broad range of areas such as permaculture or giving support to refugees.

As Transition Leaders, we look beyond local activities. Our aim is to change the systemic operation of our entire society in ways that will make the society overall healthy and viable. While this concept may seem intellectually daunting (or even impossible) at first, with a bit of thinking we can make it intellectually manageable, and we can see practical things to do.

An important step for many of us is to engage in self-directed learning to develop our own map of how our society currently operates in ways that make things worse.

### **Start with the big picture**

It is good to start with a broad integrative overview. The point is not that there is bad news; that is obvious. The point is to begin to understand what is going on as a *system*.

*Mapping the big picture* develops a one-page diagram that enables us to identify broad scale leverage points.

[www.box.net/shared/static/umtgedvz0.pdf](http://www.box.net/shared/static/umtgedvz0.pdf)

There are many books that also contribute, including

- David Korten's *From Empire to Earth Community*,
- Paul Raskin's *Great Transition: The Promise and Lure of the Times Ahead*,
- Gus Speth's *The Bridge at the End of the World*
- *Orienteering to Creating a Viable Future*, downloadable from [www.box.net/shared/static/ck2k5zn7og.pdf](http://www.box.net/shared/static/ck2k5zn7og.pdf)) covers all the elements that are listed below.

### **Understand the core values of a healthy society**

A powerful insight into core values is given by futurist Riane Eisler's contrast between *domination/control* relating and *partnership/respect* relating. People using a dominator mode willingly seek aggrandisement of themselves and their associates at the expense of other individuals, communities and the environment as a whole. People who use partnership relating, while they may be leaders and have hierarchical authority, seek the wellbeing of others, the community, and ecological systems.

These two modes, partnership and dominator, operate fractally at every scale of human relationships from how we relate to our children, friends, and employees right on up to how we deal with international relationships. We currently live in a largely dominator society where powerful interests resist the changes we need to become ecologically viable. This same dominator quality results in the deep psychological distress that tends to fuel excess consumption. Arguably the style of our society must shift from dominator to goodwilled concern for community and ecological wellbeing if things are to come right. In practice this means that we must get better at embodying the partnership style in our personal relationships and in the way we run our organisations.

Riane Eisler's *The Power of Partnership* is excellent for understanding how the Partnership-Dominator contrast plays out at different levels from personal relationships to global governance.

Helena Norberg-Hodge's *Ancient Futures: Lessons from Ladakh* describes a traditional society that until recently embodied partnership values. There are others.

Ricardo Semler's *Maverick* describes one way that partnership values laid out in a successful and orange business.

### **Understand the core principles of sustainability**

If we are to achieve actual ecological sustainability, is important that people understand what sustainability really means. How do we know whether a business, the nation, or our global civilisation is sustainable or not? The phrase 'sustainable development', nor even Brundtland's good hearted 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' does not suggest a practical approach to working this out.

The Natural Step *Four System Conditions for Sustainability* ([www.naturalstep.org](http://www.naturalstep.org)) give clear criteria for working out whether a given enterprise is sustainable or not. The principles are not difficult to grasp. We should all know them, because they ground our thinking about sustainability in physical reality, and give us a means of asking the questions that will enable us to see through the absurdity of many supposedly ecological proposals.

All of this may sound like a lot, but partly it is just a matter of connecting-the-dots with what you already know.

### **What next?**

Your own map or mental model provides the context for your leadership within your sphere of influence. Now what?

Well, we think that if an entire culture is to shift in a healthy direction, people in general must understand, desire and contribute to the shift. While there are many relevant books that can contribute to our understanding, they are read by only a few people. Popular media carry nothing about changing the whole system, and government policy is adamantly sticking to business as usual.

*The Earth as a garden and work of art implies a massive shift in attitude by billions of people.*  
Matt Taylor

So we think that we need to catalyse a national self-education movement. This is a function of Transition Leaders. We are mobilising a massive citizen activist movement to enable people to think through for themselves what is involved to make a viable society, and take action. Among other things, Transition Leaders start conversations that get other people thinking.

### **First leadership steps**

Being a Transition Leader is all about self initiated action. There is no one thing that we need to do – there are many changes that are required if we are to become viable. And people's temperaments vary. Some of us might want to do one kind of thing, others another. Many different kinds of actions are appropriate and necessary, provided they contribute to the goal of transitioning to a viable society.

This is why we invite you to think through for yourself what is needed, and what you might do. Do something you are moved to do. But do it with the conscious intention of contributing to a whole system change to a viable society.

Once you feel *somewhat* prepared, even though there is more to learn, we urge you to take a first step as a Transition Leader. It doesn't matter what that first step is. By taking it you have shifted from being a passive bystander to being a creator of the future, and you will become more skilful as you go along.

We do have a suggestion.

We suggest that you make a time to talk in depth with one person about whether we are in an ecological emergency or not, and about the understanding that you have developed regarding what it will take for things to come right. Or you might talk with a group of friends.

This discussion will help you clarify your own thinking. And of course it will also stimulate your friends' thinking. At minimum, it will equip them to support constructive leadership when it appears – which always happens in challenging times.

When you have done this – congratulations! You are now acting as a Transition Leader through your own initiative!

## Emotional considerations

On the way to taking this first action step, all sorts of considerations may arise. Let's review some of them, and how to deal with them. Developing the ability to deal with our doubts and fears can help our personal lives enormously. Life is better when we are as cheerful and emotionally resilient as possible.

It is also valuable for us to have skills with which to help other people deal with their fears and considerations. Leadership can be easy in practice – you just do it with a cheerful disposition. But leadership is not necessarily emotionally easy at the beginning, because it takes us out of the norm.

We have identified several kinds of issue people encounter.

### **I don't know enough**

If you have developed your own map of what is needed, even if it is rudimentary, then you *do* know enough. You know enough to get started.

We don't have to be experts. While we may start by 'teaching' what we have learned, as we become more skilful we will tend to ask questions more. The point is to get other people started doing their own thinking. Our own thinking will be simulated by the questions and challenges that arise.

Many of us have an internal expectation that we need to be perfect to even start. You don't need to be perfect. So start where you are and learn as you go – the barefoot doctor approach.

## **People will think I am weird**

Surely some people will react negatively and judgementally.

But so what?

It is not the end of the world if some people judge us. We can 'feel the fear and do it anyway'. This 'push through' approach has merit.

However, there is a more sophisticated approach, which we recommend you learn and apply with yourself. It is called Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) – the tapping technique. Learning EFT will help you become more emotionally centred and resilient in many areas of your life. It will equip you to be very helpful with other people.

## **EFT**

Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) can be regarded as a major breakthrough in achieving emotional wellbeing. It deals with many of the same issues people go to counselling or therapy for, but in a way that is often far faster and more effective. And it is useful for all sorts of things that people would never consider going to counselling for, including working through our resistance to acting as Transition Leaders.

How can EFT be faster than skilled therapy in many instances? The answer is simple, though novel. Instead of trying to gain insight into emotional upsets, or trying to express their emotions, EFT resolves the energetic imbalance that underlies disturbed emotional reactions.

Westerners are not used to thinking in terms of 'energetic imbalances', but for millennia dealing with energetic imbalances has been the basis of Chinese medicine.

The EFT theory is simple. Normally our acupuncture energy is meant to flow smoothly. However, when the mind is in contact with a disturbing thought the energy gets out of balance.

The discovery at the heart of EFT is that by a simple procedure of tapping with our fingers on a few acupuncture points – while the mind is in contact with the disturbing stimulus – we can rebalance the energy. This procedure is easy to learn.

The sign that our acupuncture energy has rebalanced is that the intensity of our emotional reaction reduces to zero (or nearly so), and we feel calm and centred inside. Sometimes this shift occurs astonishingly rapidly. At other times it takes persistent digging to find and resolve the root issues.

You can download the EFT manual for free from [www.emofree.com](http://www.emofree.com). The instructions are clear, and EFT is entirely safe. You cannot overstimulate yourself by tapping with your fingers on acupuncture points. The worst that will happen is that

you get no particular result, which typically means you were inaccurate in homing in precisely on the issue.

Ideally EFT or some similar technique should be in every Transition Leader's and facilitator's toolkit. Indeed, it should be in every human beings emotional toolkit. If we are to develop a viable society 'all of us' must become more emotionally centred and resilient.

There are other energy psychology techniques that are also excellent, such as Tappas Technique and the original Thought Field Therapy.

Here is how you might apply EFT in our context. The 'set-up phrase' might go

*Even though I'm afraid people will think I am weird, I deeply and completely accept myself.*

This specifies the thought that you are having an adverse energetic reaction to, and gets the mind oriented in the right direction.

Then you tap on

*People will think I am weird.*

Stimulating the acupressure points while holding the thought in mind *People will think I am weird* resolves the energetic imbalance this thought triggers, leaving us centred and resilient. To people in will use affirmations, this may seem like a firming a negative. But it is not. We are in the conditioning our negative emotional reaction.

For many people, just tapping on the thought *people will think I am weird* (or whatever the relevant phrase is) will be immediately helpful.

But many of us have a strong internal critical voice that act as a barrier to original independent action. You may have childhood memories of times when parents, teachers or other people told you in no uncertain terms to *conform*, to *not step out of line*, to *not be different*. This, of course, is an example of dominator relating. It becomes internalised. By doing EFT to resolve the emotional charge associated with these memories you can become more authentically yourself in every sphere of your life.

If it goes well, you will find that you remain cheerful and resilient inside at the prospect of your friend thinking that you are weird for wanting to talk about serious world issues. You may even find that your perspective shifted, and it now seems to you that perhaps your friend might *welcome* a conversation of the sort you are proposing.

The next consideration people might have about taking action as Transition Leaders is concern about proselytising.

## **People will think I'm proselytising**

This is a tricky one. Once we really get that we are in an environmental emergency, and that massive changes are necessary, an urge to tell everybody about it – to proselytise – is an understandable response.

Proselytising is not especially effective. It has a bad name. Think of door-to-door sales people and Christian missionaries. They may have something of great value to offer us, but most people shut the door. People do not want to be preached to or converted.

However, in a healthy democracy people – citizens – talk about the important issues of the day. This is essential for democracy to work. I sometimes wryly say

*A passive and ignorant citizenry will never achieve sustainability, not even by accident.*

So engaged conversation is crucial. In conversation, even if people disagree with us, they and we are inspired to think more deeply, check our facts, consider aspects of the situation that we have not thought about, and perhaps, in our current situation, rise to a new level of personal leadership.

So we suggest inviting people into give-and-take conversations. You may initiate many of the ideas, because you have done your homework and have an integrated framework for thinking about these things. So perhaps you will 'lead' conversation. That's ok. That is what is needed. The conversation can still be a process of respectful give-and-take.

This is not proselytising. It is becoming real.

## **It all seems so overwhelming**

It *is* overwhelming. Trillions of dollars are spent in pushing the system the wrong way. The media sing the wrong songs. The trend lines are accelerating in the wrong direction. The odds are that our global civilisation, including Australia, will unravel, and the process will be horrible to go through.

Each of us must come to terms with this in our own way. My personal way is that I have become a *committed optimist*. How I shifted from being a pessimistic idealist to committed optimist is recounted here: [www.box.net/shared/static/bm26u972de.pdf](http://www.box.net/shared/static/bm26u972de.pdf). I find taking the 'optimistic stance' helpful. I choose to work for the good as I see it no matter what the apparent odds are. This is the only way that success is conceivable. I recognize that I am not alone.

Because I feel a connection to future generations, I am committed to winning. I am committed to Australia actually becoming sustainable and healthy. But I don't *have* to win, and I am not despondent (and least, not for very long) if it appears we are not winning. All I have to do is to do my best.

A Buddhist nun commented: *If things are falling apart and the outer world is miserable, it doesn't make it any better for us to be miserable on the inside.* A Buddhist prayer avows: *May you know the joy of your own true nature.*

Practices to connect us to our deeper (loving) nature, and to clear away emotional debris, can help us keep our inner cheer and motivation as we actively work to catalyse a shift to a viable society.

**I am just a voice in the wilderness. Just talking to one or a few people won't make any difference.**

Just so. A few people talking to a few people will have little effect. The British Environmental Protection Agency slogan got it right: *I will if you will.*

We need an active movement, and it appears the basis for the movement already exists.

In *Blessed Unrest* Paul Hawken recounts how there are tens of thousands of NGOs springing up to deal with various aspects of our current dilemma. However, as Hawken observes, most of them tend to work on their own local endeavours. They do not collaborate to also bring about the whole system changes that are necessary. It is the hope of those of us involved in the Alliance for Sustainable Wellbeing and Leading for the Future (and those involved in parallel organisations such as Tellus Institute's *The Great Transition Initiative*) that we can mobilise masses of people to get involved in the necessary changes.

There are precedents. As *A Force More Powerful* recounts, the strikes in Poland that led to the rejection of communism were preceded by the Flying University, an underground organisation that gave lectures in people's homes. The civil rights movement in the United States was powered by activists who did rigorous training in non-violent theory and practice.

Here, however, we are not talking about protests and rebellion. Our goal is larger: an educational and organisational change movement that profoundly changes the way things are done in Australia. The purpose of Leading for the Future is to catalyse this movement. We have already begun.

**I dare not hope**

Perhaps this one should have come first. It has been noticed that people's minds often shy away when the idea of actually making a healthy society put forward. The prospect may arouse cynicism or despair. Some people working in the environmental area want the security of small-scale projects, and avoid even dreaming about the big picture.

There must be a reason for it. An obvious reason is that the prospect seems daunting, as we mentioned before.

But perhaps there is a deeper reason. A similar pattern of avoidance sometimes appears when people face the prospect of really being loved. Presumably, deep down,

everyone wants to be loved. But many of us concluded early on that we are not lovable. If we fully believe we are not lovable, we would probably die, just as infants in hospitals who are not given loving touch sometimes die. To fully believe that we are not lovable would be unbearable. So perhaps the reason people shy away from the prospect of really being loved is that they do not want to put their love ability to the test. If they opened up – and then were rejected – the experience would be emotionally devastating.

Similarly, perhaps many of us deep down long for a sane and beautiful world, and fear that we could not bear the pain of actually trying to create it, and failing.

The first step in handling this is to recognize our reluctance to commit. Doing EFT tapping may either resolve this, or reveal deeper layers of despair. Presumably EFT can help this as well. Actually committing to contribute to creating a viable world can be a step out of the despair. The paradox here is to be committed to winning – for us to actually succeed – and yet not attached to the results. One way to handle this is to take the stance of being a ‘committed optimist’ – willing to work for the good as we see it with no guarantee of success. Why? Because to not do so would be giving up on our connection to life.

## The broader scope of being a Transition Leader

We have covered the basics of becoming a Transition Leader: recognizing that we are in a global emergency, caring enough to want to contribute to the positive outcome, and developing our own systemic understanding of the needed changes.

And we have suggested that an important step is talking to friends about the need to change our whole society. Anyone can do this. And millions of us need to. We need to get a massive civil dialogue going – not in the form of debate, but through constructive creative thinking. The more the merrier!

However, there are other ways to manifest our commitment to evolving a viable society. We will list a few, you may think of others.

### **Invest in your own personal development**

Personal development is rarely discussed in the context of concerns about ecological sustainability. Most of the attention goes to technical solutions. But the plain truth is that in order for us to become a sustainable society, *we must become the kind of people who can create and enjoy a viable society*. This applies as much to those of us who are already environmental and social activists as to anybody else.

Three broad areas engage our attention here:

- Getting better at creativity and systems thinking, so that our thinking and action are not limited by traditional silos of thought.
- Training in any of a variety of techniques such as Conflict Resolution, Aikido, improvisation acting, Synectics, Feldenkrais, Crucial Conversations, Non-

Violent Communication (NVC) and others that enable us to become more personally skilful at partnership relating

- Engaging in disciplines such as insight meditation, Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) and psychotherapy to resolve our emotional issues.

### **Organisational change**

For roughly 5000 years, since the rise of the first city-states, we have lived in militaristic societies. The domination/control style of relating pervades families (male dominance), businesses (hierarchical command and control, often oppressively), religion (religious wars and the Inquisition) and of course government (which today often serves the business interests of large pharmaceutical and fossil fuel companies, as well as the armaments manufacturers). While we all have both dominator and partnership potentials, many of us have come to expect a dominator style through our experience in schools, education and business organisations.

Repression at any level – the pattern of being either a dominator or one who is dominated – supports repression at every level. Therefore it is important to change organisations to operate on respectful partnership values rather than on authoritarian values.

Ricardo Semler's *Maverick* describes the way one business leader changed his culture from autocratic command-and-control that stifled initiative to one that liberated enormous enthusiasm and initiative within his company by supporting worker autonomy.

Australian consultants in this area include

- Ken McLeod                      Leading for the Future
- Peter Rennie                    Leadership Australia ([www.leadershipaustralia.com.au](http://www.leadershipaustralia.com.au))
- John Corrigan                 Group 8 Education
- Allan Gatenby                 Sustainability Consultants  
([www.sustainabilityconsultants.com.au](http://www.sustainabilityconsultants.com.au))

### **Putting on events**

Events and training can contribute to our shift in consciousness. Any event, such as a permaculture design course, an eco-homes tour or a personal development course, can be linked to the whole system change we need. One briefly talks about the need for whole system change, and shows how the content of the event contributes to that change.

Be The Change presents the *Changing The Dream Symposium*, which awakens people to a feeling that the Earth is our home, and our home is in danger because of our way of living. They have a growing team of trained facilitators ([www.changingthedream.org.au](http://www.changingthedream.org.au))

Two Alliance for Sustainable Wellbeing workshops speak directly to whole system change.

*Orienting to Creating a Viable Future* covers much of the ground covered in this article. In it participants develop a map of how our system currently operates, and what the constructive points of change are that will make things come right.

*Personal development for social change* introduces methods of personal development that can enable people to be more creative, resilient and courageous in their ordinary lives and as Transition Leaders.

## Summary

We hope you will become a Transition Leader. Maturing as a Transition Leader overlaps with maturing as a caring, responsible and competent human being.

Becoming really skilful at anything takes time. However, like the barefoot doctors in China, who learn enough to be helpful at a basic level and begin practising right away, you can quite quickly develop a basic orientation to whole system change, and begin usefully talking to people about this right away. Grasping the fundamentals is not hard. You know much of it already, it is a matter of connecting-the-dots. Going through *Orienting to Creating a Viable Future* equips you to begin by talking with a friend or two. The questions that arise will stimulate you to further learning.

We wish you the best.

*We transition leaders spark the hidden hope that the world may become good. Defying the apparent odds, by talking to people we catalyse the understanding and action necessary for large-scale social change. Like fresh breezes in a rainforest, we reach out to engage senior leaders and ordinary people. We initiate discussions, host events, and change organisations to operate on positive values. We are rising to greatness.*

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