

The Future Is Calling Us to Greatness

with Michael Dowd + 56 Experts



The Power of Social Change 2.0

with David Gershon

Big ideas from this session:

- Organizing “The First Earth Run”, a torch relay for peace that united 20% of global human population
- Empowerment Institute’s School for Transformative Social Change
- Catalyzing large-scale habit change and helping cities become more sustainable

Michael: Hello. Welcome, David Gershon. I’m glad that you can participate in this series, The Future is Calling Us to Greatness.

David: My pleasure, Michael.

Michael: So great to be with you.

David: It’s great to be with you too again brother. For those of my listeners and viewers, I actually worked closely with David for five years. He’s been one of my main mentors in my life and David, if you could share a little bit about not just our work together, but basically what have you been engaged in since the mid-eighties and help our viewers and listeners who may not be familiar with your work yet, have a sense of what you bring to this conversation.

David: Okay. Big question. I think maybe that’s a good place to start. What are the questions that I’ve been holding in my life and how have they moved into form? The first thing that I would say is I hold the question of what’s possible as an organizing principle, not what’s wrong and how do we fix it, but what’s possible and how do we create it?

I see everything as an opportunity, truly, not just as a euphemism for dealing with bad things, but genuinely as an opportunity for great possibilities. In the eighties I saw this contraction going on between Russia and America and I saw an opportunity to see if we could do an intervention that could create what I’ve come to call a planetary unitive field.

Michael: Planetary what?

David: Unitive field.

Michael: Okay.

David: Bringing people together in a unitive state that shows how we are connected more than we're separated and to use that as a way of overcoming the divisiveness in the cold war that was going on between Russia and America and Russia and most of the rest of the world. We did it by passing a torch of peace around the world and it entered into a vacuum for this type of solution or for any solution.

It got pulled along. It shouldn't have happened, but it did and 25 million people participated, 45 heads of state, 62 countries, ABC TV and many TV stations around the world covered it. Twenty percent of the world followed this amazing unitive experience on our planet and we raised many millions of dollars for the neediest children and we focused the torch on what was working in the world.

We shed light on what was working in the world and my take away was that the impossible was possible. That has been an organizing principle in my life that has guided me to ask the next set of questions around the next set of challenges that the planet has been facing. In the late eighties, the question was how do we create an intervention to address the unraveling of the global ecosystem?

We found that the greatest cause of the deterioration of the global ecosystem was the unsustainable patterns of consumption and production in the industrialized world and that if you worked on the consumption side you drove the supply side and that became the global action plan initiative, which you joined me in and we learned how to actually get people to adopt sustainable lifestyles, bring that to scale within neighborhoods and blocks and among many cities all around the world in 22 countries.

That led to understanding behavior change, community engagement, large system transformation and has led me to my latest venture on addressing the issue of climate change, around using these tools within cities to lower the carbon footprint of households, which are 70% of the footprint of a city and cities are 70% of the footprint of the planet, and bring that to scale in a city, across the country and around the world.

Michael: That's great. In fact, let me just jump in here and share some of my own experience with David and with global action plan and the empowerment institute. First of all, David and his wife, Gail Straub, are two of the most amazing empowerment trainers in the whole world of personal and collective empowerment. They're organization, the Empowerment Institute, has trained people all over the world, worked with organizations all over the world.

The thing that David is talking about that he and I worked on together where I was the Portland Sustainable Lifestyle campaign manager and then – for three years there in New York – was really a program designed to help neighbors come together and support each other in using less water, driving less, composting, recycling, all the different aspects of living a more Earth-friendly, sustainable lifestyle, but also building trust and community with their neighbors.

Many of these people have never even met their neighbors before. We would train the neighbors to go and invite their neighbors to come in. We'd do a program. The genius of this program was that we've known, most of us personally for a long time, that behavior change, habits, don't change just because you intend to have your habits change or you would like your habits to change.

Typically, habit change requires at least two things: peer support and accountability. When you're meeting with your neighbors, in three to five, seven, households within a several block radius for four to six months going through and Eco Team workbook and every time you meet, whether it's every other week or whatever or once a week, what's happened is the previous time you say, "Okay, out of these 12 actions or 14 actions, my wife and I are going to take this, that, number 1, 4, 5, 6 and 9."

Then you've got to meet with your neighbors the following week or two weeks later, or a month later, however long you meet and what invariably happens is you realize a day or two before you meet, "Oh man, I've got to meet with my neighbors." It's that boot in the butt that most of us need to follow through on the things that we say we're committed to.

One of the things that I've found really inspiring, David, about your work with the Eco Team program and then the Livable Neighborhood program and others, the carbon work that you've done since, is that as we learned a couple decades ago that there was a sticking power. There were surveys that showed that years after people had gone through the Eco Team program, they still kept with the behavior changes because they had been committed in a direction.

When new opportunities arose for them to lessen their carbon footprint or live more sustainably, they often took those. David, if you want to say anymore about that, but certainly, how then did you go further with the cool city program and what you've done with climate change?

David: First of all, Michael, let me just say that the way we got so smart – it sounds so smart what you're describing – was the hard work that you, as one of our key innovators and just putting your shoe leather to the ground, helped us create. I remember many, many, many conversations on iterative learning on, "Oh, that didn't work. Let's try something else. What's the best script? How do we get people connected?"

Neighbors. Oh, wow neighbors. That's a great piece because now they have this other bond. They want to know their neighbors. We're smarter because of your help Michael, so I want to just acknowledge you on that.

Michael: Thank you.

David: Also, great to hear your – you haven't lost your touch. It's reminding me I need to keep you in mind for some of our future trainings. The question again was what Michael?

Michael: You took this model of citizen behavior change, of habit change and what it requires for that. You then took that and did specifically focused on lessening carbon impact. If you could say a little bit about how you took the methodology and the techniques and tools from what we learned in terms of the livable neighborhood program and the Eco Team program and then what you've done in the last decade or longer around specifically climate change and carbon footprint.

David: Sure. Well, what we found was when a neighbor says these three things to a neighbor, "I'm your neighbor from up the street. I'd like to invite you to a neighborhood gathering to hear about a program sponsored by the City of Portland or Rockland County [or wherever Michael happened to be at the moment, or anywhere else where this program was] to learn how to conserve resources [inaudible 9:13] for the sake of our neighbors, to get to know each other better as neighbors and create a healthier, safer, more livable neighborhood. Can you come? It's this Thursday, 7:30 to 9:00."

What we found was about 75% or so said yes. Half came. Seventy-five percent joined and we got a twenty-five percent uptake block by block across the country on average. We took that model, applied it to livability around health safety, resource sharing. It goes through a program called Livable Neighborhood.

We got a 63% uptake. We get even a higher uptake when we applied it to resiliency in New York City in the eighties in buildings. We got a 43% uptake when we applied it to carbon in Portland. We found that the ability to get to know one's neighbors through this opportunity did three things. Conserving resources for the sake of my children or our children really was meaning and purpose.

Being able to meet my neighbors was community and improving the livability of my block was about a sense of self-efficacy. We found intrinsic motivation that drove people to want to participate, not the extrinsic of money or saving the planet. All those were good, but it was these specific needs that were unmet within the psyche of most people in the country and around the world.

We have been drilling down and understanding how to do it better. The question has always been, “Do we have an issue capable of scaling?” What are the system conditions for bringing this kind of a methodology, which is intensive, to scale? What we found was that those issues, while able to get a certain percentage of people, were not really tackling a deep enough need, I believe, in people, in a community and in the world for us to scale it.

I still don’t know if that’s the case, but I believe it is with climate change and that’s certainly the hypothesis that we’re operating on because this is about the end of the species or certainly a diminished experience of the species on the planet. When you’re looking at a crisis of this sort of magnitude in your community, in your lifestyle, in your block, actually be a model and if that model can be scaled up across a city and across a country and across the world, not just in my drop in the bucket, but my drop is filling the bucket.

The big thing with the issue of carbon in a city, as I mentioned earlier is 70% of the footprint of a city is the residential sector. Seventy percent of the footprint of the planet are cities. If you can bring this to scale at the residential level, and bring it to scale within a city and then bring cities to scale across the country in the world, you actually have a game changer.

Not only that, as we learned earlier with Sustainable Lifestyle campaign and as my earlier quote about unsustainable consumption, this is the demand side and it drives the supply side. It builds demand for new technologies, for political legislation to be implemented or to be sustained if it is implemented and for new markets to be built.

It’s the supply side meets the demand side, a whole system solution and it also makes your block a better place to live, more resilient, so we’ve integrated, Michael, all four of those programs. They’re now all in one. They’re called the Cool Block.

Michael: The Cool Block.

David: The Cool Block program. Let’s see. What’s our subtitle? A program to learn how to create to live – I’ve got to get better at remembering the subtitle. A program to live more planet-friendly, disaster-resilient and community-rich.

Michael: I like it.

David: That is the nature of how we’re doing the intervention. We’ve got five cities in play, San Francisco, Palo Alto, San Rafael, Davis and Sonoma, who’ve signed letters of intent. We’re raising the funds right now to put it together. We have great partners Stanford – Lawrence Berkeley Lab is doing the research.

To be determined, but we think that we have something that will actually engage people so they’ll want to do it even if there wasn’t a climate issue because just the opportunity to

have the social connectivity – and this whole her thing that’s in play now – Michael, you may be familiar with collaborative consumption, the sharing economy.

We’re activating that. We’re tapping into the social zeitgeist, once again, at a deep level that transcends just the crisis, but the crisis, actually, I think, gives us the power to bring something like this to scale.

Michael: That’s fabulous, David. One of the things that I’ve appreciated about your work and your approach – and still do, obviously – is not only the focus on what’s possible here – that’s been one of my mantras actually for now, I can’t even remember how long, decades – whatever is real is just real. I can’t change that, but I can interpret it in ways that move me forward and move us forward, whatever groups I’m participating in.

That mantra of, “Okay, here’s what’s real. Now what’s possible?” is one that you’ve been, perhaps, my most significant older brother one the path with regards. I’m curious to hear – part of this is just personal interest because it’s been awhile. You and I used to catch up once a year or so and it’s been actually a few years since we done that.

I’d love to hear where is your growing edge? Where’s your and Gail’s growing edge in terms of your own work. You just shared, obviously, some of it in terms of these – what you’re partnering with these various cities in terms of the cool block program. Anything in addition to that that you’d be willing to share?

David: Let me say something about that issue and the climate issue and my growing edge around that. Then we can talk about my growing edges at large because they are often aligned because my life is so connected with my service that most of my growing edges show up in my service, which is how I actually grow because I take on challenges that are way over my growing edge.

It forces me to grow to get to be able to achieve or move forward these big visions. We have been having a conversation with Deepak Chopra around some of this work. He wants to help raise some funds for it. I’m very grateful for it. His whole interest now is life extension, so we’re thinking life extension micro and life extension macro.

This is my life extension project for the species. What I believe, Michael, is that the growing edge of the climate movement and what I’m holding, not unlike the work that you and I were doing around Y2K in the year 2000, is a belief in hope and possibility in the face of despair because the biggest threat we have, I believe, is climate fatalism.

As soon as one steps into climate fatalism then one close down action. One of my beliefs and the first [inaudible 17:13] taught me, which was a catalyst of hope, is that if you don’t have hope you don’t act or if you do act you don’t act with conviction and you don’t get any

traction. What will allow people to feel hopeful that we can actually address it and transform climate fatalism.

Part of that, Michael, in my judgment, I don't believe that the climate change issue is an issue of just pure climate. It's an issue of our social change knowledge and our strategies for change itself and our paucity of knowledge of how to go about social change. Climate fatalism is also a lack of understanding, how one could, in fact, get this issue scaled, how one could get climate action brought to scale.

If they just work with the current models of social change it's very difficult to see how we get from here to there, but if they start to understand what I call social change 2.0. We have a whole other framework that people can operate from.

Michael: Yeah. Wow, there are actually several things that – I just took notes – I wanted to go further on. One of them, obviously, is I want you to say a whole lot more about social change 2.0 as your book on that topic goes into great depth about, but also I just want to say, because I didn't say before and I want to make sure the viewers or listeners get a chance to hear me say something about it, is that – I was having a conversation with somebody eight or nine months ago.

We were talking about various resources, things that we've watched on YouTube or movies that we've watched that gave us a shot of hope, that gave us a shot of inspiration, of possibility. I reported that one of the videos that I have seen half a dozen times more, that every single time I've seen it is that deep shot of hope and inspiration – and it's mythic – is the video, the 15-minute or however long it is video, that was created about this torch relay that you and your wife organized in 1986.

It was so – there was something about both the scale at which how many people participated and countries and heads of state and the pope and a whole bunch of – and the media, but also the symbolic nature of passing a torch from person to person around the world with the vision of inspiring peace and a vision of inspiring, by lifting up, what's possible, what different communities around the world are doing that's working, giving people a sense that it's not just the bad news.

Again, coming back to that, okay, yes, there are real challenges, but here's what's possible and here's what's possible in all these different locales. I, to this day, would still consider one of the top two or three most inspiring videos I ever have seen in my life. How can – is it up online on YouTube?

David: Bless you, Michael. Thank you for those kind words.

Michael: Is it up online? Can people access it from your –?

David: Yes, they can. If they go to empowermentinstitute.net, there's a section called Societal Empowerment and it's under A Dream for Our World. It tells the story of the First Earth Run. It has the video. It has photographs and a lot of other things, including seven actions to change the world that grew out of that that many people use to translate that into what can be done in their lives and in their communities.

Michael: That's great. That's great. Now, the second thing I wanted to come back to is this whole notion of climate fatalism because I love it. I've never actually heard that languaging of it. One of the other conversation partners that I've had in this series is John Michael Greer who writes a lot on peak oil and a whole range of issues in terms of our relationship to the planet and that sort of thing.

He outlines in a way that I think is very compelling. He's just a brilliant writer. He outlines the two mythologies that he claims that probably 75%, 80% of Americans are stuck in. One is the myth of perpetual progress, that there's no need to be in action as an individual because things are going to just keep getting better and better.

The other also keeps people from being in action. It's the myth of the apocalypse. There's not need to be in action because the whole things going to hell in a hand basket soon anyway. Both of those are, in a way, climate fatalism, but in different ways. One you wouldn't call fatalism, climate optimism or whatever, that somehow technology will save our ass our we'll figure something out last moment, hail Mary pass or something.

Your work has been, as John Michael Greer also tries to keep people in that place of that our actions make a difference and our actions as individuals make a difference and collectively there are certain things that we have to take on systemically. There are certain systemic design flaws, is the way I have come to talk about it, where our society and economy and ways of doing governance actually make it really difficult to do the right, just ecological thing and really easy to do the unjust and unecological thing.

We've got a system where the cheaper, easier, more convenient thing to do is often the wrong thing to do. We need to shift that. That's why people working on the design side of things, I think, is so important. Please share anything and everything you want to about social change 2.0 as this is a different model from what many people have been thinking in terms of how to go about making change in the world that's going to serve all of us.

David: Yes. Thank you, Michael. One of my laments over the years, as a change agent, has been watching people try to bring about change, bump up against how difficult it is and throw in the towel and become a wounded warrior and cynical even because they say you can't change it. Then they look for the causes and they're often some good source like the broken

political system or corporations or what have you, but in fact, in my judgment it's the social change model that isn't able to deliver against the needs that we have right now.

I would say here's how I see the world, the state of the world. I see the world through social systems: the education system, the financial system, the political system. You name it, everything, the political system in Washington, these are social systems that have been constructed by us consciously or unconsciously.

Sometimes some consciousness, some unconsciousness, but it's what we've got. The state of problems that we face are much greater than those systems are designed to handle, so those systems now are in deep states of stress and oscillating or [perturbating 24:23], that is to say fluctuating, between the stability and instability. We see that in many, many cases or they have already gravitated to dysfunction like we see in Washington so nothing can get done.

When a system reaches that point, from a system's point of view, then what happens is that either they break down or they can break through to a higher level of performance and social value, which in systems theory, is called second order change. In my book, *Social Change 2.0*, is how to further social change 2.0 interventions or second order change interventions.

What I described with the Cool City Challenge is a second order change intervention. Most of everything that I've been doing and we've been doing together from a systems point of view is a second order change intervention. Let me describe social change 1.0 and compare it with social change 2.0.

Michael: That would be great.

David: Social change 1.0 is the current way that most people thinking about climate change are trying to solve that issue or address that issue. It's what is currently causing so much consternation and those are pass a law, but unfortunately we can't pass the law because the system doesn't enable it. The political system is broken.

That's a catch 22. Financial incentives, which is a subset of pass a law because laws often have financial incentives to motivate people, but we find that the financial incentives are not getting the job done. California spent \$300 million trying to get retrofits, home retrofits, and they got \$5,000. It was about \$75,000 a retrofit, just to do a retrofit.

They weren't able to get financial incentives. We're not motivated by classical economics. We don't make utilitarian decisions. It's more part of what's called behavioral economics. We make decisions for behavioral reasons. That doesn't cut it. The third one is social protest, as in occupy, as in so many others, but that's basically going and saying no to something.

It doesn't really say yes, so that isn't going to build a transformative social change intervention or a second order change and the fourth one is awareness like in *An Inconvenient Truth*, raise awareness, but all the behavior change research, which talks about something called the deficit model, a belief that why people don't act is they just don't know the problem, so let's give them more information.

Now they have tons of research. They call it the deficit model. It does not actually get behavior to change or anything to change other than awareness raise, which often then leads to paralysis because don't know what to do. That's social change 1.0. It's designed for incremental change. The change that's required is transformative change, so enter social change 2.0, which is a whole model, which would take more time to explain, but it's in my book and it's a five-part model.

It's fundamentally based on the premise if you can't pay to change, if you can't force them or command them to change, if you can't cajole them to change through protest and if you can't educate them to change through knowledge or information, what's left is empowering them to change because they want to, which is about a compelling vision that pulls them to see a better way and the tools to enable that.

At the heart of this is an empowerment strategy, the knowledge on how to scale a transformative intervention, the ability that a whole system together, so all the parts, are now working in relationship to one another, the public, the private, the civic sector, which you saw in action in Portland and Rockland.

Being able to get knowledge on how one diffuses an innovation and brings it to scale and the ability to understand how to design and implement a transformative social innovation and iterate it, which is what we did together. All that makes up the social change 2.0 framework, which can be deployed at any levels around any issue because it's a pattern language.

You don't have to just do it around climate change. That would apply to any one of the issues in any of these social systems that are currently facing dysfunction.

Michael: Yeah. That's great David. That was a good overview. I'm wondering if you could take that model and specifically go a little bit deeper into – I personally consider the single most important systemic shift that needs to be made is the need to institute a revenue neutral carbon tax or a fee and dividend is what James Hansen calls it, but basically where the products that – well, first of all, the producing of carbon.

Every year, what it does is it aligns the incentives, both at the supply and demand side of things, but that it helps us move in the right direction and so if that's true, that this is one

of the, if not the, single most important systemic action that needs to be done and somebody were to just get fired up about this social change 2.0 model that you're offering in your book, they read your book or they listen to this interview, how might they help further this? What would this social change 2.0 model offer in terms of that specific problem or issue or design challenge?

David: Let me also suggest something. Social change 1.0 is not in opposition of 2.0. They're meant to be synergistic. Every solution has to ultimately work the whole system. In California, where we have chosen to put our work, there is a financial incentives, there is legislation that created the financial incentives. They have a carbon – what do they have – it's not that particular thing.

Michael: It's like cap and trade kind of thing?

David: Yeah, cap and trade, yeah. Cap and trade and there is a carbon tax in British Columbia. There are a variety of models. There is cap and trade in New York. What we find is that it, by itself, is not a silver bullet, but it helps the whole system, so we go to California because they are going to be investing a billion dollars a year from those revenues in being able to address climate change, but they're still not getting people to change.

They have incentives now in the right place, as opposed to the wrong place. 1.0, by itself, given that transformative social change is required, is not enough, but it's seemingly low hanging fruit because it's so logical, but it's actually higher hanging fruit than one might imagine because the politics are so difficult.

A solution that is a great solution, but that can't get traction to be implemented because of the politics describes why the 1.0 system struggles to get traction even though it's a great idea. Now, that's not to say that it can't get traction state by state and early adopters might not pick up versions of it and then eventually get it to the national level.

That's what's actually happening. Versions of that are occurring in Massachusetts and California and so on, but that's still not enough to create transformative social change because the assumption is based on classic economics, which is that people make decisions based on utility, utilitarian considerations and it doesn't reflect the current work on [inaudible 32:24] economics, which is people make decisions economically based on many other factors that are not really about utility.

Yes, it's important. Yes, we should work it and yes, if you build up enough demand and enough citizen education around this, you have a better chance of the law passing and, when it does pass, to actually get traction for it to be implemented in an effective way. Again, it's making the whole system work better.

Michael: That's great. One of the things I want to come back to is what you were sharing earlier that has been so true in my own life and in my understanding of human history as well. That classic phrase, "Without a vision, the people perish," without it, that can be also true individually.

If I don't have a vision of what's possible or something that inspires me to move toward and all I'm present to are the challenges and the breakdowns and the difficulties of the current situation, this psychic energy to be engaged and to collaborate with others who are engaged in a positive way – Joanna Macy calls it active hope.

I'm curious. There are two questions that I want to ask. You can take them in either order. One, Paul Gilding speaks about the likelihood of the damn of denial breaking within the next three to five years. When a damn breaks, the floodwaters are unstoppable. He believes that sometime between now and 2018 we're likely to see the damn of denial around climate break and he envisions China and the United States and the European Union, Brazil, India, everybody being mobilized like we were at the beginning of World War II.

That's a vision of possibility of inspiration that I find hopeful, but as you imagine, say, I don't know, 20 years from now or 50 years from now or 100 years from now, rather than just the vision of humans doing less bad, what do you see as possible in the near term to fairly long term future of humanity that you personally find inspiring? What way of humans interacting with the natural world and with each other, down the pike a little bit, do you find particularly empowering or inspiring for you personally?

David: I love that question, Michael. One of the things that I got very clear about was I wasn't interested in just getting a bad thing to not be so bad, which is climate carbon mitigation or climate change mitigation, nor am I interested in just adapting to a bad thing called climate adaptation. The whole notion of the Cool City Challenge is the reinvention of a city and how people interact, really a transformative social innovation in the urban landscape, which is where, by 2050, 70% to 80% of humanity will be living.

If you reinvent a city so neighbors know each other, share resources, feel connected, do things to make the city better, have visions of possibility that they're living, learn how to have that social change 2.0 embedded block by block – by the way, the idea of the Cool City Challenge is it's got three levels of scale: the cool block, which is basically 50 to 150 people based on this work that's be done by – I'm trying to remember his last name – the anthropologist that talks about 150 is the number of people that people can interact with because of the neocortex of the brain.

That's the most number of people. We're organizing by 150, the cell if you will, 150 people or less. That's the cool block. Ten cool blocks equals a cool neighborhood and then you have orders of, which we say, scale that allow you to do things at the neighborhood level you can't do at the block level, then you have the cool eco district and you have ten cool neighborhoods and

you can organize at the scale of an eco district and do things at that level of scale that you couldn't do at other levels of scale, like community-based agriculture and all kinds of things.

When you organize a city and you literally take a transformative social innovation and you put it into the city and you start to train people and you get everyone working to address an immediate crisis, but through that, transform the whole vision of how a city and people living in it can be, city and citizen, as partners, you have a vision of the future that can be brought to scale immediately to solve a problem.

[Inaudible 37:22] has to address, but the dividends, the climate dividends get paid off immediately or start showing up immediately. That's what my vision is, to build a future, block by block on up, city by city, to solve the problem and through the solving of the problem, create the future we want to have now.

Michael: Yeah. What I love so much about that vision – and I align with it wholeheartedly – is that these are the kinds of transformations of blocks, of neighborhoods, of cities that would be, and are, supremely healthy for both the human and the nonhuman components of that bio region, whether climate change was an issue or not.

David: That's why, for me, climate change is a remarkable opportunity because it's the first time, as a change agent, there was ever an issue that with undisputable – the way I frame it is, we have a non-negotiable feedback system that's forcing us to pay – to look in the mirror and see what we've created.

Up until now, you could negotiate the feedback system and say, "Well, that's – people in that part of the world or this or that," but it's all of humanity and it's the evolution of the species. It forces and forcing function. In [inaudible 38:41] it's called a force multiplier because it's forcing us to actually multiply our action and our investment of time and resources. What an opportunity that is for those of us who can seize the moment and figure out how to be really intelligent and resourceful and creative around solutions.

Michael: Yeah, exactly. Now David, one of the things you mentioned earlier, that I just made a note to myself to ask you about, you mentioned the phrase early adopters and you and I have used this kind of language. Everett Rogers has innovations or social diffusion theory. If you could just say a little bit about that.

The reason why I ask is that so many times in my experience individuals and groups try to go – try to convert or make a difference with the most challenged or resistant populations and we found, through social diffusion theory, that that doesn't work. Could you just briefly introduce that model and why you really want to be preaching to the choir?

David: Well, Michael it's such a pleasure. We learned a lot together. Everett Rogers really transformed my whole way of thinking about social change. Everett Rogers – he's no longer alive – was a social science researcher out of Stanford and his area of interest and research was how innovation diffuses, whether it be a new seed strain for farmers, new medicine for doctors, family planning, our new technologies.

He observed that there are four groups of people that respond to an innovation and there is a process, which is catalytic at a certain percentage of people participating in the innovation. He called the first group of people the early adopters and they have two characteristics. They seek out the new and they have a high tolerance for experimentation.

You might be an early adopter for one thing, but not for another. That represents about 15% of a population. What he found was that if an innovation is capable of getting to about 15% or it could be less, 10%, within population, whether that be a block or neighborhood or cities within a county or counties within a state or states within a country.

We're watching this now with all the legislation happening round gay marriage. We hit the tipping point. It's almost exactly 15% and now it's tipping. It's actually tipped because it's beyond seven states. The idea being that, at that point, if the innovation is capable of diffusing, and most of them are not architected well enough, it starts to hit a critical mass.

It diffuses on its own. The next group are the early majority. The next 35%, who are the believers, who aren't the risk takers, but if something is proven they'll join in. The next group is called the late majority. They will hold off as long as they can. They represent the next 35% and the last group is called the laggards or the people who will never participate. They're the last 15%.

What Rogers basically taught us, that is to say you and me because we put his work into action, is preach to the choir because the choir will sing loud enough to get everyone into the church, but what most social change agents do is fall victim to this belief, which is don't preach to the choir and then they have some pejorative term to say who they're preaching to and they basically are reflecting the late majority or the laggards.

When you preach to the laggards and the late majority, they're number one thing is to poo-poo it and to throw cold water onto it and then the change agents, not being skillful, think that that's actually reflection on the innovation, whereas, in fact, it was a reflection on their social change strategy and the lack of sophistication that they know that they need to go to the people who really want to hear it, who will help them build it and learn about how to make it better and better because you never get it right.

It's always iterative. That's the fusion of innovation. I would just add, for those that are tracking the climate change issue, where they spend a lot of time is the deniers. The

deniers is really 15%. It's the lagger population, so they'll never participate and for us to try to address the laggards is just, again, a lack of sophistication of understanding how diffusion works.

We have to go to the early adopter cities and the early adopter states. When we see polls it really has to be by the places we're trying to get to do it, not by a whole national profile because then you have everybody in that profile and it's not like you're trying to do something nationally. You're trying to do it in [inaudible 43:38], at least for our work.

It's really important that people understand. This is why I say, "Climate change is really a social change issue." If people who try to affect climate action are not sophisticated in social change and they keep using tools that are not that effective and then they say, "The world can't change," or they become climate fatalists, really that is to say those who hold that have to look in the mirror and say, "What am I doing? Can I do it better? What's my theory of change? What data do I have that says that theory of change is effective?"

If it's not working, what can I do better? It's really upgrading our own understanding about social change and if we don't, then we suffer the pain of constant rejection and blame it on people, whereas, it's more often than not, us, the change agents.

Michael: Yeah. Yeah. That's great. One of the things that even complicates things further with regards to this issue of climate change is that – I read a book not too long ago called *Merchants of Doubt*, how a handful of scientists obscured the truth on issues from everything from tobacco to global warming. It's really about, in addition to the psychological dynamic of being late majority or laggards, you've also got a situation where you've got a multibillion dollar industry, coal, oil and gas industry that are working with scientists for hire and the same PR companies that confuse the issue for 50 years.

We now know there are internal documents that prove that the tobacco industry knew in 1962 that tobacco could cause cancer and many other problems and yet they successfully confused the issue so that legislation wouldn't be taken that would cost them money for 50 years. Well, we don't have 50 years on climate change.

I agree that we really need to go with the early adopters and the early majority, but it does challenge the issue when you've got such a well funded campaign to confuse the issue and you've got news outlets like Fox News, that also – if you ask most Americans do they think that the scientific community is in doubt or in conflict around climate, something like 40% of Americans say yes.

The truth of the matter is it's like 97% or 99% of the scientists who actually study climate are in complete agreement that climate change is real. Humans are the main cause now and we've got to take significant action soon to avoid the worst catastrophes.

David: Michael, here's a question for you, an opportunity.

Michael: Okay.

David: Take those numbers, which are plus or minus 5% because I've heard it's like 66% or 35% who are in that state that you described and some are in pure denial, but place the diffusion of innovation overlay on it and describe who those people are who are saying that.

Michael: Late majority and laggards.

David: And?

Michael: And laggards.

David: Those of us who listen to that without a more sophisticated interpretation, somehow turn that into a negative as opposed to, "Of course, that's the late majority and the laggards. Why would they have anything different." But, if 60%, the people where change is really needing to happen, are already there, then that's where we need to focus on and this is, again, why my mantra is our social change lens has to be sophisticated enough to know how to interpret this kind of data.

Michael: Yeah, that's very helpful David. Now, there's one thing I want to ask you about personally, if you could just share – and I happen to know this just because you've been a friend and mentor for decades – but it's something that I think a lot of people who are listening to this or watching this could be inspired by.

That is one of the issues that people ask me a lot about is, "What about the population issue?" My response is I'm not sure that we really have to. I think nature is going to take care of that. I think we're going to see some serious drought, so I don't think we need to focus on that a lot individually and yet, you and Gail made a very conscious decision earlier on in your life and even did a ritual to honor the choice to not have children and to make your legacy, your mission, your child, your baby.

I'm wondering if there's anything you'd be willing to share about both that choice, but also the way that you ritualized it. I think many would find that helpful.

David: Sure, Michael. Well, I would say I can't claim that we were trying to reduce the population on the planet as much as it was a choice about where we felt our energies needed to go. We were very clear that we had a higher purpose, a social mission, to really have an impact in the world. That was our goal. That was our vision.

We realized that we would put a child at risk of not having the attention and us being diverted from what we felt was our social mission, so we decided to consciously not make that choice of having a child, but instead to make the choice of the Earth and humanity being our intention or child, if you will, for use of that creative energy.

We literally went through the 18 years of that child's life that we would not have spent raising that child and what we would do with that energy over those 18 years. It was a very powerful ritual. It brought profound closure to an issue, particularly for Gail, because, as a woman, it's even more profound to sort those issues out and it's been inspirational to many women who's tried to figure out how to make those choices for different reasons, not just for the sake of the population issue.

Albeit, I've been a vegetarian since I've been 21 and now I'm getting all kinds of credit for being a vegetarian, but it wasn't even a choice for animal cruelty at the point. It was just an intelligent choice for my body and then I began to realize the moral implications. It's a little bit like that for this, so I'm happy to take credit for the moral implications as well, but it was really coming from a different angle.

But, I think the more important issue is the idea of consciously choosing and building clear intentions for everything we choose to do. I think from an [inaudible 50:35] point of view, I think that may be valuable to some people.

Michael: I'm glad you clarified. I was not meaning to imply that either for you or even for most people the issue is one of not contributing to population. One of the things that you and Gail have that Connie and I have – and I wish it for everyone – is a mission partnership, a sense of deep alignment of values and priorities and commitments.

Connie and I share this sense of life purpose, what we're here on the planet to contribute. It's really a legacy consciousness that is as strong as any sense of legacy around biological children, but for us, it's not biological children. Now, fortunately, I was able to and was blessed with three children with my first wife, so I do also have that biological legacy.

But, I know for, really since 1988, when I was first introduced to Thomas Berry and Brian Swimme and this whole Miriam MacGillis and Joanna Macy, this whole epic of evolution, what's now called big history, conscious evolution the way Barbara Marx Hubbard talk about it, that I wanted to contribute to the furthering of evolution and healthy ways.

With Connie, I just have never met another human being, male or female, that shared all of this. You and Gail have been one of those, again, older brother/sister on the path in terms of mission couples and I just honor you and appreciate the role that you've played, the model that you've been, that both of you have been for that on that topic for me and Connie.

David: Thank you, Michael. Thank you, Michael. I appreciate that.

Michael: Cool. David, anything else that you'd like to share just in closing in terms of how or where you find inspiration, the sense that the future is calling us to greatness and then where people can learn more about your work?

David: Let's see. Let me tell you where people can learn more about the Cool City Challenge, coolcitychallenge.org and they can learn more. There's a six-minute video on the website that tells the story of what we're trying to do and a lot of information and background, so if anyone has interest they can go there to learn more.

Well, I, as someone who's really into the glass-half-full world view, I see us living in a time of abundant opportunity for anybody who seeking meaning and purpose in their life to contribute because the world is in need. The opportunity also invites people to use it as a path of spiritual growth because it demands that one grow at every level, to be able to play skillfully in whatever space they want to engage in.

It's also a call to being smart around social change and one other thing that might be of interest to people is that on my website this is the empowermentinstitute.net website, there are study circle guides for people that want to use the book in small, study circles, to take on an issue because at the end of each of the chapters are five questions that people can answer around their social change project.

In fact, I have a master class that I'm going to be leading this fall on social change 2.0 and behavior change and community engagement. They can learn more about that on the homepage of my website as well. We have lots and lots of programs that people can learn from, but the main thing is hope, belief in possibility and stepping into these opportunities that are abundant for all of us who see life as one of contribution and making a difference.

Michael: Yeah. Great. Well, David thank you so much for this conversation. As always, every time we talk I just find myself more and more inspired both by your work, but also the way that you approach social change, the way you approach social change, the way you approach global transformation, so just deepest love and blessings to you and Gail and I look forward to seeing you again, hopefully in the not too distant future.

David: Michael, my pleasure. Thanks for the invitation.

Michael: Great. Thanks, David.

David: Good luck with the series.

Michael: Yeah, thank you.

David: Bye.

Michael: Okay, bye-bye.