

Michael: Amy, thank you so much for joining this conversation around the theme of the *Future is Calling us To Greatness*.

Amy: Thank you. It is my total pleasure, Michael.

Michael: Amy, I first encountered your work less than a year ago, when I read the hardcover edition of *Environmental Debt* and I just found it to be a brilliantly written and very important book for our time, so I knew I wanted to have you in this conversation.

I am also realizing that some of the viewers and listeners may not be familiar with your work yet. Could you just begin by letting people know who you are, what you are known for or what your contributions have been, and how you got to this place?

Amy: My background is as a producer and entrepreneur and throughout my whole adult life, I first was a volunteer for Greenpeace for 25 years and then worked for them for 12 years. As a volunteer, I did everything from produce walk-o-thons and concerts, fundraisers and I was on the board twice and then I became the Solutions Director of Greenpeace in 2005.

When I did that I had the incredible opportunity of falling on decades of work of fellow Greenpeace activists but perhaps working a new way with corporations where the emphasis was on solutions.

Every time I would go into a meeting with a corporation, at the end they would always say, "We've never expected to have this kind of meeting with Greenpeacers," and I've always said the only reason I am here is because my colleagues jumped on your roof or because they did something that got your attention, that's the reason we are here.

However, once you are there, once you are in the room you can do the impossible and so that was I think spectacularly informative and successful work for Greenpeace, for the environment but also for the corporations and honestly, that worked changed my life and was the reason why I ended up writing this book.

That's how I came to writing the book. My work life on top of the Greenpeace work was largely as a producer in the arts in New York, Seattle and Europe but I also started one of the first affinity marketing companies in the mid-80s called Message Check and that was very successful and we gave millions of dollars to our non-profit clients.

I think that for my whole life I have been an activist of some kind, in the arts, in the environment, for social causes, candidates and I have always felt if you do not connect commerce with the culture and social mission, you will not have enough power to embed what you are trying to have happen, and for corporations, if they do not incorporate the realization that they are living in a world, in a place that has a society, that has an environment, and they think they can screw that up without consciousness they will fail.

I have always felt public-private is where it's at.

Michael: That is great Amy. Could you say a little bit more, because this is really in my experience, one of the gifts of your book is that it really does bring this conversation of business, commerce and the environmental sustainability and more than just sustainability, we don't want to sustain a damage but how can we have an economy that brings us into what my mentor Thomas Barry called the "mutually enhancing human-earth relationship," where we benefit from the earth and we are a blessing or benefit to the earth community.

I think some of the things you've outlined in your book really points us strongly in that direction. Could you go a little bit more into how you see us moving forward and really the core argument of your book, I would love you to articulate that.

Amy: First of all, I want to thank you for not using the word sustainability. I try never to use it. Occasionally I have to, because it is the right word but I think that first of all, we are in a fight for survival, not for sustainability, make no bones about it, it is about survival. Thank you for making that distinction.

I think that I would go back to Wilberforce and the Abolitionists who worked as co-belligerence. Sometimes, there are things I am sure that has meaning to you and I came to it because I write for *The Guardian* now regularly and I was researching a piece that I just wrote about radical cooperation.

I think that I went to look for examples for that and of course the Abolitionists came up where people who do not necessarily share a worldview, people who do not have or seemingly don't have similar values can work together for something that is greater than themselves.

I would submit that survival, clean air and water are greater than

ourselves. You and I mean quite little in the scheme of the world, but clean air and clean water is central to the scheme of the world of the human race and every other race.

Michael: Amen.

Amy: For me, I think what I've found is that when you work with people and presume that they hold those values that is not a Greenpeace value. That is not a radical value. You need clean air and water? Good, me too. Let's do that together.

I think that my basic premise of my book is twofold. Number one, no nature, no business. Forget about it. You either have a business that maintains the natural world and respects it, uses it carefully, consciously, and conservatively or you and everyone else are going to be in trouble, so that is number one.

The second is that we speak about what is expensive very untruthfully. For example, we have to use coal and natural gas and oil because they are cheap energies. They are not cheap. The only reason they appear cheap is because we do not include their real costs that they incur for the product or for the company, or for the purchaser.

When I give speeches I always say, you are already paying your carbon tax. You are just not paying it where you should be paying it. You are paying it for health care where in the United States, health care, because of pollution costs more than health care from tobacco, so you are paying more for health, for pollution in health care. Try to wrap your head around that. That is just health care.

Infrastructure rebuilding, emergency services, droughts, you have industries at risk every time there is a wildfire, a drought or a flood. Not only does it disrupt people and habitats and animals, it disrupts business, and until we pay for the real costs of what we use our economy on some fundamental level is broken.

I developed, I tried as hard as I could to come up with three rules that I thought would encompass this basic premise. The first one is pollution can no longer be free and can no longer be subsidized, because right now we sometimes charge a company for pollution from a big dramatic act when there is a big accident, BP paid some money for the cleanup but it would be much smarter and of course, it does not pay for the whole cleanup at all ever and you cannot clean it up, so cleanup is kind of a word a little bit

like sustainability. It's a safe word.

The second rule is that the long view must guide all decision making and accounting. An example is the Thai flood that happened few years ago where all of Thailand was shut down for six months. Obviously, that is very dramatic impact on people and the businesses of Thailand.

It was such a cataclysmic flood not because of the big storm, which was bad, but because there was no top soil left from deforestation from the 20 years prior. So the people that cut down the trees in the 90s and the odds caused cataclysmic floods in 2009. Not only did it harm Thailand, the factories in Thailand were unable to supply the auto parts to factories in Kentucky, Singapore and the Philippines.

You and I paid unemployment insurance for people in Kentucky, all of the regions where there were auto plants in Kentucky, Singapore and Philippines. We are in big trouble, and Toyota lost 2.5 percent of its annual output because of trees that were cut down 15 and 20 years earlier. No accounting took those numbers into account. You have to look at the long term consequences.

The third thing is that government plays a vital role in catalyzing clean technology and growth while preventing environmental destruction. Obviously, the internet, you and I are speaking on Skype now, and thank you United States government for developing the internet. Really, thank you. That spawned trillions of dollars of industry. It altered the world in ways we cannot even conceive of yet.

That happened because the government had some wacky scientists who thought we needed it and I am sure it did come from military research but there occasionally are very good uses for military research, actually often there are. In fact, I shouldn't be glib about it. The military, in fact, has developed tremendous technologies in alternative development. That was a long rant for me too.

Michael: No. I so appreciate you going into some depth around it because it is the simplicity of this nature means business model that you've been offering that I found to be one of the most alluring and also memorable. When somebody can remember the core argument of a book that there are three core fundamental principles or rules that we really have to abide by if humanity is going to survive.

We can no longer allow for the free or subsidized polluting of the

commons. Allowing for individuals or corporations to get wealthy by polluting air, water, soil and life upon which we all depend is collective insanity. That is the first one.

Number two is that we've got to take the long view in mind. We can no longer have as quarterly profits or next year's statement or whatever be the measure of our success, be the measure of our progress. That is also collective insanity.

The idea that government doesn't have a role to play is just as simply collective insanity. Government has a vital role to play, so the way you've articulated that I found it to be so elegant, simple and yet prophetically powerful.

Amy: Michael, you are warming my heart. Thank you.

Michael: It's the truth. One of the things that I have been doing, just to give you a little background, my wife and I, Connie Barlow, my wife is a science writer and I am a minister. We've both done environmental activism and sustainability work for many years and we've been living on the road, traveling all over North America, preaching and teaching the sacred side of science, what I call right relationship to reality.

What does it mean for us as individuals and collectives to come into right relationship with what's fundamentally and inescapably real? This is our shtick. This is what we do. We have spoken to close to 2,000 groups and I read a book back in 2001 by John Stewart, *Evolution's Arrow: The Direction of Evolution and the Future of Humanity*.

He talks about throughout evolution history what we keep finding and it's not a coincidence that we keep finding this is that we keep finding biological systems and then social systems that find a way to effectively align the self-interest of the parts with the well-being of the whole, so the impact of the part is reflected back to the part. If the part has a positive impact on the community or the whole of the organism or whatever, it benefits, so it is incentivized to do the right thing, and if the part has a negative impact on the community, tribe or whatever, or the cell or the organism, then there is some negative repercussion.

It aligns self-interest at multiple levels and so one of the things John was making the case for and I've been speaking about it for more than a decade is that one of the most important things we need to do is to integrate true cost and to no longer allow for what you call the free or

subsidized polluting of the commons and that we've got to find a way of aligning the natural self-interest of individuals, corporations and nations with the well-being of the body of life.

Your articulation of that, especially in the first two principles but the third one as well that governance does play a role. In fact --

Amy: Huge role. I am working on something now, trying to get – first of all, there are huge numbers of people globally, organizations, corporations that are trying to change accounting systems to internalize these external costs that should be included at the moment.

It is going to take a decade to change these rules. It is complicated beyond belief and every time groups come into present a new option it is a nervous breakdown to look at them, but they continue to do this work and it is crucially important.

My experience in working with companies is that there is one possible rule that could alter how infrastructure investments are made and I am working with some companies now, trying to move that forward and that is that there should be accelerated depreciation for clean infrastructure investments.

Right now, I tell this story in the book and it was one of the sources why I came up with this idea. PepsiCo created a new factory. They built a state of the art factory in Arizona. It was near net zero waste water and energy. The engineer who led the development of this factory was telling me about it and I was really suitably impressed.

It was pretty extraordinary engineering and he is a conservative Texan. He and I do not see eye to eye on many things and on this hats of, chapeau to him and on much of his work. He does spectacular work. I said, are you going to deploy these new technologies in all your new factories globally and he said, "It's more expensive to put them in even though in five years it will have huge amounts of savings, plus it will be near net zero waste water and energy we would like to do them all but we have to pick and choose because it is an expensive upfront expense and our quarterly and even annual earnings will take a hit."

I said that's crazy, basically, and so I immediately what would happen if you had accelerated depreciation, and then the VP in global public policy was with us and he said, "Are you kidding? We would do this and this..." It is a pretty straightforward thing.

Here is a corporation having done really good work, wanting to do it more and better and faster, and because accounting does not take in the long term and because they are at the mercy of shareholders who are looking short term impacts they in fact are not doing everything they want to do. That is insane.

After I asked PepsiCo what they thought of it I began asking companies and every single company that I asked went same response as PepsiCo, “You have no idea. We would do this and this, and this...” so that is something I am working on now.

Michael: That is great because that is kind of like this trim-tab kind of things, one shift could make an enormous difference.

Amy: Exactly, and I think that when those of us who are environmental activists speak to the public, as you and I do, all of us have been told, “If you become alarmist you are ineffective,” and so then you and I or people like will go to the bar and be alarmist together because it is alarming out there.

I think that my experience is that many people in companies have the same feeling. I’ve been drinking with everyone and it is not unique to people who look like or feel like a typical environmental activist, people who work as farmers, people who manage water systems, people who deal with any kind of commodity, lawyers who are doing transactions, across the spectrum they are much more vocal and are beginning to be fairly local publicly as well that they are completely freaking out about the environmental consequences, especially climate change.

I am not saying anything that anyone in a corporation knows it’s not the case.

Michael: Exactly, and what I’ve discovered in talking people who work with business people, such as yourself, is that there are lots of business people that get this in a far deeper, more compelling way than some of our politicians do and they are starting speak with one voice that we need a level playing field.

For example, whether you call it a revenue neutral tax on carbon or fee in dividend or whatever, but until we somehow level the playing field in that way companies that want to do the right thing can’t really do it without causing their own disadvantage in the process.

Amy: Right. Currently, the biggest polluter makes the biggest profit and until we change that rule, until politicians certainly in our country there is barely a politician who is willing to speak up the way corporate leaders would like them to speak. Bob Crane of NRG, one of the larger electric producers in the country, he recently wrote a shareholder letter that says, “Our children will hold us accountable.”

Michael: Yes, exactly.

Amy: Bob Inglis, who you probably know well who was a conservative Republican who spoke much the way you do saying, “We have to stand up and deal with this in a real way,” and of course he was voted out of office.

I think another thing that is a really big spiritual or cultural change that has to happen, especially in the United States, but the whole world is that we are all – not all – we presume we are entitled to live like kings with everything, with easy access, money is barely an object. So a t-shirt can be \$5 and an iPhone that has the world in your pocket should be \$100.

“I want a new this, I want a new that,” and we do not. There are two basic connections that I think are sacred that we have broken and the first one is the obvious one with the natural world but I think the second one is one of the best books that I read in the last 20 years was by Jerry Mander and it’s called *In the Absence of the Sacred*.

Michael: Yeah, I’ve read it too.

Amy: It is a beautiful book and in it, he talks about how when he was a child he would go shopping. He would go with his mother to the store and it was a social act. It was a basic glue of his community. The merchants and what they sold with their community and their customers and he said, “At some point in my childhood, the small stores became replaced by big companies where nobody knew or cared who their customers were.”

Now they care who the customers are broad scale but the change from the social piece of commerce is not to be denied and it is missing. The great thing is that the generation after us is creating economy where they are sharing things from Air B&B to Uber and Lift to they are sharing lawnmowers and they are sharing 3D printers, they are sharing things which is a really interesting new take on reinstating the social into the commercial.

Michael: Yes, I completely agree. I also agree on the assessment that Jerry Mander’s

book is fabulous. One of the things that I have been preaching a lot about lately, in fact I just did a sermon where I talked about this last Sunday because this year Connie and I are preaching and teaching in churches and colleges along the route of the great march for climate action.

We are going from Los Angeles to Washington, DC over nine months and it is this notion that we have thought, we religious – and I speak to secular groups and religious groups and religious people have been thinking that somehow we could think of god without also thinking about nature, as if nature was somehow separate from or distant from, or that god was somewhat divorced from nature and we forget the way language works that the word nature did not exist for the Hebrews, the word reality did not exist for the Hebrews.

What we call nature, what we call reality, they called YHVH and so one of the things I am trying to do with religious people is help them stop using a trivial understanding of god that whatever we mean by the word god has to be inclusive of time, nature and mystery which are three things I see as fundamentally real, whether you believe in them or not.

I think that sense that *In the Absence of the Sacred*, when god is absent, when we think of god as only otherworldly or supernatural, rather than including the natural and embodied in time then we treat nature as an it an “I – it” relationship rather than an “I – thou” relationship, so we don’t have this respect for honorable relationship.

Amy: Obviously, that is the ultimate sacred bond that somehow is not embedded in our culture. It is not embedded in how we live, although also the generation after us in fact also getting closer, recreating roots in that way but the mass merchandising of everything from food to clothing to stuff, sometimes you go into people’s houses and you see the number of toys in a house and you think this is crazy, and of course all the kids want to do is play with the box.

Michael: Yes. The consumerism has become the de facto religion of the West, I think, it is fairly undeniable.

Amy: Yes, and it is horrifying, and I also think to imagine, I actually eat meat, not very much but I do eat it and I try to eat less and less but very often, be it with friends or some eating event or some dining event and people will say, “I don’t want to eat a whole fish because I don’t want to see the eyes,” then don’t eat the fish, it is a fish, or “I don’t want to eat the meat,” it is okay. If you don’t want to deal with the fact that it’s a pig, then don’t eat

the pig.

If you do eat the pig, be very cognizant of the fact that you are eating another being. Thank you to nature that gives that to us and also the consequences of eating that pig, which is that it is very high in the food chain which goes back to that we think we are entitled to live like kings.

Michael: Yes, exactly. Amy, I want to come back to some of the things that you discussed in your book because I read it first and then Connie read it afterwards, and what we both found really helpful and hopeful were some of the stories that you relate in terms of things that we just didn't know.

Often times, those of us who are in the environmental movement and sustainability movement and help trying to ensure a healthy future and all that kind of stuff can portray corporations as the problem, the evil or whatever and yet, business drives so much and so any stories that you would be willing to share in terms of your own experience where some businesses or corporations or those within the realm of commerce are doing the right thing or helping to move us in the right direction?

Amy: I would say there are many corporations doing great things and in my book, as you mentioned, there is a chapter called *Courage* and I describe some of the work that McDonald's did, preventing the destruction of the Amazon forest for soy, for their animals, Tiffany's work on changing mining protocols and where they mine, Pepsi and Unilever and the work on refrigeration and Wal-Mart's sustainability initiative, and also I talk about the passage of the Clean Air Act in 1970 where a Democrat Ed Musky and Republican Howard Baker led the United States Congress to pass a radical bill.

You want to be grateful that the air in the United States is not like the air in China and you should tip your hat to Ed Musky and Howard Baker, and Republicans and Democrats on their senate sub-committee that took that bill as it was and for strange people, Michigan senator who went to Nixon and said, "Sign it."

I think that the work with corporations it goes back to what I said earlier about co-belligerence. Many of the companies that I wrote about I would not call them sustainable companies. However, I think that in general, they all have a long way to go. However, each of them has done something extraordinary which has I think honestly changed the DNA of their company.

When you do something that powerful for the good, you are changed. You in some ways become – I am not quite sure what the word is but I know from my work with all of these people they are changed. They are aware that they can do something impossible within their companies and in the world, and with activists who they thought they would never work with and alter the course of history, and if they had their way they would do that more as hard as it is.

Our job is to change the accounting rules. What I always say is that our work is to harmonize the rules of business with the laws of nature.

Michael: Amen and that's what I call coming into right relationship to reality, exactly what you just articulated.

Amy: Yes.

Michael: Amy, actually first there is a question that Connie, my wife, has wanted me to ask various people that are involved in this and it's a fun question, I purposely don't let you know ahead of time what it is but if you were to invite over for dinner or go out and have a glass of wine or a beer with three people throughout human history and any three people, who would you love to share a meal with or a glass or wine or a beer with, who would you love to have a conversation with in an informal way, and why?

Amy: Maybe Jung.

Michael: Why Carl Jung?

Amy: Because I think that the subconscious life runs the whole show and that's one of the other things that we ignore in our modern world. We presume that the empirical world is the world and certainly, it is the conscious part of our world, however as we all know from our own foibles and the strengths of the people around us who we love or don't love, we are motivated by things deeper and unknown.

Our dreams tell us so many things and I think I loved how Jung put that forward and I think he did alter the course of psychology, the new study of psychology and probably...

Michael: It can even be somebody alive today.

Amy: Probably Michelangelo and Michelangelo in some ways goes with Jung because people always described his work as if it is coming out of the

stone and I think that when you see his work, especially the slaves that sit in the room with David and having been to the Marble Mountains where he got this, there is something that could make an atheist girl get religious.

Michael: That is great. Amy, there is two questions that I want to conclude our time together with and they are related. One of them is where do you personally find your inspiration to wake up and be engaged in this great work, and then related to that, what would you say to some young person that would inspire them?

This whole theme that the *Future is Calling Us to Greatness*, obviously I am personifying the future. I suggest that that's a very useful belief to imagine how the future is calling us to be a blessing to sacrifice, to contribute in a way that costs us something and yet will be a tremendous blessing to them. So what is that you personally find that inspires you on a day by day or week by week basis and then what would you say to some young person who is perhaps maybe overwhelmed by the challenges of our time and looking to the future and it's pretty scary, what would you say to some young person?

Amy: I think what inspires me are two-fold. Obviously, my family and the young people I love so dearly, whose lives I want the world to be their oyster and it doesn't look so food for that. That is one thing but any other thing I think that inspires me, I guess there are two things I think that I think are truly otherworldly.

One if art and one is nature and I think that the natural world is so amazing. I mean, you do not have to be a scientist to have your mind blown by how the relationship from the bacteria to the barnacles, to the acid, everything about the web of nature is miraculously complex and miraculously simple, and to me, it is not just getting drunk on the lilacs that one can smell in season today because really, they are not and it's drunkenness that is so beautiful.

It is the web which is insanely amazing. It is to me wondrous, miraculous, inspiring and worthy of protecting every moment of my life. It is to be cared for as much as one's children and family. To me, it is.

That's what inspires me and I think what I would say to young people first and foremost is put your phones down. Notice the world around you without electronic additions. Spend a moment, look at a bird. Look at the floor of the forest and see what's going on there. Plant something, watch it grow and I think that will inspire you to do great things.

I think that once you love or respect or understand the bond, or are intrinsically connected to the natural world you will find what you are going to do. I can't say to a young person go be a political activist, you could be the best teacher in the world and that's fantastic or you could be the best plumber in the world and that is fantastic or engineer, or whatever.

I think though everything we do when there is a conscious relationship to the natural world, we do better. For me, that's what I want and do it without your phone. You don't have to put in on, really.

Michael: First of all, I agree with everything you just said in terms of where I also find my inspiration and what I would share with a young person. In fact, there is an exercise that I've often offered where find the places where your joy and the world's needs intersect and then just follow that, what Joseph Campbell called "Follow your bliss," but especially come into a more intimate, personal, yummy, soul-nourishing relationship with the natural world.

Amy: Exactly. To me, once you are there you are good to go.

Michael: Amy, anything that you would like to say just in conclusion around this theme of the *Future is Calling Us to Greatness* and how can people learn more about your work?

Amy: My website is environmentaldebt.net and that's where people can learn about me. I am speaking all over the place in the fall and is there anything more I want to say? I guess I want to thank you for putting this together. It's been a total pleasure to speak with you and I agree with you, the future is calling us to greatness because if we do not behave with our greatest selves we will lose our world.

The world will survive but it will be tough, it will be really tough, so I think we have to step up and I would also say that the idea of radically cooperating with people who you think you have nothing in common with you have something in common with them and that is your need for the natural world. Start there.

Michael: That is great. Amy, thank you so much for your work but also thank you for taking the time to have this conversation with me and to participate in this larger conversation around how the past is rooting for us and how the future is calling us to greatness, so thank you.

Amy: Thank you, Michael and I look forward to hearing more about it. Be well.
Thank you. Bye-bye.

Michael: You too. Bye-bye.