

# The Future Is Calling Us to Greatness

with Michael Dowd + 56 Experts



## The Shift Network: Promoting Personal and Planetary Transformation

with Stephen Dinan

Big ideas from this session:

- Building a global movement dedicated to evolving consciousness and culture
- What would a more enlightened society look like, sound like, feel like?
- One Minute Shift videos, Radical Spirit, and Sacred America

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Michael: Stephen, thanks so much for being part of this conversation series, *The Future is Calling Us to Greatness*.

Stephen: It's a delight to be here. Thanks for inviting me.

Michael: Cool. I've been asking all my guests at the start to help us really get who you are. Don't be bashful, share with us what you are most known for, what you are most passionately committed to, a little background, how you got to be where you are and feel free to take your time.

Stephen: Great. I am best known for being the CEO and founder of the Shift Network, which has touched hundreds of thousands of people around the world and really serving up a lot of content, teachings and trainings that help us evolve our consciousness and evolve our world.

I originally got the vision for this 14 years ago no, this is the third iteration. During the meditation retreat, right after the turn of the millennium, I was working for the Esalen Institute and had some vague sense of being called to something more than what I was doing, which was creating think-tank conferences on leading edge subjects.

I knew that it had something to do with going beyond being a more academic treatment of how we evolve to the next level to really empowering people and how to do that. This vision downloaded really over three days and it felt like it came from a very high place, well beyond my conscious mind or even my higher mind, and just was streamed in, a lot of details about creating a network of people who are awakening in a new consciousness and a new

culture and that it was going to have web platforms and empower the interconnection of those people the world over but eventually media platforms and then local centers where people would really be animating, embodying and enacting this new way of living.

It is about living in a truly sacred way and making this earth an outward expression of higher potential, so that means making it healthy and sustainable, peaceful and prosperous and really getting along as one human family, one global culture but at the root of that is a kind of a spiritual awakening or a spiritual recognition that has to flow from seeing ourselves in our own divinity, as well as expressing that and seeing the divinity in others.

We move beyond saying that only one religious tradition has got it right or my god is better than your god that we are really seeing the sacred expressed through the many facets of the larger diamond of human culture.

Anyway, I first got that download, tried to get it off the ground. It did not work out the first time and left me in a lot of debt and a lot of learnings. I then had to back my way into a second version with the Institute of Noetic Sciences, under a non-profit, eventually it led me to pull out of that as well, even though it was moderately successful. We had 10,000 people paying \$10/month to be part of that around the world and so now the latest iteration it has been four and a half years and it really does feel like the fruition of a life work and I think that I probably couldn't have actually done what we have done 14 years ago.

The universe kind of tricked me into getting going on it early enough that I could build the skills, the network and the capacity to really move things forward.

What we do is we are looking at a full spectrum approach making the shift to a new culture. So we do big telesummits on everything from conscious parenting to enlightened business to spring of sustainability, winter of wellness.

We've done things that are more focused on things like the enneagram or new paradigm economics, and then we also have a whole, about 70 programs of courses and trainings that help people go to the next level personally that could be in their spiritual growth. We have things like the Christ Path that are more coming out of the Christian religion. We also have things like the Enlightened Business Academy where people really get entrepreneurial skills.

We have women's programs, health oriented programs, a whole variety of things and then we are gradually going to be building this next phase. I really feel like we are still in the phase one of the original download that I got, where we build a web platform, courses and trainings and really aggregate more of the best teaching and evolutionary thought out there.

The next phase is to create much more multi-media platforms, TV, video, radio, film and then moving to these local centers and hubs, and really activating a whole global network of those.

I've had to learn to be a lot more patient and allow for organic unfolding, even while holding this bigger vision that was originally given to me to bring in, and so on a personal level, I am very appreciative and I love the inheritance we've gotten from all the different spiritual traditions.

I've practiced with Eastern teachers and I have very much a deep connection with Jesus as a guide and shamans, shamanic ceremonies, and I really see us as now we are coming to harvest the full panoply of the gifts of all the world traditions right now and to learn how to harvest the best from each lineage and help us grow and evolve to the next level.

Michael: That's great. That's a wonderful overview. One of the things that I've become aware of just in talking with others is that I think there are some people that don't have a fuller picture or a complete picture of what the Shift Network is about.

There is at least among some people the perception that it is mostly about just personal wholeness and healing the individual, transforming the individual, helping the individual evolve. I get that it is all that or there is a lot of it that is that but there is a piece that I think is often missed by people, which is that that is part of a larger process so that we can be a greater blessing to the future, that we can help transform culture, that we can help humanity come into right relationship with the planet and that sort of thing.

Could you say anything about that since the title of this series is *The Future is Calling Us to Greatness*?

Stephen: I feel like ultimately there is a whole evolution of our interiors and the exterior world, so that the real shift and the real change in the planet has to be made manifest in how we do things differently with each other.

We have done a lot of stuff that's on the interior work and the interior development, partially because when you have an individual making a decision about what they want to invest their time and money in it often is important that they are seeing some tangible evolutionary benefit for themselves.

Paid programs tend to lend themselves often more to things that are about the interior development but we always try to pair some element of how this shifts your relationships, how this shifts the world. Some courses are very explicit about that, like the Peace Ambassador training where you are training people to think about systems and shifting systems.

Some are it's a little bit more in the background but it's often part of the philosophy of many of our teachers as well that there has to be this co-evolution, that we are going beyond the time when it's all about just personal awakening and personal transformation because there are urgent

needs from climate change to war in the Middle East to economic challenges as we reach our maximum population growth on the planet of about ten billion by 2050.

We have to figure out how we really design this long term sustainable, beautiful, empowering, wonderful culture that can work for ten billion people on this planet because that's about what we are going to end up with.

Michael: My heart is so with you in terms of the basic impulse. I think I may be a tad more pessimistic in terms of the impact of drought and famine that I see is probably better than 50 percent chance for some parts of the world. I think that there is the possibility that we could see eight to ten billion people certainly, if things continue in the way they are but I think it's possible that with drought, with famine, with some of the other large scale challenges, and hell, who knows, even Ebola for all we know could have a bigger difference.

I think that it's possible that we'll see less than that but in any event, whether there is four billion people or two billion people or ten billion people a hundred years from now, however many there is, we need to have a more what Thomas Barry used to call a mutually enhancing relationship with the natural world upon which we depend utterly and I completely agree that it's both in inner and outer, and the social process.

I am curious, what are some of the things that you've learned now with the Shift Network that you have been most proud of or gratified that really just either exceeded expectations or just went really well and you can see it continuing to ripple out? What would you say are some of the greatest learnings or things where you would perhaps do things differently? Both successes and some of the growing edge.

Stephen: Some of the things that I hadn't anticipated doing, for instance, was this course on the Christ Path because we originally were kind of post-denominational in our approach to spirituality but in talking and spending some time with Andrew Harvey who is the teacher of that, it really became evident that part of what we can offer is what is the next iteration of any particular lineage, so to really harvest the beauty, depth and power of the Christian lineage and then bring it into a more global context.

The Christ Path became one of our most successful courses and it's really continued to ripple out in people really having a powerful impact.

Michael: With an amazing teacher like Andrew Harvey too, that is not surprising to me.

Stephen: Yes, and part of it is it's like for someone like Andrew who has traveled the world all over the place and often to not necessarily large rooms of people, for him it is so gratifying to teach to hundreds of people globally at the same time from the comfort of his home, so there is a real beauty in being able to multiply these really key voices and I think each teacher, with

Andrew, he's got 40 years of scholarship in mystical experience and literature, he just has a penetrating quality.

When you get exposed to him for seven weeks, 12 weeks, nine months, there is an ignition in consciousness. There is a shift and opening and people experience tremendous healings in relationship to the Christian tradition and in relationship to Jesus as a guide and pioneer and also opening to a fuller spectrum approach to this sacred life.

I also think on the social impact side, we have done a lot with the Peace Ambassador program. We have done cycles every year of the Summer of Peace. We originally did Peace Week. We are going to be launching a World Peace Building Library. I think we have – I don't know – maybe 200 of the major peace builders in the world who have contributed to that in different ways and so Peace Ambassador training, I think we have 900 graduates at this point.

We've really gotten some great skills for interior development, conflict transformation, as well as working their communities. We've had more than a dozen international cities of peace come out of that. We've got 30 or 40 folks in Oakland who are working on the front lines. We have Oakland, California become a template for a city of peace.

We have partnerships that are aiming to create a thousand cities of peace in the coming years. We are looking at a whole range of things, so I feel like what we have done has helped to thread together the larger narrative of peace from the inner to the international and bring together many pioneers in a collaborative way and platform, and do so in a way that also gives people very concrete skills.

Another one that came to mind was I would say is not as fully developed yet but I feel like we have done some interesting work with the healing between the predominant white Western culture and indigenous cultures.

We have done a number of shamanic courses that have done very well. We have done several things with the International Council of 13 Indigenous Grandmothers. We also did a declaration of commitment to indigenous people that was signed by 10,000 people online and actually presented to the two of the representatives of the 13 Indigenous Grandmothers for safekeeping.

We have made some stands there, contributions in different ways and helped to seed knowledge. It feels like there is more to come in that arena of really trying to bridge between cultures, and then in the future, we really want to look at how we can bring some high-leverage, high-impact ways that we are leveraging the consciousness work to focus on really sticky global situations.

I am personally thinking a lot about the Middle East these days and how we can be a catalyst for greater healing there. We've made a contribution to a group in Bethlehem that we are looking at

partnering more actively with and we've actually made a couple of contributions in Israel and Palestine, and just sort of feeling into what's the best impact there.

I think that those are going to be really key in the future.

Michael: I know you have done some work with two other people that participating, at least two, maybe more other people are participating in this particular conference, *The Future is Calling Us to Greatness*, both with Barbara Marx Hubbard and I think Blain Elgin, as well, and perhaps others.

I know Barbara has spoken very highly about the work she has been doing with you.

Stephen: With Barbara, we activated something that was very ambitious that was aligned with the vision she had been given of creating a moment for humanity where we are acknowledging the birth of a new era. She particularly thought it would be unique and interesting to do so on the first day after the end of the last Mayan calendar, because she said, "What we know for sure is when the last Mayan calendar ends, we know it's going to be the day one of the new calendar."

So she thought it was an auspicious moment to create a unifying feeling globally and we did activate that. We had a major event at the Agape Spiritual Center in LA. We had many of the new paradigm teachers and luminaries speak for that. We had 40 different broadcast locations around the world from places from Byron Bay, Australia to Rishikesh to Giza, to Jerusalem.

All these different events link together in consciousness and have their own celebrations of the birth of a new era. So we have done some great stuff with Barbara and also, she has been really focused on training people now in co-creative skills because that's at the foundation of how we create a new era.

The way I see it is 2012 marked the end of the masculine dominant era or some would call patriarchy but patriarchy has a loaded connotation, but we are really moving into sacred balance between the masculine and feminine, and so that means developing more skills of co-creation between other people and even within ourselves so that we are really learning not to just impose through force or through will but through a real dance of creative energies.

I think as we do that more as a society, we create a co-creative world because in the last era, it's like you were at the top of the decision making or you were a cannon father. It wasn't very great for us the men frankly in the last era because a few people at the top pushing agendas around and not a lot of space for the flourishing of the all.

Michael: One of the things I have so appreciated about Barbara's event was that it gave the light to the misunderstanding that some secular people and others had that so many people in the New Age, New Thought, New Paradigm intricate movement were really expecting the end of the world that it wasn't that at all.

The fact that Barbara chose the day after the supposed end of the world to really launch this mythic mindset and commitment to building and co-creating a just, healthy and sustainably life-giving future and that most of us know in our gut, it has to take some form other than dominance. I thought it was brilliant.

Stephen: Yes.

Michael: I am curious, how do you personally – here, you are in touch with so many spiritual leaders and so many people involved in the transformation of individual consciousness and working toward how we transform our systems as well, how do you personally stay inspired on a day by day basis to do the great work you are doing in the face of some pretty scary stuff?

Peak oil, climate change, overpopulation, species extinction are some really bad news that can be really scary and overwhelming. How do you stay inspired to be in action?

Stephen: First of all, I think there is no other choice but to try to be part of the positive shift because if we surrender to the gloom and doom, intrinsically we will tend to just go toward self-protection and carving out our own little niche to maybe make our lives a little bit better for ourselves but all the rest of the planet goes to hell.

So, I feel like it's an imperative just to take a stand for the positive, to move towards it but I am also not going to pretend that I don't go through waves of dismay. I check *CNN* headlines couple of times a day between other things and I'll pay more attention, read more magazines and every day and every week, there are things that I find really dismaying.

I also am aware that what we see in the headlines is not always the accurate pulse of the planet. The last couple of years have been the fastest turnaround towards solar technology and renewable energy that anybody could have anticipated. Even the most optimistic forecast was never going to turn as quickly as it has, and it's really on an accelerated path now.

We see things, breakthrough technologies like once you hit a tipping point, it's like the electric cars are starting to hit a tipping point. It's like we really had the chance to – Emery Levine has laid it all out. He said when he drew a big picture map, it's like without any government intervention he thinks, I believe, that the stats could be 75 percent renewable on this planet by 2040.

That is without any government intervention, just based upon the acceleration of all these different trends. So when you see on the macro level that for the most part, with some blips up and down, the planet has gotten more peaceful. We have fewer wars. There are still painful and terrible ones but on the whole, we are getting better at that.

All the European countries are no longer destroying each other the way they were a hundred years ago. We have shifts towards sustainable lifestyles in different ways. People in packets getting healthier, happier, more vibrant, more thriving and they are getting better at marketing and sharing that out to the world so that those innovations begin to replicate.

That's what really gives me hope because when I look around my friends, allies and co-leaders, I see a lot of people who are really thriving and really being great examples of conscious eldering. People in their 80s who are making their biggest contribution. People who have amazing marriages, people who are in amazing shape at 65 and having the best sex of their lives at 70.

People are learning how the human game works better and how we can actually really be embodiments of our true divine essence and not just be like kind of overweight, sluggish and war-torn and depressed. We are really getting better at producing high functioning people en masse but we haven't done it at the global scale yet.

We still have massive systemic things, but if you look at those two trends, it's like those little lines start to cross each other. Whether it's all the solar technology, people have been saying for years, "We've got to do it," and all of a sudden, we cross a tipping point.

I believe there is more new solar power installed this year so far in the global grid than the old school coal plants and other stuff, fossil fuels. So that's a massive shift in the entire infrastructure and it's got huge implications for geopolitics as well, since there is a lot of geopolitics driven by the resource scarcity and if everybody is more self-sufficient with their energy needs, that definitely mitigates war and some of the spend on defense.

There is some deep reasons for positivity if you track the deeper trends of what's going on and see all the emergence, but you have to titrate how much of the mainstream media news you take because it's just death, destruction and warfare and it's important that we have some cognizance of it and that we are related to it and we are trying to solve it, but also not so much that it overwhelms our sense of positive initiative and excitement to be part of the change moving forward.

Michael: Yes. Well said. One of the things that actually has gotten to the place where I actually regularly go on media fasts, because what gets caught in for 99 percent of the human history, as I am sure you well know, the news that we are exposed to were things that we could at least potentially make a difference with.

Now, we are exposed to things globally and yet, even people who don't believe in evolution play on our evolutionary instincts for fascination, titillation, sensation, fear, all the kinds of things we are programmed to pay attention to and most of it is episodic trivia, and even the things that aren't they are usually things where we can't necessarily make a difference and yet, we only have so much emotional time and energy.

Our emotions get engaged by these things that happen all around the world where we can't necessarily make a difference and so the challenge is to – as you say – expose yourself to what's going on so we are not completely oblivious and yet also find the things where you can really be inspired to be in action given your own gifts, given your own passion and that sort of thing.

I am reminded of a quote from Tom Atley when he says when people ask him how he thinks we are doing as a species, he says, "It seems to me things are getting better and better, worse and worse, faster and faster."

Stephen: That's a great way to say it.

Michael: Now the things are getting better and better for humans and now, we need to start really focusing on some of those systemic things so they can also get better so that we can be a part of the mythic frame I like is that humans beginning to become not a cancer in the body of life or we consume the body of life for our benefit, but where we take on being the immune system, where we protect and foster, and defend the health and well-being of this planet, this body that we are part of.

I think that's a vision of greatness that can inspire young people and old.

Stephen: It's kind of the higher active of the natural masculine impulse which to be a protector, so if the masculine energy has been too caught up in trying to compete, to dominate in order to not get squashed in the last era, now it's like taking the same protective instinct to consecrate it to the whole planet and all eco systems.

You are no longer just protecting yourself or your family, you are protecting the whole and I think that that's a really noble and evolutionary approach to the next level of the masculine expression too, which is also balanced with the feminine that has a natural desire to nurture the whole, as well.

Michael: Amen. There is one question that is kind of off the wall just to wind down here, but Connie has asked me to ask it to all my guests and I have been doing so. I've been getting some fabulous responses and I purposely don't let you know about it ahead of time.

If you had the opportunity to have a dinner party with any three people in human history, so it was you and these three people, or the opportunity in a one on one setting, on a hike, over a cup of coffee or a beer, or whatever, who would those three people be and why would you choose them?

Stephen: That's a great question. Obviously, Jesus would be for me a key person because I've done a lot of practices in other traditions and I really appreciate other traditions but I still feel like he has been more my primary inspiration of what is a template for a new divine human looked like.

I think it would be nice to have a supper, hopefully not a last supper but have a meal with him.

I want to be a little bit provocative with this. There is a part of me that wouldn't necessarily want to follow through on it because what I find is it is kind of nice to have people that are on pedestals. I find that when you get to know people, you start to relate to them, you realize they are human, they've got their quirks, they've got their challenges and I think we've put out a thousand different teachers in 70 different faculties, so I've gotten to know all these people and so there are very few people that are left on a pedestal for me, which is sort of refreshing, normal and human but it's also like I want a few heroes that I can idealize versus just friends and allies that I respect and I think they are doing good work but it's sort of that wow reaction.

I think what happens is anytime you get up close and personal with somebody, it's like being human being is complex, we are multidimensional and so I think it would be obviously great to spend time with like Gandhi or Martin Luther King. I think recently, some people would have come to mind that I think would be fascinating to get to meet would be like Ellen Johnson Sirleaf or [indiscernible 25:48].

I am particularly interested these days in people who have really taken a deeper spirit and brought it into the political sphere the way that I really respect and admire, and I thought Barack Obama was going to do more of that but I feel like he hasn't lived up to what I was anticipating he was going to be able to carry forward in terms of the wedding of a deep consciousness and the sensibility of transformational politics.

I think that I certainly wouldn't pass up the opportunity to be with all these luminaries but I also know they are okay and I probably would take them off the pedestal now.

Michael: It's so funny. I love your response, by the way, it's just absolutely brilliant and I can resonate with it myself, because for 12 years Connie and I have traveled North America and we have developed friendships with just so many people who I have had upon pedestals and I still see as older brothers and sisters on the path and people doing great work but you are so

right, when we get to know people we are all human. We are all angels with assholes. It's just the way we are.

The other day, I asked Bill McKibben this question and he just paused for a moment and he said, "If I had to answer really honestly," he said, "I would like to be with my wife, my daughter and my dog." He said, "Because I am all around the world, meeting with all these famous people all the time and it's really wonderful but what I really crave is the time with my wife, my daughter and my dog."

Stephen: I could echo with that is that I have turned on some extroversion juices in order to the Shift Network and all the stuff but when it comes down to a quiet weekend with nothing on the calendar at home with my cat and my beloveds, it satisfies me in a very deep way. I don't need all the rest of it.

Michael: Amen. Stephen, this has been fabulous. When people want to go more deeply into your work in the Shift Network...

Stephen: You can get on the email list at the [ShiftNetwork.com](http://ShiftNetwork.com). We've got lots of stuff coming down the pipe. We have new free events every week, at least new one free summit every month and we are going to be doing all kinds of goodies in the years to come and launching more video and audio.

Get on the Facebook page, as well, just search for the Shift Network and get plugged in.

Michael: Cool. Great. Stephen, blessings to you and your work. I hope it just continues to unfold in ways that you actually couldn't predict but you are astonished by and grateful for.

Stephen: That's a great blessing. Thank you, Michael and I return it to you, as well.

Michael: Thanks brother. Take care.

Stephen: All right, bye.

Michael: Bye.