

Creating Communities of Connectedness and Hope

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If you're reading this, you probably consider yourself a progressive in your political and social values and, in all likelihood, are or have been an activist/supporter of one or more of the urgent issues that define our time. But given current and recent events, it's very possible you're feeling stunned, disheartened and overwhelmed by the global horrors of climate crises, war, terrorism, increased isolationist/conservative nationalism, diasporic human displacement, and a range of other tragedies and miseries.

I will not minimize or sugarcoat what is happening. But I do want to express my conviction that proactive endeavors by citizens on a massive level worldwide can turn the tide. And this is genuinely possible if individuals and organizations big and small are aware of each other, connected by communication and mutual support, and a shared willingness to be hopeful even in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. There have been terrible events and periods throughout human history. But owing to combinations of determination, organization, compassion, and interconnection, humankind has survived, often overcome, and in many instances thrived. True, these are scary times. But collectively, we have the power to...yes...change the world.

Indeed, these efforts are already happening. Those individuals and organizations big and small are working right now and have been for decades. Progress, albeit what many may see as a lesser scale than hoped, has been achieved and is increasing. As I was preparing to write this article, an old saying my grandmother epitomized kept coming to mind: "It is better to light a candle than curse the darkness." If all you are seeing right now is the darkness, it may be because you haven't yet lit your own candle, nor have you seen the candles of millions glowing all around. Hope is alive and struggling.

Of myriad examples, I'll begin with the Global Citizens Circle ([GCC](#)) for which I am a senior advisor. For more than 42 years, GCC has fostered diversity, inclusion, and civil discourse aimed at creating constructive change. Tens of thousands of intergenerational participants around the world have engaged in hundreds of Circle discussions, empowering a global learning community of social action. Through these Circles, people from all sectors and perspectives have met each other, discovered each other's work, learned new approaches and tactics, and in some instances have formed partnerships and other alliances. GCC helps create connections and offers opportunities for the creation of communities of action.

Global Citizens Circle is now being revitalized – in part because of a new alliance with the Social Change Initiative ([SCI](#)) whose mission is "To improve the effectiveness of activism for progressive social change particularly in divided societies and to influence the way this work is funded and supported." Because SCI closely aligns with GCC's mission, we're working together

to relaunch Circles under the umbrella theme “Intergenerational Listening and Learning: Delivering Progressive Social Change.” A new community has been formed.

Creating connectedness is at the core of my company, beCause Global Consulting. [beCause](#) helps individuals and organizations connect to their core purpose, connect across silos within their organizations, and connect with external stakeholders – friendly and even adversarial – all based on building and sustaining trust. We’ve been recognized as a Top 100 Thought Leader in Trust enough times to have earned a [Lifetime Achievement Award](#). Global CEO Magazine ranked us nine of the Top 100 Corporate Social Responsibility Leaders globally and SustMeme ranked us 62 of the [Top 500 CSR Influencers](#) internationally.

For many years prior to founding beCause, I did the same kind of work in both the private and public sectors. What I’ve done – and what I’ve seen done by many, many others – is what assures me that the continuance and broadening of this kind of work definitely resolves conflict and creates positive change.

In our increasingly globalized world, we are all global citizens. Taking personal action is the main responsibility of citizenship – nationally and globally. President Barack Obama, in his Farewell Address in January, superbly explained this dynamic:

“...The fight against extremism and intolerance and sectarianism and chauvinism are of a piece with the fight against authoritarianism and nationalist aggression. If the scope of freedom and respect for the rule of law shrinks around the world, the likelihood of war within and between nations increases, and our own freedoms will eventually be threatened...All of this [progress] depends on our participation; on each of us accepting the responsibility of citizenship, regardless of which way the pendulum of power happens to be swinging...I am asking you to believe. Not in my ability to bring about change — but in yours. I am asking you to hold fast to that faith written into our founding documents; that idea whispered by slaves and abolitionists; that spirit sung by immigrants and homesteaders and those who marched for justice; that creed reaffirmed by those who planted flags from foreign battlefields to the surface of the moon; a creed at the core of every American whose story is not yet written...”

Mr. Obama was talking about America, but his wisdom applies to everyone everywhere.

The power of action, community and connectedness is superbly reflected in the 2015 French documentary feature film [Demain](#) (*Tomorrow*). As its own site describes, the film “[shows] solutions, telling a feel-good story...this may be the best way to solve the ecological, economic and social crises that our countries are going through. After a special briefing for the journal *Nature* announced the possible extinction of a part of mankind before the end of the 21st century, Cyril Dion and Mélanie Laurent, with a team of four, carried out an investigation in ten different countries to figure out what may lead to this disaster and above all how to avoid it. During their journey, they met the pioneers who are re-inventing agriculture, energy, economy, democracy and education. Joining those concrete and positive actions which are already working, they began to figure out what could be tomorrow's world.”

Among the solutions revealed are a number of common sense actions that individuals can take in their daily lives. These include “reducing, re-using, recycling, repairing, and sharing: all over the world, [10 million tons of waste](#) are thrown away every day. Landfill sites, rivers, forests, oceans are saturated with the western countries waste. In Africa, entire cities are clogged up with old computers, TVs, vehicles we don't use any more; waters and soils are polluted, children are poisoned... We throw away a third of the food we produce. At the same time, the bulk of natural resource is running out. Recycling creates 10 times more jobs than burning. Sharing things rather than owning them would allow us to reduce tremendously our needs in raw materials.” More information about other simple solutions and the substantial reasons for them is on their [website](#). I strongly encourage you to discover more about the people and communities featured in the film as it's a source of tremendous hope in the face of despair.

I also recommend the book, [Hope in the Dark: Untold Histories, Wild Possibilities](#) by Rebecca Solnit who “calls on us to act in a world whose future remains unknowable ... [towards] transformative victories.” Action, communication, creating stronger connections with other actors, forming communities of action, and maintaining a hopeful attitude are the foundations for creating important and substantial change. And sometimes it just takes a glimpse of the courage, tenacity and action of others to help one stop cursing the darkness and lighting an optimistic candle instead.

A friend of mine who lives in the U.S. told me about a civil rights rally that was held in Washington DC on January 14th in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day and in response to the US presidential election. It was a cold, rainy day; there were no A-list activist or entertainment celebrities participating; and only about 1,000 people turned out. But the rally was cablecast in its entirety on C-SPAN. My friend, who is among those overcome by the darkness and feeling defeated by the election, watched all of it and said it cheered and inspired her.

The speakers, both young and older activists in civil, women's, immigrants, LGBT, labor, and other rights, spoke passionately about going back home, getting together with others, and fighting the good fight for fulsome freedom and democracy and addressing the practicalities of poverty, legal justice, health care, education, voting rights, and more. The Howard University Gospel Choir sang *This Little Light of Mine* (those candles shining) and *Ain't Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me Around*. She was reminded of what she fought for during her youth in the '60s and '70s and began to think about what her little light could be now. She's older and tired and not in the best of health. But neither were many of those standing and singing in the rain. One of the slogans of the event was “We're all in this together.” And we certainly are.

There's a place – and a candle – for everyone who wants it.