

Right Now

Readings for Finding Hope and Creating Confidence during Crisis

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*“It’s worth remembering that
because we’re human,
we start with two things:
What’s the story I’m telling myself,
and what’s the story
I’m telling everyone else.”*

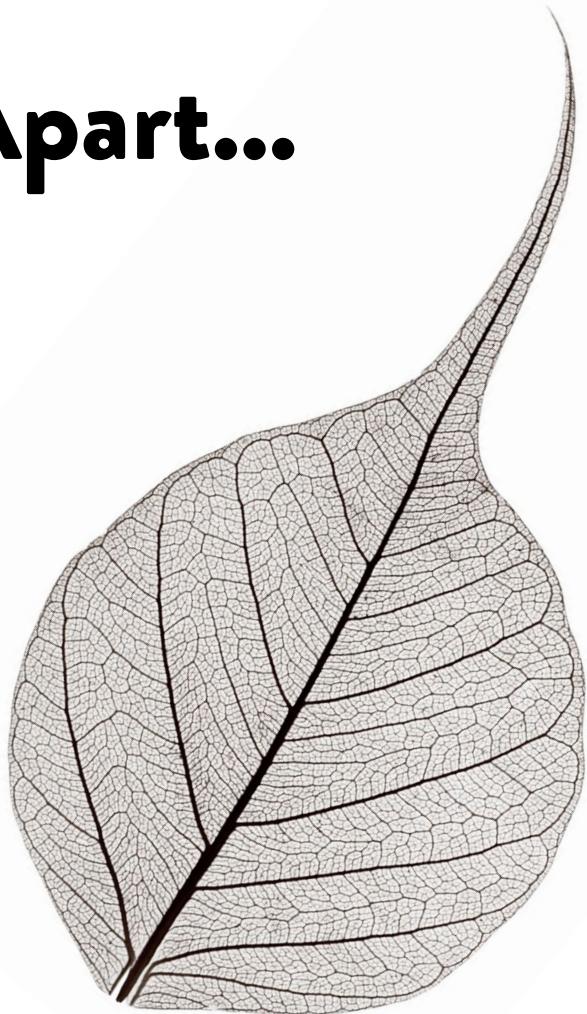
Seth Godin
“The semiotics of face masks”

When Things Fall Apart...

...and we're on the verge of we know not what, the test for each of us is to stay on that brink and not concretize. The spiritual journey is not about heaven and finally getting to a place that's really swell.

In fact, that way of looking at things is what keeps us miserable.

Thinking that we can find some lasting pleasure and avoid pain is what in Buddhism is called samsara, a hopeless cycle that goes around and around endlessly and causes us to suffer greatly. The very first noble truth of the Buddha points out that suffering is inevitable for human beings as long as we believe that things last—that they don't disintegrate, that they can be counted on to satisfy our hunger for security. From this point of view, the only time we ever know what's really going on is when the rug's been pulled out and we can't find anywhere to land. We use these situations either to wake ourselves up or put ourselves to sleep. Right now—in the very instant of groundlessness—is the seed of taking care of those who need our care and of discovering our goodness.



Stop Worrying

I often think of an inscription on the ruins of a fifteenth century cathedral in Amsterdam, Holland. This inscription says in Flemish:

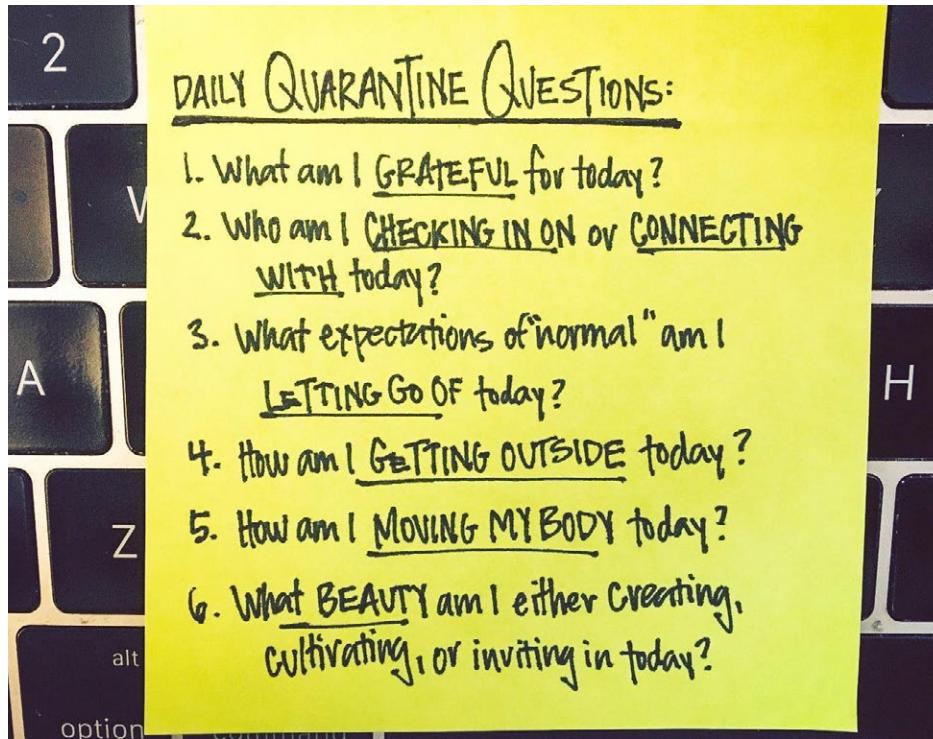
“It is so. It cannot be otherwise.”

As you and I march across the decades of time, we are going to meet a lot of unpleasant situations that are so. They cannot be otherwise. We have our choice. We can either accept them as inevitable and adjust ourselves to them, or we can ruin our lives with rebellion and maybe end up with a nervous breakdown.

Here is a bit of sage advice from one of my favorite philosophers, William James.

“Be willing to have it so,” he said, “Acceptance of what has happened is the first step to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune.”





Communicating Intentionally

Building an architecture.

In order to streamline communication, whether between ten early-stage employees or across dozens of global teams, companies need to set up guidelines in a communication architecture. These guidelines will help your team communicate requests on a sliding scale of urgency, lowering the risk of burnout and helping individuals to prioritize tasks.

Aiming for asynchronous.

An important part of your communication architecture is setting expectations regarding synchronous and asynchronous communication—that is, knowing what needs to be discussed live, right now, and what doesn't need immediate response. It is wise for every company and team to develop communication policies to identify when, where, and how to engage in each type of communication, including guidelines for asynchronous or synchronous behavior, and use of related tools.

Actively managing time differences.

Don't leave it to chance for your team to work out how to handle time zone differences. Once communication has to span more than 2–3 time zones, lots of default practices start to break down. You will want to map out who is where, when they are available, and what your main periods of overlap are. You can then fold that into your communication architecture, so people can know when to expect more synchronous forms of communication, and can schedule needed meetings and standups during those times of overlap.



Read Leanne Brown's *Good and Cheap* in [English print](#) or [digital](#) and [Spanish digital](#) editions | 2015

Eat Well on \$4 a Day

In 2014, Leanne Brown launched a project on Kickstarter.

She wanted to publish a cookbook that was based on the capstone project for her master's degree in Food Studies at NYU. Brown had designed a set of recipes for people living on SNAP and dealing with the reality of having \$4 per person per day to spend on food. The recipes encourage the use of fruits and vegetables, when in season and most economical. The recipes created satisfying meals that didn't require meat or carbs to stave off hunger.

Brown had already created a digital version and posted it online. In the first few weeks, the cookbook was downloaded 100,000 times. The project was to fund the printing of the first physical copies of the book. More than 5,600 backers, including myself, supported the project.

Since then, more than 200,000 copies of *Good and Cheap* have been distributed to people in need all over the United States and Canada. The digital version has been downloaded over one million times and translated into Spanish.

It felt like a good time to point to this project again.



The Crucible

Again and again, we found that something magical happens in the crucible—an alchemy whereby fear and suffering are transformed into something glorious and redemptive. This process reveals, if it does not create, leadership, the ability to inspire and move others to action. We found intelligence, optimism, and other traits traditionally associated with leadership present in all our subjects, but those traits are no guarantee that the alchemy of leadership will take place. Countless gifted people are broken by suffering. But our leaders discovered themselves in their crucibles, for reasons we still do not fully understand. However searing the experience, our leaders were able to make sense of it or organize meaning around it—meaning that subsequently attracted followers. Instead of being defeated by their ordeal, each of our leaders saw it as a heroic journey. Whatever their age, these men and women created their own legends. Without being untruthful, they constructed new, improved versions of themselves. In many cases—as in Truman's—the ordeal and the leader's interpretation of it lead others to follow the newly revealed leader.



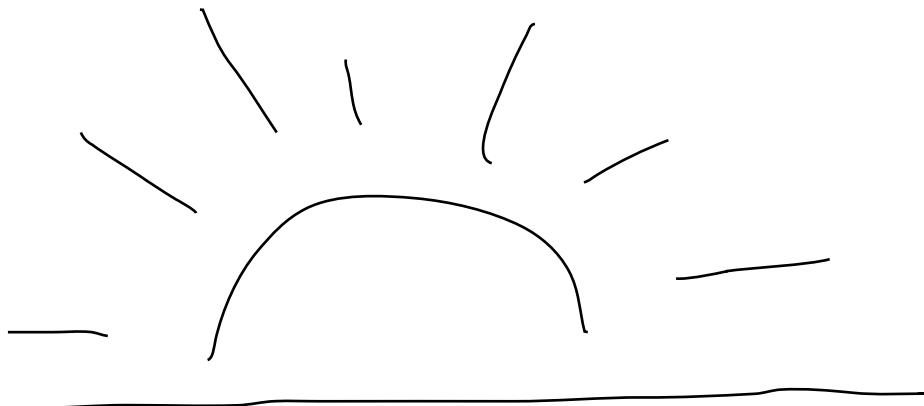
*“Optimism is the **faith**
that leads to achievement.
Nothing can be done
without hope and confidence.”*

Helen Keller

Times Like These

I, I'm a new day rising
I'm a brand new sky
To hang the stars upon tonight
I am a little divided
Do I stay or run away
And leave it all behind?

It's times like these you learn to live again
It's times like these you give and give again
It's times like these you learn to love again
It's times like these time and time again



From Marcus Aurelius' *Meditations* 161-180 C.E.

Is any man so foolish as to fear change...

...to which all things that once were not owe their being?
And what is it, that is more pleasing and more familiar to the nature
of the universe? How couldst thou thyself use thy ordinary hot
baths, should not the wood that heateth them first be changed?
How couldst thou receive any nourishment from those things
that thou hast eaten, if they should not be changed? Can anything
else almost (that is useful and profitable) be brought to pass
without change? How then dost not thou perceive, that for thee
also, by death, to come to change, is a thing of the very same
nature, and as necessary for the nature of the universe?

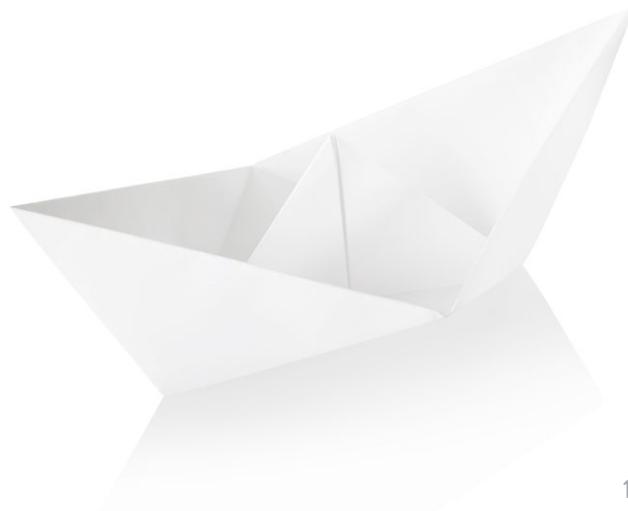


What We Need from Leaders Right Now

Gallup has studied global citizens' worries, fears and confidence during nearly every major crisis of the past eight decades—including the Great Depression, Pearl Harbor and World War II, the Kennedy assassination, upheavals and riots in the 1960s, 9/11, the 2008 global financial crash, and now the COVID-19 pandemic.

One thing is clear. Global citizens look to leadership to provide a path—and to provide confidence that there is a way forward that they can contribute to. In times of crisis, there are two directions human nature can take us: fear, helplessness and victimization—or self-actualization and engagement. On the latter, if leaders have a clear way forward, human beings are amazingly resilient. There is a documented “rally effect.”

Gallup meta-analytics have found four universal needs that followers have of leaders: trust, compassion, stability, hope.



[Read Matt Alt's "From Japan, A Mascot for the Pandemic"](#)

Amabie

The Japanese mythical sea creature, Amabie, is three-legged and covered in scales with a beak and long hair. An 1800s-era legend claims a Kumamoto town official spotted the Amabie, and curious, he approached it. The Amabie told them, “Good harvest will continue for six years from the current year; if disease spreads, show a picture of me to those who fall ill and they will be cured.” This legend has resurfaced and people have been sharing images of the Amabie on social media to share their creativity and good fortune during the COVID-19 pandemic.



Image from [Main Library](#), Kyoto University

Walking Through The Door

[O]nce each found themselves in what Bonhoeffer called a “boundary situation,” they understood they had to navigate through the moment to endure. They didn’t do this by grand design, but instead point by point, with each individual taking a single step forward into the turbulence and then taking the next step after that.

This was messy, grueling, exhausting work. And like everyone in the midst of a personal crisis, these five people were at their most vulnerable. Because they were so vulnerable—hemmed in by doubt, fear and at times, hopelessness—they were also porous, pried open by the shock and awe of their respective situations. What was each to do in this perilous, fertile space? Somehow, these [people] realized that the emotional penetrability they experienced and that caused them so much suffering was also a door into new insights about themselves and new ways of being in the world.

Each decided to walk through this door, to use the subtle but powerful opportunity for personal growth for personal growth contained in every crisis.



*“After tragedies, one has to invent a new world,
knit it or embroider, make it up.
It’s not gonna be given to you because you deserve it;
it doesn’t work that way.
You have to imagine something that doesn’t exist
and dig a cave into the future and demand space.
It’s a territorial hope affair.
At the time, that digging is utopian, but in the future,
it will become your reality.”*

Bjork

Ten Qualities That Increase Our Perception of Risk

Catastrophic potential: If fatalities occur in large numbers in a single event—instead of in small numbers over time.

Familiarity: Unfamiliar or novel risks make us worry more.

Understanding: If we believe that how an activity or technology works is not well understood, our sense of risk goes up.

Personal control: If we feel the potential from harm is beyond our control—like a passenger in an airplane—we worry more than if we feel in control—like the driver in a car.

Children: It's much worse if kids are involved.

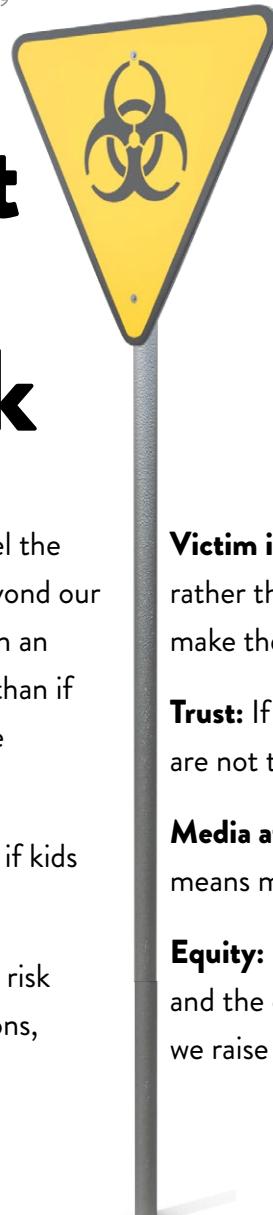
Future generations: If the risk threatens future generations, we worry more.

Victim identity: Identifiable victims rather than statistical abstractions make the sense of risk rise.

Trust: If the institutions involved are not trusted, risk rises.

Media attention: More media means more worry.

Equity: If the benefits go to some and the dangers go to others, we raise the risk ranking.



What is Already There

Most social change is chosen—you want to belong to a co-op, you believe in social safety nets or community-supported agriculture. But disaster doesn't sort us out by preferences; it drags us into emergencies that require we act, altruistically, bravely, and with initiative in order to survive or save the neighbors, no matter how we vote or what we do for a living. The positive emotions that arise in those unpromising circumstances demonstrate that social ties and meaningful work are deeply desired, readily improvised, and intensely rewarding. The very structure of our economy and society prevent these goals from being achieved... Disaster demonstrates this, since among the factors determining whether you live or die are the health of your immediate community and the justness of your society. We need ties, but they along with purposefulness, immediacy, and agency also give us joy—the startling sharp joy I found in accounts of disaster survivors. These accounts demonstrate that the citizens any paradise would need—the people who are brave enough, resourceful enough, and generous enough—already exist. The possibility of paradise hovers on the cusp of coming into being, so much so that it takes powerful forces to keep such a paradise at bay. If paradise now arises in hell, it's because in the suspension of the usual order and the failure of most systems, we are free to live and act another way.



*“Prepping and hoarding are not the same.
Share what you have.*

***Now is our opportunity to rethink and re-imagine
the type of community you want in your life.***

*Time to explore how our cultural need for
individualism has kept us from the collective.*

*Time to stop with binary thinking and be
more expansive of our definitions for health,
love, community and family.”*

Desiree Lynn Adaway