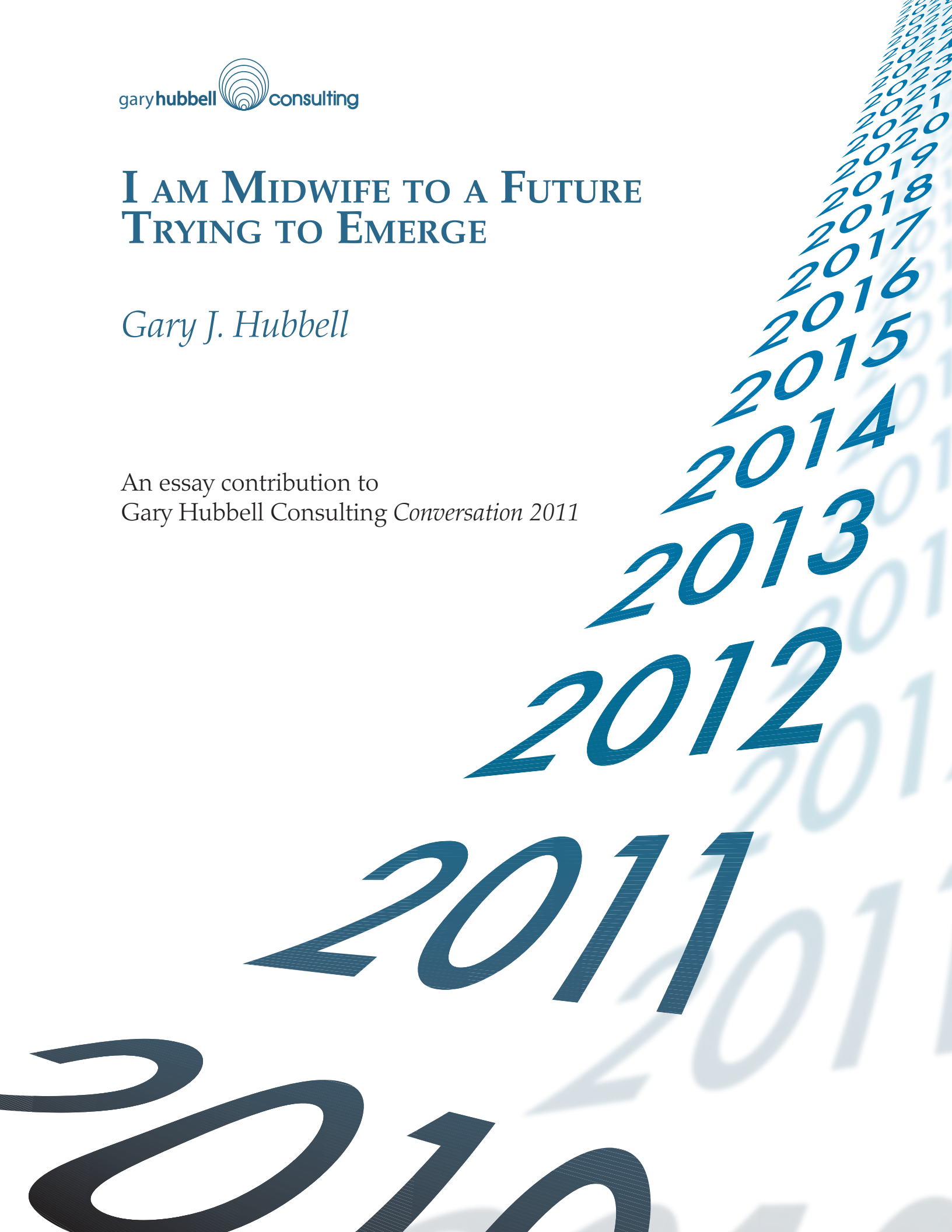


# I AM MIDWIFE TO A FUTURE TRYING TO EMERGE

*Gary J. Hubbell*

An essay contribution to  
Gary Hubbell Consulting *Conversation 2011*



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## ABOUT GARY HUBBELL CONSULTING CONVERSATION

Annually, Gary Hubbell Consulting convenes and hosts a small hand-picked group of social sector professionals from throughout North America for three days of intense dialogue and critical thinking. We strive to create a thought-provoking, mind-opening, and stimulating conversation about philanthropy, organizational leadership, and social sector change. This deep exploration of the nature and challenges of the philanthropic environment is intended to engage, inform, and inspire senior leaders to be catalysts for change in their own organizations and communities of influence. With each GHC *Conversation*, we seek to establish the seeds of a continuing and enriching network that nourishes us as individuals and helps each of us change how we converse, inspire, and seek new dimensions of philanthropy.

# Gary Hubbell Consulting *Conversation 2011*



## PARTICIPANT BIO

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Gary is a strategist, providing high-level consulting to social sector organizations and private companies in the areas of philanthropy, strategy development, and planning. He is passionate about partnering with leaders to transform organizations - applying his research and experience to help define and achieve goals.

A voracious reader and student of history, he is constantly looking to understand the driving forces that shape organizational choices and create openings for change. He seeks to know why people and organizations behave the way they do so their passions and energy can be channeled to reach their full potential.

With more than 30 years' professional experience, Gary has been counsel and coach to more than 135 clients throughout his career. He started Gary Hubbell Consulting in January 2006, following 15 years as a senior strategist with a national consulting firm. Earlier leadership roles include development and marketing responsibilities in hospital and museum settings, and consulting roles in resource development, public relations and opinion research.

Recent books and monographs include:

- *Forces of Change: The Coming Challenges in Hospital Philanthropy* (2005)
- *Lessons from Benchmarking: Fast-Forwarding the Maturity of the Fundraising Operation* (2007), with Mary Reinders
- *Staff-Led Feasibility: How to Design and Conduct Your Own Fundraising Feasibility Study* (2008)
- *When the Party's Over: Why, How, and When to Conduct a Post-Campaign Assessment* (2009)
- *The Prophecy of Millennial Philanthropy* (2009)
- *In Search of New Meaning: Philanthropy, Community, and Society* (2009) (edited by Gary Hubbell)
- *I am Midwife to a Future Trying to Emerge* (2011)

# I AM MIDWIFE TO A FUTURE TRYING TO EMERGE

By Gary J. Hubbell

C. Otto Scharmer introduces the concept of learning from the future. He paints a stark picture of current reality, one which frames the pursuit and promise of philanthropy:

*"The crisis of our time isn't just a crisis of a single leader, organization, country, or conflict. The crisis of our time reveals the dying of an old social structure and way of thinking, an old way of institutionalizing and enacting collective social forms."*<sup>1</sup>

The starting point for my thinking about my own midwifery is found in Peter Senge's introduction to Scharmer's *Theory U*, where he observes

*"[W]hen people living inside a shifting reality begin to 'see' what was previously unseen and see their own part in maintaining the old and inhibiting or denying the new, the dam starts to break."*<sup>2</sup>

Well, I can sense my own dam starting to break. In fact, I believe I may be standing on the cusp of a new era, a dawning of a new age of enlightenment. The good news is that I am not alone on the cusp. I am you. I am every Boomer, Gen Xer, Millennial, and New Silent generation member. I am my neighbor. I am the colleague in the cubicle next to you. I am 55. I am 42, 27, and I am eight. The harder news is that the future that I want to see in 2030 will not emerge without my help. If it is to be, it's up to me.

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<sup>1</sup> Scharmer, C. Otto (2009). *Theory U: Leading from the Future as It Emerges: The Social Technology of Presencing*. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc. , San Francisco, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Senge, P. in Scharmer's *Theory U*, p. xv.

We are all responsible for working collectively to bring about the most powerful and positive future that is *trying to emerge*. The future will require networks of solution seekers, working in concert. The most telling growth of philanthropy by 2030 will be in the raising of issues, voices, and hands—even more so than the donated dollars. It will be a centering, a focusing, a selfless bigger picture melding of visions. This will not be a nirvana state, nor will it be possible to sustain this national/hemispheric/global commonality for long. Physics and the study of systems teach us that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. It will, however, be enough to leave a lasting mark on the arc of philanthropy and the tenor of the social sector.

So what is the future that is trying to emerge? This new era of awakening will be characterized by faith and understanding. Not faith in the religious sense (although that's certainly part of it), but faith in humankind, faith in one another. The understanding that emerges will be born of a deep curiosity and a willingness to listen. The result is trust and a deep sense of connectedness. I envision other characteristics about this 2030 future that is trying to emerge. Among those characteristics are the following:

Social justice issues (peace, hunger, shelter, safety, etc.) are and will remain pressing issues.

The enormity of these issues will evolve to a higher level of consciousness for more people everywhere. The global recession begun in 2007 will prove to have had a lasting effect on collective psyche—albeit affecting each generation differently, due to their phase of life during the zenith of this near economic depression. Collectively, we will take stock of what matters most, bridle our headlong rush toward consumption and pausing (then acting) long enough to see who else we can help. Basic issues of life support and safety will continually remind us of both our frailty and what is best about us when we act. Former U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright wrote, “Above all, we need leaders who will not accept that misery and deprivation are inevitable, for failure to act to ease suffering is a choice, and what we have the ability to choose, we have the power to change.”<sup>3</sup>

China and India—the most populous nations—will have strength in numbers (of people). As they focus, so goes the direction of resources in the future. Philanthropy will be just one form of resource flow. Micro-loans, business incubation, and favorable government

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<sup>3</sup> Quoted from her foreword to *Leading From Within: Poetry That Sustains the Courage to Lead* (2007), by Sam M. Intrator and Megan Scribner, (digital text location 129-133).



contexts will continue to grow over the next two decades, resulting in these nations' greater ability to redress their own social ills and, perhaps for the first time in a meaningful way, join more mature philanthropy cultures in the western world.

Religion won't lead the way. There will be increasingly secular approaches to the giving impulse, largely because there is such limited history of successful, large scale interfaith cooperation on anything. Religious fundamentalism, while unlikely to disappear, will have become so shrill and detached that it will have become marginalized. The rise of "middle positions" will continue to grow, thereby taking steam from the engines of religious fundamentalism and reducing the relevance and attractiveness of their messages to many. Growth of civil society and great progress on social justice and personal freedoms will foster the diminution of all fringe fundamentalists. The passing of these dark clouds will then allow the light of insight, creativity, and hope to reemerge in a whole new capacity.

The explosion of artificial intelligence (AI) and the effects of competition within mature sub-sectors of society will foster commoditization in North America. IBM's Watson mega computer (and other AI leaders) will continually learn and adapt, effectively blending encyclopedic knowledge with human inference and the nuances of language. Hospitals and colleges will be impacted the most, leading them to completely reconceptualize their roles or risk extinction, as pervasive access to technology continues and AI makes education and medical diagnosis increasingly self-directed and without need for an institutional "middle man."

Recognizing the growing strength of networks of providers, both health care and higher education will witness significant consolidation, sometimes merging traditional nonprofit providers with for-profit providers. This evolution will accelerate and amplify the long-bubbling call in the U.S. for removal of federal tax protection status. Over the next two decades, these sub-sectors will have become so commoditized that all but a small fraction of the population will remain deeply motivated enough to philanthropically support the things that are commonplace today (e.g., equipment, construction, endowment, faculty chairs, etc.). These institutions will live by what they charge. They will remain distinctive and worthy assets of the community and the sector, yet they will lose their current prominence in the ranking of priority organizations to support with outright donations. The pursuit and application of charitable gifts will, for the most part, slow or cease outright. The exceptions will be the sector leaders (e.g., Mayo, Johns Hopkins, Cleveland Clinic in health care; Harvard, Oxford, Yale in higher education), whose market dominance and adaptability continues to inspire and foster gift investment. These sector leaders will

champion the morphing of “competitive advantage” to a new sense of “partnerships of equals” for the practice and promise of philanthropy.

Generational idealism will become a potent force for change. By 2030, the first wave of the Baby Boomers will be 85. In that year, I will be 74 years old (meaning I’m a mid-wave Boomer)—too young to sunset, but unlikely to possess the sustainable energy to lead new initiatives. True of this generation our entire lives, we will set precedent again in our twilight years, shaping the message of idealism and adding the wisdom of proven change agents. The first wave of the Millennials will turn 47, just hitting their full leadership stride, having lived another 20 years of tech-savvy, networked, solution-orientation idealism. They are and will remain impatient.

By 2030 we will have witnessed (and participated in) the forging of a powerful generational collaboration between Boomers and Millennials along a path of new awakening. This will help usher in an era of enlightenment. The social sector will have shifted from its focus of the previous 30 - 40 years as being a tag along partner to fill government funding gaps and will have shifted to its highest calling of drawing attention—world attention and world resources—to social injustices and to the fulfillment of human potential. The shared idealism of the Boomers and the Millennials will be a reinforced vanguard for this shift. This experience will breathe renewed life into Boomers’ aging lives of waning leadership and influence. The Millennials, moving decidedly into their most robust and energetic phase of life, will drive innovation, outreach, and experiences—albeit grounded in idealism—to entirely new levels.

The characteristics of leadership will change. We will find that the leadership qualities that we will embrace and require will be the ability to network, amalgamate, combine (not control), crystallize messages, and invite others to act. Crutchfield and McLeod Grant spotted this organizational leadership quality in 2007, noting,

*“The secret to success lies in how great organizations mobilize every sector of society—government, business, nonprofits, and the public—to be a force for good. In other words, greatness has more to do with how nonprofits work outside the boundaries of their organizations than how they manage their own operations.”<sup>4</sup>*

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<sup>4</sup> Crutchfield, L. R., and McLeod Grant, H., (2007). *Forces for Good: The Six Practices of High Impact Non-Profits*, Jossey-Bass, p. 19.



Again this is why I am so bullish on the rise of the Millennial generation in leadership. From birth, they have been networked and collaborative, seeing the value of team and insistent upon breaking barriers. Their leadership will change the way organizations behave and the philanthropy dialogue is conducted.

## WITNESS OR CATALYST?

As I imagine this possible future, I find myself thinking *less about how society* and social sector organizations might change, and *more about how I might change*. What might this future that is trying to emerge want and need from me right now? The key ingredient is to find my highest and best calling; to have authentic alignment of my action with my ideals. I believe it means I cannot simply be a witness to this emerging future; I must be its catalyst.

I am sometimes nervous about the signals of our current environment. I see many organizations acting and thinking as if they were alone. Rampant leadership ego risks erroneously seeing ourselves as the center of the universe. We are too easily trapped by notions of “fundraising” – which promotes transaction, technique, and tedium. What happened to trying to change the world; no, really! I mean changing the world? Not the lip service and spinning of phrases that are intended to polish institutional cases in order to resonate most deeply with most people. Done superficially and seemingly only for the purposes of “raising money,” much of philanthropy risks becoming boring and unimaginative. Worse, it risks becoming “institutionalized.”

I seek to raise up issues in people who can bring justice and energy – positive energy – to overlooked and under-resourced issues and people around the world. If I believe philanthropy is a positive lever of change, then I must acknowledge that dollars alone are insufficient. Dollars must be coupled with amplified voices and the power of personal presencing.<sup>5</sup> These combinations will be more powerful (and more lasting) than individual missions and individual donations.

Actions of my Millennial colleagues will speak just as loudly. They seek to get busy, to have an impact, and to make a difference. They are in a hurry. They are also well wired, globally

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<sup>5</sup> The term “presencing” is often used by Otto Scharmer. It means to sense, tune in, and act from one’s highest future potential—the future that depends on us to bring it into being. This term was introduced in Senge, P., Scharmer, C.O., Jaworski, J., and Flowers, B.S. (2004), *Presence: An Exploration of Profound Change in People, Organizations, and Society*. Currency-Doubleday: New York.

traveled and experienced, and fully expecting to collaborate with people whose life experience is completely unlike their own, save for a shared generational personality. By 2030, their sense of entitlement will have long disappeared. Their generation's urgency is about seizing this moment. They have long been adept at technology, which has given this generation not only the instant ability to feed their natural curiosity, it has given them the instant ability to connect across boundaries. Two decades from now they will have long felt deeply connected to the entire planet. As a result of their shared generational experiences during youth and young adulthood, they will have embraced cultural differences as a learning opportunity rather than as an annoyance or something to be contained or combated. Millennials will have grown accustomed to immediately directing their giving to individuals, groups, and communities—often without institutional middle men. By this time, they will have long ceased to depend on the tax benefits of giving as a motivation for outward concern. Philanthropy for them will have ceased to be a singular siloed response and instead will be combined and co-leveraged with other remedies including adoption, business incubation, teaching, advocacy, etc.

The resulting practice and promise of philanthropy will be nothing short of incredible. The influence of individuals from years before (e.g., Bill Gates, Warren Buffet, signers of the Giving Pledge, etc.) and other selfless acts will have created and seeded a future of possibility where people—as individuals, as organizations, and as communities—see their greatest and highest potential resting not in what they achieve for themselves, but what they bring about for one another and for the planet. “When we live in the close-knit ecosystem called community, everyone follows and everyone leads.”<sup>6</sup>

Is it naïve to think this way? Am I Pollyanna? Am I simply projecting what I'd like to see? Or have I seen a glimmer of the future that is *trying to emerge*? Of course, none of us knows the answer to that question, but my belief is in the latter. My belief is that the change that I want to see in the world in 2030 begins with me. The change that I want to see in the world is up to *me* to catalyze.

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<sup>6</sup> Intrator, S.M., and Scribner, M. (2007). *Leading From Within: Poetry That Sustains the Courage to Lead*. Digital text location 129-133.

First and frequently I ask the question, “Why?” Why am I doing this? Why does it matter? ” I then ask, “How will I go about serving that Why?” And only then focus on what I must do and what I must pursue in service of that greater Why. I must ask myself, “Is my behavior a reflection of my deepest beliefs and highest priorities? Are my words and deeds consistent with those beliefs? Am I making a difference? Am I being authentic? Am I worried less about popular opinion, external evidence of wealth and riches, and titles or station? Or am I thinking about the impact of my actions today on seven generations from now? Am I serving them well?” If so, they will remember. They will be inspired. They will take the arc of philanthropy—its pursuit and its promise—to unimaginable new levels as they look toward a new millennium to be seen in their lifetimes. I seek not so much to be right, but to be insightful; not to be seen simply as hopeful, but as curious and inspired. Perhaps to be selfishly reflective to ask myself, “What will I do? What conclusions will watchers make about what matters(ed) most to me and whether I did something of value about it. Join me. Help me find even deeper meaning, greater clarity, and more courage to do that which truly changes the world wherever I am. After all, as poet Wendell Berry notes, what we need is already here.

### **The Wild Geese**

Horseback on Sunday morning,  
harvest over, we taste persimmon  
and wild grape, sharp sweet  
of summer's end. In time's maze  
over the fall fields, we name names  
that went west from here, names  
that rest on graves. We open  
a persimmon seed to find the tree  
that stands in promise,  
pale, in the seed's marrow.  
Geese appear high over us,  
pass, and the sky closes. Abandon,  
as in love or sleep, holds  
them to their way, clear,  
in the ancient faith: what we need  
is here. And we pray, not  
for new earth or heaven, but to be  
quiet in heart, and in eye  
clear. What we need is here.

~ Wendell Berry ~

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<sup>7</sup> For an interesting and complete perspective on the power of this simple question, see Simon Sinek’s *Start With Why* (2009).