

# THE BIRTH OF

# BLUE

## A speech to the Commonwealth Club by Adam Werbach

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### Environmentalism is still dead

In 2004 I came here to the Commonwealth Club and performed a eulogy for environmentalism. Eulogies by their nature are the last word on the subject. But I made a promise on that cold December day to come back in the spring and share a set of solutions. It took me a few more years than I thought, and the world has changed a fair bit since that time, but I'm back.

Let me quote from that speech:

A reasonable case [could] be made that environmentalism needed to package seal pups, redwoods, clean air, Yosemite, clean water, and toxic waste under the brand of 'environmentalism' in order to pass a raft of environmental laws in the 1970s. But for at least 20 years and maybe longer, the basic categorical assumptions that underlie environmentalism have inhibited the environmental movement's ability to consider opportunities outside environmental boundaries.

It is at moments like these that we need to take a hard look in the mirror.

We must not trade our fear of what will come next for our affection for environmentalism.

I remember shaking as I spoke, knowing full well that the reaction would be swift and harsh. No one likes to be called dead when they perceive themselves to be alive.

I remember long conversations with my wife, Lyn, as she tried to make me feel better about myself and about the accountability I felt for my own failures. I was unable to sleep, staring at repeats of cable news shows.

Little did I know that the speech was being circulated in places I would never have expected: among senior leaders at Wal-Mart, as they were beginning—with Paul Hawken's help—to consider sustainability as a core part of their business.

It wasn't until 2006, when I started helping Wal-Mart implement this sustainability program, that the outside



attacks really started flying. A widely circulated piece critiquing my decision to work with Wal-Mart was entitled “The Death of Integrity.”

Another one, published just this week, has a more visceral title: “Adam Werbach makes me puke.”

A blogger named Cliff Schector wrote a piece called “Adam Werbach: Wal-Mart’s New Fraud Salesman.”

What Werbach needs to realize is that Wal-Mart is beyond improvement and yes, beyond redemption. Those who really are forward-thinking need to stop working with this man, certainly stop paying him and I would daresay, if you really believe in what you say you do, stop returning his phone calls.

He has chosen to sell out. It doesn’t mean we all have to join him in Wonderland.<sup>1</sup>

Tonight I invite you to join me in Wonderland. I ask you to consider joining me in building a movement that goes beyond the political to the personal, that views the existential threat of global warming as a chance to change the way we treat ourselves and the planet, that aspires to have 1 billion active participants across the earth. Tonight I’ll contend that we need to invest more time in making a difference through our routine activities and the things we buy every day. To achieve this we need a broader platform than green.

Since giving that speech in 2004, I’ve traveled the world to find the next trends; I’ve seen and will share with you tonight the tragedy of forest destruction for soybeans in the Amazon. I’ve seen the birth of a new sustainability movement in the rapidly growing economy of Poland. I’ve seen the inspiring echoes of the 2 million citizen activist groups around the world chronicled in *Blessed Unrest*.<sup>2</sup> I’ve seen the twinkling of the next phase of environmental thought—true BLUE—bursting onto billboards and lifestyles in the mature green environment of Switzerland.

In all of those places, I’ve seen people seeking something broader than a green or environmentalist solution to the myriad problems they face in their lives. Yes, they believe climate change is happening, but they also want to feel good about the way they look in the mirror and the way their kids look at them at the dinner table. They want to be part of something larger than themselves without having to

sacrifice their identity. They want joy, not guilt, and a little money in their pocket so that they don’t have to trade down on yet one more thing in their life.

Building this new movement will require a commitment to the mainstream that we are unaccustomed to in San Francisco. It’s not enough to have a revolution that consists only of Mac users. It’s not enough to have a revolution that exists only in coastal states and college towns. It’s not enough to attack China as the home of lead-painted toys and neglect the aspirations of the hundreds of millions of people who have been brought out of abject poverty because we’ve bought those toys.

Something is happening now; progress seems at hand. We don’t know what to call it. For now let us call it the sustainability revolution—we are beginning to understand how human culture will harmonize its relationship with the living world.

But let’s not forget that the word sustainability has little meaning in the world. My daughter, Mila, asked me what the definition of sustainability was. I explained it and she asked me, “Daddy, do we have to take a plane to get there?”

I’ve come to believe that changing the way people look at the world is more important in the long run than focusing only on the marginal ecological impact of the individual actions they take.

Eating organic food should be only one small articulation of the way you take care of yourself, your community, and the planet. You can eat locally grown, co-op, organic heirloom tomatoes and still be a bad person.

Green is good, but it frequently breaks down as a strategy when it hits the marketplace. The common green definition of sustainability, or “environmental sustainability,” is mainly concerned with the fate of the planet and how that affects our lives. For me, sustainability has four integrated streams: social, cultural, economic, and environmental. All must exist in balance.

That’s why tonight I’m speaking about the birth of a new mass movement to complement and expand our existing political efforts. A movement not just for professionals or experts or people who can explain photosynthesis and life cycle analysis. A movement we can call BLUE.

This movement will have many faces, but at its heart it's a lifestyle movement, a way to live a successful life. Many of us already have a regular practice that can reinforce our values. While political activism is at best a biannual pursuit, shopping is a regular activity for most people on the planet, and if trends continue, it will be for virtually everyone. We can either cede this field to the profit-driven marketeers, or we can share it.

Now, before you attack me for sounding like President Bush, who seemed to say after 9/11 that we could “shop our way out of it,” let me be clear. I'm not calling for you to get off the farm and into the mall. But how do we bring our aspirations for the world into what we buy? This is the billion-person question.

## Then vs. Now

The problems are worse than we feared.

Between 1990 and 2003, American CO<sub>2</sub> emissions increased 16%.<sup>3</sup> That wasn't just America's record; that was my record as a professional accountable for results. Even Europe's emissions grew at about twice the rate of U.S. emissions during the first five years of the decade.

- Half the world's tropical and temperate forests are gone.<sup>4</sup>
- 90% of the large predator fish are gone.<sup>5</sup>
- 75% of marine fisheries are overfished or fished to capacity.<sup>6</sup>
- Species are disappearing at rates about a thousand times faster than normal.<sup>7</sup>
- A recent study found that there are 287 chemicals in the cord blood from babies in the United States.<sup>8</sup>
- America now has 2 million people in prison and about 960,000 farmers.<sup>9 10</sup>
- An estimated 35% of cancer deaths are directly attributable to diet.<sup>11</sup>
- CDC estimates that 50% of today's health care costs are attributable to health risks that can be modified by lifestyle behaviors.<sup>12</sup>
- The United Nations says 826 million people are hungry; however, a much larger number, roughly 1.6 billion, are over-nourished and overweight.<sup>13</sup>

Consider that fact for a moment. Twice as many people on the planet are dealing with the problems of too much food as are dealing with the problems of too little.

We can't diminish the need to make sure that everyone has enough to eat, but today's world requires that we have a solution for people who have too much as well.

## Birth of BLUE

Since 2004, some things have changed. We've seen awareness of the problems we face skyrocket. At no time in my career has the public thirst for change been so strong. The covers of *Newsweek*, *Time*, and *Vanity Fair* are all festooned with images of our planet's peril. Perhaps it was the catalytic effect of *An Inconvenient Truth*, or maybe it was the doubling of gas prices, or maybe it was an unpopular war of choice, or maybe it was the loss of a great American city to the sea. But today the ideas of an Apollo Project for clean energy, a major national investment in clean energy technology which I spoke about in 2004, are mainstream. Everyone seems to be talking about green jobs. If this makes you feel optimistic, good. It makes me optimistic as well.

Regardless of why public sentiment has changed, it has, and it's now time to take delivery on that desire.

But just as in 2004 I told you that we were ill equipped to foment a movement or to exercise power, today we remain narrowly focused on policy changes as a means for change.

We need solutions as big as the problems we face. Despite all of this attention, most people are not engaged. Policy change is critical, but it's not enough. As Jib Ellison told me when I was trying to decide whether to work with Wal-Mart, “You can choose not to work with corporations, but then what's your solution?”

We need to unleash the creativity and imagination of the global public. I have no patience for people who want to preserve what environmentalism was at the cost of our effectiveness.

In December of 2004, I performed an autopsy on environmentalism. Today, I'm here to acknowledge the birth of a BLUE movement.

As vast and common as the ocean, BLUE is a platform for sustainability that goes beyond the deep, beautiful green of

environmentalism. Green puts the planet at the center of the dialogue. BLUE puts people at the center.

I'm not asking you to give up on green—far from it. Green is the beating heart of the emerging BLUE movement. Green represents the simple and inarguable wisdom of ecology: that all things are connected. BLUE brings together a broader set of human concerns, from practice to price, from nature to society. BLUE integrates all four streams of sustainability: social, cultural, economic, and environmental. BLUE puts the way we treat ourselves and each other at the center of our focus.

In Michael Pollan's book *In Defense of Food: An Eater's Manifesto*, he offers a set of rules for eating: "Eat food, not too much, mostly plants," and "Don't eat anything with a health claim." Also, "Don't eat anything your grandmother wouldn't recognize." He writes,

What other animal needs professional help in deciding what it should eat? Yet for most of human history, humans have navigated the question without expert advice. To guide us, we had, instead, culture, which, at least when it comes to food, is really just a fancy word for your mother.<sup>14</sup>

Pollan's book is a call for us to defend what we innately know about food—whole foods, less processed, eaten in modest amounts, are a healthy path.

We are people who shop as well as people who eat. Shopping is the only other activity, besides sleeping and watching TV, that consumes our time as thoroughly as eating. Yet when it comes to shopping, we have few cultural rules and signposts to follow in the way that we have with eating. As flawed as they may be, Americans know the concepts of fat, calories, cholesterol, and sodium. But what do we know about the sodium lauryl sulfate in our toothpaste, or the phthalates in a baby bottle, or the embedded energy cost in a cable box, or the provenance of the parabens in cosmetics? It's enough to make your head spin.

Women across the world lead the shopping budgets for families. The average American woman spends an hour per day shopping.<sup>15</sup> She is an expert at finding price and value for herself and her family, and increasingly, she's looking to make a difference when she does. To date, the only social change movement that speaks to her says one thing: stop. Stop shopping and start making your own household

chemicals, grinding your own detergent, packing homemade lunches for your children, and hanging your clothes out on a laundry line.

While these are noble ends, everything that we've learned about behavior change is that it happens small step by small step, so it's unlikely that a mom will switch from Cheez Whiz to tofu. Our challenge is to inspire people to make better choices.

Do not underestimate the power of the shopper. Private consumption expenditures in the United States represent about 70% of the GDP.<sup>16</sup> In the words of Andy Ruben, a Vice President at Wal-Mart, "We live in a consumer-driven economy. We can either deny it or try to leverage it. Denying it hasn't gotten us very far."

Engaging people as consumers, as people who shop, allows us the possibility of building a billion-person movement. To be a part of it, people don't need to join a listserv or pay a membership fee. They won't get a newsletter or a membership card that they need to stuff into their wallet. And no wall calendars. Imagine with me what this movement could do.

## Green vs. BLUE

Put most simply, to many people, "green" means choosing the environment, nature, and the atmosphere over all things. BLUE means you don't have to choose.

Not surprisingly, there's a sense of green fatigue facing many consumers, largely because it's being promoted as a panacea in ways on which it doesn't deliver. Organic American Spirit cigarettes still cause lung cancer and low-birth-weight babies. They may be better for the environment, but this is the sort of near-sightedness that the green "fetish" for organic creates. Organic is simply one step toward being BLUE, even though it's the gold-standard for being green. The real battle among consumers is not between the conventional carrot and the organic carrot; it's between the carrot and the Twinkie. The wholesome food vs. the overprocessed food. That's the battle that moms are facing every day at snack time, and it's a place for us to start our service to her.

We want to keep the parts of green that have brought us

change and innovation, but let go of the narrowness. BLUE builds on the foundation that green has laid but lets go of its baggage.

## In Moving from Limits to Possibilities

Let's step back a bit and talk about the roots for a BLUE movement. In my speech on the death of environmentalism, I traced back the roots of the American conservation movement: from Henry David Thoreau to John Muir, to Rachel Carson, to my mentor David Brower. All of these transformational figures were trying to protect nature or humanity from harm. To change our orientation from limits to possibilities, we need to know what we're for and not strictly what we're against. The field of psychology went through a similar challenge almost a decade ago when Dr. Martin Seligman became the president of the American Psychological Association.

Seligman pointed out that the entire history of psychology was based on finding treatments for dysfunction and disease. Psychological research was focused on depression, mania, and hysteria, and on what to do for people who suffered these maladies. His solution was to create the field of positive psychology, which focused on creating positive interventions for our lives that would proactively make us happy rather than treat us when we are sad. They found quite simply that once material needs are met, there are four factors that can help increase happiness.

- 1) Being of service to something larger than yourself
- 2) Experiencing "flow," or full engagement, on a regular basis
- 3) Showing gratitude to the people in your life
- 4) Having at least three people emotionally close enough to share your life with

Similar to traditional psychology, environmentalism, which is the political arm of the green movement, is focused on executing ameliorating actions for the planet: slowing the release of CO<sub>2</sub>, removing glycols from household cleaners, or protecting farmland from being destroyed. While these are absolutely essential political activities that we should continue, they are not the basis for a lifestyle movement. A lifestyle movement requires the construction of a set of

practices that make up the way we wish to live our lives. Slowing global warming and protecting our last wild places is a necessity, but it's not the whole end.

If we see our goal as moving beyond just ameliorating harm and toward creating the future that we want to share, what can the logic of nature, the green movement, and the best parts of the environmental movement teach us?

To help you understand this, I want to share with you my experience with what might be the largest sustainability engagement campaign in the history of the planet: our efforts to engage the almost 2 million associates, or hourly employees, who work at Wal-Mart.

### Personal Sustainability

How many people here have been to a Wal-Mart in the last two weeks? If it's less than two-thirds of the room, you have to acknowledge that you're strange, since 200 million Americans shop at Wal-Mart regularly, and 89% of Americans shop there at least once a year.

When I was first approached about working with Wal-Mart, I refused, confident that the only reason they could want to work with me was for their PR needs. As it became clear to me that they wanted to lead, and not just go through the motions, the enormity of the task began to become clear to me. They set out three goals:

- 1) Produce zero waste
- 2) Be powered by renewable energy
- 3) Sell only green products

For the largest corporation the world has ever known to set these goals for itself was no small matter. I was still staying close to home in the wake of my speech here, watching too much cable news, when I received the call from Wal-Mart, and I began to imagine what working with Wal-Mart could mean.

While there's a certain activist romance in the David vs. Goliath story, I began to get more comfortable with the odds of working with Goliath in the spirit of a David.

I remember my first trip down to Bentonville, Arkansas, arriving in the meeting hall as they began to do the Wal-Mart cheer. Who here knows the Wal-Mart cheer? I didn't know whether to clap or to sit with my arms crossed

in protest. I clapped meekly, hoping no one would notice.

I started working with the people who work at Wal-Mart—almost 2 million of them globally—figuring that if we could learn how to make them care about sustainability, then we could make it stick to the 200 million people who shop there regularly in America. Working with associates, we created the Personal Sustainability Project.

The project was designed with associates in Plainfield, Indiana; Broomfield Colorado; and Tampa, Florida. At the heart of the project was a simple voluntary commitment that we called a PSP, or a personal sustainability practice.

What are the qualities of a PSP? It's something that is **SMART**.

**Sustains the planet**

**Makes you happy**

**Affects the community**

**Repeatable**

**Takes visible action**

Examples: Bike to work. Park in the spot that's farthest from where you're going. Change your lights bulbs to CFLs. Care for a park. My PSP is to make healthy breakfasts for my kids every morning and to learn something new from them every day. My wife Lyn's is to increase our composting. Lee Scott's PSP was recycling, and now it's getting in shape for the spring.

The associates at Wal-Mart made creating a BLUE movement their mission. They formed teams and plans, and soon there were 10 sustainability captains in every Wal-Mart store, each working with the roughly 500 associates inside to develop their practices. This grassroots-driven, voluntary movement spread to over 4,500 Wal-Marts and Sam's Clubs across America in the period of about six months. Over 500,000 Wal-Mart associates adopted and maintained a PSP in the first year of the project.

The behavioral idea behind PSP is a simple one we call nano-practices. Nano-practices are the thousands of tiny things you do each day that make up your lifestyle. For example, how you tie your shoes, the type of shoes you wear, your choice of socks, how you fold your socks, and whether you wear your shoes indoors. Instead of trying to change the big things about someone's identity—whether they're a Democrat or Republican, for example—we start by finding

daily or recurring practices that can express their values. A personal sustainability practice, at its most basic level, is a repeated action that's good for you, your community, and the planet.

Initially, we focused on strictly environmental PSPs, but we quickly learned that the environment was only an entrance point.

### **Jan Bennett**

I first met Jan Bennett in Broomfield, Colorado. She is a spiritual woman, quick with a smile. Her thinking, more than anyone else's, formed the ideas I'm sharing with you tonight. She's a Wal-Mart associate. Originally from Mississippi, she's a lifelong learner and was as excited as anyone about learning how sustainability works, what exactly is going on with our atmosphere, and how recycling can be a business driver. She volunteered to become a PSP captain and soon had almost everyone in the Broomfield store involved in the project.

But when I really talked to Jan, I understood that her PSP—learning how to recycle—was the touchstone of a transformational change she was hoping to make in her life. Jan wanted to lose about 75 pounds, and she wanted to get control of her type 2 diabetes. More than anything else, she wanted to find a way to connect to her daughter, who had been growing more and more distant every year and had recently told her that she had decided she didn't want to have children because of the state of the world.

Jan's first PSP was recycling, and encouraging her friends to recycle. After recycling, her next PSP was to lose weight. Her PSP became the mechanism to tackle those broader issues in her life. After trying to lose weight a number of times, this time the diet worked: She lost 75 pounds over the year. And with all of that weight off, she started getting control of her diabetes. She's been able to go off her medication. And most importantly, her daughter thought what she was doing was cool, and it's been a way for them to start getting closer.

I remember the conversation with Jan when she told me that her new PSP was a diet. "Really?" I asked, obviously disappointed that this born leader had chosen to go with something so ... ordinary.

“What do you mean, ‘Really?’” she snapped back.

“Well, I just figured that sustainability—I said it slowly this time—has to have something to do with protecting the earth.”

Jan gave me a kind sigh. “Where do you think all that food is coming from?” She paused. “And what about sustaining me, so I can sustain my family?” She then smiled. “You’ll figure it out.”

A few months later, Jan was invited by some folks at Wal-Mart to come along to a small, exclusive clean-energy investment conference at the Aspen Institute, attended by people like Vice President Al Gore and *New York Times* Columnist Tom Friedman. At some point in the proceedings, a senior official from the Bush Administration stood up and said that he thought climate issues were too complex for average Americans, implying that climate change needs to be solved by experts, not the people. Jan couldn’t hold her tongue even though it wasn’t her turn to speak.

She summoned her courage, stood up and said:  
“Discount me, and the South will rise up in me; inspire me and I will move any mountain you put in front of me.”

Silence.

This humble hourly worker had just corrected one of the president’s men, a renowned expert in clean-energy policy. Why was she even in Aspen, she wondered?

And then Vice President Gore started to clap. And pretty soon everyone else was applauding Jan as well.

And it’s not just Wal-Mart associates who have gotten involved with PSP. Amanda Adler’s mom Ruth works at Wal-Mart in Vancouver, Washington.

As Ruth got more and more excited about PSP and what she could do, her daughter Amanda started getting curious and created her own PSP: recycling. Amanda is 11 years old and loves to play softball. They live in Battleground, Washington, a town with a population of about 13,000 people.

A few weeks ago Amanda was finishing up drinking out of a plastic bottle and went to put it in her backpack to recycle it. As she did, her teacher asked her what she was doing.

“I’m recycling this.”

“Throw it away, Amanda,” he said.

“No, I’m recycling this because that’s my PSP.”

The teacher was so infuriated that he sent her to the principal’s office and she got detention. When Ruth got home, she couldn’t believe it. Amanda is a straight-A student. When she heard what happened, she and Amanda set up some chairs on their lawn and waited for the mayor to come by; he happens to live down the block and walks his dog by their house every evening. When he did, they told him their story, and he agreed to help.

He had lunch with the superintendent of schools the next day. Within a week they had recycling programs at the two middle schools and the high school in the community. And they dropped her detention.

The Adlers are just getting started. At dinner they make sure that there’s no TV, and they use it as family time. Their softball league got rid of the deep fryer and are now serving up organic vegetables.

Ruth says, “I started in Battleground, and I’m going to Vancouver next.”

## Augmenting Political Activism with Consumer Activism

We must rapidly begin the shift from a thing-oriented society to a person-oriented society. When machines and computers, profit motives and property rights are considered more important than people, the giant triplets of racism, militarism, and economic exploitation are incapable of being conquered. A nation can flounder as readily in the face of moral and spiritual bankruptcy as it can through financial bankruptcy.

—Dr. Martin Luther King, 4 April, 1967

There are three desired outcomes for the BLUE movement. First, to measurably improve the quality of life of people who join. Second, to engage as many people as possible in the effort, and third, to increase the effectiveness of their activism. The primary tactic is getting 1 billion people to create their own personal sustainability practices.

Today there are two major forms of activism to combat problems ranging from climate change to child poverty: structural-change activism and direct-outcome activism. When you volunteer at a school, you are engaging in direct-outcome activism. When you lobby the school board

to improve the textbooks, you're engaging in structural-change activism.

My critique of environmentalism in the United States is largely with the effectiveness of the structural activism that it has undertaken over the past 30 years. Few laws have been passed, few regulations have been changed, and certainly none of them have been up to the scale of climate change. The movement has also ignored the critical role of government investment in clean technology, which will be required to reduce our emissions to 80% below 1990 levels.

As my colleagues Michael Shellenberger and Ted Nordhaus have attested, investment in research and development will be required in order to combat climate change. A recent article in the scientific journal *Nature*, entitled "Dangerous Assumptions," argues that the United Nations Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change has significantly underestimated the amount of emissions reductions required to stabilize the amount of carbon in the atmosphere. The technological challenge is at least twice as large as the world has come to believe. In other words, we're going to need massive investments—investments similar to those that helped us build highways and railroads, guarantee the market for micro-chips and fund the creation of the Internet—in order to get enough new clean-energy sources online fast enough to make a difference. The movement of which I speak can lower energy demand somewhat and create public demand, but it can't make the investments required by governments worldwide.

As David Brower liked to say, it's not a choice of either/or, it's both/and. I'll say it again: Do not confuse my advocacy of personal actions and using the platform of consumerism as a rejection of political action or a lack of commitment to strategic investments from the public and private sector. I've spent my entire life working on those, and we need to continue them. But if you believe it's important to engage an audience as large as 1 billion people, we need to speak in words and encourage practices that solve the everyday problems that people face. There are only a few institutions on the planet that have a billion-person reach—not the United States, not the United Nations, and not even Wal-Mart. Who reaches a billion people? The nation of China, the nation of India, Procter & Gamble, and McDonald's. Why do people rob banks? Because that's where the money is, as Willie Sutton said. Why do you

work with corporations and India and China? Because that's where the people are.

Let me share a story that shows why I believe that we have only begun to tap the power of this vein of activism.

I went to the Amazon on a fact-finding mission as a member of the international board of Greenpeace to go to the roots of a shoppers' campaign that has done more to stop climate change than any other single action in the last five years—the moratorium on cutting new forest for soybean plantations.

For the last decade, the cutting of the Amazon forest has rapidly increased. I had thought that our activism in the early 1990s had irreversibly slowed the cutting, but the great soy expansion brought it back in full force at the beginning of the century.

While China and the United States battle to be the world's largest CO<sub>2</sub> emitter, if you count deforestation, Brazil is the fourth-largest emitter. Seventy percent of Brazil's emissions come from deforestation, and that deforestation is largely happening in the Amazon.<sup>17</sup> And the largest contributor to deforestation in the last five years has been the clearing of land to grow soybeans.

The years 2004, 2005, and 2006 were particularly hard on the forest, as the global demand for soy increased. Soy didn't arrive in Brazil until the 1980s, and it took off like heroin. Farmers make less than \$200 per hectare for cattle, and can make up to \$1,200 per hectare of soy. It's no small business. Soy is more than 10% of Brazilian exports: about \$30 billion a year. Most of the trade is in the hands of a few companies: ADM, Cargill, and Bungee. The soy is used for animal feed, cooking oil, and increasingly often as a biofuel ingredient.

### **Ivete**

The head of the local workers cooperative is Ivete. She lives near San Pedro, not far from the confluence of the Amazon and Tapajos rivers. She speaks rapidly, her hands moving whenever she speaks. "I'm happy you've come to understand our reality," she says when we arrive.

"We face some serious challenges here."

"After Cargill came in 2003, we faced huge pressure to sell our lands." Ninety percent of families don't have official title



on their lands, and many were kicked off after 2003. The government has been slow at land reform and settling the disputes. “The big landowners get their papers first,” she says, “even though the new constitution gave us our land.” Soon after the large landowners received their papers, the police came and told them that the land was not theirs.

Entire communities disappeared. “The process was violent,” she says, shaking her head.

There have been 1,534 workers assassinated in the last 15 years.<sup>18</sup>

In one town I visited, Genipapo, a farmer named Casagrand claims all of the land as his. There were 45 families here with a new church and a new water system. They were almost finished with a rural electrification project. Casagrand led the efforts to frighten people from their homes, and today there are only 12 families left. You can see the charred remains of the houses of families that resisted. The smell of smoke is still fresh, and the weeds are growing up quickly through the old thatch. The school is now closed, and it’s difficult for the remaining families to stay. Everywhere I travel I bring a few of the soybeans that Casagrand grows in the fields that are now encroaching on Genipapo. It’s a reminder of the cost that the people of the Amazon are paying for the way I live.

But this is one story with what could be a happy ending. In the last year, the cutting has almost stopped. The major soy producers have enacted a voluntary ban on buying soybeans from newly logged forest. It came about through a European consumer campaign led by Greenpeace to put pressure on McDonald’s to stop buying chickens for Chicken McNuggets that were produced with soy from the Amazon. McDonald’s investigated and then put pressure on its soy producers.

The soy moratorium has protected millions of acres so far. And I’m very happy to announce that last week, the soy producers tentatively committed to keeping the moratorium indefinitely. This is an incredible achievement for consumer activists.

If activists could change the world through Chicken McNuggets, imagine what we could do with a coordinated movement.

## Why a Consumer Revolution?

In developing the thinking behind BLUE, there has been nothing more controversial than the idea of a consumer-led movement. But I think that our understanding of the power of consumerism can change. Recall that a hundred years ago the word “consumption” was a way of describing tuberculosis. We are no longer an agrarian society, and it’s time that our cultural understanding of shopping—gathering the things we need to live and thrive—matures.

I recently shared the vision for a billion-person consumer movement with the head of one of the largest environmental organizations and he scowled, “a billion-person consumer movement? I want a billion-person anti-consumer movement.” It’s a nice line, and a wonderful sentiment, and I hope he goes out and builds that movement, but what I’m proposing is that we meet most people where they’re at today: as busy, complex humans looking to do the best thing for their family and themselves.

Throughout history, consumer movements have been central to revolutions. The French Revolution was a call for bread, which Marie Antoinette famously and fatefully responded to by saying, “Let them eat cake.” On February 1, 1960, four African-American students—Jibreel Khazan, David Richmond, Joseph McNeil, and Franklin McCain—sat at a segregated lunch counter at a North Carolina Woolworth’s store in the seats reserved for white customers. And Gandhi rallied a nation against imperial British rule with the simple and radical call for a march to the sea to make salt.

Today, our response to shoppers as a social movement is much like our response to corporations who wish to be leaders, which is, “I’d rather you just didn’t consume.” Or, in the case of corporations, “I’d rather you didn’t exist.” We don’t have time for this preciousness. Corporations and consumerism can be vehicles for change. The question is what type of change that will be.

Let me give you one example of what happens when consumers are not involved: 7UP. 7UP is a soft drink made by Cadbury Schweppes. The drink’s target market audience is moms who are looking to create healthier alternatives for their families. Their brand proposition is now “all-natural,” and they have wonderfully executed ads that show farmers picking 7UP cans in fields as if they were the blossom of

a new day. Of course, 7UP is not really “all-natural,” but the statement is technically true based on current food regulations. This is just one example of how the hyper-focus on one green claim — “all-natural” — can obscure the true health effects of the product. Also, 7UP has tested different packaging versions to figure out that if you add 15% more yellow to the green on the package, people report a taste experience that has a lot more lemon than lime.

A frequent reaction to manipulations of this sort is to recoil in horror and to fall into a rant against marketing in general. Stare into the dark and learn how we’re being manipulated in order to manipulate the system back. For most of my activist career, we have been trying to get an issue into the mainstream and our tactics are conflict-oriented since conflict raises awareness. But now that people know that global warming is an issue, our challenge is to figure out how to activate them.

Generally, when we talk about affecting consumer culture, we start by looking at the media Americans consume.

I’d like to offer instead that we need to work on ground-level media as the platform for moving “make-a-difference” activities into consumerism. Shopper marketing, along with digitalization, has been one of the two fastest-growing segments of marketing in the last few years. Shopper marketing is the effort to reach people in shopping mode, the time when they’re at a store online or offline and searching to buy a product. Unless you know how shoppers shop, you can’t hope to help them use that shopping to change the world. As someone who has spent his life in grassroots organizing, I’ve found that shopper marketing is the translation of ground-level organizing to the marketing sphere.

### Shopper Marketing

Seventy percent of all purchase decisions are made in-store. Sixty-eight percent of in-store purchases are made on impulse.<sup>21</sup>

Shopper marketing is rapidly becoming a science. For example, marketers now know:

- How many men who take jeans into the fitting room will buy them compared to women: 65% to 25%<sup>22</sup>
- How many browsers buy computers Saturday before noon

(4%) as opposed to after 5 p.m. (21%)<sup>23</sup>

- That when given bigger baskets, shoppers buy more things (74% of shoppers with baskets make a purchase, compared to 34% of shoppers without baskets)<sup>24</sup>

### The Shopping Cycle™

Since I spoke here last, my company, Act Now, grew to a staff of 45 people, and we decided to merge into the global advertising firm Saatchi & Saatchi. Saatchi was an obvious choice, since it launched perhaps the most inspirational consumer product, the Prius, and it represents the world’s largest consumer products company and advertiser, Procter & Gamble.

The reason was simple. Saatchi’s CEO Kevin Roberts convinced me that this would be his life’s work: transforming one of the world’s great advertising companies, with 7,000 employees in 84 countries, into the world’s most powerful sustainability advocate. First, by making Saatchi the “Bluest” agency on the planet, and then by helping all of its clients transform their businesses, their products, and their communications to improve people’s lives, build the BLUE movement, and radically dematerialize and decarbonize the products they sell.

Saatchi’s shopper marketing division, Saatchi & Saatchi X, uses a technique they call the Shopping Cycle to understand how shopping works.

Which item is more likely to prompt a trip to a store?  
Running out of Diet Coke or running out of toilet paper?  
Diet Coke. Diet Coke is not substitutable, whereas toilet paper has a substitute.

How many people here create a list before they go shopping? The dream of every company is to get the name of its product on your list, as opposed to just a generic name. “SunChips,” not “Chips.” “Tide Coldwater,” not “Laundry detergent.” My dream is that BLUE becomes a meta-brand so that our billion advocates will buy as long as it’s BLUE, the way a small number of people today will only buy a product as long as it’s green.

Once you’ve got your list, you enter the store, the automatic doors opening as if you were entering a spaceship, and something strange comes over you. Your identity changes to “shopper,” a cross between a game show contestant and

James Bond, as you search for the things you need.

“If it’s two for one, is one half the price of two?” you ask.  
 “Which is more important, the price per ounce or the price per use?”

It’s during this phase that the rapid process of deselection begins; this is often a preconscious process. Many sustainable products are left out in this process, almost instantly before you even have a chance to evaluate them. Maybe you haven’t heard of the brands, or they are too expensive, or maybe the color palette is unfamiliar.

I share these details because as we build out the BLUE lifestyle movement, we need to empower shoppers to demand sustainability in every step of the process. For those of us who wish to be professionally engaged in helping shoppers get the right products to improve their lives and serve to make a difference for our world, we need to create products that fulfill shopping needs at this level.

## BLUE Plans

We’ve discussed why we need a movement that’s broader than a green movement. We’ve shown how consumers actually shop through the Shopping Cycle. Now we need to get to the hard work of how we take these needs and form them into a BLUE movement.

Let’s review. Our purpose is nothing short of building a world full of happy people contributing to a healthy planet.

There are three outcomes for the BLUE movement. First, to measurably improve the quality of life of people who join. Second, to engage as many people as possible in the effort, and third, to increase the effectiveness of their activism.

In the next five years, we need to build a billion-person movement, representing over \$1 trillion in consumer buyer power—consumers who are maintaining their PSPs and acting on them when they shop.

To create a world full of happy people, we need to go far beyond reducing our individual carbon imprints. Happiness requires that the material Maslovian needs of the 9 billion people projected to be living on the planet by the end of the century are met, so we need enough resources for all of them.

No greater scion of capitalism, John Maynard Keynes, once quipped, “In the long run, we’ll all be dead.” We all know that once we’re gone, someone else will inherit the earth we’re leaving. This sort of long-term thinking is hard for the capital markets, and that’s one reason that we need shoppers to lead the companies from the bottom as emerging regulations press them from the top.

To create this pressure, we’re going to have to move beyond the four P’s—Price, Product, Place, and Promotion—taught in every marketing class. I want to suggest three P’s that I hope marketing professors will start to teach their new students and that BLUE folks will use to drive their shopping habits: Price, Process, and Purpose.

**PRICE:** First, we need to democratize sustainability and make it available to everyone. You shouldn’t have to be rich to be sustainable.

**PURPOSE:** What’s the purpose of what you’re buying? Do you need it? Does it fit into the healthy practices in your life?

**PROCESS:** What was the process to make the product? Was it energy intensive? Did it use pesticides or petroleum? Were the workers paid a fair wage? How will it be disposed of?

These three P’s are a step toward building cultural rules for shopping. Your mother may have taught you how to find a bargain; you need to teach yourself how to make a difference through the things you buy.

This will eventually come naturally to all of us. We live on a planet that’s two-thirds water, and we don’t have gills; we live on a planet full of consumer choices, and we don’t yet have the faculties to choose well.

BLUE needs you to invent it. No one owns it; it’s a platform. Everyone is welcome to catalyze action around it, as long as it improves life at a personal, community, and planetary level. And start now.

Start by setting your own PSP if you don’t have one already. The process of personal improvement is never-ending, and if you already have a practice, recommit to it or begin another. Once you have your PSP, share it with a friend. The possibilities for PSPs are endless.

Start placing plants next to light switches, since people conserve more when they see nature. If you travel a lot, get your company to declare a no-fly week once a year. Start

buying concentrated detergent and washing your laundry in cold water. Eat one less meat meal a week. Write a thank-you letter to someone you haven't spoken to in a while.

Each individual personal sustainability practice does matter.

President Bush just sent out a \$150 billion stimulus package to boost the American economy. How are you going to spend your \$600?

If just the Americans in the movement bought cars with the same fuel economy as the Prius, we would save over 3 million barrels of oil each day (that's more oil than the United States currently imports from the Persian Gulf) and more than \$45 billion each year at the gas pump.<sup>25</sup>

If half of the time we bought cotton it was organic, we could stop as much as a billion pounds of toxic, oil-based pesticides and fertilizers from being exposed to farmers, their communities, and the end customer—every year.

If each time we plugged something in, it only drew power when it was needed, we in the United States alone would save \$5.8 billion annually on power bills and prevent the greenhouse gas equivalent of taking 7 million cars off the road for a year.<sup>26</sup>

If every time we turned on a light, it was a compact fluorescent bulb, the savings would be equivalent to taking 50 million cars off the road for a year.<sup>27</sup>

If every time we bought a gallon of milk, it was organic, we would save 200 million pounds of pesticides a year.<sup>29</sup>

If every time we washed laundry, it was in cold water, we would save 75 billion Kwh of energy.

If every time we drank water, it was from a reusable bottle and water filter, we would save \$600 million a year.<sup>30</sup>

This is only the beginning. But it doesn't start without your commitment to your own practice and your asking someone else to start as well.

And then I hope you'll join me in asking the smallest and the largest institutions on the planet to encourage the people in their universes to start as well. I've been working with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, who will be launching a campaign after November that will be based on principles similar to BLUE's; it will be called "A Healthiest Nation." Wal-Mart will only accelerate its focus on sustainability as they move from their 2 million associates to

their 200 million shoppers. And, perhaps most importantly, I believe that Amanda Adler's softball team in Battleground, Washington, will all have PSPs by the end of spring. We need websites, we need shelf-talkers, we need writing, we need songs, we need great food, and we need you. If you tell me that we can't get to 1 billion people, I'll tell you that with the people in this room, the people listening to the radio, and the people reading these words, we're on our way there. I'm done convincing people that the world is going to end. This is the how the world is going to begin again.

When you look at the planet earth from space, you don't see social problems, you don't see economic problems. But you do see a little bit of green. And a whole lot of **BLUE**.

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**The following books have been deeply influential in writing this speech:**

Break Through: From the Death of Environmentalism to the Politics of Possibility by Ted Nordhaus and Michael Shellenberger  
 Ecology of Commerce: A Declaration of Sustainability by Paul Hawken  
 Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History Is Restoring Grace, Justice, and Beauty to the World by Paul Hawken  
 Authentic Happiness: Using the New Positive Psychology to Realize Your Potential for Lasting Fulfillment by Martin E.P. Seligman  
 Silent Spring by Rachel Carson  
 Encounters with the Archdruid by John McPhee  
 Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future by Bill McKibben  
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 Natural Capitalism: Creating the Next Industrial Revolution by Paul Hawken, Amory Lovins, and L. Hunter  
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