



## Issue 190 - January 2019

What's stretched out in front of us this shiny New Year? Since the dawn of civilization, humans have wanted to see into the future. Seers, prophets, and fortune-tellers of all sorts have responded to -- and preyed upon -- the primal desire we have to reduce the uncertainty of what lies ahead.

This time of year, we're bombarded with glib and confident "experts" forecasting everything from the economy, to global warming, to financial markets, social trends, weather, and lots more. Predictions often tell us more about the predictor's explanatory style and values than the future. Optimists sometimes make wildly rosy predictions while pessimists typically foresee doom and destruction. Most forecasters project a glass half full or half empty extrapolation of today's best or worst trends.



Neuroscience shows the survival of our species depended heavily on our primitive brains letting negatives stick like Velcro and positives slide off like Teflon. We're programmed to pay more attention to danger and fear. Forecasters (and politicians) playing to our dark side can trigger those menacing and powerful emotions.

With the benefit of time and hindsight we can now laugh at these dire predictions:

- In the 1890s, German Max Nordau, wrote, *Degeneration*, a runaway bestseller forewarning the moral collapse of society through crime, immigration, and urbanization. He called it a Black Death of degeneration and hysteria.
- A 1901 American bestseller was *The Simple Life* by Charles Wagner arguing that materialism was dying, and people were going to migrate back to the farm.
- Oswald Springer's 1923 bestseller, *The Decline of the West*, warned that civilization was on the brink of collapse and optimism was cowardice.
- Stanford University biologist, Paul Ehrlich, published *The Population Bomb*, in 1968 with this catastrophic warning, "The battle to feed all of humanity is over. In the 1970s hundreds of millions of people will starve to death in spite of any crash programs embarked upon now. At this late date, nothing can prevent a substantial increase in the world death rate."

In his book, *Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress*, Harvard professor, researcher, and author Steven Pinker's notes a long list of failed predictions and writes, "prognosticators are biased toward scaring people."

Technology is a major driving of change and is changing very unpredictably as we see in these forecasts:

- Lee DeForest, the "father of radio," said in 1926 "While theoretically and technically television may be feasible, commercially and financially it is an impossibility."

- Postmaster General Arthur Summerfield predicted in 1959 that mail would soon be delivered by packing letters into guided missiles.
- In 1968, the chair of Ontario Hydro said, "I feel safe in predicting that man will have unlimited electrical energy to shape his future during the next hundred years. The more energy we deliver, the lower will be the unit cost of electricity."
- In 1980, AT&T projected that 900,000 mobile phones might be sold by 2000. There were 109 million sold by then and over 17 billion sold to date.
- Experts forecasted in 2000 that 30 gigawatts of electricity would be generated worldwide through wind power by 2010. It was 200 gigawatts and reached 370 by 2015. Solar power has generated over 17 times what was predicted in 2000.
- Sir Alan Sugar, a British business magnate, and media personality, said in 2005, "next Christmas the iPod will be dead, finished, gone, kaput." As of 2014, 390 million units were sold.
- Just before the iPhone launch in 2007, Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer laughed it off, "There's no chance that the iPhone is going to get any significant market share. No chance."

So, enjoy the latest rounds of prediction fiction. Some can be good fun. Treat the diviners of doom like going to a horror movie -- have a frightful scare, treat it as entertainment, and get back to reality.

Speaking of reality...we kick off this issue kicking off our New Year with our annual look at how the world keeps getting better and better -- despite all those gloomy headlines and dismal predictions.

We also take a look back at last year's top blogs to help your reflection and renewal. We see how Peter Drucker's thought leadership continues to guide leaders and organizations. These transformations are vital to continuous change and development in our unpredictable and fast-changing world.

I predict a year of unpredictable events. It'll be filled with good and bad, joy and sadness, and plenty of ups and downs. Positive progress will continue to quietly march forward while "the news" diverts our attention and feeds our fears.

## Don't Get Sucked in by the Gloomy Headlines: The World's Getting Better and Better

It's time for our annual dose of reality. Let's start the New Year with a perspective check. We've heard way too much from the "nattering nabobs of negativity," purveyors of pessimism, and deliverers of doom. Let's ditch the "**crap glasses**" and get real. Let's look at what's truly going on in the world.

This annual New Year's blog on how the world continues its relentless march of continuous improvement has become our most inspiring and favorite to research and produce. This tradition started five years ago with "**A Dose of Reality: Our World is Dramatically Better**." The following year we reported, "**Despite Dire Headlines, the World is Getting Much, Much Better**." The next year we added to our long and growing list of positive facts with "**Beyond the Doom and Gloom: Over 65 Ways Our World Keeps Getting Better**." Last year we piled on even more evidence with "**Don't Get Dragged Down by all the Negative News: Life's Better Than Ever**."



One of my favorite books to read in the past year was Matt Ridley's *The Rational Optimist*. He's "write on" with these comments, "No matter how persuasive our evidence, we routinely encounter disbelief and even hostility, as if accentuating the positive was callous. People cling to pessimism about the state of the world. John Stuart Mill neatly summarized this tendency as far back as 1828: 'I have observed that not the man who hopes when others despair, but the man who despairs when others hope, is admired by a large class of persons as a sage.' It's cool to be gloomy."

Many authors of the books and articles highlighted in these New Year's blogs point out humans are hardwired to look for weaknesses and what's wrong. Ridley writes, "We're even capable of fretting about the bounty of prosperity, as 'Weird Al' Yankovic highlights in his clever song, 'First World Problems': 'The thread count on these cotton sheets has got me itching/My house is so big, I can't get Wi-Fi in the kitchen.'"

Here's a fraction of the good news reported in the past year:

- 85.8% of the world's one-year-old children have been vaccinated against some disease, but pessimism based on anti-vaxxer negative news abounds. A poll of Americans showed they felt only 35% of the world's children are vaccinated. Japanese feel it's just 18%.
- Smallpox has been vaccinated out of existence. This has saved around 5 million lives per year and between 150 to 200 million lives between 1980 and 2018.
- Since 1990 global average income has increased by 55%. For the first time in 10,000 years over 50% of the world have enough income to be considered middle class or rich.
- 2017 was the first year there were no commercial passenger plane deaths at all with over 4 billion people in the air.
- Global suicide rates have fallen by 29% since 2000.
- Between 1980 and 2017 the world's population increased 69% from 4.46 to 7.55 billion yet resources are more abundant than ever. The CATO Institute researchers found "humanity is experiencing superabundance."
- In the past 25 years the share of people living in extreme poverty around the world fell from 36% to 10%. 200 years ago 90% of the world lived in extreme poverty.
- Violent crime in America has dropped 75% since the early 1990s. The chances of an American being killed by a terrorist in the USA in 1 in 3.5 billion -- less chance than drowning in a bathtub.
- Since 180 countries signed the Montreal Protocol to phase out chemicals like CFCs, the ozone layer is now improving about 3% per decade and should be fully restored in the Northern Hemisphere by 2030 and Antarctica by 2060.
- Global life expectancy has increased by 10 years since 1980.
- The number of annual deaths from natural disasters has been cut in half in the past 100 years.
- Child mortality has been halved in the past 20 years.
- 2/3 of the world lives in a democracy.
- Since 1990 winter smog is down by 77% and summer smog by 22% while the U.S. population has grown rapidly.
- The 2018 Social Progress Index reports "overall the world is getting better, with 133 of the 146 countries seeing an overall improvement in social progress."
- The 2018 Report of the Global Commission on the Economy and Climate concludes, "We are on the cusp of a new economic era: one where growth is driven by the interaction between rapid technological innovation, sustainable infrastructure investment, and increased resource productivity."

Pessimists often call themselves realists. Really? It's completely unrealistic to believe the world's getting worse. The evidence clearly and overwhelmingly shows we're better off with each passing year.

But what about global warming, economic uncertainty, rising populism, famine, war, the refugee crisis, or ballooning debt levels. As Gregg Easterbrook writes in *It's Better Than It Looks: Reasons for Optimism in an Age of Fear*, "There is a great deal to worry about. But while worrying, be optimistic. Optimism does not make us blind to the many faults of the world. Rather, optimism is the conviction that problems can be solved if we roll up our

sleeves and get to work... optimism is the best argument for reform -- and the bow that propels the arrow of history."

My very favorite book of the past year is Harvard professor, researcher, and author Steven Pinker's latest, **Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress**. In over six dozen graphs, Pinker provides powerful data showing how the pioneering leaders of late 18th century enlightenment thinking are here now. We truly are living the dream. [Click here to read the blog](#).

Pinker opens the Progress section of his book with the words of Barack Obama, "If you had to choose a moment in history to be born, and you did not know ahead of time who you would be -- you didn't know whether you were going to be born into a wealthy family or a poor family, what country you'd be born in, whether you were going to be a man or a woman -- if you had to choose blindly what moment you'd want to be born, you'd choose now."

### ***Sources of the Above Facts and Suggested Reading***

- ***Enlightenment Now: The Case for Reason, Science, Humanism, and Progress***, Steven Pinker
- **Thoughts That Make You Go Hmmm on... *Enlightenment Now***
- **Good news: The world is getting better. Bad news: You were wrong about how things have changed**, World Economic Forum
- **New Evidence That the World Really Is Getting Better**, Singularity Hub
- ***It's Better Than It Looks: Reasons for Optimism in an Age of Fear***, Gregg Easterbrook
- ***The Rational Optimist: How Prosperity Evolves***, Matt Ridley
- **Good news at last: the world isn't as horrific as you think**, The Guardian
- **Capitalism isn't broken -- the world is getting better**
- **More Evidence for Abundance**
- **These 9 Amazing Graphs Reveal How Life Is Actually Getting Better for Billions of People**
- **A global tipping point: Half the world is now middle class or wealthier**, Brookings Institute
- **The Goalkeepers Report**, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- **HumanProgress**, Cato Institute
- **Our World in Data**
- ***Factfulness: Ten Reasons We're Wrong About the World -- and Why Things Are Better Than You Think***, Hans Rosling and **Gapminder** -- website behind the book
- **40 Ways the World is Getting Better**
- **50 Reasons We're Living Through the Greatest Period in World History**
- **Business as an Agent of World Benefit**
- **The New Climate Economy**

## **Season's Readings for Reflection and Renewal**

This is a great time of year to put our lives in perspective. As business slows down during the holidays, we can step back from the life canvass we're painting with our daily brush strokes to review our personal masterpiece.

Year-end reviews are highly valuable to my personal growth and development. Decades ago, Heather and I began an annual practice of reviewing highlights of the past year. We use this as a progress



check against long term vision, purpose, and shared values. We then update and renew the vision of our preferred future.

One of today's big challenges is weathering the tornado of multi-tasking the crazy-busy bustle that can spin us around in ever faster circles. If we're not careful we end up just getting through ever more hectic days and not really living and leading.

Now's a good time to assess whether we're spending way too much time sweating the small stuff and missing the big picture. Unless we turn down the volume, we can't hear our inner voice.

With a blog posting each week, we've published over 50 in the past year. The following, are the five most popular blogs. I hope you find them useful "season's readings" for stepping back and putting your year -- and life -- in broader perspective:

### 1. **Don't Get Dragged Down by all the Negative News: Life's Better Than Ever**

I am delighted to see this was the most popular post for the year. It's our annual actual and factual negativity negation of the "fake news" of gloom and doom. Stay tuned next week for our annual update to start the New Year with a blast of good news.

### 2. **Facing Reality: Are you a Rational Optimist or Unrealistic Pessimist?**

Are you wearing "crap glasses" a little too often and ruining your I-sight? Clean your glasses and read a few insights from Matt Ridley's book, *The Rational Optimist*, for a reality check.

### 3. **HR Needs to Make Big Changes to Boost Effectiveness**

Research shows big changes are needed in performance management, coaching, teams, and learning and development to help organizations become much more agile.

### 4. **Stupid Busy: Is Your Leadership Team Overloading Your Organization?**

Just in time for a year end perspective check. Have you been smart busy or stupid busy this year?

### 5. **Time to Assess How You're Using Your Time?**

Smarten up your busyness and assess your strategic use of time. Learn how to leverage and master your leadership time so time doesn't master you. And don't lose your cabbage!

Last year we also polled our readers for the most important topics in eight major areas I generated for a new development book, key chapters, or series of books I am going to write. **Click here to see which topics were voted most popular.** This pull method of outlining and writing a book is a big shift from my previous approach to writing a book and then pushing it to market. After spending lots of time with our wonderful grandkids, this will be the main project I fit in between keynotes, workshops, retreats, and executive coaching work.

17th century English poet, Edward Young, said "they only babble who practice not reflection." Yoda, the funny little Star Wars philosopher and teacher, would like how he phrased that sentence. So, as Yoda might say, babble, do not. Reflection teach you, it will, if you pause to listen and learn.

# Hinge of History: A Major Leadership and Culture Transformation is Underway

The 10th annual Global Peter Drucker Forum recently wrapped up in Vienna, his birthplace. Forbes senior contributor, Steve Denning's entitled his report on the session, **A Major Transformation of Management Is Already Underway**.

The first management book I ever read way back when was Drucker's *The Effective Executive*. Published in 1966 (I didn't read it quite that early!), the book's succinct and practical advice is still highly relevant today. Bestselling leadership author and researcher, Jim Collins, says "if you are to read one book on executive self-management, it should be this definitive classic."



I've been an avid Drucker fan ever since that first introduction to his highly useful work. Peter Drucker (1909 -- 2005) left a huge legacy to our field. He wrote 39 books and hundreds of articles on leadership, management, and organization effectiveness. Drucker was the original thought leader and widely considered to be "the father of modern management."

Here are a few key points from Denning's report on the 10th Drucker forum:

- Firms operating in the new way are hugely profitable and putting traditionally managed companies out of business. The organization of the future is already here.
- Money is the result, not the goal of successful new companies.
- These human-oriented firms tend to be bottom-up, not top-down.
- New firms are customer-obsessed with adding value. This aligns with Drucker's consistent theme that the only valid purpose of a firm is to get and keep customers.
- Small is beautiful as these companies get big things done in small, self-organizing teams and units.
- Processes are less important than inspiration and innovation.
- Leading companies are mostly focused on passion and commitment, not roles and structures.
- Values and culture are key features for consistency and coherence during rapid change.
- A Deloitte survey of over 10,000 senior executives found more than 90% give high priority to being agile and collaborative. Many are frustrated because they don't know how to be.
- Organizations rarely change from the top down. Change comes from people who are activists. Everyone needs to become a change activist rather than waiting for permission.

Peter Drucker blazed a path spanning many decades. His thinking provided valuable maps for developing highly successful leaders and organizations. Many executives who ignored his advice or considered it too idealistic eventually paid the price. Reading the optimistic themes in this report reminded me of the old adage, "People who say it can't be done should not interrupt those who are doing it."

## Thoughts That Make you go Hmm...from Peter Drucker

I've been a lifelong follower of Peter Drucker's seminal work on personal, team, and organization effectiveness. After writing the previous post on the Global Peter Drucker Forum I went into my research database and found I've filed over 130 of his quotes, articles, and excerpts. Here are just a few favorites:

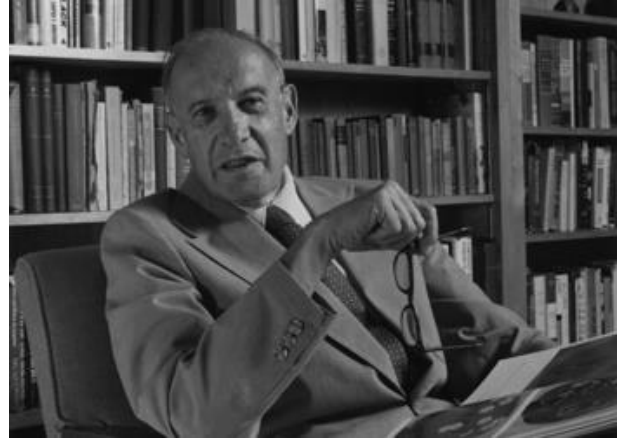


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"So much of what we call management consists of making it difficult for people to work."

"Charisma becomes the undoing of leaders. It makes them inflexible, convinced of their own infallibility, unable to change."

"Success always makes obsolete the very behavior that achieved it. It always creates new realities, It always creates, above all, its own and different problems. Only the fairy tale ends, 'they lived happily ever after'."

"A leader has to be an energizer and motivator, someone who inspires and guides others, who energizes the system and generates the magic that makes everyone want to do something extra."

"Effective executives do not start out by looking at weaknesses. You cannot build performance on weaknesses. You can build only on strengths."

"A manager develops people. Through the way he manages he makes it easy or difficult for them to develop themselves. He directs people or misdirects them. He brings out what is in them or he stifles them."

"There is nothing so useless as doing efficiently that which should not be done at all."

"Every enterprise requires commitment to common goals and shared values. Without such commitment there is no enterprise; there is only a mob."

"Making the right people decisions is the ultimate means of controlling an organization."

"Follow effective action with quiet reflection. From the quiet reflection will come even more effective action."

"The leaders who work most effectively, it seems to me, never say "I." And that's not because they have trained themselves not to say "I." They don't think "I." They think "we" they think "team." They understand their job to be to make the team function."

"Every enterprise is a learning and teaching institution. Training and development must be built into it on all levels - training and development that never stop."

## Tweet Reading: Recommended Online Articles



This section summarizes last month's LinkedIn Updates and Twitter Tweets about online articles or blog posts that I've flagged as worth reading. These are usually posted on weekends when I am doing much of my reading for research, learning, or leisure. You can follow me on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/JimClemmer>

My original tweet commenting on the article follows each title and descriptor from the original source:

Further evidence that we can -- and should -- keep growing at any age. Age can be a competitive advantage.

**Never Too Late to Learn New Tricks** Julie Winkle Giulioni, Chief Learning Officer *"Young workers tend to be the focus of development programs, but older workers also deserve to have their learning needs met."*

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Zenger Folkman research reveals five companion skills that can be strengthened to boost effectiveness.

**What Great Problem Solvers Do Differently** -- Joe Folkman, *Forbes*

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Leadership effectiveness is the single biggest factor in staff retention.

**Most Canadian employees are ready to quit their jobs, survey finds** -- Brandie Weikle, *CBC News*  
*"Low unemployment rate means employers must step up their game to keep staff happy"*

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## Read *The Leader Letter* in Weekly Installments



The items in each month's issue of *The Leader Letter* are first published in my weekly **blog** during the previous month.

If you read each blog post (or issue of *The Leader Letter*) as it's published over twelve months, you'll have read the equivalent of a leadership book. And you'll pick up a few practical leadership tips that help you use time more strategically and tame your E-Beast!

## Feedback and Follow-Up

I am always delighted to hear from readers of *The Leader Letter* with feedback, reflections, suggestions, or differing points of view. Nobody is ever identified in *The Leader Letter* without their permission. I am also happy to explore customized, in-house adaptations of any of my material for your team or organization. Drop me an e-mail at [Jim.Clemmer@ClemmerGroup.com](mailto:Jim.Clemmer@ClemmerGroup.com) or connect with me on [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), [Facebook](#), or my [blog](#)!

Live, learn, laugh, and lead -- just for the L of it!





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