Citizen Earth Leadership in Trump Era

The impact of the Trump election hit like a ton of bricks. Recalling the prior setbacks of President Reagan dismantling the U.S. Solar Institute in 1981, and President W. Bush rejecting the Kyoto Protocol in 2001 to embark on a climate disinformation campaign, the election of a climate science denier at this late date seemed surreal. This caused us to take a deep look at our mission in the broad context of the Trump era.

In 2006, we coined the term “Earth Leadership” to advance a compelling vision: Within the Northwest, motivated citizens would be the true leaders to a sustainable culture. In doing so, we might provide a model for other regions to follow.

The upsurge of knowledgeable, visible, vocal citizens would provide cover and pressure for local decision makers to change policy and businesses to “green” their practices. But new administrations can retract laws and regulations, and company values can be lost with takeovers or new leadership. In contrast, when citizens take intentional steps to advance sustainable practices, in myriad uncoordinated ways, they weave a rich culture impervious to top down attempts to dismantle it.

At this time of uncertainty and negative news, the four quadrants of Earth Leadership provide a framework for individual action to help build a truly sustainable culture from the ground up.

**Quadrant 1. Agent of Change.** Over 1,200 adults have enrolled in our earth leadership training on being an agent of change in a circle of influence. But lack of training need not hold one back from taking action. As “members” of varied groups (workplace, neighborhood, organization, etc.), we each have standing to take the lead on some initiative. Example: With two neighbors, organize a fall block party with a goal of building community and creating a method for sharing tools and other resources.

**Quadrant 2. Daily Practices.** Our intentional practices advance sustainability and inspire others. Examples: Bike to work; convert yard to a pesticide-free zone or one certified for backyard habitat.

**Quadrant 3. Forceful Advocate.** Work to change conduct of others, often organizations or institutions that depend on you or do not wish to have displays of unhappiness impact their image. Example: Organize a campaign to persuade a local garden store chain to stop selling pesticides that poison bees.

**Quadrant 4. Paid Work.** Use of paid work to advance sustainability may not be possible. But expansive thinking may uncover opportunities. Expansive-thinking example: At work in a coffee shop, Joe asks each customer, “Would you like a paper or ceramic cup today?”

— Jeanne and Dick Roy, Co-Founders
Between Stimulus and Response—the Power of Choice

Realizing that the Trump election was demoralizing for citizens concerned about protection and restoration of Earth and its natural systems, we adapted our program plan a bit for January through June with a goal of elevating citizen earth leadership with hope. Below is an outline of the strategies we have pursued.

**Practice of Hope Workshop.** One Center principle is that societal hope is essential; the alternative of a hopeless community should be avoided as a strategic matter. With that goal in mind, we began this calendar year in January with a public workshop on The Practice of Hope.

The workshop, which filled to capacity, explored two key questions: (1) What is hope? (2) How do I remain hopeful in an era of a bad news? The first question is answered by three principles of hope developed at our Center to address this multifaceted topic:

- **Hope is intentional.** Because we live in an era of bad news, hope must be an intentional act. "I choose to be hopeful."
- **Hope is one's highest vision of the possible.** This provides a stable vision, not dependent on a changing assessment of probabilities. Optimism and pessimism—both transitory feelings—can be treated as distractions.
- **Authentic hope cannot be based on denial.** A hopeful person embraces reality, even with a goal of changing it in a fundamental way.

To answer the second question, we explored five practices of hope. An example is gratitude for all that had to happen, over eons, for me to be alive today in a remarkable spot on this planet.

“Contrary to how I felt at the beginning of the day, I realize that this election has not stopped me in my tracks.”

–2017 Hope workshop participant

The power of this workshop came through the four breakout discussions in small groups of three or four. The process of self-discovery and bonding when sharing thoughts and feelings about hope is quite uplifting, even when the very motivation to attend the workshop was bad news. (The Roy’s TEDx talk on hope can be viewed on YouTube.)

**Early 2017 Earth Leadership Training.** To mobilize citizens in the Trump era, in February we offered the Center’s Agent of Change training to Portland Agent Cohort #73—a group of 18 citizens eager to effect change. According to trainer Jeanne Roy, this group had a higher than normal level of motivation and focus shortly after the Trump election.

Within the first month after the training:

- Josh ordered durable eating ware for all events and meetings at Linfield's School of Nursing,
- Laura convinced her apartment complex to start food-waste collection,
- Kati started a student garden club at her school, and
- Brion got his co-working space certified by Portland's Sustainability at Work program.

**Lawyers’ Manifesto.** Our project, Oregon Lawyers for a Sustainable Future, has trained 17 cohorts of 12 lawyers each in a four-session seminar on Lawyers’ Earth Leadership. From that pool, we invited 15 lawyers to a focus group lunch in March to explore how Oregon lawyers might respond to statements and actions of our a new president on global warming.

As a premise for response, we acknowledged the international consensus grounded in science: human activity is the engine driving inexorable ecological degradation and global warming. Children of today and certainly future generations will need to deal with projected consequences including sea level rise, forced migration, desertification, failed states, crop failure, and species extinction—all of which can be greatly modulated if bold steps are taken today to mitigate release of climate gases.

As traditional champions of justice, how might lawyers expand that concept and become visible champions of intergenerational justice? Because the Oregon legal profession is the nationally recognized state-bar leader for interest and work to promote a
cluding representatives of green teams in businesses, agencies, and centers of faith, the tips are redistributed internally and posted on the Center website. For example, our May Eco-Tip is “Moving Toward a Plant-Based Diet”—a topic not always associated with environmental degradation and climate change. It provides information on practical ways to reduce impact on Earth with no structural change in lifestyle (like installing solar panels) and with an added benefit to personal health. For those concerned about taste or nutrition, the Eco-Tip suggests great recipe books and guidelines for a healthy vegetarian diet. It tells how one can gradually shift dietary habits to reduce consumption of meat. See Lifestyle Eco-Tips on the Center’s website, www.earthleaders.org.

The Power of Choice. The Trump strategy to roll back environmental protection is a reminder of essential learning from the classic, *Man’s Search for Meaning*: Between stimulus and response lies our freedom and power to choose a response. For those who choose to resist rollbacks, or to pursue alternative avenues of progress, in the words of Arne Naess (Norwegian philosopher), “The front is very long.” His suggestion: Identify a discrete point on the front for your work, be persistent, and recognize that others in the movement will be working at different points to collectively push the front forward.

**Documentary—Merchants of Doubt.** In April we partnered with Senior Advocates for Generational Equity (SAGE) and the Sustainable Future Section of the Oregon State Bar to sponsor a well-attended film screening of *Merchants of Doubt*. The film is an account of deceptive corporate-financed public efforts to sow confusion and skepticism about scientific research, starting with the tobacco industry. Pseudo-experts are brought before cameras, or publish papers, to spread the idea that no real consensus exists: “We just don’t know.” “The science is complicated.” “We need more research.” The same strategy has been used to avert governmental regulation of greenhouse gas emissions in response to global warming. Alarmingly, the film documented how easily citizens can be hoodwinked by corporate PR campaigns.

**Eco-Tips.** For obvious reasons, much of the public response to the presidential election is focused on public policy. How do we preserve, and possibly advance, laws and regulations to protect the environment and natural systems? Although public policy is essential, ultimately fundamental change in daily living is required to reduce the use of energy and resources. In other words, the transformation of local culture will be driven to a large extent by daily and long-term choices of citizens.

A popular Center program is the publication of monthly Eco-Tips that address daily practices. They are short (one page each), contain numerous possible actions, and cover diverse topics from cat litter to natural burial. Sent to over 100 “redistributors” in-
Eco-School Network Update
By Lindsey Griggs, ESN Coordinator

For the Eco-School Network, May means another school year coming to a close, and we have a lot to look back on and be proud of in 2016-2017.

Parent Networks. In 2016 we welcomed twenty new parents and formed the West Linn Eco-School Network. We had vibrant programming thanks to our spectacular steering committee members: Liz Erickson, Lindsay Kearl, Nadya Burchette, Dana Visse, Audrey Schaab, Jen Anderson, Paige Dickson, Rebekah Chou, Carolyn Garnett, and Nicole Alexander. Parents came together to address a wide range of issues affecting schools, including waste reduction, gardening best practices, student green teams, climate change curriculum, and garden tours.

School Initiatives. Throughout Portland Metro, ESN parents were hard at work in their own schools maintaining thriving gardens, increasing recycling and waste reduction, making transportation to and from school more sustainable, and bringing students into the learning and greening process through student green teams.

Special Projects. This year through a partnership with ALSCO, the Eco-School Network was able to provide durable silverware to schools. With the help of Joe Kitterman and Harmony Scofield, we’ve collected almost 2500 forks and spoons that would have otherwise been melted down and have delivered them free to seven schools!

We also had our best attended service day to date, rallying 60 parents and kids for a beach cleanup at Fort Stevens State Park, and collecting over 400 pounds of plastic.

Selected ESN Impacts 2009-2017
184 parents trained as sustainability leaders
25 student nature clubs and green teams started
11 million disposable styrofoam lunch trays unused