

## CHAPTER ONE

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# What Is Environmental Change-Making?

“I wish there were one in my neighborhood.” Again and again, when we describe the Environmental Change-Makers to others, we hear amazement and enthusiasm. We hear people’s longing for action. With its positive focus and growing core group, our circle offers something unique.

The environmental movement started out by being the “Opposition.” Early efforts battled the unwise practices of the status quo. “No Nukes.” “Save the Whales.” *Silent Spring*. With horrifying descriptions of species decimation, cancer, and toxic waste, these campaigns broadcast what was wrong with the existing mode of operations. Early environmentalists picketed and protested, lobbied, and chained themselves to fences. They fought against that which had gone before.

We are indebted to these brave pioneers. We are grateful beyond measure. Because of those early efforts to raise public awareness, we now have better choices. In the ensuing decades, people at all levels of society have made changes. We now have international CFC treaties that are stabilizing the ozone layer.<sup>7</sup> The introduction of catalytic converters brought vastly improved air quality in our Los Angeles basin. Many municipalities now offer recycling programs. Mainstream supermarkets are increasingly offering organic foods.

The explosion of Internet free speech has played its part. Sites such as Grist, WorldChanging, and TreeHugger encourage people with radical dialogue and the challenge to embrace greener action.

A generation of school children learned “50 Things” they could do to save the earth. These erstwhile children are now in the workforce; and, according to *Time* magazine, they’re holding their corporate employers to higher standards of envi-

ronmental responsibility.<sup>9</sup>

Environmentalism has grown far beyond its resistance roots into a world of possibilities.

### Positive Action

By its very name, environmental change-making is about action: making change. In our Westchester group, we move beyond environmentalism’s initial resistance role into testing new ways, creating new lifestyles. We focus on this new world of greener possibilities. Our meetings highlight “What We Can Do” as everyday citizens within a solidly urban life.

This might mean real physical changes such as switching to biodegradable cleansers or adopting the habit of taking cloth bags to market. But it might also mean changing minds, like convincing our local political representatives to vote greener. Within our circle, our peer group, we explore earth-wiser practices. We share resources and how-to techniques.

This doesn’t mean we ignore the problems. In our experience, the bad news seems to come along for the ride. Many people have already heard about the problems—perhaps years of progressive news about our Southern California dryland ecology and the hundreds of miles water must travel to reach our Los Angeles faucets. As we explain water-wise solutions, it’s easy to provide catch-up information—that, with only 3.21 inches of rain, the 2006-2007 water year was the driest since Los Angeles began keeping records. We don’t need to dwell on the problem or debate it because water-wise practices are so clearly needed. Instead, we consciously choose to spend the balance of our precious time together discussing the many worthy solutions: con-

servation techniques, drip irrigation, mulch, efficient appliances, and more.

Positive action is empowering. It plain old feels good to say, “I grew the lettuce for my lunch in my own vegetable garden.” It’s thrilling, and it makes you want to do more. One positive step leads to another. With each baby step, we accumulate successes. The steps add up quickly. One day a newcomer to the circle expresses amazement at our achievements. A fellow change-maker overhears and chuckles: “I knew her when . . .” It’s truly amazing to look back and discover how much real change can be accomplished, baby step after baby step. This is how we begin the process of societal transformation.

### All Hands on Deck

Environmental change-making isn’t something any one of us can do alone. Given the magnitude of the issues we face today, together with the incredibly short timeframe we have, it’s going to take all of us working together. No single-faceted solution will work. We need to implement *both* top-down *and* grassroots approaches simultaneously.

Top-down solutions such as political negotiations, legislative action, industry policies, and corporate resolutions help redirect the giant forces which run our economy, our political system, and our economic values. We do this to slow ecological destruction but also so that local resources can flourish again.

The environmental and social problems we face require big picture thinking and long-term solutions, much longer than any term of political office. Thus it’s up to us to step in and be the guides. In our role as concerned citizens and intelligent consumers—or, at times, as neighbors, clients, stockholders, or employees—we have the power to get top-down policies moving in the right direction. Through letters, pe-

titions, articles, and meetings, we can make our voices be heard.

But without citizen support or conscious consumers, even the best top-down solutions are doomed to fail. Grassroots solutions—“greener” changes in our individual habits and our decision-making processes—are the essential base of the overall picture.

Grassroots change is powerful. It’s exhilarating and, we dare say, lasting. Grassroots change affects our lives where we feel it most: our food, our transportation, the buying choices we make, the messages we teach our children. Once we’ve experienced the new way and have integrated it into our habits, our natural inertia becomes beneficial. We rarely go back.

But grassroots action alone will not achieve the magnitude required. For issues like global warming, countries must work together. Industry and government must work together. Communities must come together in new and different ways from ever before. Secular and religious people must work together. Environmental solutions call for “all hands on deck.”

There has long been a divide between secular environmentalists and religious people. Each has tended to view the other with a certain amount of suspicion. By misdirecting our focus on nuances and

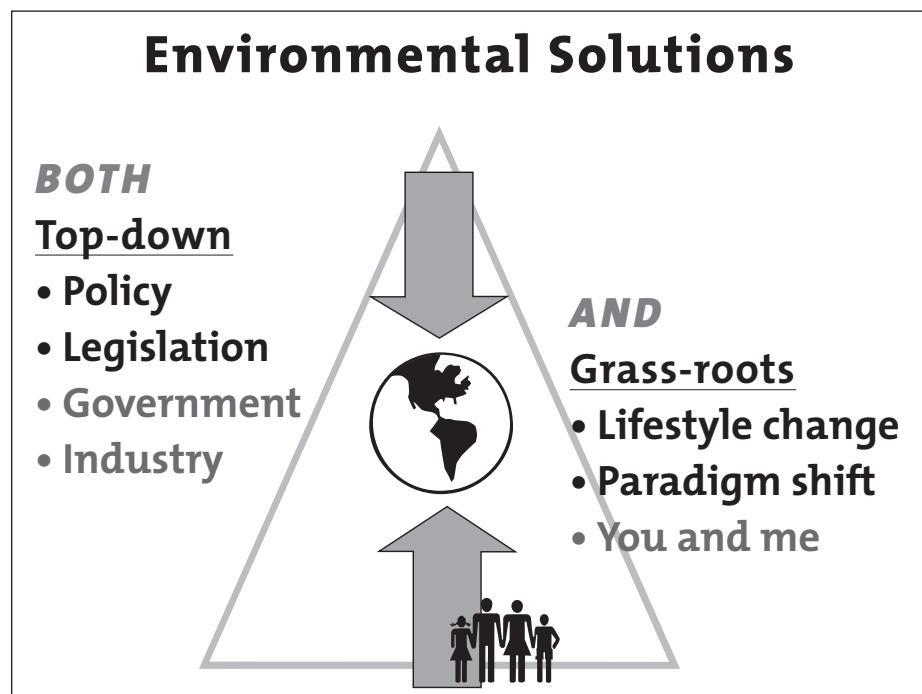


Fig. 1 Top-Down and Grassroots Solutions<sup>8</sup>

details, we've lost sight of the big picture: we need to work together to solve our common problems. Maintaining an earth environment that is healthy and supportive of human life isn't exclusively an Episcopalian issue. It's not completely a secular issue. It isn't only a Jewish issue nor Catholic nor Islamic. Our environmental issues transcend all these definitions.

All of us suffer the impact of climate change and toxic pollution. No one of us can solve global warming nor soil depletion alone. We cannot afford to get proprietary about environmental change-making. The timeline for action is far too short.

Part of the strength of the Environmental Change-Makers of Westchester is that we work together, bridging our differences. This teamwork shows up in the language of our meetings and is reflected in the vocabulary in this book. Religious people and secularists have slightly different terms to describe the vast natural world: environment, ecosystems, the Earth, the planet, God's creation, *ha'Adamah*, Gaia, Mother Earth. Each of these terms carries nuances of meaning. Perhaps some evoke a knee-jerk reaction in you.

Each of us must find a way within his or her heart to become comfortable with the other's language. When we refer to God's creation, we invite the atheist environmentalist to bridge the terminology. When we speak about a closer connection with the earth, we remind devout believers that all our physical needs come to us through the vehicle of the earth's ecosystems. Whether you believe the earth's cycles are the hand of God or they are scientific reality, the focus must be on the fact that we do share plenty of common ground.

Change-making invites each of us—whether secular or religious, no matter which tradition or denomination—to take a journey deep inside ourselves. It's deep inner work to still the chattering part of our minds and to rediscover and reconnect with our core values. Through change-making, we examine how our lifestyle habits reflect values about the sanctity of life, the connection between people, and the interconnection between humanity and the other life forms with which we share this small planet.

But contemplation alone isn't enough. When we say that environmental change-making is an "all hands on deck" activity, we mean it demands real, concrete action. We've got to walk the talk. Change-making challenges each one of us, whether newbie or

veteran environmental campaigner, to bring our core values alive in our everyday practice. It pushes us to discard destructive habits and form new patterns that are wiser in our use of natural resources, less damaging and wasteful, more respectful and harmonious.

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## Use and Value Diversity.

— *A Permaculture Principle of David Holmgren*<sup>10</sup>

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Change-making presents wonderful opportunity to overcome differences between people. In fact, environmental action becomes a reason for rallying previously unrelated people, because, as you'll learn in the following pages, we're really going to need each other. We'll have to work together to change to life-sustaining ways.

## Toward Sustainability

The environmental organization WWF periodically analyzes the amount of earth's resources—energy, raw materials, water, food—that industrialized nations consume. They compare this figure to our per-capita share of the resources available. It's all measured in acres: how many acres of planet it takes to produce those resources. This concept is known as our *ecological footprint*.<sup>11</sup>

When we divide the biologically productive acres available on the planet, our per-capita fair share amounts to about 4.5 acres. North Americans currently consume resources equivalent to 24.7 acres of planetary surface—nearly five times our fair share. In other words, if everyone on the planet lived the lifestyle we do, we'd need about five planets to provide the resources for it all.<sup>13</sup>

And our consumption continues to grow.

For one of my presentations, I borrowed globes from several different friends. Lined up down a conference table, those five blue-green earths made a stark visual statement. It's obvious that we don't have five, six, seven planets. We have only one. We must embrace a lifestyle for which our one planet can adequately provide.

Environmental change-making is about change but not merely change for the sake of change. In environmental change-making, we're aiming for a specific very long-term goal: *Sustainability*. We can take from the planet no more, no faster than the

planet can produce more.

While we acknowledge that achieving this balance is quite a long way into the future, the changes we strive for in our everyday lives are our best efforts to head in that general direction. At Environmental Change-Makers meetings, we encourage each other to stay on course toward Sustainability, toward long-term survival.

This is an important distinction because not everyone seems to be headed in that same direction.

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Sustainability encompasses the simple principle of taking from the earth only what it can provide indefinitely, thus leaving future generations no less than we have access to ourselves.

— *Friends of the Earth Scotland*<sup>12</sup>

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With voracious desire for ever-increasing business profits, mega-corporations are now jumping eagerly onto the “green” bandwagon. Wal-Mart installs solar panels. Virgin Airlines offers global warming prizes. Dow Chemical underwrites “green” events. Nabisco plans to market organic Oreos. The Ceres coalition of big businesses—which includes Coca Cola, Bank of America, General Mills and General Motors—sets “sustainable prosperity” as its motto.<sup>14</sup> When we consider the integrated, cycle-based definitions of Sustainability, which we’ll discuss in Chapter 8, we begin to sense a disconnect. Transnational corporations and the natural cycles of resources on the earth somehow just don’t fit together.

As change-makers, we learn to be wary. We teach each other to look beyond the label and to ask the right questions. We learn to check our sources. We remind each other to think and to keep sight of the long-term goal of Sustainability. We help each other sort out true course versus “greenwashing.” (How are the above examples “greenwashed”? See the Notes section for explanations.<sup>15</sup>)

Humanity is at a crossroads. As we’ll show you in Chapters 8 and 9, we’re entering a time of transformation, a great revolution in human thinking. As we part ways with the outrageously unsustainable habits from the past, it’s important that our long-term investments—in infrastructure, in cultural philosophies, in the education of our children—be headed in the right direction.

Here at the Environmental Change-Makers of Westchester, with our humble little actions, we help each other to stay on course. We help each other keep moving in the right direction. We’re actively pursuing a graceful way out of our “five planets’ worth of consumption” habits.

### Paradigm Shift

Creating real physical change is important, but it isn’t the only thing. In order to create the bigger changes—the massive shifts which will become the true solutions—we must rethink. We must reevaluate the basic premises by which we make our decisions.

Understand that our future will be quite different from the trajectory of our historic and economic past. It will be very different from the future we have been told we might have. It must be. To reduce greenhouse gas emissions 70 to 80 percent over the next two decades and to segue our entire society into the declining half of planetary oil supplies, we must rethink and redesign all of our fossil fuel-intensive habits.<sup>16</sup> From our food supply to our transportation preferences to our concept of a “growth” economy, everything will change.

The essence of environmental change-making is changing perspectives. We can’t solve the environmental issues facing us today merely by switching from the conventional brand to “brand green.” Solving our environmental issues is going to take *paradigm shift*: a reevaluation of previous goals, dreams, and visions for society’s future. It’s going to take a change in the underlying thought patterns by which we make our decisions. This calls for a rethinking of our relationship with the natural systems of the planet and a new view of how humans fit into this vast Creation.

To truly make societal progress in a “greener” direction will require much more than a simple substitute of products and materials. As Chapter 8 will explain, “greener” can only mean moving closer to a Sustainable human existence on the planet, moving toward lifestyle patterns that are more respectful of and more integrated with the natural cycles of the planet. This requires some major shifts in basic understanding.

Let’s consider a rosy red apple. We learn apples are on sale at a certain major supermarket. It’s easy to choose the “cheaper” alternative, based on how it impacts our wallet. That’s cash, also known

as *financial capital*.

But there are other costs involved with that apple.

Compare it to one from the local farmers' market. The farmers' market apple might cost a little more cash. Maybe it isn't as pretty; it's not covered in petroleum-based wax. The farmers' market apple is organic, chemical-free; it's healthier for our bodies, plus the farming practices didn't create soil and water pollution. Organic farms support more wildlife than conventional farms. Smaller farms often plant local varieties, like heirlooms adapted to the specific microclimate; that's biodiversity. Smaller farms typically use more Sustainable agricultural practices such as multicropping and native fallows, which result in biodiversity, soil building, and soil sequestration of carbon dioxide gases. Maybe it's a family farm, thus supporting small local business.

The rosy red apple came from New Zealand. Consider the increased carbon dioxide emissions and the greenhouse impact from shipping it halfway around the world. Include the human cost of oil wars to gain petroleum to make the plastic clamshell box. The nonrecyclable #6 plastic will get used once; then it will sit in a landfill longer than our children's lifetimes. Rather than family business, the mega-market chain store pays workers a bare minimum, hardly a living wage. These are the environmental and social costs, which some environmental thinkers

refer to as *natural capital* and *human capital*.

Suddenly the two apples look very different.

As we move toward a more Sustainable future, we must redefine "cheaper." Cheaper to our wallet isn't necessarily cheaper to the ecosystems of the earth nor to our health nor to the lives of our fellow

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We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.

— *Albert Einstein*

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human beings. In the bigger picture, the cash in our wallet no longer represents a complete guide. We must consider *both* financial capital *and* natural/human capital as we make our lifestyle decisions.<sup>17</sup>

This is an example of a paradigm shift: first, realizing that cash is an incomplete guide; second, integrating new guides. Certified organic and fair trade designations, LEED certification on buildings, Forest Stewardship Council stamps on lumber, and the trusting relationship we've built with the vendor at the farmers' market are examples of guides that provide additional facts to put into our decision matrix. As we shift our paradigm toward Sustainability, we make better individual decisions and overall become better stewards of the earth.