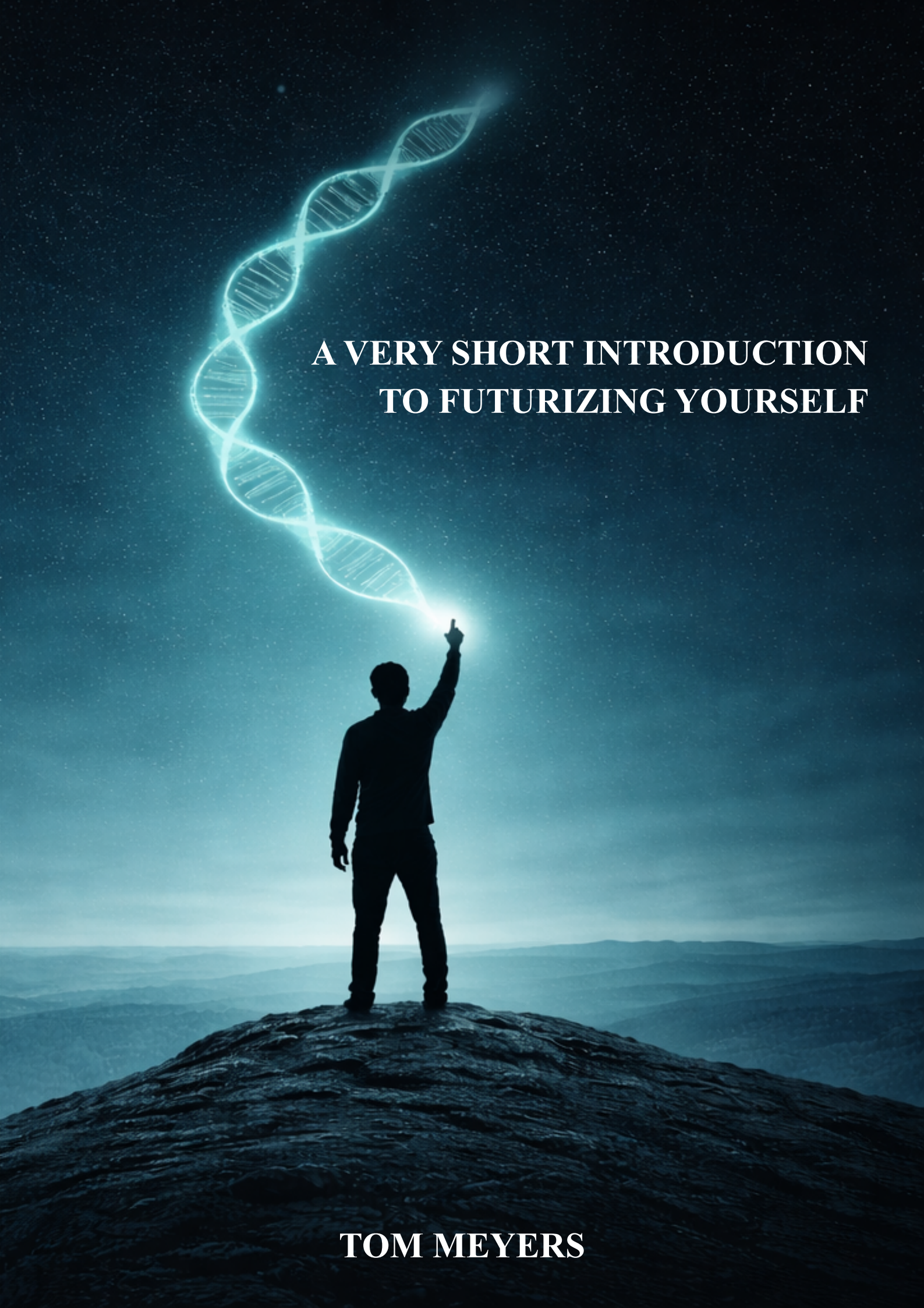

A VERY SHORT INTRODUCTION TO FUTURIZING YOURSELF

TOM MEYERS

Have you thought about y'our future lately?

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Do you act knowing that y'our future and the future of the future depends on your decisions, choices and actions today?

INTRODUCTION: IT IS Y'OUR FUTURE

The future is as much your future as it is ours (y'our). As much as you are a product of the decisions, choices and actions of preceding generations, so are future generations influenced by y'ours.

We are living in a fast-changing and ever more complex and ambiguous world. A world that is trying to cope with what seems like never-ending waves of changes and challenges that are unleashing themselves over us at ever shorter intervals.

Challenges like the devastating effects of COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine resulting in the loss of loved ones, social and economic changes, including job insecurity and rising energy, fuel and food prices. Don't you sometimes ask yourself: "What will be next?" or "When is this going to stop?"? There doesn't seem to be an end to this bad news show.

At the same time, there is no denying any longer that every aspect of our life is being influenced by emerging technologies, digitisation, automation, robotisation, datafication, and so many other changes due to technological advances that have outpaced by far our own biological – and much slower – evolution.

That we are living in a fast-changing and challenging world can be especially felt at work – just look how COVID-19 has shaken the world of work and changed your working conditions. But also, look how fast new technologies came out on the market to support these new conditions, including all the new cloud-based video communications apps that just seemed to have popped up out of nowhere. You can say that the COVID-19 pandemic also induced a highly uncertain outlook for the labour market and accelerated the arrival of the future of work. A future where whatever can be automated will be automated.[1]

According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2020), a staggering one billion jobs, almost one-third of all jobs worldwide, are likely to be transformed by technology in the next decade.[2] Will your job be one of them? It is worth contemplating whether these changes in conditions, like from working in an office to now partly at home, aren't the harbinger of more change or even unemployment for you.

Stop reading for a moment and go to https://www.replacedbyrobot.info. Type in your job title and press Enter... to determine the likelihood your job will be automated in the near future.

When one billion jobs are likely to be transformed by technology in the next decade, that means that one billion people need to be reskilled or upskilled by 2030 to meet the requirements for the jobs of tomorrow.

And let's not forget that while we are trying to cope with our daily challenges and technological advances, we need to find solutions to the depletion of Earth's resources and climate change that are affecting our natural environment, our health and wellbeing and world peace.[3]

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The future is all about change; that's not new. Still, when the pace of change outweighs our resources – in other words, outpaces our capacity to adapt within a given period – it becomes a problem.

As an osteopath and body-centred stress coach, I know that when the pace of change outweighs your resources, stress sets in. When stress is left unmanaged, it harms our health and wellbeing, changes our behaviour and makes us less resilient.

Professionally and privately, I often think about how we will cope with all these changes. How will we cope with the increasing stress and anxiety levels that the changes will undoubtedly bring about? Stress and anxiety are already such big problems today and are directly or indirectly the cause of many physical health problems like neck, shoulder and back pain; cardiovascular disease; mental health problems including anxiety, depression and a sense of hopelessness, and can lead to substance abuse.

Stress and anxiety are natural responses to demands and uncertainty. While external factors trigger stress, anxiety is often centred around worries about the future and all the bad things you can anticipate (internal factors). As changes and challenges increase, so will stress and anxiety levels and, therefore, all the biopsychosocial and spiritual health problems that are related to and made worse by them. In my practice, I can already see how this is playing out – and more change is coming.

So in these unsettling times, with everything changing so rapidly and so extensively, it shouldn't come as a surprise that I'm concerned about y'our future and especially the lack of consideration that is being given to how we – you, me and humanity at large – will cope with all the changes and challenges that lie ahead and which will, without a doubt, increase the already out-of-control stress and anxiety levels.

So far, we have tried and mostly failed to deal with the changes and challenges. We have relied too much on past experiences to cope and solve our unprecedented problems – and look where that got us. Then we started to be more mindful of the present and didn't see the future coming. Now, that future, "the future of humanity and Nature herself are at stake".[4] Why?

> "The world that we have made as a result of the level of thinking we have done thus far creates problems that we cannot solve at the same level as the level we created them at."
>
> Ram Dass (and not Albert Einstein)

The why may lie in the wisdom that we cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them. Neither can we use old ways of thinking for problems that will emerge in the future.

But if we cannot rely on the past as it has passed, nor the present – as living in the present is the fundamental cause behind many of our most significant problems – what can we rely on to pull us out of here?

Let's look at this from a mind and body perspective. Our brain (mind) continually seeks out problems for us to solve to avoid adversity, reduce uncertainty and feel in control as it wants to

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protect us from danger and pain.[5,7] Our brain needs a sense of control over and a feeling of safety towards its environment.

What the body needs – apart from oxygen, water, nutrients, sleep, exercise, tender loving care, etc., is a feeling of ease and enough time to unwind so it can recuperate and regenerate to respond appropriately to demands put on it.

But, you may ask, what about "spirit"? Distracted or trying to catch up with the multitude of demands on our time, what we need on a spiritual level, like meaning and purpose, is often neglected. However, these are recognised as some of the most fundamental human needs that, when met, lead to fulfilment. Just imagine a life without meaning and purpose…

As I mentioned before, in this fast-changing and challenging world with nevertheless plenty of opportunities, we need a new modus operandi to provide this sense of control, ease, meaning and purpose. We –you, me and organisations alike – need to find new ways of going forward while facing this fast-changing and challenging world. We need a new way to manage our present so we can flourish and thrive tomorrow.

> "Our 'new world' of short-term technological and environmental change requires a new mind capable of perceiving long-term, slow-motion calamity."
>
> Robert Ornstein (1988) *New World, New Mind: Changing the Way We Think to Save Our Future*

We need to think long-term to manage our present better and act with foresight on purpose instead of leaving our lives and future up to chance. I call this process "futurizing yourself". It involves you and others becoming futurewise. Like becoming streetwise to deal with the potential difficulties or dangers of life in an urban environment, we need to become futurewise by increasing our futures literacy.

At the level of the individual, it involves envisaging a preferred future, the future you want, and knowing the means you have within to get there. With the future in mind, you can start "using the future" to manage the present better. You can start making more informed decisions and choices today to guide your behaviour and create the conditions to flourish in the flow of evolution and thrive in this fast-changing world.

Episodic Futures Thinking

Episodic futures thinking is one of several forms of futures thinking or prospection and refers to the capacity to imagine or simulate events that might occur in one's personal future.[6]

It seems a lot of work, but in many ways, it is very similar to what you do when you plan a holiday. The time frame is just different. I also know that for some, this futures thinking might even feel counterintuitive at first, especially in times of crisis – but it is what is needed to solve our current problems and will help you cope and heighten your ability to prepare, sense, shape, and adapt to whatever happens in the years ahead.[8]

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Futurizing yourself is what you need to have a great future, as a great life doesn't happen by leaving your life up to chance. It is envisaged and built on purpose.

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What sort of future are you creating for yourself? Are you actively creating the future or do you face it day-by-day, leave it up to chance, and get pushed towards destiny unknown?

CHAPTER 1: FUTURIZING YOURSELF

Futurizing yourself is proactively envisioning y'our preferred future and incorporating (episodic) futures thinking into your decisions, choices and actions to "change forward" and create a GREAT future for yourself and others on purpose.

The future is screaming for y'our attention. In this fast-changing world, neither past nor present but the future has become the key to y'our life, y'our health and wellbeing, and that of the planet on which we all depend. can't leave the future up to chance ("Que Sera, Sera"), fate ("Whatever will be will be") or others to decide. The future is your future, and you have to learn to embrace it and pull it towards you through your decisions, choices and actions in the present.

Yes, you might have learned to fear the future. Still, you can unlearn that fear by understanding, learning about and starting to "use the future" better to manage your present. Thus the future, rather than being a stressor, will become a comfort zone[1] where you feel at ease and reassured and which you can develop into a source of meaning and purpose. You can do this by seeing the future not as some unknown destiny, a noun at which you inevitably arrive (Douglas Rushkoff)[2] or an emotion where you park your feelings (Gerd Leonhard)[3] but as a verb – a thing you do or, as I see it, a mindset to guide a new way of being.

For this mindset, you can borrow and expand on the idea of a business plan to create a personal futures plan to which you can align your behaviour through your decisions, choices and actions. This requires some preparative homework to know who you are, what you want to feel and aspire to have.

It also requires some futurecasting, which means thinking and listing some of the problems of the future you might be faced with, and thinking of the steps you can put in place, preparing to meet those challenges in the future. For example, problems that might influence you, your family or your work are climate change, automation and digitisation. How will these influence you?

With this wisdom in mind, you can consciously envisage future scenarios. This includes envisaging a preferred future, one where you can flourish and thrive and that best suits and assures y'our health and wellbeing. Isn't that ultimately what we all want? So, what do you want your future to be like? Or, as I like to put it: What "the future" do you want?

The next step is to change forward. By that, I mean to make decisions and choices with more forethought and act intentionally to make your preferred future into an ongoing reality. In other words, making this an ongoing reality by proactively incorporating your preferred future (episodic futures thinking) into your decisions, choices and actions to "change forward" and create a GREAT future for yourself and others on purpose.

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By GREAT I mean:

A **G**OOD future where you flourish and thrive;

A future where you are **R**ESILIENT and adapt well in the face of change;

A future where you feel that you **E**VOLVE and grow as a person;

A future where your **A**CTIONS matter and where you **T**RANSCEND yourself – in other words, you are adding value to the world you were born into and making sure that future generations will have a **GREAT** future too.

That GREAT future is out there and lies within y'our potential. However, it will depend on what you do today. It will depend on how fast and proficient you become in futurizing yourself before it is too late. With the future in mind, you can change the world. You can create the adaptive stability needed to get us through the changes and challenges ahead and fully use the opportunities that will present themselves.

Futurizing yourself will not only make you a better, more adaptable, resilient and healthier business leader, manager, employee, parent, and person – it will make you a more conscious steward of Planet Earth on which your life and all of our lives depend.

I know how crazy this may sound at first – at least it was for me. My futurizing journey started in 2000, when the business, a gourmet deli I had opened in 1999, was failing, and I along with it. Ready to give up on life as I just didn't see a way out of my predicament, I was given the advice to seek help, which I did – but reluctantly. Luckily I gave up on the many excuses I had created in my mind about not needing support, and one day I picked up the phone and called the number I had been given.

The aid I received helped me get a new perspective on my past. It also helped me realise that although I had come to believe that I was good for nothing, I actually could become good at something. That something being my potential that I was coached to find.

I had been trained as a chef de cuisine from when I was 12. At 20, I started to work as a waiter in luxury hotels in England and as a waiter and sommelier on board the cruise ship Queen Elizabeth 2. Between jobs, I often went backpacking around the world. In total, I meandered for eight years before settling back in Belgium. At 29 – when I went to seek help to deal with my existential crisis – I was the owner of a (failing) gourmet deli.

So, when the coaching revealed there was a therapist, communicator, teacher, researcher and traveller (someone who needs movement) in me, what was I doing selling charcuterie and cheese? No wonder I felt out of my element.

You can find the full story in my book ***Futurize Yourself – Design your life on purpose***, which will have a follow-up soon with ***The Futures Effect – Change Your Story, Change Y'our Future!***

www.futurizeyourself.com

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Overall, changing my perspective and finding my potential helped me get to know myself. It helped me figure out and verbalise what I wanted to feel. These were essential when I was asked to design a preferred future scenario that I thought would make me feel what I wanted to feel and make my life more meaningful.

I must admit that at the time, when I was asked to think about designing my preferred future by imagining an ideal day ten years later, I was really taken aback and even a bit dismissive about what I was being asked to do. Thinking about an ideal day in the future… what? I had a zillion problems to solve to keep my business afloat and was close to giving up on life. Spending time thinking about my future seemed the last thing I needed at the time. My situation was dire, and it needed to be fixed now! Depressed and wallowing in self-pity, it felt a preposterous task and a waste of time to think about the future while faced with so many problems.

However, I did as I was asked to do. Now, with hindsight, I know that contemplating the future and envisioning a preferred future, one I wanted to wake up to, was exactly what I needed. I needed an image, something that I could hold on to. An image that guided me and helped me pull myself forward and out of the downward spiral I had got myself into and put a halt to the negative patterns that were repeating themselves at ever shorter intervals.

Who would have thought that what seemed preposterous, even impossible, would become the key to the mindshift I needed in my time of crisis? I didn't…

Today, I am the therapist with my own private practice who is invited to give presentations and workshops around the world relating to a new health approach I've developed, researched and written a book about. I am what I envisaged more than 20 years ago.

From "good for nothing", I have become more than what I envisioned. That is precisely the beauty of this process and journey, as futurizing yourself and envisioning what the future you want is, as I mentioned before, not a destination but a mindset. A mindset that influences how you think, make decisions, and behave in any given situation. It is also a mindset that grows with you and is flexible enough to evolve with the needs of the changing environment.

> You have many pressing issues of the day but none is more pressing than the future health of our planet and of the people who inhabit it. The planet's health today will dictate the health, happiness and economic prosperity of generations to come – hence our overwhelming responsibility to generations yet unborn.[5]
>
> Prince Charles (2021)

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Do you make decisions with consequences that are pleasant in the present (immediate gratification) but harmful in the future (long-term benefits)? In other words, are you prioritising the present over the future?

CHAPTER 2: FUTURE SELF-CONTINUITY

The more continuity you feel between your present and future self, the more you are likely to make decisions with your future self in mind.

Futurizing yourself is something that everyone can do and benefit from. However, what will be different for each individual is where you start the process of defining y'our future on purpose and proactively incorporate futures thinking into your decisions, choices and actions to "change forward" and create a GREAT future for y'ourself.

It depends on where you find yourself, the stage of life you are in, the baggage you are carrying along and/or whether or not other essential needs are met. There are 7 billion different starting points, so to speak.

Futurize Yourself

Futurizing yourself is living your life on purpose. Instead of leaving your life and the future up to chance, you use images of your preferred future as a starting point to change your behaviour in the present.

It is a conscious process and mindset where you proactively incorporate futures thinking into your present-moment decisions, choices and actions that are consistent with the future you want, and it contributes to better, more meaningful living and a GREAT future for y'ourself.

This process is based on a narrative for your future that you have taken the time to envisage and develop by means of three steps.

The first step starts with creating a new narrative for the past when you have, for example, limiting beliefs about yourself and/or about the way the world works.

The second step is to uncover and define your potential (i.e. the talents you were born with) and in addition define how you want to feel (innate expression of wellbeing) on any given day and your aspirations (hopes for the future) that don't change over time (unwavering principles).

The third step is to create a narrative for your preferred future based on steps one and two. A narrative that is agile enough to cope with changes including your personal evolution, changing demands of the world of work, the changing environment, megashifts and megatrends.[1]

My three-step process started at a time when life had become meaningless, a never-ending uphill battle. Tired of fighting against the odds and emotionally drained, I remember waking up one morning in my cold, damp bedroom situated at the back of the gourmet deli, thinking: "If this is what life is about, this continuous struggle to survive, don't want it." But what *did* I want? What I wanted then and still do is what I believe you and we all want. It is something we have in common, no matter at what stage of life you find yourself. What you/we want at y'our most intrinsic level is

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to feel content, fulfilled and healthy. What you/we want to have is a future that is Good, Resilient, Evolvable, Actionable and Transcendent, i.e. **a GREAT future**.

Why do you/we want this? Because we all want to flourish in the flow of evolution and thrive in this ever-evolving, changing world. We want to **flourish** – to grow or develop in a healthy way the non-material part of us that goes beyond the confines of simple happiness or wellbeing. We also want to **thrive** – and by that, I mean to succeed in material terms.

I wish I had come up with the words "flourishing in the flow of evolution". However, all praise goes to futurist, psychologist, educator, philosopher and author of *Future Consciousness – The Path to Purposeful Evolution,* Thomas Lombardo. A book that speaks to my heart which addresses "How to create a good future by developing a core set of character virtues, most notably and centrally wisdom."

We want this because this is what we innately strive for. Life needs a sense, a direction in which we can excel and expand our feeling of belonging and wholeness. Just imagine a GREAT future – a life where you feel content, fulfilled and healthy while making a meaningful impact on the lives of others by growing into the best version of yourself purposefully. Do you want this?

"The future is not something that just happens to us – it is something we create every single day, by action or by inaction. Whether the future is good or bad is entirely up to us" (Gerd Leonhard).

"As we see the future, so we act, as we act so we become!" (Barbara Marx Hubbard). And while it makes sense that focusing on the moment can improve your wellbeing, so can futurizing yourself. Because futurizing yourself makes you more willing to look after yourself. It also gives your life a direction, makes it more meaningful, makes you more responsible for your present-day behaviour, makes making decisions and choices – and life in general – easier. Because creating and nurturing a vivid sense of your future self will increase the extent you feel more continuity between your present and your future self (future self-continuity), and it is more likely that you will make decisions and choices, and take actions, that are good for you in the long run.

Future self-continuity

Future self-continuity is the extent to which people feel more continuity between their present and future selves, as a result of which they are more likely to make decisions with the future self in mind.

"Focusing on one's connection to the future self may help one realise the long road of repeated healthy decisions to improve long-term health, and perhaps this process would be further facilitated by shifting priorities, yielding a trajectory of self-reinforcing positive behaviours. Acting today for health benefits that may not be seen until far in the future may be easier to do when recognising one's connection to that future, specifically to one's future self."[2]

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Change is inevitable. Don't rebel against it or ignore it, as that will not change anything in the long run but will just give you more stress.

CHAPTER 3: YOUR DNA FOR THE FUTURE

What do "DNA" and "epigenetics" have to do with your future? Everything! Because the way these two work in biology are the exact principles you can apply to build your life and y'our future.

OK, here is something I only came to realise recently. For this, there is a myth to bust first. The myth is based on a quote from Heraclitus, a Greek philosopher who said: "Change is the only constant in life." Is it?! Is change the *only* constant?

Not at all… I was nearing the end of writing my second book, *The Futures Effect – Change Your Story, Change Y'our Future!* when I discovered that there were plenty of things I could come up with that hadn't changed in my life. For example, how I wanted to feel hasn't changed, nor have my aspirations and potential. I also couldn't imagine that these feelings, aspirations and potential I was born with would ever change. I could, however, imagine that in different stages of my life, these would express themselves differently.

Let's take my innate potential as a therapist as an example. Today, that potential has evolved and is expressed in being an osteopath and body-centred stress coach. Through these activities, I feel pretty much content, healthy and fulfilled.

By the way, by "healthy" I do not mean the World Health Organization's (WHO) restrictive definition: "Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." When I mention "healthy", I refer to the new concept of health introduced in 2011 as "The ability to adapt and to self-manage, in the face of social, physical and emotional challenges."[1]

However, there is a scenario that in the future, through whatever circumstance, I might not be able to express my potential as a therapist through osteopathy any more. What do I do then?

Knowing that I need to keep practising some form of therapy to be in line with my preferred future, feel content, healthy and fulfilled, and keep developing my aspirations of a GREAT future (that other constant in time I have discovered), I will need to adapt. In other words, I will need to express the therapist in me differently and could become, for example, a transformation coach or a health coach for space tourists. One thing I know is that because I'm futurizing myself continuously, I'll be ready for the day I need to adapt.

Envisioning my preferred future with – at one end – what I wanted to feel and, at the other end, my aspirations, manifested through developing my potential, has been key to becoming who I am today. This trifold DNA-like structure has become a mindset and a way of life.

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PS: DON'T always start with why!

Yes, I go against Simon Sinek's Golden Circle, where you are told to start with "why". Asking why is relevant, but always placing it as the first question is just pure nonsense, albeit good marketing. Anyway, you can find my thoughts on this in a blog article I wrote:

https://meyerstom.wordpress.com/2020/03/26/dont-start-with-why

This DNA-like structure has become part of me and has helped me through many changes and challenges that life has thrown at me. But only now – by sharing my story and writing about futurizing yourself these past few years – do I realise the importance of this trinity.

DNA structure… hang on a minute… DNA… what do you know… these are also the initial letters of "Does Not Alter". How fitting is that?!

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@ Tom Meyers (2022)

The paragraph above is, in short, a conversation I had with myself a few days after – for the first time – I compared the essence of what I had based my envisioned future on (feelings – potential – aspirations) to a DNA-like structure. At first, the DNA-like structure was meant metaphorically, but my felt sense was signalling to me that it could be more.

Then, a few days later, I saw in my mind's eye an image of the concept "Your DNA for the future". It became picture-clear, and I understood that this structure is a solution to get more grip and certainty on the future. It can become the guiding, organising and development principle for evolving on purpose and helping others find stability through change as it did for me.

A "DNA for the future" with one strand made of base feelings (e.g. Content – Healthy – Fulfilled), the other strand made of aspirations (e.g. Good – Resilient – Evolvable – Actionable – Transcendent) and the two strands bonded by potential (e.g. Therapist – Communicator – Teacher – Researcher – Traveller).

Does it sound reasonable to you that with every important decision and choice you make, and every action you take, it is helpful to have a "DNA for the future"?

Over the past few months, I've discussed this with many people from very different backgrounds, and the common feedback is that it feels like common sense. The question is: why haven't we used it before? Why haven't we used the future to lead the way?

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Now is the time to do what was timely yesterday but essential today. Don't wait till you have more time. Take that first step. There will always be something in the way if you don't start.

CHAPTER 4: MENTAL TIME TRAVEL

It is worth pausing to consider why we haven't adopted a futures mindset or are so unaccustomed to thinking long-term. There are a few reasons for this that have something to do with how we evolved.

For that, you need to go back a few thousand years. You are a pre- or early human trying to survive in a hostile environment. Would you consider it useful to start thinking about what you would like to be doing 10 years from now? That is, would you find it useful to think about the long-term future while being chased by a sabre tooth tiger?

Human evolution has been driven to respond to immediate physical threats, but now that our environment is evolving faster than we are and the threats to our existence have changed, our body's natural reaction to danger – led by the pre- or early human's stress-response system that evolved to survive the present – has become unsuited to modern life.

Humanity is stuck in short-term thinking. Here's how we escape.
Richard Fisher (2020)

Our sense of the future has expanded and contracted over time. But survival means learning new lessons from the shocks society is facing right now.

https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/10/21/1009443/short-term-vs-long-term-thinking

Over thousands of years, the stress response, also called the "fight-or-flight response", has helped us survive acute physical threats. It enabled us to confront danger or run and flee from it in a fraction of a second. It prevented you from thinking about your next meeting or meal when your immediate survival was at stake. The stress response is an excellent automated response that is still very much needed today when you find yourself in the path of an oncoming car. However, it is not a good response when it comes to psychosocial risks (high workloads, tight deadlines, lack of control over the work and working methods) or threats to our existence that have been a long time in the making, like climate change.

In an interview entitled "Humans Wired to Respond to Short-Term Problems",[2] Harvard psychology professor Daniel Gilbert says that: "We created an entirely new environment to which our brain is not perfectly adapted" and "the human brain evolved to respond to immediate threats but may completely miss more gradual warning signs."

In his 2004 book *A Short History of Progress*, Ronald Wright describes human beings running 21st-century software on 50,000-year-old hardware in today's world. The results can be catastrophic. For example, our inability to properly consider long-term risks or opportunities combined with our short-term focus explains the many decades of inaction in dealing with climate change. We did not respond to the proverbial hand moving in slow motion towards our face before it was nearly too late.[1]

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So, our environment is evolving faster than we are, and the threats to our existence have changed in type and time. “Fighting or fleeing” – or “freezing”, for that matter – is not a response that helps us deal with this new environment we have created; on the contrary. Biological evolution is slow to adapt – so slow that the stress response itself has become a stressor. A stressor because it is triggered for demands that don’t require the reaction it causes. For example, you don’t need your muscles to tense up, your breathing rate and blood pressure to go up, or your stomach action to be inhibited because you have a tight deadline. However, you do when a car is speeding towards you and you need to get out of the way.

While evolutionarily we are hard-wired (brain) to respond (reflexive) to short-term problems, we are also naturally disposed to disregard issues that are in the distant future (prospective), issues that are not challenging our daily lives or those which dilute our convenience (opportunistic). This is one of the reasons why we tend to make decisions with consequences that are pleasant in the present but harmful in the future. We eat fast food rather than vegetables, watch TV rather than exercise, spend rather than save, and otherwise choose immediate gratification over long-term benefits.

On top of that, your brain is naturally really terrible at thinking about the long-term future. When you think of your future self, something quirky – an unexpected glitch in your brain – happens. Studies suggest that your brain starts acting as if you’re thinking about a stranger, someone you don’t know very well, when you imagine your future self. So, when the future you is someone you don’t know very well, why care for that person? The more your future self feels like a stranger – that is, the more disconnected you are from your future self – the less motivated you will be to plan for your future.[3,4]

When I read about this phenomenon, which has been corroborated with functional brain scans (fMRI), I wondered if this glitch could be considered as a reason why, for example, smokers keep smoking when they must be aware by now that smoking cigarettes causes nearly 9 out of 10 lung cancer deaths: “Cancer?! It will not happen to me, as me in the future is not me!” so to speak.

That aside, today there is a whole body of scientific evidence in social psychology exploring the phenomenon of future self-continuity which supports the idea that incorporating futures thinking into your decisions, choices and actions improves your health, wellbeing and quality of life, as well as that of others.[3,4]

So, when your future self shares similarities with your present self, when it is viewed in vivid and realistic terms, and when it is seen in a positive light, you are more willing to make choices today that may benefit you at some point in the years to come.[2]

The question that remains is: how do you create similarities between your future self and your present self? Well, you futurize yourself. You create that image of your future self in a vivid, realistic and positive light by basing it on your DNA for the future. Then you utilise that image of your future self to better manage your present self. That means you incorporate that image of your future self into your present self’s decisions, choices and actions – and with every step you take, you close the gap between the two.

You can do this because, as a member of the *homo sapiens sapiens* subspecies, you come with the potential of mental time travel to anticipate and imagine y’our future. You also come with the skills needed to put it to good use. You can do this because you are amazing.

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Take a moment and think of your next holiday destination. Imagine you are already there. Picture it vividly in your mind. Can you see yourself there? What are you doing, what is the weather like, what do you see? What are your plans for that day?

You've just accessed your episodic futures thinking or mental time travel capacity there.

Let's come back to solving our base problem. What can you do to overcome the uncertainty about the future that can paralyse you (freeze mode) and disrupt your ability to think constructively about the future?

You can create "your DNA for the future" and futurize yourself to increase your future self-continuity. I know you knew that I was going to say that! What else?

To deal with change is to anticipate and prepare for change. Futurizing yourself is a mindset where you embrace episodic futures thinking and use it as a problem-solving technique to prepare for any change. I would even go one step further and say that futurizing yourself is "the" stress management approach for a GREAT future. Remember: if you cannot change your hardware, you learn how to use your software differently.[1]

In her book *Imaginable: How to See the Future Coming and Feel Ready for Anything — Even Things that Seem Impossible Today*, futurist and game designer Jane McGonigal writes: "Episodic Futures Thinking (EFT) isn't an escape from reality. It's a way of playing with reality, to discover risks and opportunities you might not have considered. EFT is not a daydream in which you fantasise about waking up in a world where your problems are magically solved. It is a way of connecting who you are today, with what you might really feel and do in the future." She also writes: "EFT is an incredibly useful, practical tool to prepare your mind to adapt faster to new challenges, build hope and resilience, reduce anxiety and depression, and inspire you to take actions today that set yourself up for future happiness and success."

So, while the future is intrinsically uncertain, by defining "your DNA for the future" to futurize yourself, you have an anchoring framework and mindset to hold on to and fall back upon in times of need. This is how you become futurewise and "use the future" to create a safety net to make the future a relative comfort zone instead of being a stressor.

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> The prospection lens gives you a new way of thinking about what it means to be human with ramifications for navigating the future and building relationships in a world of future probabilities.[1]

CHAPTER 5: CREATE Y'OUR FUTURE, MANAGE YOUR PRESENT

Establishing your DNA for the future and using it as a guiding (G), organising (O), and development (D) principle to futurize yourself is good for you, and it is good for business.

Let's step back a moment and summarise some of the steps to futurize yourself. Where you start your process depends on the stage of life you find yourself in and how much you've invested in your personal development.

When starting from zero as I did, the first two steps are to get a new perspective on your past and to uncover your potential. The third step is to build a narrative of a preferred future based on steps one and two. As I mentioned before, I only discovered recently that I instinctively also based this preferred future not only on my potential but also on what I wanted to feel and my aspirations.

An additional step in the futurizing process, and one which is best done before step three, is **futurecasting**. This involves futures thinking, the rational, creative, reflective and contemplative process of studying possible, probable, and projected… futures (prospection). It also involves thinking about the drivers of change that are happening today (forecasting) and considering what will be necessary in the future (forethought).

Futures thinking is a creative and exploratory process that uses divergent thinking,[2] seeking many possible answers and acknowledging uncertainty. It's a different mindset from analytical thinking, which uses convergent thinking to seek the correct answer and reduce uncertainty.

Futurecasting helps you define your preferred future better and makes it more future-proof[3] as it enhances your ability to prepare, recover and invent as changes occur.

It would really be a shame and a waste of your precious time if, for example, you started upskilling or reskilling yourself for a job that is expected to be obsolete in a few years. It would also be completely bonkers to start investing time learning something that – because you haven't thought it through – you discover afterwards you're not cut out for. Nor does it make sense to do things today that won't lead you to feel content, healthy and fulfilled or that won't contribute to a GREAT future.

Today you can start futurizing yourself and start living on purpose to make your preferred future into an ongoing reality. Today you can become more knowledgeable about the future by increasing your futures literacy. You can prepare the future you and be ready for the future of work. Investing in yourself and your future from a futures perspective will give you the advantage needed for your career but also for your health and wellbeing.

I didn't do this additional step when I futurized myself. Times are different today, and we know through research that anticipating and evaluating future possibilities for the guidance of thought and action is the cornerstone of human success.[4] The whole process, journey or whatever you want to call it will change you and will continue to amaze you as it does me.

I don't think you will disagree when I say that the way we are living today isn't sustainable. You know that we not only need to change something but also that we have to do it now. Humanity and

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Planet Earth are under threat. We also know that our individual actions matter. The COVID-19 pandemic has made that clear and shown how fragile and interconnected we are.[5] We need to act now and do it together as one to change the course of our future. We need to act now to have a future.

To overcome our fear and give us the motivation needed to change, we need to change the perspective from which we drive our behaviour. Rather than being driven by the past or taking steps that are merely a continuation of present methods, our actions can be pulled by the future.[1]

We need to develop a futures mindset on purpose to manage our present that can adapt in the flow of evolution and reassure us to go forward with confidence.

Futurizing yourself is the best foundation you can give yourself for the future – and, unlike what you might think, it evolves with you and the fast-changing world we live in.

As the future is not set in stone, the trick is to understand, when you identify your "DNA for the future", that all the elements can be expressed in different ways. I already touched upon this in Chapter 3. In different stages of your life, your "DNA for the future" will need to be expressible in different ways, just like your biological DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid). Your biological DNA does not change (however, it can mutate). It can express itself in different ways through behavioural or environmental stimuli. For example, exposure to pharmaceutical and toxic chemicals, diet, stress, exercise and other environmental factors is capable of eliciting positive or negative epigenetic modifications with lasting effects on development, metabolism and health.[1] Epigenetics is the study of this phenomenon.

So when you define "what" you can develop (potential) and want to feel and aspire to, make sure you define them in a way that will give you the "stability through change" needed but is flexible enough to change "how" you will express them.

Creating a life based on things that don't change but can evolve… When surfing the net about this phenomenon, I was pleasantly surprised that one of the strategies of Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon and the private space flight company Blue Origin, is to build on things that don't change but that are stable in time. Stable in time, but that can express themselves differently. For example, people will continue to read, but how they will read can change. So he went on to develop the Kindle reader.[2]

At an Amazon annual shareholder meeting, Jeff Bezos was asked about how to make long-term plans, to which he answered:

"In 10 years many things will evolve; technology will change. Machine-learning technology, in particular, will evolve very significantly over the 10-year time horizon. But I would always encourage people, when they think about 10 years, to ask the question, what won't change? That's actually the more important question. You can build strategies around things that will be stable in time. In that 10-year vision, there are a bunch of things at Amazon that are not going to change."

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The likelihood that the future will become a continuous distressing battle against the odds is significantly increased if you leave it all up to chance, fate or others to create.

CHAPTER 6: THE FUTURE IS Y'OUR FUTURE, SO MAKE IT A GREAT ONE!

Just like your body is made of some 37.2 trillion cells, so are you part of 7 billion humans walking this Earth and some on the International Space Station. From that space station, it is clear we are one. But we don't have to be in space to experience how connected we are. I think COVID-19 has made that clear.

In his book *Future Consciousness*, Thomas Lombardo writes that flourishing within the human condition requires a purposeful future focus. Furthermore, he states that, unquestionably, living in the relative present is the fundamental cause behind many of our most significant problems.[1]

Meanwhile, evolutionarily we are hard-wired (brain) to respond (reflexive) to short-term problems, and your brain is naturally really terrible at thinking about the long-term future. Our minds are not constructed to live in the present. To evolve, there needs to be anticipation of a general direction for the future.

It is the nature of the evolved human mind to act with purpose and perceive with anticipation.[1]

Today, in the midst of turmoil, where short-term pressures are up against medium and long-term uncertainties, and with our future at stake,[2] we must awaken and put to good use our anticipation skills and, in particular, our mental time travelling potential.

We have to do this without delay, as we live in what is considered by the United Nations as "The Decade of Action" (2020–2030)[3] and have ten years to reinvent ourselves.

Remember, the future – your future and the future of the future – is being shaped by the decisions and choices you make and the actions you take today. The future is y'our future and is in the making right here, right now. It is not some inevitability at which you arrive; it is you who create it in your moment-to-moment decisions, choices and actions.[4]

Dare to look ahead today.

What "the future" do you want?

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We have the ability to imagine future scenarios and shape our behaviour through our decisions, choices and actions that get us closer and closer to our preferred future and prevent possible unwanted future scenarios from ever happening.

CHAPTER 7: THE FUTURES EFFECT

The more futurewise you are, the more you'll be able to know how to cope with the inevitable: "Change". Change, positive or negative, always leads to stress. When stress is left unmanaged, it leads to illness – so futurizing yourself and becoming futurewise benefits your health and wellbeing.

Futurizing yourself is something that everyone can do and benefit from. However, what will be different for each individual is where you start the process of defining y'our future on purpose and proactively incorporate futures thinking into your decisions, choices and actions to "change forward".

It depends on where you find yourself, the stage of life you are in, the baggage you are carrying along and/or whether or not other essential needs are met. There are 7 billion different starting points, so to speak.

My three-step process started at a time when life had become meaningless, a never-ending uphill battle. Tired of fighting against the odds and emotionally drained, I remember waking up one morning in my cold, damp bedroom thinking: "If this is what life is about, this continuous struggle to survive, I don't want it." But what *did* I want?

That said, I am still futurizing myself. It is an ongoing process. The approach is very different now than when I started 22 years ago, but the essence and what the future I want hasn't changed.

What I want is what I believe you and we all want. It is something we have in common, no matter at what stage of life you find yourself. What you/we want at y'our most intrinsic level is to feel content, fulfilled and healthy. What you/we want to have is a future that is Good, Resilient, Evolvable, Actionable and Transcendent, i.e. **a GREAT future**.

Why do you/we want this? Because we all want to flourish in the flow of evolution and thrive in this ever-evolving, changing world. We want to **flourish** – to grow or develop in a healthy way the non-material part of us that goes beyond the confines of simple happiness or wellbeing. We also want to **thrive** – and by that, I mean to succeed in material terms.

We want this because this is what we innately strive for. Life needs a sense, a direction in which we can excel and expand our feeling of belonging and wholeness. Just imagine a GREAT future – a life where you feel content, fulfilled and healthy while making a meaningful impact on the lives of others by growing into the best version of yourself in a purposeful way. Do you want this?

Maybe you've never looked at your life or your future from this perspective before. If so, let me encourage you to give it a go. I think you will be pleasantly surprised!

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The Good Future is entirely possible – it all depends on the choices we make.

Gerd Leonhard – The Good Future (film)[1]

Yet despite all the doom and gloom we hear and see about the future, not only is the present already better than the past (even with the ongoing woes of the pandemic), the future has strong potential to be even better! The "only" challenge is that, while we will have all the tools we need (science and technology) within a decade, we must also develop the telos, i.e. the will, the purpose and the wisdom.

The Good Future will come down to our ethics and values, to global collaboration and to a collective definition of what kind of future we want (rather than what future we can have), and to reaching a consensus on how we can best achieve it.

"As we see the future, so we act, as we act so we become!" (Barbara Marx Hubbard). And while it makes sense that focusing on the moment has some benefits, it means nothing when the world around you is heating up through global warming. It also means nothing when you've been told that you are out of a job because you weren't paying attention to the future and your job got automated.

Futurizing yourself gives your life a direction, makes it more meaningful, makes you more responsible for your present-day behaviour, and makes making decisions and choices – and life in general – easier.

This is precisely the beauty of it. By creating and nurturing a vivid sense of your future self, you increase the extent you feel more continuity between your present and your future self (future self-continuity), and the more likely it is that you will make decisions, make choices and take actions with your future self in mind.

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What "the future" do you want? What would an ideal day look like let's say ten, twenty years from now? Let me ask it a different way: what don't you want the future to be like?

AFTERWORD: WHAT TO DO ABOUT Y'OUR FUTURE

Knowing where you are going is the first step towards getting there.

Kenneth H. Blanchard

Today, you/we are living in a fast-changing and ever more complex and ambiguous world. A world that is trying to cope and navigate the COVID-19 pandemic and the devastating effects of climate change. At the same time, every aspect of y'our life is and will further be influenced by automation, robotisation, datafication, and so many other changes and challenges due to technological advances that have outpaced our own natural evolution.

You are also living in a time with tremendous opportunities. However, for these opportunities to emerge you need a new modus operandi. A new way of thinking that cannot be left to others.

We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them – and neither can we use old ways of thinking like the rigid command and control theory for problems that are going to emerge in the future which are unpredictable and require agility.

You and we all, including businesses, need to adopt a new, more strategic way going forward instead of leaving it – our future – up to chance.

Like becoming streetwise to deal with the potential difficulties or dangers of life in an urban environment, you need to become futurewise through increasing your futures literacy to better manage the present.

You need to futurize yourself and, with your mental time travelling capacity, create the future you want. You need to envisage the future based on things that don't change and are stable over time but can be expressed in different ways. In other words, you need to create your DNA for the future, with which you can align your decisions, choices and actions.

Futurizing yourself makes you more willing to look after yourself. It also gives your life a direction, makes it more meaningful, makes you more responsible for your present-day behaviour, and makes making decisions and choices – and life in general – easier. Futurizing yourself will also help you ready yourself for the needs and work skills of tomorrow.

As you see the future, so you act; as you act, so you become.

I'm giving you carte blanche here to come up with your ideal future, the future you wholeheartedly want to evolve into.

What do you want to feel?

What do you desire the future to be like?

What is your potential to make what you want to feel and aspire to into an ongoing reality?

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What does your preferred future look like?

However, when designing your preferred future, remember you are not alone. You are not alone, and a GREAT future can't be achieved alone; nor can it be achieved when we have depleted the Earth's resources or haven't limited the effects of climate change.

As much as you are of one in body, mind and spirit, so do you belong at the same time to a larger whole, humanity, that lives together on a planet that is part of the Milky Way…

So, as much as you are simultaneously a whole in and of itself, you as a human being are part of a larger whole, humanity, which in turn is part of… You can fill in the rest. Never lose sight of this when you create your "DNA for the future" and design your preferred future.

It goes without saying that the future is not set in stone, and you will never be able to predict the finer details of the future, as there is not one absolute future, but many relative futures. Its plurality makes the future difficult to predict to the letter, but that doesn't mean the future is a big unknown. You know, for example, that climate change will have an impact on rising water levels and mass migration. How much water levels will rise, well, that is another matter.

Because I have told you about it, you can be fairly certain that technological disruption will influence millions of jobs over the next 5 to 10 years, necessitating mass reorientation plans and a reskilling revolution.

Much is uncertain – but what is certain is that y'our future, whatever it might be, is defined by y'our behaviour, in other words the decisions and choices you make and the actions you take or do not take.

With all of these thoughts, reflections and insights about y'our behaviour and possible, probable and plausible futures running through my mind, I'm more adamant than ever about raising awareness of the benefits of futurizing yourself to help you steer y'our future(s) towards a preferable future.

I firmly believe that you will benefit from evolving on purpose to manage and be ready for the changes ahead. For that, you need to have a clear vision individually and collectively for y'our life and the future you want to create. With the preferred future in mind, your decisions, choices and actions will be better informed, and you can make that future into an ongoing reality.

I'm very hopeful that you and we all can create a GREAT future. As human beings we are very resourceful, plus we have within us the hardware and software to make it happen. But it can only happen if we apply it on purpose.

"Never let a good crisis go to waste," said Winston Churchill, who went on to become one of the founders of the United Nations after World War II. The crisis we in are now is a sign for change.

A single step in time won't be enough, but every step counts. What is needed won't be a walk in the park, but a life left up to chance won't be, either.

Futurizing yourself is an evolving, ongoing reality that fills you with hope, joy, contentment, happiness and fulfilment in good times and a guiding light during challenging times.

Yes, you can leave y'our future to chance ("Que Sera, Sera"). That is up to you to decide, but then you also have to accept the consequences of that choice.

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I ask you again: **“What the future do you want?”**

I believe, if you boil it down, that, at a basic level, we all want the same thing. We all want to feel content, fulfilled and healthy, and to have a good life where we are resilient and evolve into the best version of ourself. We want to act with meaning and purpose, and we want to avoid pain. We want to leave this life knowing that we left it a better place for our having been in it. We want to be good ancestors. In other words, we want to live a great life and have a Good, Resilient, Evolvable, Actionable and Transcendent (GREAT) future.

In this book, *A very short introduction to futurizing yourself,* I’ve set the stage for how you can have a GREAT future and a GREAT life.

I want to leave you with the following words from Thomas Lombardo:

> “The most distinctive and empowering capacity of the human mind is to be able to consciously imagine, think about, and intentionally pursue preferable futures. We can amplify nature’s vast and pervasive evolutionary process, and by doing so, we can flourish in the flow of evolution and create a good future for ourselves, human society, and the planet.”

Be good to you, be good to y’our future, always.

Tom

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“The future belongs to those who prepare for it today.”

Malcolm X

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