Hope Presentation, UU Vancouver, Feb 1, 2015

Jeanne: Since the early 1970s Dick and I have worked as volunteers to protect our planet, including the past 22 years of fulltime work together in several nonprofits we have created. Some things have improved, but overall Earth’s natural systems are unraveling. Climate change has become a crisis. Fisheries and forests are still in decline, and scientists say humans are causing the sixth major extinction of species. At the same time, worldwide population growth is unrelenting, and consumption keeps increasing. Politically, we seem incapable of getting ahead of the curve. In fact, in his book Blessed Unrest, Paul Hawken said that if you look at the science that describes what is happening on earth today and aren't pessimistic, you don't have the correct data.

People sometimes ask us, in the face of so much bad news, how we can keep at this work. Why haven’t we burned out or given up in despair? In fact, some years ago our colleagues in Port Townsend asked us to give an Earth Day talk on hope. So we really had to grapple with this question. We’d like to share our insights with you.

Dick: Three principles of hope guide our work and lives.

**Principle 1: Hope must be an intentional act.**

Because we live in an era of bad news, hope must be an intentional act.

- The need for hope is easy to see at the community or societal level. The opposite of hope would be hopelessness or despair. Hopeless people can become discouraged or immobilized. We don’t wish to contribute to a community feeling of hopelessness.
- Hope at the personal level is more complicated. On this point, we are influenced by Viktor Frankl, the author of *Man’s Search for Meaning*. As a Jewish psychiatrist in a Nazi concentration camp, the worst conditions possible, he observed that some prisoners steadfastly maintained hope as a means to survive the ordeal. Their hope generally had to do with once again being with loved ones and once again doing meaningful work.
- For us, hope is essential. We choose to be hopeful.

**Principle 2: Hope is one's highest vision of the possible.**

- In 1987, we spent three months at the Oregon coast to plan our future without children at home. After thinking as deeply as possible, we concluded that we were called to work together as full-time volunteers for Earth and future generations. And we clarified our highest vision for our work as partners:

  *Within the Northwest, a minority of highly motivated citizens would be the true leaders to a sustainable future. Collectively, we would transform the fundamental culture of our region and, in doing so, become a model and source of inspiration for those living in other regions.*

- We realized we would have no power to make this hope and vision a reality. But we did have the ability to participate fully in what we would view as the greatest human adventure of all time – the Great Turning in the words of Joanna Macy. Our hope would provide a very bright beacon, and we could strive to **align our conduct with our highest**
hope. In that way, alignment would an end in itself, not a means to an end outside our control. In other words, our highest calling would be alignment – doing what we could do with no expectations about the ultimate outcome or even the results from our daily work along the way.

- By focusing on alignment, we need not to be distracted by transitory events of the day, either good news like a break-through in automobile battery capacity or bad news like the possible extinction of the polar bear. This caused us to conclude that we would treat both optimism and pessimism as distractions.
  
- Also, we no longer need to worry about probabilities. We could simply live and work for a noble possibility. Dana Meadows, the author of Limits to Growth, which was published in the 70s and updated in 2004, was an expert on the interface of human development and natural resources. Before she died a few years ago, she was often asked, “Do we have enough time left” to avert the collapse projected by some scenarios in the book. She would always answer, “We have just enough time.” In doing so, she was coupling a noble possibility with a sense of urgency and keeping the window of hope open for all she touched.

**Principle 3: Authentic hope cannot be based on denial.**

- If this is true, a hopeful person must seek to understand the reality of the context we live in. As an example, in recent years we have experienced dead zones off the Oregon coast – the lowest oxygen levels ever recorded. We have seen major die offs of sea birds, including the magnificent Common Muir nesting in flocks on our off-shore rocks. Because that Oregon coast is so close to home, we would like to understand why these events are happening.

- A hopeful person is not discouraged by that reality.

- To the contrary, a hopeful person does not have that nagging feeling that comes from knowing there is a problem, but refusing to explore it in detail. This is analogous to being in a workplace where things aren’t quite right with the boss, but not really understanding what is going on. When you finally have the conversation, even if you don’t like what you hear, you feel much better grounded knowing where you stand.

**Jeanne:** An attitude of hope requires conscious effort. As a practical matter, we must engage in practices in our daily lives that keep hope alive. We’ve identified five practices that help us, and we’ll give three as examples. These specific practices may or may not be the right ones for you, but we’re suggesting that you can create similar practices in your life to keep hope alive.

**Gratitude.** In the movie Journey of the Universe, Brian Swimme takes us through the creation of the universe from the Big Bang to biotic evolution on Earth to human civilization. I’ve given a lot of thought to all the changes that had to occur on earth to make it an ideal place for human life. The scientist Loren Eisley says that if flowering plants hadn’t evolved, the human wouldn’t have evolved. They produce seeds whereas other kinds of plants don’t have enough protein or fat for humans. We also rest on the innovations of our human ancestors. They figured out how to domesticate plants, to form a bill of rights, to develop vaccines. So I’m grateful to be living in this time and place.
At the Center for Earth Leadership we often take time in our gatherings to express gratitude. At the end of a meeting or class, we sometimes have a circle of gratitude. That always strengthens my sense of hope. That focus on gratitude at gatherings also helps us be more conscious in our everyday lives. For example, as Dick walks to and from the office he appreciates those who designed the awnings that keep him dry. When I cut my finger while chopping vegetables, I am so grateful that it grows back!

Also in our everyday life, there are precious moments we feel grateful for. One precious moment that comes to mind is when my 15-year granddaughter moved from Colorado to Eugene. I wanted her to meet her cousins—girls 4 and 7, who lived in Washington, so I arranged for them to spend a couple days together at our home in Portland. I often involve the girls in tasks around the home. This time I asked them if they wanted to crack filberts. I gave them each a hammer and a piece of wood. They loved it. As they pounded their nuts, shells would fly in all directions, and they laughed out loud. After 45 minutes they were still having fun, but the nuts ran out. None of us have forgotten this simple time together.

**Inspiration.** I try to place myself in situations where I will be inspired. Rachel Carson speaks of our need for the beauties and mysteries of nature. I have acknowledged that need for myself. As a practice, for 20 years I set aside one day a week to spend in nature either hiking or x-country skiing. I could then hold certain beautiful scenes in my head during the week—like water trickling down a moss-covered cliff or buttercups dancing in the wind.

Children are also a source of great inspiration. I recall vividly one day when our 7-year-old neighbor saw me working out in the yard picking up cones and twigs that the fir trees drop—pretty dull work. She asked if she could help, and I said, “Sure.” So she and her twin brother came over. While dropping the cones in the bucket Annalise said, “This is so much fun. It is just like picking up Easter eggs. I wish I could come over every day after school and help you.” I went inside that evening uplifted.

I am also inspired by people of good will bringing about change at the local level. At the Center for Earth Leadership, some of our change agents were intent on creating a garden space at Duniway School, but the school yard was totally paved. They rented equipment, dug up concrete, and brought in soil for planting natives and edibles, all with a goal of allowing the children to experience the cycles of nature.

**Dick: Good work.** A third practice for me personally is to do good work and stick with it.

1. **Be clear on what is my good work?** By good work, I mean work that is consistent with my highest ideals. It has to do with the **goal of the work,** not the **nature of the specific activity.**

For 23 years, I worked as a corporate lawyer in a large Portland law firm. That was my paid work, but not my good work. That is not to say I was working for unworthy goals, but the goals of my clients were not aligned with my highest ideals.
2. **Dedicate time to my good work.** When I was being paid to do legal work, I had to reserve a specific portion of my time for good work as a volunteer. That *dedicated time* was for work for Earth and for children.

By being intentional, my good work gets a higher priority. I do not leave it to chance, or to the energy I might find for good work after other priorities receive attention.

This allowed me to spend four years to create a chess program for inner city children while I was practicing law. As an enrichment activity, Chess for Success clubs meet twice a week after school. Kids meet to learn the skills of chess, come to believe they are pretty smart, and have fun in a positive atmosphere. I created the program in my *dedicated time* while working as a lawyer.

3. **Persevere in my good work.** I have also found over the years that perseverance makes me hopeful. The temporal side is important. If I stay with something long enough to know I have made a difference, I am more hopeful. Examples:

   - Offering discussion courses for 13 years.
   - Organizing an annual Earth Club Conference for 13 years.

4. **Bring my full energy to bear in my good work.** Beyond perseverance, I find hope in being as relentless as I can be. Relentlessness goes beyond merely sticking with it. It means bringing energy to bear on my chosen good work and leaving no stone unturned. This relentlessness allows me to feel the impact of my contribution in the most significant way.

**Summary.** Thus, my hope is sustained when I am clear on my good work, dedicate time for it, persevere for some length of time, and bring my full energy to bear in my good work.

11:29 Jeannie. Earlier, Dick spoke about focusing on alignment. In the reading you heard before our talk, Ghandi speaks to his daily struggle with alignment. Developing a vision is an easy part. Aligning your conduct on a continual basis is more difficult. Let me finish by reading his quote again.

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I know the path; it is straight and narrow.
It is like the edge of a sword.
I rejoice to walk on it.
I weep when I slip.
God’s word is; “He who strives never perishes”
I have implicit faith in that promise
Though, therefore, from my weakness I fail a thousand times
I shall not lose faith.
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