

Transition Towns Training

Contributed by Mike Adams
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San Francisco -- This past weekend I was fortunate to be able to spend some time with folks who are looking into the future and not talking only about the doom and gloom scenarios that certainly will befall pockets, if not most of humanity, if we continue down the path of consumption, ignorance, and denial that we are currently walking.

Instead, this weekend was more about accepting that we are going to live in a world that will need to go through a period of transition away from our reliance on cheap, abundant liquid fuels and into one that is short on dense, transportable energy and one that is affected by climate change that is most inevitably upon us.

I wrote recently a summary of Transition Towns. That can be found at <http://leftcoastjournals.blogspot.com/2008/09/transition-towns.html>.

The event was called "Transition Towns Training." Transition Towns is a movement started in England about 4 years ago. This is on their home page: "It all starts off when a small collection of motivated individuals within a community come together with a shared concern: how can our community respond to the challenges, and opportunities, of Peak Oil and Climate Change?" They put forth a series of steps, or ingredients, that communities can implement if they want the transition to be smoother. "We are all in transition, whether we like it or not, some of us are just not aware of it." Through increased awareness we have much to gain, including a less panicked population, more time for preparation and the most valuable resource of all, in my opinion, engaged humans bringing forth their individual knowledge.

We met on the northern coast of San Francisco as the moon was in its third quarter. A sunny and warm beautiful morning with the Golden Gate off in the western horizon, 52 unique individuals came together to be led through Training for Transition by founders (of the training) Sophy Banks and Naresh Giangrande. After beginning with some protocol for group discussion -- one hand up to be next, two hands up to respond to the immediate point, and a T to indicate a technical response -- we moved on to different group mingles. We aligned by geographic location, community (however we defined it) size, our community's progress in transition, and how long we have been 'involved' personally, with introductions and discussing why we are here going around among each new set of neighbors. The group came together with many goals, among them:

- To form groups
- Learn practical ideas
- Gain and share inspiration
- Explore the role of technology
- To create jobs
- To gain a sense of wider contacts

We then moved into an exercise where we shared knowledge about peak oil, PO, and climate change, CC. Much of this information was known generally to most of the group, so the importance of understanding the problem before moving onto solutions was made clear. I will state here my high regard for both Sophy and Naresh as instructors. The methods employed allowed for all members of the group to be engaged and helped facilitate communication between the Transitioners. In our talking of peak oil, climate change and solutions, we were encouraged to leave out opinions, and instead to present facts in as balanced a way as possible.

We discussed how to close the loops; using less resources — producing less waste — using the waste as a resource was emphasized. We have plenty of 'energy', but not liquid fuels.

Naresh then spoke of 4 potential future scenarios, after we had a mutually defined reality based on PO and CC. Starting

from the top:

- Blue line: shows what most seem to believe, that growth will continue without end, even if we must go into space at some point
- Pink line: that green technology will emerge and at such a level to enable us to maintain our near current way of life
- Yellow line: an Earth Stewardship approach that has the world using much less energy in order to maintain a balance with the rest of life on earth.
- Blue line: a Mad Max scenario, which may be where we end up if transition does begin soon on a large level.

Naresh also recommended Naomi Klein's Shock Doctrine and Starhawk's Fifth Sacred Thing and inspired us with this quote by JFK: "The problems of the world cannot possibly be solved by skeptics or cynics whose horizons are limited by the obvious realities. We need people who can dream of things that never were."

After lunch, which surprisingly was everyone fend for themselves (the only drawback for me all weekend), we began with a visioning experience looking forward 20 years into the future to see what life was like then. The resounding view was a positive one, of more community, more shared meals, a simpler life.

Along the way we would need to hold different events for different groups based on who was present and what stage they were at.

Pre-Contemplation

Is there a problem?

Talks, films, info sessions, potlucks

Contemplation

What needs to be done?

Solutions detailed, reasons for change

Preparation

What will I do? How?

Reskilling, timetable, transition teams

Change

Keep going and/ or try something else.

Support, celebrations, deepening work

When we begin meeting, there are some first steps to keep in mind:

- Get to know others in group -- this may take time
- Set intent
- Establish ground rules
- Take time, meet a few times without putting pressure on results
- Set a when will we finish task -- i.e. we cannot grow food for all of 'town' but we can celebrate when we install 5 gardens.

The first day wrapped up nicely and with many tired folks, as much work was done. As many folks were staying at the hostel also located at Fort Mason, I offered to pick up some food for a communal dinner, an offer only one other member of the group accepted, though we met some great folks travelling through SF over our lentil, rice, and broccoli dinner superbly prepared by a gracious guest and chef. Some other Transitioners did enjoy the meal the next day for lunch.

The moon set a little later on Saturday, falling into the Pacific just after midnight.

Day 2

The mourning process will be long and hard. There is much that we will lose as we accept that a transition is coming. We need to put that energy into something positive. On that note I will head out to the spiral gardens and continue this after the sun has set.

Back home after recovering much primo topsoil to put new plants into.

The afternoon began with a discussion about our Beliefs in the Industrial Growth System. These brainstormed ideas could loosely be placed into these 5 categories:

- The world will not meet our needs -- Create excesses to compensate
- Worthlessness is felt -- We use external things to gratify us
- We are powerless -- we have lost confidence in our own abilities -- So we dominate nature and other people
- We have concern for our safety -- So we arm ourselves, protect ourselves
- We are separate from nature -- We seem to know celebrity news but not our neighbors

We then moved into a talk about psychotherapy, and how we develop their world view as they grow up in this world. Most experience a duality of the brain -- one part saying all is well and we are safe and the other saying we must watch out for ourselves. We adapted by doing things that first bring us partial success and then by repressing memories of the good and bad split within our thoughts. Here again I felt that awareness raising was critical to helping the people as a whole from fully crossing over to 'everyone for themselves' as the situation deteriorates. We will find our own place, where we belong.

The question was raised -- what do we who have transitioned do when the hungry come knocking on our doors? -- we must open our doors or we have not transitioned. (but when has opening the doors ever led to anything positive?)

We may all be hungry together, but sharing the human experience is the key. We have to chance to reclaim our humanness, our femininity.

Remember the law of 2 feet -- when not engaged, use your 2 feet and go somewhere else. This leads us to the 'open space' model of discussion. Those with a topic to discuss wrote their idea on a post it, and we merged ideas to get about 8 topics and then broke to different tables to discuss our ideas in a free form model, with some people staying put and others floating about the room. When open space starts it starts, and when it ends it ends, and whoever comes are the right people, and whatever happens is the only thing that could have happened.

Lunch Sunday ended with a brief discussion about the state of the economy, and if I was trying to be optimistic before this talk it faded again, hopefully the denial will not try to come up again. Money is debt -- thanks to the Federal Reserve and their lovely policy of charging us interest on all the money they print and lend us -- that is citizens of the US. Two scenarios for the economy:

- There are resource constraints, peak oil is upon us -- economy looks bad now, and if oil prices go up again the economy spirals down
- There is more oil -- the economy can hang on until the peak hits, which is inevitable.

When peak oil becomes apparent, Wall Street will crash.

Perhaps the most powerful part of the weekend was a visioning experiment where 1/2 of us journeyed 7 generations into the future and then came back to listen to a present day transitioner describe what it is like going through transition and what their role during transition was. This brought a level of realness, we are going into the unknown, and having the chance to talk about what it 'was' like and what we did helped, for me, move my ideas forward. My dominating idea is to bring food production to more urban/ suburban areas by planting food in people's backyards, frontyards, and eventually streets. I see this as being a very local movement with most 'farmers' travelling less than a mile to work, with local nurseries to help with teaching and propagation and soil making, with many homes slowly making the conversion to graywater and solar, and many more community meals being shared and information being shared, and community growing and happening in many places. I wrote more about this here.

If you had a piece of land that was yours to care for, what would you do? Now turn this around and treat yourself that way, as you are a part of the earth. If you are tired, rest. If you are hungry, eat. Take care of yourself, LOVE YOURSELF.

Thank you for your interest in my experiences at Training for Transition. Since last weekend I have met many others in the east bay who are looking to get a transition movement, including POGO, peak oil group of Oakland, who screened just Power of Community. We have a long way to go and not much time. Please contact anyone from transition, there are groups set up in every state now, or feel free to contact me directly if you want to talk.

Thanks so much. Love to all.

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<http://leftcoastjournals.blogspot.com>

<http://www.transitiontowns.org/>

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