

Stop Now, So You Can Start.

Written by Alex Baer

Saturday, 28 January 2012 16:30 - Last Updated Saturday, 28 January 2012 16:36

You have to stop it, in order to start it: To begin the fresh and new thing, you have to stop the stale and old thing.

By no longer accepting the outrageous as fair or normal, we can start to replace it. If we all -- all of us, individually and collectively -- refuse to accept manure as our candy, we might still have a chance.

If we will all -- you and me, and everyone -- agree to pay attention, to think, to express our wishes, to speak up and be heard, to hold signs and mail letters, to send emails and make phone calls, to turn out in numbers, there is a chance, even at this late and sealing-fast date, a possibility, a thread of a chance.

Reject apathy.

Eject apathy.

Stop making excuses.

Stop taking excuses.

Do what you can do: No wilderness-clearing heroics, here. Just a share -- your share.

It's as simple as that.

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Some countries turn out 30 percent or more of their population when their rights and dignities and needs as human beings are stomped on.

Imagine, in a country of 307 million people, such as we are, if we could have even ten percent registering their anger or displeasure at being tricked or fooled or conned or swindled or robbed or lied to.

Do you think 30 or 31 million people, out in the streets, mad as all hell, would catch a little attention - from media, politicians, the cowards in high places?

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OK, so -- devil's advocate time, now:

I agree, they would just do what they always do: yank hard with their power, pull on the reins of government, demand some action, add another gate to their estates, put on another shift of guards, layer up like you or I might don a favorite, old sweater.

At some point, the politicians will be more afraid of us than of their masters, turn this whole thing around, and have themselves doing the People's business once more.

Hard to believe? Imagine you are they, the powerful members of government, up on high, the top steps, on Capitol Hill:

Down below, 30 million people, angry and shouting, coming closer, chanting, each and every person holding up a copy of the Constitution of the United States of America, way down below, a sea of people holding and waving parchment -- versus, what? Ten steamy and insistent, vaguely or outright threatening phone calls -- Shocking! And, to you, a member of Congress! --

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calls from one from each of, maybe, the ten richest people in the country?

Or twenty? Or fifty? Or 100 richest?

Against 30 million, live and in person, right now, right here, today, approaching the steps, in lockstep, holding their rights aloft, written down, the only original and true and faithful contract with Americans?

All right, my devil's advocacy is done, the scenario is set, and, as a member of Congress, there on the top step -- what would YOU do, right then, while the cameras were on you?

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Funny, how they'll arrest 50 or a hundred folks who show up to protest.

Where would they park 30 million of us, peacefully protesting, exercising our First Amendment rights, as citizens, to petition the government for a redress of grievances -- and doing so peacefully, mostly quietly, very respectfully, too?

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More postage-stamp philosophy? All right:

* It's only class warfare when we fight back.

* I'll believe corporations are people when one dies for this country.

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* We are the 99 percent -- we are too big to fail.

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When will you and I say, out loud, to be heard across rivers, shouting in full lung, "Enough!"

Will it be when we have something left to lose?

Maybe, when we still have a few precious things left?

When we have lost almost everything of value?

Perhaps, when we have left all that they will allow -- because then, we will have absolutely nothing left to lose, nothing remaining for them to take, nothing left to give, nothing left that they want, except the marrow in our bones, save for our organs, except for our eyes?

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You want more fiber in this diet, in these Serving Suggestions -- more protein and less fat, a look at the calorie counts, no artificial sweeteners, you want it all served up straight?

OK. Here it is: To change the world -- or your socks -- you first have to start.

Lesson over.

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Class dismissed.

All there is to it.

Drive safely, and defensively, on your way home.

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If you choose to start, here are some pointers on how to start:

Make a deal with yourself to give two hoots about your own future, about your children's future -- or that of your nieces and nephews, or the kids of complete strangers -- and then, their children, too.

Do one thing a month that would make them, and you, proud -- just one thing. That's just 12 times a year, doing something. Would you watch 12 movies a year to make a better world, to help your kids, and their kids, and your community, and this nation, and this world?

Maybe you watch 12 movies a month -- or a week.

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Brother, can you spare some time?

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You can be as guarded or as generous with your time as you like. You can make whatever bargain with yourself that you like -- or not. Either way, you get to live in it, live with it, remembering how it went.

In this world, we all choose what we do -- and, not choosing is still choosing, it's frustrating but true.

Right now, I'm here anyway -- I might as well do what I can do. That's all I can say for me -- say what you want about you.

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The average teevee is now blaring six or seven hours a day in the average US home, where there are more sets than people inside.

Even at six hours a day, that's more than 91 consecutive days of nonstop teevee -- 106 days if you said seven hours a day.

OK, I get it -- we all have hard days, no one's talking about stealing your time. You give what you can give in this world, when you can, if you can. That's as true for me as it is you.

Let's pause and reconsider, and remember what we're saying, now: We're talking about investing time to make a better place for you, for those you love, and for those that they love, too.

And, we're talking about trading some down time, in front of a box, to make that come true. OK,

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no value judgments -- it's just good to get clear, to bring things into view, by setting them off to one side with some set framing, all bright and all new.

My friend:

You drive a hard bargain -- OK, how about devoting just TEN PERCENT of that teevee time to making a better world. Think of it as giving yourself a crumb of a tip, some small, extra incentive, making a better place for those you care about.

Yes: That would be on top of going to work, doing the chores, and all the rest of the responsibility you already carry. We're talking about this extra, new load, coming out of your free time, already precious, I know.

Thing is, and I hate to be crude, but, really, when you come down to it -- better world, in a trade for some time in front of the tube, spent forgetting the day, sometimes looking right through the thing, into the back of the wall, wondering why you bother to get up and go even once, some more, every day, why you do it at all?

We're on the same side, now -- I used to be you. Felt the same way, kinda lumpy, all out of sorts, all black and blue.

Now, I know this will not be a fashionable thing to say, but we are living in increasingly desperate times, so, here goes, hold on tight, until we see light of day:

We have become soft.

No other way it can be said.

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Wish I didn't have to say it -- but here we go, revved up anyway, and instead:

If I had to, I could not move my small family and its heirlooms, microscopically few as they are, all the way to cross a country, across a whole continent, up and down mountains as tall as the roof of the world, to start a new life.

How about you? Ready to load up the conestoga, put up the canvas on hoops, hitch up the team, charge off into the setting sun? Got that barrel of flour, the jerky, the matches, the pans? How about water, some clothing, grain for the horses, cough syrup for the kid?

If our ancestors did all that -- crossing oceans of water and wild wheat and tall weeds -- under sail, tall ships and prairie schooners, insisting on truth, arguing hard for their freedoms, fighting for their voices to be heard -- what can we show them to compare?

Will we Tweet something, discretely and sweetly?

Would they look at us dumbly when we told what we did -- we wiggled our fingers and our thumbs, sent 140 characters or less, to a screen, with no more trouble than wiping an eye, then show them our i-Pods, and our laptops, tell them what we do with our time?

Will we have to explain why it is we have to use battery juice to read a book, while the sun's out, that it's inside this box?

No, I'm not a Luddite -- but as a poor person, there's little money for toys.

So far, it's not a crime to be poor, not yet, anyway.

You wanna wait around, then consider giving up a slice of teevee time then, when it's a crime to

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be poor?

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Kin Hubbard, a master of one-liners in a time of rich newspaper lore, said, "It ain't no disgrace to be poor, but it might as well be."

I think he was talking about finances, about money, not spirit.

You know how I know that?

Because you can buy cheap spirits, to drink, with money -- but no amount of money can put real spirit back in your bottle. Nothing can supercharge you except you, sitting there, all beat up, all black and blue.

No, this ain't no revival, there's no tent around us now. Just telling you the truth, and sometimes, it's in song.

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Al Stewart sang, on his album, "Year of the Cat," a million years ago, "It sharpens your perceptions when your back's against the wall."

Feeling the wall, yet?

Feel like tearing down that wall?

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Tired of being just another brick in that wall?

If so, it's a start.

As we said, you first have to stop, so that you can start.

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Here is the list to get started.

It is simple and direct. You can bitch and complain, if you like, kicking and screaming the whole way, and, I agree: You could be half right. We might not make a difference, not any difference at all.

I will agree with you on that, but first, you must be truthful, now, and agree with me, on one thing: That if we do nothing, you and I, then we will fail, absolutely, and we leave everything to chance. We leave everything, all of it, to the charity of the rich and the few, we say, "No problem, make up any rules to make your lives sweeter, and of more ease."

To not try at all is to tell the rich and the strong, "Come on into my home, take whatever you want, and do as you please to whatever or whoever you find here -- they'll be no crying out, no penalties, no crying, no matter your scum or disease!"

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Without stopping the old voices in our heads and our lives, the ones that say it cannot be done,

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the ones that insist the time is not right, or that we're tired, or that maybe it is ourselves we should swap out -- get someone better for this job...

There is just us, to get us that justice.

We cannot start hearing the new voices egging us on, rooting for us and our side, unless we first admit we're not perfect, but are willing to do what we can -- no heroics, just our share and our slice.

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Our strength is in numbers, in people, not paper bills, not money on paper.

As long as we're on the subject of money, take a look at those portraits next time and ask yourself this, "What would George or Abe or any of them do here and now, with these times, with these shrews?"

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I won't force you to try, I won't make any efforts or attempts to make you upbeat -- so long as you won't force me to quit, to stop, or lay down, so I can be more easily whipped and beat up.

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Everything has been set and rigged against us, goes the thought, so we'll fold our cards, not try, and just fade away and fail; if you're fine with that, then, sure -- go right on and bail.

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If you think the bastards have it too easy by half, that they have pushed long enough and there's no pushing room left -- that you can now feel the wall on your back -- then, it's time to push back, or let them keep pushing you, right through that wall.

You see: We are supposed to look around, you and I, and realize we're outgunned, in more ways than just one, and shrug and go home -- all finished, all done.

If you will not give up ten percent of your 91 or 106, consecutive, nonstop, 24-hours-a-day teevee viewing days a year, not for you and yours to have a better life or nicer world...

I wish you good luck, and end before starting.

But, if you do, you have to start stopping before you can start, and put a stop to this crap.

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"A republic, if you can keep it."

- Benjamin Franklin

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It's OK to go slow, to be confused, to struggle along while you poke at some idea. It gets easier the more you do it, just like anything else in this world.

For a while, it will be awkward, like the first week of work somewhere. Magically, you're an old

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hand, knowing all the ins and the outs, and before you even knew it -- *Hey! When did that happen?*

Remember, no heroics here, no leaping of tall buildings allowed.

Go slow, and go easy, especially at first. Reward yourself with the satisfaction of finding-out, and the knowing, of this thing you want to know more about.

Start small. World peace can wait until we get this one vote down, about this issue that has you and me a little bit vexed, until we can figure out this one situation and issue, right here, and right now.

Find something that matters to you -- that will be the thing that pulls you and your interest. It will keep you going long after someone else pushing you poops out.

Rings spread outward in ponds, after the first pebble is plunked in.

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Finished the meal, here, looking for dessert? Here's the best we can do, on your own private menu:

Become engaged.

Learn about something.

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Pick up some ideas -- start anywhere: libraries, online, friends, books, whatever. At first, just sifting information and asking the small question, "Why," will pay you big dividends, and help light your way.

Talk it over, this thing that interests you, with someone you respect, someone you care about -- in person, online, by phone, whatever.

Test the waters on your ideas; be as good a listener as a talker, and be a sounding board for your person (or your people), just as your person is (or your people are) for you.

Make a decision: Decide what you think, how you feel.

Express that opinion, in polite but very firm ways, to people you think should hear that message, should share your opinion, can do something about the thing that has caught your interest.

Congratulations: You have now done one thing that will make you feel better right away, right now. It will help start the discussions, will start to help change things, will create a chance for real change, will let everyone you respect know where you stand.

You will sleep better knowing you chipped in -- no heroics, just noodled around with some ideas.

Small victories are as sweet as the bigger ones -- it comes from doing your part, not from the size of the thing tackled.

Aim for small victories. Keep an open mind, ready to go where the facts lead you, and keeping asking why something is as you find it.

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Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, who gave us the great detective, Sherlock Holmes, was correct in many things, including this view: "... when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth."

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You can follow up, too -- if you like, later on, to see how that thing of yours is doing, down the road, by and by, if you like.

Meanwhile: You have to stop before starting.

Reject apathy.

Eject apathy.

Stop making excuses.

Stop taking excuses.

Do what you can do: No wilderness-clearing heroics, here. Just a share -- your share.

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