

You can change the world

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It is easy to feel powerless when politics is failing, inequality is growing, and the climate crisis is accelerating. But ordinary people can change the world. I know because I have seen it happen.

When John Christensen and I helped create the Tax Justice Network, we began with a plan. We identified what was wrong, worked out credible solutions and persuaded others to support them. Years later, policies we had promoted were being adopted internationally. Country-by-country reporting, an idea I created, became part of the rules governing multinational companies around the world.

That did not happen quickly, and it was never the work of one person. It required expertise, cooperation, persistence and the willingness to take risks. But it proves that change is possible.

In this video, I explain how recognising that the world is wrong can become the first stage of doing something about it. Anger is not necessarily a weakness. Properly directed, it can motivate us to find solutions.

Your contribution does not have to be global. You might organise locally, contact your MP, write for a community publication, join a campaign or simply bring together people who share your concerns.

The important thing is to choose an issue, make a credible plan and begin. You are not powerless. You can play a part in creating change.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdzbHjJ7Z0w?si=TS3sIIRGUnFgqzoT>

This is the audio version:

https://www.podbean.com/player-v2/?i=gtqcp-1b25791-pb&from=pb6admin&share=1&download=1&rtl=0&fonts=Arial&skin=f6f6f6&font-color=auto&logo_link=episode_page&btn-skin=c73a3a

The Debate Ammunition for this video is available here:

This is the transcript:

Three things have come to my attention in the last few days, and they seem to create something that I want to talk about.

The three things were, first of all, an email from somebody who said that a video we made earlier this year, which was called [You Are Not Crazy](#), had had a massive impact upon him. He had felt he was crazy facing the world that we live in. The fact I'd simply said, "No, you are not. You are sane if you think that this world that is going on around you is mad," had helped him enormously to come to terms with the reality of what he felt about the world that he was living in, which he does feel is crazy, but it's not his fault.

The second thing that happened was that I had a discussion with a group of people at a meeting, which I gave online, and people kept on asking me, "What can we do about this world we're living in? We feel desperate about the state of the world, the climate, the economy, our relationships, because they're so much under stress because of what is happening inside our politics; what can we do about this?"

And the third thing that triggered this thought, which has given rise to this video, was a conversation I had with John Christensen. It's in a podcast that we might have already put out by the time this one goes out or might follow it. But John and I talked about the fact that when we started the Tax Justice Network, we wrote a plan for what we were going to achieve. A giant plan, a vision, if you like, a strategic plan. We set out what the goals of the tax justice movement were going to be, and astonishingly, they remain the goals of that movement now. But by 2015, they had become the goals of the OECD, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development in Paris, who were trying to tackle, by then, the issues for which we had created an agenda.

What's the linkage here? The call for change in a mad world and the fact that change is possible and individuals can create it. Now, I'm not claiming that John and I were very

special, although we did have expertise to offer in our area, and we did exploit the opportunities that came our way to good effect. But what I want to talk about is the fact that we can all make a difference in a mad world, and that's the thing that joins these themes up.

If we're going to make a difference, the first point is we have to realise that something is wrong. And that is the point that the person who wrote to me about my video saying, "Thank you for it," saying "Thank you for telling me I'm not crazy," had reached. He'd got to the point where he understood this world was mad, and the question was, is it the world that's mad or was his reaction to the world mad? And I reassured him he was the sane one.

But that's the point we have to get to: a point of confusion, a point of anger maybe, and I don't think that anger is inappropriate in this case; it motivates us to look for solutions. We need to reach that point, or we will never try to change the world.

That is, by the way, why we are told we shouldn't be angry. The story that we are now told time and time again, that we should learn how to control our anger and never express it, is a neoliberal trope. It's about keeping us in our place so that we don't challenge the status quo based upon the anger that we have with it. You have a right to be angry. This person was. He could not understand it. I helped them do so. That was great. That's stage one in this process, the stage where we realise we have to take action.

Stage two is asking what action we can take, and there is no one answer to this, and I think that's an incredibly important point to make. The action that you take has to be the one that suits you. It has to reflect the priority that you've identified. You might think climate change is the big issue. You might think health is. You might think education is. You might think the economy is. I don't know what it might be. Only you will, that's my point.

But you have to decide there's an issue in which you can become sufficiently expert to make a difference; to be able to talk about something and say, "Change is possible." And you need to work out what those changes are. Simple things; do use every tool available to you to assist this process. Of course, you need to read books. You need to do your research. You might want to use AI, in itself, a controversial suggestion, but I'm not going to dismiss it because it can help. But work out a plan of action, a plan that suits you and what you think you can do.

You might think you can just put leaflets through doors, working for an NGO, for a political party, whatever else. Well, if that's what you want to do, that's fine. That's perfect.

You might want to set up a small discussion group where you can find support and help from others who feel the same way as you do. Literally go and have a coffee with them.

Make it a Saturday morning treat. Do it during the week if you're available. Do it after school if you're young enough. But do something like that to make sure you have a support network. That is key, and set out your plan. Share it with others, test it, and then in whatever way you can, communicate it.

I write a blog, and it's managed to work for me. I prepare these videos. They also work for me, but they may not for you. You may not have the desire to write in that way. You may not have the willingness to sit in front of a camera. It's a mad thing to do. Don't try if you don't like it. But you might find something else that suits you.

Explore the possibility. One of the things I often suggest is to write to your newspaper. Local newspapers still have an influence. Write to something else. You might have a parish magazine, or a village magazine or community news of some sort in the area where you live if it's in a city. Do that too. They're desperate for articles. Say what worries you in plain English.

Phone into your local radio station. I often talk about this. I appear on the Jeremy Vine Show on Radio 2 quite often; in fact, they phoned me during the course of the making of this video to ask me if I could go on today. It so happens I can't. But the point is, they're always looking for contributors. If you phone in and make a good point, you'll get on air, and you'll do the same with your local radio station. Your voice can be heard. It can make a difference. And that matters because the more voices there are out there, the more the chance of change.

And don't ignore your MP and your local councillor. They matter too. Look, I know we get stereotype letters back from our MPs. It's very frustrating, but they do count the number of letters they get on a topic. It does influence their behaviour. It is worthwhile sending that email, even if it's a chain one from a campaign organisation. Play your part is the point I'm making. You will feel better about yourself even if every now and again, you'll also feel deeply frustrated that all the things you want aren't happening. That's how I know you will feel, because that's how I have felt.

Everything I've worked on has taken at least 10 years to happen, and some of them haven't yet. And therefore I understand that sense of frustration. But it's got to be worth trying. We are playing for a big prize here. We are playing for the future. That is the stake we're talking about. We are playing for a future for us, for our children, our communities, our world, and that to me matters.

And now I want to get to that last point, and this is a bit personal. It's about what John Christensen and I did. We set up the Tax Justice Network, and in 2015, 12 years after we started, it adopted a whole range of policies that we had promoted. We persuaded the OECD of the merits of our argument. We won.

Country-by-country reporting, which I created when Thomas behind the camera was about eight weeks old, became international law by 2017. It's now in use in 80

countries around the world. It challenges the use of tax havens by multinational companies. Google, Starbucks, and Amazon were the original targets, but every multinational company in the world now has to report using those rules.

Now, you may not make a change as big as that. I'm a bit surprised that I contributed to one of that scale, and of course, other people did play their part along the way. This was not a single-handed effort. Many NGOs campaigned for this. Many people joined in the fight, but I thought up the idea. And the fact is we do need that cooperation. But my point is there are things people can do. You are not powerless. If you sit down and work out what you want and write a plan for it, you can affect change.

But the important point is, make sure your plan is credible. I see so many plans that are quite literally incredible. They ask for things that can't be delivered. They ask people to make changes in their lives that do not appear to be reasonable. They look for cooperation from people who are not going to supply it. They ask for funding on a scale that is unimaginable. You have to work within the parameters of what is possible.

If you want allotments, you have to be able to identify a site. You have to be able to persuade a council to raise the money to buy it. You have to have a committee who would run it, whatever it might be. You need to work out the possibility. You can't ask someone else to do that detailed thinking for you. You have to do it. But when you have, you'll have a plan that can persuade people that they've just got to put what you've thought through into action, and that is the key point. This is how we change the world. This is how we tackle the insanity that is out there.

And we did take on big targets, John and I. We took on large companies. We took on tax havens. We took on wealthy people. We changed the rules, and that therefore is possible. That's what I'm seeking to persuade you of.

If you are frustrated, work out what you can do. It doesn't have to be mega. It doesn't have to be world scale. I'm not saying it should be. I'm saying local is just as important, and it has to be within the capacity that you think you have in terms of time, ability and courage. And I'm not disputing that a lot of this will require courage from people to deliver an outcome that is, and I'm going to loop right back to that first point, that is of importance to you because you've realised the world is mad and you've got to do something about it.

When people ask me what they can do? That's my answer. You must work out what you can do, and it's best done if you can find a few other people to talk about it with. So go have a coffee. Find a few friends who share these views. Put up an advert in the coffee shop and say, "I want to have a meeting to talk to people about..." and see what happens. Take the risk. The world will not be changed without taking the risk and having the courage to take on tasks that we didn't know we could do.

I didn't know I could make a video until I tried. I didn't know I could do one unscripted

until I tried. This one is wholly unscripted. I didn't know people would watch them until I published one. You've got to take the risk. If we don't, we will end up sinking under the weight of the world's wealthy who want to keep things as they are. Under the weight of the climate change that they want to create. Under the weight of the fires or the rising sea levels that they will deliver, and the inequality that they want to maintain. We are the only available agents for change that there are. It's up to you to play your part. Please do.

That's what I think. What do you think? Leave us a comment. Ask for help, although I have to say personally, I can't provide it. I'm working at my limits. But you might find other people who will respond to the comment, and take care, because that is important.

Poll

[poll id="475"]