



THE FUTURE NEEDS YOU

By: Andrea Somma-Trejos

What we wear might seem trivial to some, but those of you who follow our work at the OMINA Foundation already know that every morning, when we get dressed, we make a choice: a choice so powerful that it can affect the world we live in. And here you are, magnificently outfitted in garments that make a true statement: your clothing today is telling the world that *you* have finished your university degree! I can't congratulate you and your families enough, and I want to express my deepest appreciation for your hard work. Wear your gowns and caps with pride today: they are a testament to your achievement. They represent the choice you have made to improve yourselves, and with that, improve the world. To all of you, a round of applause!

Today should be all about celebrations, I know. But I will have to bring the mood down a notch because I want to take this opportunity to talk about the world in which you will have to make a living and develop your professional careers.

In the opening line of his latest book, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, the historian Yuval Noah Harari says: "In a world deluged by irrelevant information, clarity is power". This line resonates with me, and it is the most pressing message I want to relay to you today. In times as chaotic as the one we're in (when contradictory information saturates the Internet, when it is becoming increasingly difficult to discern who and what to believe, when so many refuse to accept the complexity of today's problems and choose to believe in simple answers and fictions), clarity about what is happening, where we are heading, and what our purpose in life is, is more important than ever. Believe me, my friends: I am not a fan of drama, but your generation will have to make the most challenging decisions in human history, and you must do so with your eyes wide open.

I'm sure many of you have already read the latest UN report, written by the world's top climate scientists. It warns that we only have 12 years left to ensure that the global temperature warm up by no more than 1.5 degrees Celsius. Otherwise, we will have to deal with an ever increasing amount of natural disasters such as droughts, floods, extreme heat and the extinction of much of the planet's wildlife and food supplies—all of which will result in poverty that will affect hundreds of millions of people and will ultimately cause their death and that of countless species. We are about to face the most severe environmental threat that our planet has ever experienced. The landmark report by the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) declares that *urgent* and *unprecedented* changes are the only way to alter our destiny.

Paradoxically, this report comes out at the same time President Donald Trump is promising to withdraw the US (one of the world's biggest polluters) from the Paris Agreement, which was meant to slow down climate change. A time when the world's fifth largest country in territory, Brazil, is bound to elect a President who is planning to allow commercial logging in the Amazon, the very source of 20% of the world's oxygen. This report comes out at a time when there are masses of garbage floating freely in the Pacific Ocean, one of which is already the size of France. This report comes out at a time when the WWF has reported a steady decline in 80% of freshwater species, over 50% of land species, and 40% of our forests.

I am confident that all of you are more than aware of the state of the planet that you are inheriting. And I can imagine that you may be thinking, "How did we get here?" If the world's scientific community has been warning us systematically for the past decades about an imminent ecological catastrophe, how is it possible that our governments and civil societies have reacted with such reluctance and timidity? How is it possible that voters continue to elect climate change deniers? Why do consumers continue to buy as if there's no tomorrow, even though by now most people should be aware of the environmental consequences of this behavior? Our aspirational lifestyles continue to be linked to having *more* instead of having *better*.

In these context, it shouldn't surprise anyone that the idea of humans as independent, rational agents is being challenged or beginning to lose credibility. Some behavioral economists and evolutionary psychologists claim that, contrary to what we previously thought, most human decisions are based on emotions rather than rational analyses. These scientists argue that most of our views and values are shaped by communal groupthink, rather than individual rationality, and that we hold on to these views and values due to our inherent group loyalty. This concept certainly seems plausible when we see politicians appealing to hate and fear in order to win elections.

At the end of the 20th century, there was a certain optimism based on the belief that democracy and free market capitalism were destined to conquer the world and yield freer, and more just and peaceful societies. Nevertheless, in the past few years we have seen with disappointment how metadata have affected and manipulated democratic elections. We have come to the realization that an economic system fueled by consumerism is depleting the planet's resources and setting the Earth back to a place from which it cannot recover. Ever.

After the financial crisis of 2008, we now understand that our way of consuming, and by extension our way of living, is not economically, socially or environmentally sustainable. We need to evolve into a "well-being economy"; one that is "designed to serve the people and the planet," as one of Omina Summit's esteemed speakers, Professor Katherine Trebeck, has said. You can see the need for this change when you take the time to listen to what people identify as the most important things in their lives, such as their children's education, the time they spend with their families, or the quality of the air they breathe. These things have ceased to be subjective values and instead have become concrete indicators of wellness and progress, as multiple examples of academic writing from the world's best universities and research centers have shown.

When *fake news* penetrates our lives through social and mainstream media, and fake problems and solutions are created to divert our attention from what really matters, the result is a complex world to navigate. This so-called post-truth era is characterized by the enormous amounts of information that is available to us. Meanwhile, it is increasingly harder to discern between reality and fiction. It's an era where reality is defined by the demographic we belong to and, in turn, this determines how we act. This is a time that requires you, as responsible citizens, to invest time and effort in challenging your biases and verifying your sources of information. This is a time when you will all need to invest time in introspection and self-questioning. This, unfortunately, is not an effort that everybody is willing to make.

The Internet is full of propaganda and ill-informed forums, but it's also a magical tool to search for the truth and independent critical thinking. So are books, and open-minded conversations. These are all tools at your disposal as you navigate your future. Keep this in mind: education does not end with a college degree. In order to obtain that essential clarity in a world so concerned with appearances, and in order to act according to our ethics, we need to continuously educate ourselves on what is *really* happening in the world—how did we get to this point, and what needs to be done in order for us to set it right. Clarity, achieved by this continuous search for knowledge, will be the most powerful tool you will have in life.

You are truly lucky people. By being here today, obtaining your university degree, you are now better equipped to navigate the challenges of this 21st century. This personal and family effort you have made allows you to position yourselves better in the aftermath of the massive disruption that the fourth industrial revolution will cause. In the coming years, the merging of info and biotechnologies can drastically reshape the way we produce, work, and earn a living. Billions of humans may be pushed out of their jobs, while at the same time universal basic income becomes a reality. This will happen in your lifetime and will certainly require a new mindset and approach. A mindset and approach fit for the 21st century.

Believe it or not, I too was your age once. And I'd like to believe it wasn't that long ago either! I clearly remember how I felt and I remember my concerns at the time. "How do I get a job in the industry I have been preparing for?" "How do I make a living with it?" "How do I become successful?" Of course you worry about your immediate future; it's a legitimate concern! "Will I be able to find a job?" "Buy a car?" "Move out of my parents' home?" But I urge you to think bigger and beyond the things that only affect you.

Get involved in the collective future of humankind. Be aware that, if the future of humanity is decided in your absence, you and your children will not be exempt from the consequences. We live in a society obsessed with self-centered achievements in which the concept of success has been narrowed down to fame and wealth. Pursuing this will lead you to a successfully empty life, void of purpose and meaning. In truth, success comes in many different forms and can be measured in many different ways. As my fellow countryman, the Uruguayan poet Mario Benedetti once said, "Success is a polished collection of errors". So be prepared to embrace failure as a path to wisdom throughout your professional and personal careers. Embrace a cause and measure your success by the good you do for other people: make your success about doing well while doing good. Break free from the constraints of contemporary culture and embrace the words of Albert Einstein: "Strive not to be a success, but rather to be of value."

As future filmmakers, creatives, photographers, architects, and designers, you are responsible for creating the culture of the next era. I urge you to take an active part in the change that we need. Use your skills for the common good. Remember what creativity is really all about: A creative act is revolutionary; a creative act bends reality and redefines it; a creative act is transformative. Authentic creativity is a potent force that challenges the ordinary and alters power. Creativity brings forth deep change; so use it in your work to transform the world, and don't settle for less. For as much as you need a future, the future needs you more.

Thank you.

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