

# UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF A DOLLAR



AN EXPERT INTERVIEW WITH JOHN PERKINS

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WELLNESS WORKS HERE

# UNDERSTANDING THE POWER OF A DOLLAR

*with*  
JOHN PERKINS

## ABOUT JOHN PERKINS



John Perkins was chief economist at a major consulting firm and an advisor to the World Bank, UN, Fortune 500 corporations, the U.S. and other governments. He has written nine books on sustainability and economics, including *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man*, which spent over 70 weeks on *New York Times* bestseller list, and was published in 33 languages. He has lectured at 50+ universities; been featured on ABC, NBC, CNN, *Time*, *New York Times*, *Elle*, *Der Spiegel*, and others. John is founder of Dream Change and The Pachamama Alliance, nonprofit organizations devoted to establishing a world future generations will want to inherit.

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## ABOUT RYAN PICARELLA, MS, SPHR



As President of WELCOA, Ryan works with communities and organizations around the country to ignite social movements that will improve the lives of all working people in America and around the world. With a deep interest in culture and sociology, Ryan approaches initiatives from a holistic perspective that recognizes the many paths to well-being that must be in alignment for long-term healthy lifestyle behavior change. Ryan brings immense knowledge and insight to WELCOA from his background in psychology and a career that spans human resources, organizational development and wellness program and product design. Prior to joining WELCOA, Ryan managed the award winning BlueCross BlueShield of Tennessee (BCBST) Well@Work employee wellness program, a 2012 C. Everett Koop honorable mention awardee. Since relocating to Nebraska, Ryan has enjoyed an active role in the community, currently serving on the Board for the Gretchen Swanson Center for Nutrition in Omaha. Ryan has a Master of Science in Industrial and Organizational Psychology from the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga and a Bachelor of Science in Psychology from Northern Arizona University.

From the heart of the Amazon to the slopes of the Andes, John Perkins has witnessed the effects corporate greed has had on the environment and its people. As a prior executive in the corporate world, Perkins has firsthand knowledge of how and why corporations have become a dominant force in our economy. Through extensive travel and a personal mission of righting those wrongs, Perkins is an invaluable asset to helping change the “profits over people” perspective in the big business world. In this exciting expert interview, Perkins talks with WELCOA about how to create a movement while we shop, the power of gratitude, and how we can channel our emotions into worldwide change.

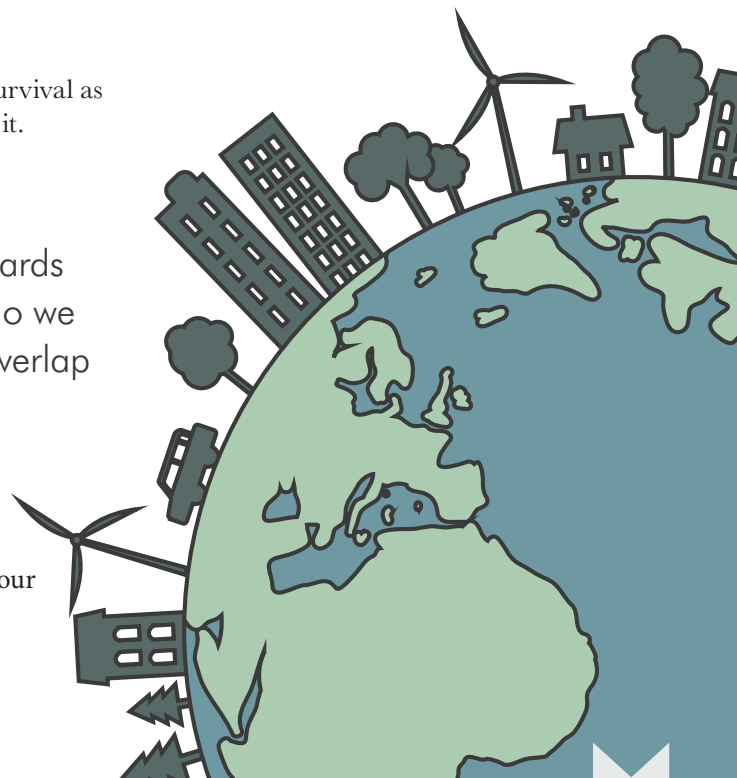
★ **RYAN PICARELLA** I have been a fan of your work for a long time, so this is an honor for me to speak with you. My big goal is to broaden the perspective of what wellness is and is not. In the past, we have been focused on the physical component of wellness, i.e. having your cholesterol and blood pressure checked. Then it moved into a focus on stress management, looking at the causes of stress and how to alleviate it in the workplace, at home, and create healthier places for all of us. I believe the work you do lends itself to broadening the consciousness of our people, and provides a new way of thinking as it relates to corporate wellness everywhere. I am excited about where we are headed.

**JOHN PERKINS** I appreciate all that you guys are doing. Our survival as a species depends upon us making this transformation, no question about it.

★ **RP** Yes, absolutely. I am also starting to see these movements and organizations mobilize in the field towards preserving the health of people and the planet. How do we take care of people better? What do you think is the overlap between all these? Do you believe consciousness and wellbeing intersect?

**JP** First we need to understand that one of the reasons that we are in so much trouble in the world today is because of a lack of a consciousness of our surroundings, about how we relate to each other, and about how we relate to the world.

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★ **RP** Where do you believe is the overlap of consciousness and wellbeing?

**JP** One of the first things I was taught when I lived in the Amazon as a Peace Corps volunteer was how to walk. I was living with the Shuar people, who in those days were traditional hunters and gatherers and extremely close to nature. They taught me that when we walk in our [Western] culture, we only watch our feet, and are not conscious of what is going on around us. The men will carry an eight foot long blow gun over their shoulders, looking for birds to shoot and take home. The women have a basket that hangs out on their backs, and they are looking for different herbal, medicinal, and food plants. Nobody is looking at their feet. I believe that is a metaphor for the way we tend to live life in the western world. We are worried about what is the stock market doing today. What did some politician say today? We are not aware of the larger issue, which is that we have created an economic and political system that just not working. When I take people to the jungle now, I do what the Shuar did with me back all those many years ago. I say, “As you walk through this forest, do not chatter away about what is going on back in the office, or what movie you saw, or a book you are reading. Be aware; look around.” People talk about the quarterly report, but not about the bigger issue of what we are doing to serve the world.

★ **RP** What do you see as the specific role of those in leadership or executive positions based on your experience? Have you worked for an organization that understood how to lead people in a way that was healthy and good for the environment?

**JP** One of the big problems we have today is that business defines its main goal as maximizing profits regardless of the social and environmental cost. That is a new phenomenon. When I went to business school in the late sixties, we were taught that a good CEO makes a decent rate of return for his company and stockholders, but he is also a good citizen. He makes sure that his company is a good citizen. The company itself takes good care of its employees by giving them healthcare, retirement benefits, etc. It also contributes money to the local education system or recreational facilities. That all changed in 1976 when Milton Friedman won the Nobel Prize in economics. One of Friedman’s major theses was that the only responsibility of business is to maximize profits, regardless of the social or environmental cost. That changed everything. It gave CEOs the license, and some would say the mandate, to do whatever it takes to maximize profits, including destroying the environment and partnering with corrupt politicians. At the time, when Friedman made that statement, it may have been appropriate. It was a time when we saw financial capital as scarce and nature as abundant. Very few people, if any, were talking about peak oil and climate change. That has all changed radically. Now businesses are recognizing that they should not be driven by a profit motive. Yes, make a decent rate of return for your investors, but only work with investors who are trying to make what I call a “life economy,” those who are trying to create businesses that will contribute to a

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better world. We can move into a brand new era. It is very exciting, and it is the first thing that we have to look at when we think of world health. When corporations start to turn around and do good things, it changes people's attitudes. When people are happy within their organizations then they have better lives, and the organizations prosper. But so many people today are out there working for companies they are not happy with.

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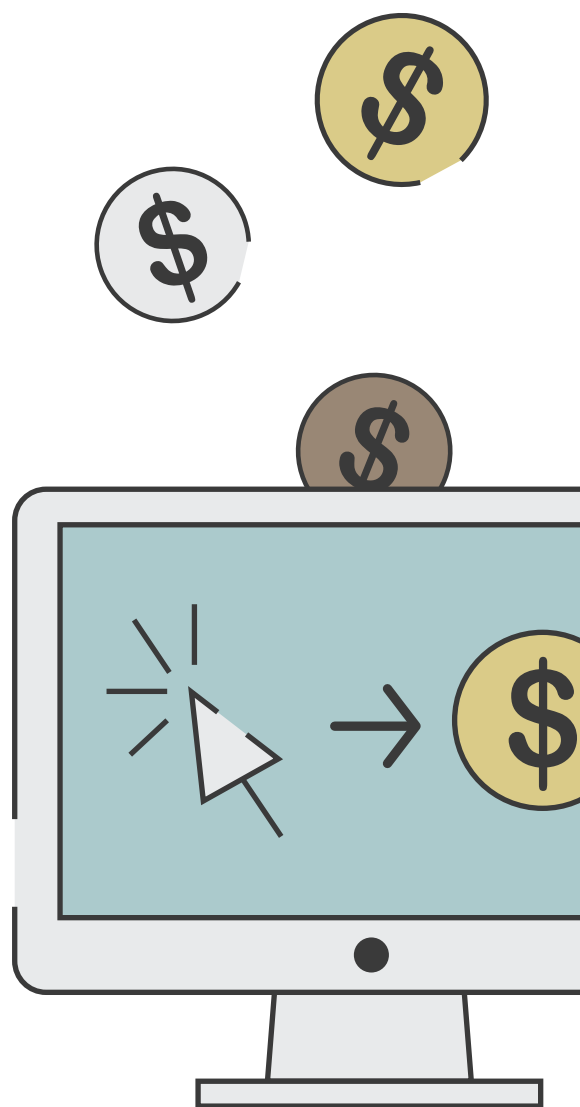
★ **RP** What is going to shift that paradigm back to a conscious capitalist perspective?

**JP** I believe the transformation is already occurring. Everywhere I go, I find that people are waking up to the fact that we have created a mess. The oceans are rising, glaciers are melting. Consciousness is already changing. The question is, what do we do to take action? I hear the same thing from corporate executives: "I want to do the right thing, I've got kids. I want to pay my workers a higher salary. I want to clean up the pollution that we have caused. But I'm afraid that if I lose half a percentage of market shares, my main stockholders will fire me. And then I will be replaced by someone who only hears about market share." Realizing this situation, they ask me to spread the word about the company wrongdoings. "Go out there and tell everybody what we are doing, send me lots of emails. Send my corporation emails. Get all your social networking circles to send emails. Say something like 'I love your products, but I'm not going to buy them anymore until you stop polluting or until you pay your workers a fair wage, etc.'" That executive can take these emails to the main stockholders and say, "Look, we may lose a little bit of market share in the short run, but in the long run we are going to be leaders." This is what we need more than anything, for people to continue to wake up and take action. The Internet makes it so much easier now than ever. Consumer movements have power. The world is controlled by business today and yet we, the people, ultimately control business.

★ **RP** What role do businesses have in raising consciousness with their employees, communities, and constituents? Do you think it is their role to improve the lives of those who work for them?

**JP** It is absolutely their role. The main role of business should be to create a good world. And we have an amazing history of that here in the United States. The American Revolution was a rebellion against a big corporation, the British East India Company. That is what led to the Boston Tea Party; the taxation policies around the company. Once the American Revolution was won and the United States was created, the founding fathers tried to make sure that big corporations would never take control again. No corporation could get a charter anywhere in the United States in any state unless it proved, guaranteed, that it was going to serve a public interest. Charters lasted on average ten years, and then a company had to go back and

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demonstrate that it had served the public interest, and would guarantee that it would continue to do so. That all ended in the late 1800s when John D. Rockefeller and the Supreme Court continually passed more laws that gave power to corporations. We lost that idea of the public interest. It is important that we get back to that idea. What I advocate is that we all get out there and tell corporations, “Look, it’s your job to serve us, the public.” We need to create an economic system that is itself a renewable resource. If we all get out there and send a message to every corporation that we buy from and say, “You’ve got to change or I’m not going to buy from you anymore,” that will have tremendous power.

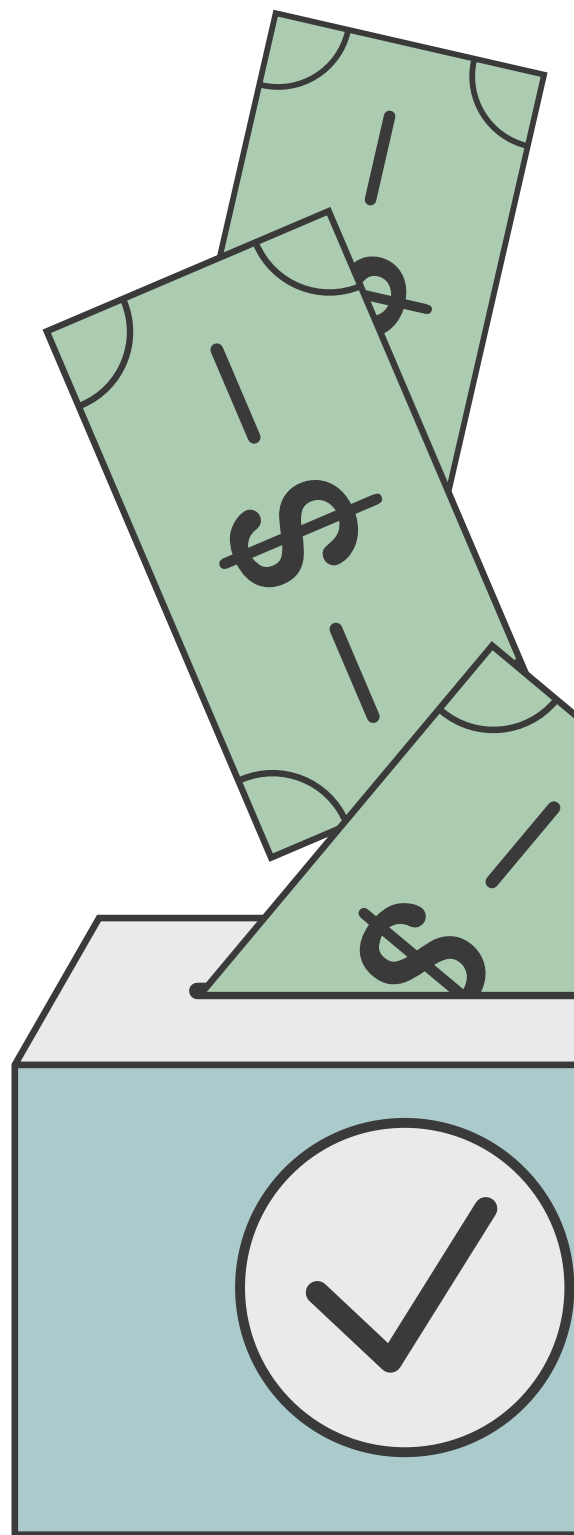
★ **RP** You talk a lot about moving from a death economy to a life economy. What does that mean exactly and what is the difference between the two?

**JP** I think it is pretty clear that U.S. politics and government are controlling big corporations through their ability to finance political campaigns, and to provide lucrative jobs to all politicians as lobbyists or consultants. When politicians decide not to run or lose an election, big corporations gain that control. Yet ultimately, we the consumers have the control with corporations. The marketplace is itself a democracy. Every time you buy something, or choose not to, you are casting a vote. It is essential that you not just shop consciously, but that you also send emails. That you let a corporation know why you are not buying their product, or if you do, say, “I am buying your product because I think I see that you are committed to a life economy.” Nobody out there is perfect, but there are companies increasingly that are becoming Benefit Corporations, or simply are stating that their goal is to create a better world and work environment. Some of them may do it for public relations reasons but that, too, is a step forward. I do see that as in the process of changing, but we all need to push that a lot further.

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★ **RP** Do you think that completely moving to a life economy is possible and sustainable?

**JP** Moving to a sustainable economy, which I would define as a life economy, is not only possible, it is essential. What happens to an economic system that is not sustainable? What happens to a species that does not practice sustainability? The answer is extinction. The way business is relating to the world today is one that is consuming itself into extinction, what I call a death economy. That economy is also based on warfare, on killing people, or threatening to kill people, and on destroying resources. It does not have much to do with life. But it is a matter of changing our perception of what corporations and consumers should do, and moving away from this perception of maximizing profits to one of being sustainable, being conscious of what we are doing in the world.



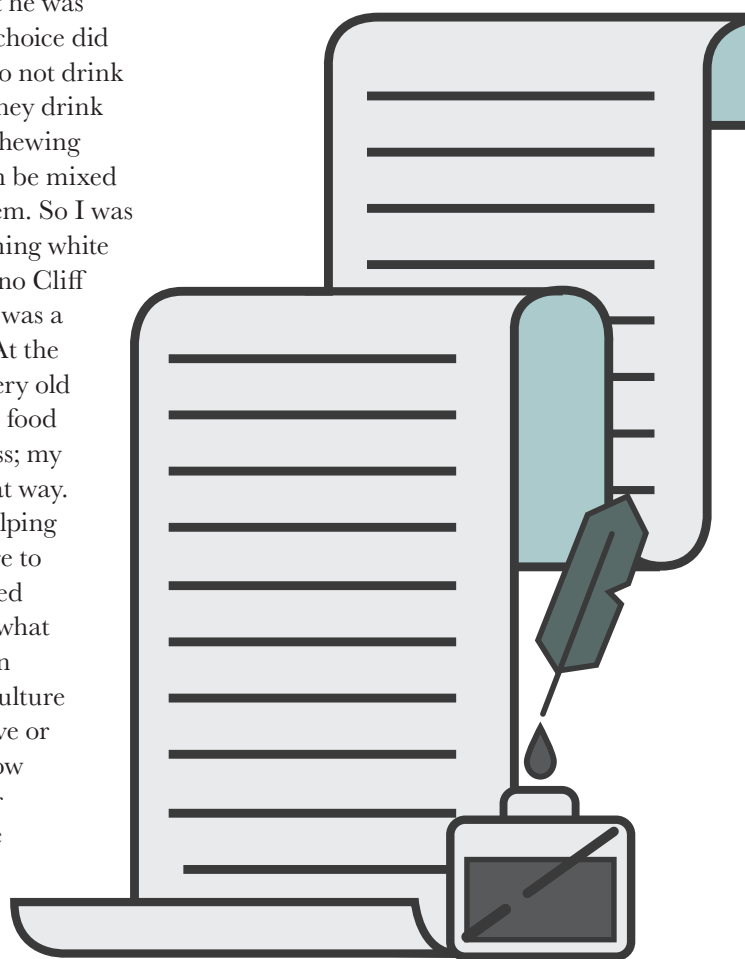


We can all get involved in movements. When I was in college, there was apartheid in South Africa. A handful of people convinced big corporations they would boycott if the corporations did not stop supporting apartheid. Apartheid ended. We have rivers in the United States that were terribly polluted. There were rivers in Ohio that were on fire with pollution. We forced corporations to clean them up. If we look at just the last five years in this country, the changes in the social rules and laws around gender, around birth control, around so many things, have been huge monumental changes. Now we need to carry this movement in how we look at the economic system. We need to realize it is there to serve us, the people, and to serve future generations. That is what is going to bring us out of these terribly scary crises.

★ **RP** I am going to switch gears on you a little bit. I want to talk about health for a minute. Sometimes even those of us in the field spend a lot of time going back and forth trying to define what is being “well.” How would you define wellbeing?

**JP** I would like to start by sharing a story about when I almost died. It was when I was a Peace Corps volunteer in the Amazon with the Shuar. I got very sick. I lost a tremendous amount of weight in a short period of time. I was dying. It was a two-day walk through dense jungle to the nearest road, and then another two days in a rickety old bus (if I could find one) to the nearest medical facility. I was resigned to dying. One afternoon, an old Shuar man was brought to me, and I was told that he was the shaman and he could cure me. I did not really believe this, but what choice did I have? I am living with people who have never seen a bar of soap, who do not drink water because they know that the rivers are filled with organic matter. They drink something called chicha which is a kind of beer that is made by women chewing food and spitting it into a container, where it ferments and then water can be mixed with it because the alcohol kills the germs. They know what works for them. So I was drinking spit beer because you have got to rehydrate. I was eating squirming white grubs and foods that I am not even going to mention to you. There were no Cliff bars. Every time I was eating those foods or drinking that spit beer there was a voice in my head (probably my mother) saying, “Hey, son, it’ll kill you.” At the same time, I saw how incredibly healthy the Shuar are. They live to be very old if they are not killed in an accident. That night I got the message that the food and drink were not killing me, it was my mindset. It was my consciousness; my perception. The next morning I woke up perfectly healthy and stayed that way. A few days later the shaman came back to me and said as payment for helping me through the illness that I become his apprentice, which I had no desire to do. But he saved my life, and I studied with him for a year. Later, I traveled through the Andes, Iran, Indonesia, Egypt, and many other places, and what I learned from all of these shamans is that their whole practice is based on changing perception. The belief system we have is an objective reality. Culture is a perception, corporations are perceptions. When enough people believe or codify them into law, they impact objective reality. We are at this time now where we understand that so much of health is due to our perception. For me, my system started to negatively react to the foods I was getting in the Amazon before I even ate the stuff. Health is about perception. Our economy is about perception.

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★ **RP** Is perception something that can change quickly?

**JP** Absolutely. If we look at cultural changes, like the shift of business to only maximize profits, leaders around the world have bought into it. It was a change of perception, and it happened like that. It happens with individuals quickly, too. And that is why many of the teachings today around mindfulness are similar to the teachings the indigenous people have been trying to spread to the world in the last few years.

★ **RP** What are some simple things that people can do either for themselves, or for those they serve to wake up and create a new awareness?

**JP** One of the most important things to do first is recognize that everything, including ourselves, is made up primarily of energy. Our mindset is everything. That is true of everything. And it is true of the way we model our system. If people realized that emotions are energy, the question then becomes how do we use our emotions and all of our energy in ways that create actions that will sustain us, that will make us happier and healthier? There are a lot of people out in the corporate world that are unhappy with what they are doing. They are angry, but they hold it in, and they get sick one way or another. It expresses itself physically because that happens. Instead you take that anger and say, *I am really angry; I am going to do something about it.* Personally, I am really angry about what our corporations are doing under this idea of maximizing profits around the world. I am angry that Chevron destroyed a huge section of the Amazon rainforest that I love and is refusing to clean it up. I used to hold that in. I used to work for a corporation. I am angry, but the actions that I am taking are totally different and they are liberating. I am writing books about it. I am traveling around the world speaking about it. One of the things I like to do in workshops is to ask the whole group, “What are your feelings?” People say, “I do not want to be angry. I do not want to be jealous. I do not want to have negative emotions.” My response is if you have negative emotions, you do not want to deny them. You want to be in touch with your emotions. And I try to help people take journeys. Get into that core self, what is there, what are you feeling, what are your emotions? And then look at how you can channel those emotions into activities, into actions, into energy, which actually serves you better and takes you out of danger that those emotions are having if you internalize them.

★ **RP** Is there a part of your day that you dedicate to creating a new awareness of space for yourself? What activities help you achieve this?

**JP** For most of my life I was a martial artist, which is a great way to get in touch with your emotions in a safe space. I studied tae kwon do, which is a rugged sport, but my teacher said it was not about being violent; it was about protecting yourself. It was wonderful. Now I've been jogging. I do not really like to jog, never have,

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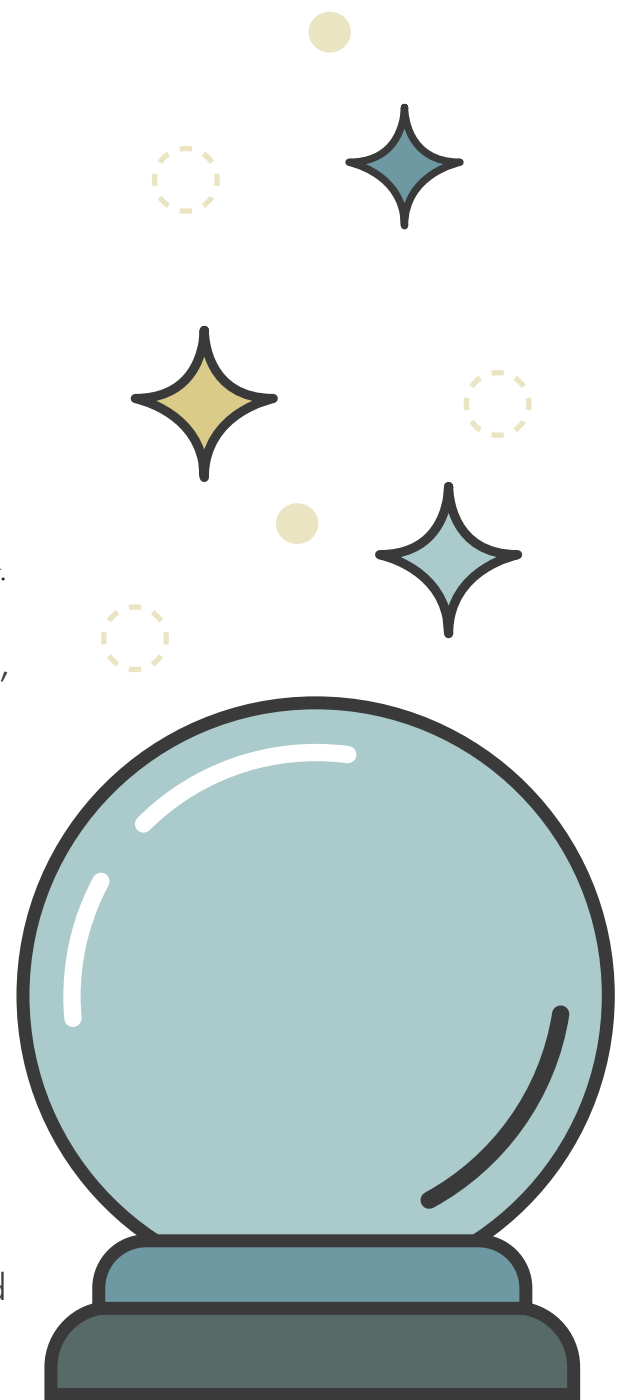
but I love the forests around here. I will jog for 15-20 minutes, and then stop and meditate for 15-20 minutes. I'll repeat that a few times. If I go days without jogging, especially if I am traveling or something, it just does not feel good. There are all kinds of activity that people can participate in, but it is important to get up and move to some degree. I like to look every day at my core self, and try to decide what am I feeling today. How can I use those feelings to make life better? I teach in workshops to get in touch with nature, to let the elements come in and take away anything that is really blocking you so you can feel yourself expand.

★ **RP** Choosing how to respond to those emotions seems to be the key to how we appreciate the good times, the bad times, and everything in between.

**JP** Yes, and to also recognize that all of our lives are filled with what we may call fate. Certain things happen to us, but it is how we respond that is always important. I have a personal example. When I graduated from college, the draft came after me. I did not agree with the Vietnam War. I did not want to go. It was not that I was opposed necessarily to fighting, but I did not believe in that war. I also did not want to go to jail nor did I want to leave my country. So I joined the Peace Corps, who sent me to the Amazon. I got sick, a shaman took care of me, and that changed my entire life. Had I responded a different way, if I had gone to Vietnam, who knows what would have happened? Something is going to happen today that is just going to happen. But how do you respond to that, and how do you use those emotions? Again, the Vietnam War made me very angry. I was angry at my government for doing this. How do I use that? In that case, I joined another government branch, and it was a marvelous experience for me ultimately.

★ **RP** I have a personal story as well. When I was eighteen, I had the fortunate opportunity to befriend a woman who had a ranch near The Painted Desert in Arizona. She was half Lakota and half African. She had an African medicine man amongst a group of people, and we were all having a cultural exchange. Someone asked the medicine man, "What is one thing that I can do every day to walk my path towards enlightenment?" We were looking for a pretty big answer. The answer turned out to be simple: "If you can wake up every day and be grateful for one thing, it'll absolutely change your life." That hit me like a ton of bricks. From that moment on, it is one thing that I have tried to build into my daily practice no matter what is going right or what is going wrong. At the time, it felt like the question I did not know enough to ask it at that point. And it has made a huge difference.

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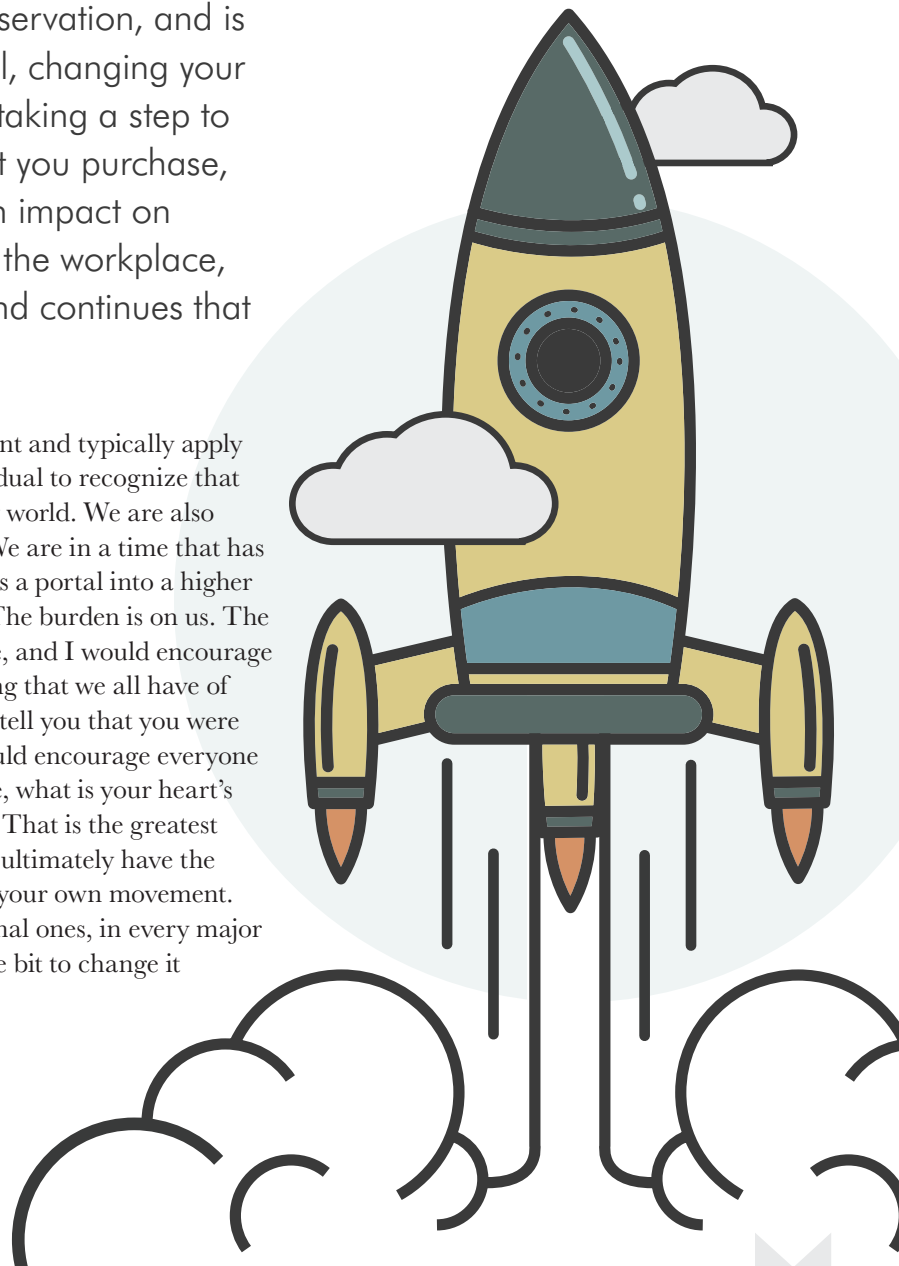


**J P** I am glad you brought that up, because every morning when I wake up, I lie in bed for a few minutes and count some of my blessings and be grateful. And I stretch a lot. That I learned from cats. I have had cats all my life, and if you watch a cat wake up, what is the first thing they do? They stretch.

★ **R P** Absolutely. I'd love to talk about workplace wellness for a bit. The issues of weight gain, smoking, etc., are always symptoms of a bigger problem. If you are not happy, you might choose to overeat, or not move, and it becomes a vicious cycle. How can we change a vicious cycle into more of a virtuous one? Being active is still a part of it, as is eating in a way that is good for your body but also good for the environment and is sustainable. Addressing the situation is choosing to eat in a way that promotes conservation, and is a blend of traditional movement, eating well, changing your thoughts, your perceptions, and then really taking a step to make your decisions known. Choosing what you purchase, how your family chooses to live can have an impact on the entire planet. Hopefully that transfers to the workplace, transfers to the communities, to the state, and continues that wave of change.

**J P** We have talked in generalities here, which are important and typically apply to everyone, but I also think it is important for every individual to recognize that we each have different ways we can help promote a healthy world. We are also living in one of the most exciting times in human history. We are in a time that has been prophesized around the world, in multiple religions, as a portal into a higher consciousness. But we the people have to make it happen. The burden is on us. The excitement is on us. I think it is an amazing time to be alive, and I would encourage everybody who is tuned into this to feel the amazing blessing that we all have of coming into this world at this time. The indigenous people tell you that you were born at a particular time because you have a mission. I would encourage everyone to look to what is your mission, what is your higher purpose, what is your heart's desire? Look at it that way. What is it you most want to do? That is the greatest course to true health and to true prosperity. We the people ultimately have the power, and we need to recognize that. Get out there. Start your own movement. We can look at this in every revolution including our personal ones, in every major change all we have got to do is tweak that perception a little bit to change it and see that that changes everything. 🏠

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