



Creating the Age of ReEnlightenment & Collaborative Excellence

By Robert Porter Lynch (Robert@iclinstitute.org)

We live in a chaotic, confusing time, filled with a muddled, mongrelized view of culture, leadership, and the human race's relationship to itself, its institutions, its economy, its businesses, and its environment.

Our world is searching for solutions, and not finding them. Our people are distrustful and anxiety ridden. Our economies are not prospering. Across the globe, eighty-five percent of employees are disengaged. Capitalism, the only truly competitive economic system, is under attack. Our political and civil institutions are highly distrusted and often dysfunctional.

Required Sea Change Shift in Leadership & Culture

New thinking, new ideas, new inspirations, and new models are in order.

When great intentions yield mediocre results,
When the tried-and-true ceases to work,
When every attempt to fix things is met with frustration and failure....
Then probably the design itself has reached its limits,
And the paradigm is ready to shift.
Opportunity is present,
Creative vision is called for,
And bold action in new dimensions is the nature of things to come.....

Truly great revolutions in world history have not been fought on the battlefield.

Foremost they have been *revolutions of the mind and heart*; first conceived by a handful of people, who, together, see, believe, and are committed to a higher order for civilization and humankind.

For prosperity to flourish, the aim of a world that works must be implanted in fertile soil – a culture of cooperation led by enlightened, trusted leaders committed to a long-term greater-good for all.

Creating the Age of the ReEnlightenment & Collaborative Excellence

For an economy to function, governmental policy must be supported by a higher standard – a shift in thinking and beliefs – a shift away from the chaotic disorder brought about by two generations of “greed is good,” self-interest focused leaders.

A shift toward a *trustworthy, collaborative* culture, away from a *tactical, transactional & adversarial, authoritarian* culture, is sorely needed.

A noble cause cannot evolve, prosper, and grow in a callous or cynical environment. No policies or studies will foster our future if people view it through a cynical lens.

Unless we capture the hearts and minds of people -- from rich to poor, from highly educated to highly intuitive --with a powerful message of *collaborative excellence* and build a world on collaborative (holistic, synergistic) beliefs, we are doomed to the fate of roller-coaster, up-and-down, upside-down world.



The Stirring Call for a Re-Enlightenment

Our institutions are no longer trusted (see [State of Distrust](#)).

The dearth of trust creates a perturbing social angst leaving people empty, anxiety ridden, betrayed, fearful, hurt, angry, disillusioned and helpless. The breach of distrust is burdened with the penalties of dire consequences.

Like a stick of dynamite thrust into a fault-line, authoritarian manipulators exploit the emotional voids of large chunks of citizens, posing as false gods, promising security to fill their yearning, sowing fear, uncertainty, divisiveness and doubt, while posturing as saviors preying on followers in return for their loyalty pledge.

Across the globe, democracies are led by faltering leaders with little vision, poor values, and lack of character.

We are now reaching the malignancy tipping point.

It will grow worse unless we take action to rebuild trust.

Culture is the Device for Transmitting Knowledge & Wisdom

Leadership, more than any other factor, molds and creates a civilization's culture through its exercise of influence on institutions.

Culture, when ordered and inspired creates the stable ground for wise decisions in times of change.

Creating the Age of the ReEnlightenment & Collaborative Excellence

Our leaders are failing us. By not rebuilding trust in institutions, we are throwing open our gates to the barbarian authoritarians storming the walls of civilization.

Yet these are also exciting times. As Charles Dickens said in the opening sentences of the *Tale of Two Cities* (my rendition):

It is the best of times, and the worst of times.

It is the brightest of days and the darkest of nights.

It is the morning of our hope and the twilight of our despair.

It is the birth of our dreams and the struggle of our anxiety.

It is the spring of our glory and the winter of our discontent.

On the one hand, we are caught in the iron grip of divisiveness, conflict, and distrust.

Authoritarianism is gaining an ignoble ascendancy across the globe. Its [leaders are dark](#). People are asking if we are cruising headlong into another Dark Age?

On the other hand, as we learned in physics, every force creates counter-forces.

We can respond to the authoritarian's negative force with a countering positive reaction. It's time to capture the high ground in these times of dynamic change.

We, as a human species, hold the best and the worst of outcomes in our hands.

The choices we, and a multitude of others, make from here to the horizon of the future near will determine the fate of millions, if not billions.

After the bubonic plague decimated half of Europe in the Middle Ages, there was widespread despair. Thought leaders broke out of the malaise with the "Renaissance" -- the rebirth of values and vision, derived primarily from the Greeks, and secondarily Romans.

The Renaissance then evolved into the 18th century "Age of Enlightenment," which produced America's Founding Fathers, and inspired scores of leaders to create the resilient structures that now constitute the foundation of our modern civilization.

The Enlightenment energized leaders to think and act rationally, to build morality and character into community decision-making, to provide a full, well balanced education to all, to explore new lands, to invent breakthrough technologies and advance scientific progress, to question and create, to unify in diversity, to ensure basic freedoms and liberties, to secure religious expression with separation of church and state, and advance constitutional democracy with checks and balances to avoid extremes.

We have strayed far off the mark from this vision and these values. We have lost our "north star" that guides leaders and culture to produce extraordinary results.

Building on Our Past to Stabilize Our Future

Today we need to create our own "Age of ReEnlightenment" -- taking its cues from the enlightened thinkers and leaders of the 18th century -- to embrace a sustainable, peaceful, and prosperous world that is socially, economically, and environmentally friendly.

In the 18th century Enlightenment, much of the thinking expounded on the basic *rights* and *freedoms*, such as liberty, thought, religious belief, expression, press, peaceful assembly, and association. By contrast, the 21st century ReEnlightenment must embrace its predecessor's values, while also enjoining basic *responsibilities* every human has to each other, their community, and to their environment.

Disintegration of Our Trusted Culture

With limited exceptions, the [trust in the institutions](#) that form the backbone of culture has fallen precipitously.



Since the First World War, institutions have been under assault;

In the mid 1960s, the inner core of trust in institutions began to fall away rapidly.

Since then the decline has been a steady drip, drip, drip of erosion. Generation after generation has been gradually losing their grasp on the future.

Now, after a century of slippage, things are quickly sliding beyond our reach.

The prophetic words of William Butler Yeats, written at the end of the Great War nearly one hundred years ago, are more revealing than most of us want to admit.

*Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold;
Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.
The blood-dimmed tide is loosed,
And everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned;
The best lack all conviction,
While the worst are full of passionate intensity.*

Too often, fateful decisions at the crossroads of destiny are left to chance, by a cast of the dice, rather than by conscious choice and careful consideration of the underlying design that can weigh the dice heavily in our favor.

Yes, we can beat the odds of chance, if we so choose. But destiny requires clarity of mission and purpose, and leadership to fulfill a shared vision.

The Need for Collaborative Leadership

The right type of leadership has been known for centuries; Mount Rushmore symbolizes that spirit.

Some have earned their stripes in war; others have championed causes in inner cities or in rural communities; others have honed their skills, committed their souls, and made massive sacrifices for seemingly impossible causes against insurmountable odds.

They demonstrated *collaborative excellence*.

Leaders of the ReEnlightenment will exhibit the same *collaborative excellence* in their strategic thinking about vision and mission, in their building a culture of values and trust, in their operational ability to get results through teamwork, and in their mastery of adaptation to change by using diversity of thinking.

Collaborative leaders do not hold a Pollyanna view of the world; rather they are *enlightened* realists recognizing the duality of human nature – ranging from the heights of greatness when led well, to the grey ground and dark depths when led poorly.

The collaborative leader is *not fearless* – that would be abnormal; rather he or she is *courageous* (from the old French “Coeur” – meaning to have “Heart”).

Collaborative leaders do have fear, but conquer their fear by having a powerful vision, strong values, personal integrity, and commitment larger than their fears.

The Future of Civilization is at Stake

Historian Kenneth Clark, musing across the wide expanse of Western Civilization, saw the Greek period – the inspiration for the Age of the Enlightenment – as one of the most remarkable in human kind:

At certain epochs man felt conscious of something about himself – body and spirit – which was outside the day-to-day struggle for existence and the night-to-night struggle with fear; he has felt the need to develop these qualities of thought and feeling so that they might approach as nearly as possible to the ideal of perfection – reason, justice, physical beauty, all of them in equilibrium.

Western Europe inherited such an ideal. It had been invented in Greece in the fifth century before Christ and was without doubt the most extraordinary creation in the whole of history,



Creating the Age of the ReEnlightenment & Collaborative Excellence

so complete, so convincing, so satisfying to the mind and eye, that it lasted practically unchanged for over six hundred years.

In the larger sense, Rome fell because its people could trust neither their government, nor their fellow man, nor their culture for its lack of vision and ideals. When Rome finally crashed, its leaders had no more will to fight the evil barbarians at their gate; instead they made a Faustian bargain, and ultimately sold whatever semblance of their souls to an evil even greater than they. Fear drained their energy; fear is the greatest destroyer of trust.

Ultimately the Roman culture failed because it *lacked a conscience*, putting Rome on a pathway to perdition. We are now following the Roman path. Kenneth Clark observed:

Thinking about the almost incredible epoch of the Roman Empire tells one something about the nature of civilization. It shows that however complex and solid it seems, it is actually quite fragile. It can be destroyed. What are its enemies?

First of all fear – fear of war, fear of invasion, fear of plague and famine, [I might add fear of cruelty and injustice] that make it simply not worthwhile constructing things or planting trees or even planning next year’s crops. A world of fear and darkness [was] ready to inflict horrible punishment for the smallest infringement of a taboo.

It is the lack of confidence [distrust], more than anything else, that kills civilization.

Confidence [trust] in the society in which one lives, belief in its philosophy, belief in its laws, and confidence in one’s own mental powers... [along with] a vigorous belief in law and discipline.

People sometimes think that civilization consists of fine sensibilities and good conversation and all that. These can be among the agreeable results of civilization, but they are not what make a civilization, and a society can have these amenities and yet be dead and rigid.

We can destroy ourselves with cynicism and disillusion, just as effectively as bombs.

Understanding how to create trust in a world of fear will be one of the great achievements of this next generation of the ReEnlightenment. We must not despair, but rather chart a courageous course into the future. As Kenneth Clark concludes:

Western civilization has been a series of rebirths. Surely this should give us confidence in ourselves.¹

¹ Clark, Kenneth, *Civilization*, Harper Row, 1974, pp 2-4, 347

Creating the Age of the ReEnlightenment & Collaborative Excellence

Ultimately our success as a civilized culture -- from the individual to the institutional: ourselves, our families, our communities, our religions, our government, and our businesses -- will depend on having the courage and vision and commitment to resurrect the Greek ideals reintroduced during the Renaissance and Enlightenment. We must then take these ideals to an even higher level – the evolution of our cultural destiny dreamt by our Founding Fathers brought forward into the modern age.

Cautions about Technology

The Technology Revolution has been with us since James Watt invented the modern steam engine early in the 18th century. Technology will be advancing at a rocket's pace as Kurzweil has proclaimed in the "Singularity is Near."

We must be very wary at this point, for technology is no panacea; it wields an agnostic sword that cuts both ways: Used for good, it can perform wonders. But in the hands of dark and evil forces, it's a dangerous device for murder, torture, and destruction, as terrorists and dictators have continually demonstrated starting before Rome's Caligula.

Thomas Edison, the most prolific inventor of our times, gave a warning in 1931 we must heed today:

Tomorrow the world will be [our children's]. It's a troubled world -- full of doubt and uncertainty. You say men of science have been helping it.

Are those children, and their children, going to approve of what we've done? Or are they going to discover, too late, that science was trusted too much? So that it has turned into a monster whose final triumph is man's own destruction?

Some of us are beginning to feel that danger. But it can be avoided..... The confusion in the world today ... is a problem of balance and adjustment... The dynamo of man's God given ingenuity is running away with the dynamo of his equally God-given humanity. Put those dynamos in balance; make them work in harmony as the Great Designer intended they should. It can be done; what man's mind can see, man's character can control. Man must learn that. Then we need not be afraid of tomorrow. And man will go forward toward more light.²

The ReEnlightenment & Collaborative Excellence – Our Noble Quest

Flourishing societies are filled with vision, purpose and direction – their "quest."

² See Movie: *Thomas Edison the Man*, starring Spencer Tracey; the speech is at the end of the movie

Creating the Age of the ReEnlightenment & Collaborative Excellence

In America the 1700s aimed at a quest for liberty, equality, and fair representation in a system of governance that could counter-balance extreme forces.

In the early 1800s, America's quest was "manifest destiny" to signify our dream for the United States to hold all the territories from Atlantic to Pacific.

In the latter half of the 1800s America turned to a "techni-quest," as the secrets of electricity, telephones, automobiles, skyscrapers, and airplanes were discovered.

The Greek quest was a "meta-quest," meaning they were seeking something "above and beyond" what was known; an exploration of the nature of things.

The Roman quest was clearly a "conquest" of people and territory, often plagued with disastrous "inquest" which carried the roots of its own destruction.

The idea of seeing the world, its history and its future, in terms of a "quest" is important, for it dynamically directs, places value on, and focuses human energies.

Modern civilization has no real quest; we are without a grand vision, a deep purpose. Is this nihilism signifying the end of revelation? Or the beginning of a new future?

The future of civilization is dependent upon our commitment to a renewal of vision, of energy, of values, and of trust.

The alternative – staying the course in a storm – is bleak.

The choice depends upon our resolution to create a bright and better future.

Choose now and choose well, before the bright future dims.

Civilization's highest aim must embrace a meta-quest to discover, understand, advance, reconcile and evolve humanity and its relationships with others, the nature of the world, and God beyond. The perfection of humanity requires aligning, balancing, and channeling energies into productive awakenings.

Sustainability in a world of collaborative excellence is a worthy quest of the emerging Age of ReEnlightenment.

The most important factor shaping human existence is the goal of being a community of free and happy human beings who, by constant endeavor, strive to liberate themselves from the inheritance of anti-social and destructive instincts. – Albert Einstein

Look to our roots to design our future.

Visit www.ICLIInstitute.org to learn more.

