

It's time to reawaken your warrior spirit: Because like it or not, we're in a fight for our lives

By Wayne Visser

In this moment of chaos and catastrophe it is okay to feel disoriented, but don't be directionless. It's okay to feel disheartened, but don't be defeated. It's okay to feel sad, but don't be subdued. It's okay to feel angry, but don't be apathetic. It's okay to feel hurt, but don't be helpless or hopeless.

The truth is that sustainability in all its guises - from human rights and environmental protection, to equity and inclusion and climate action - has always been a fight. It has always been a counter-movement—a collective act of resistance against the abuse of power and the inertia of institutions and cultures.

I think that, in the past decade or so, some of us in the sustainability movement fell into a trap of complacency. Our agenda was mainstreaming, governments were pledging bold action, companies were making ambitious strategic commitments and even impressive investments. The tide seemed to have turned. We were winning.

Now we see that our celebrations were premature. Now we see that those with vested interests in maintaining the status quo will never give up without a fight. Now we see that hard won gains that took decades or centuries to achieve can still be lost in months, weeks or even days. Now we see that the war was never won.

This won't come as a surprise to many veterans of the human rights and environmental movements. They never stopped fighting. They never mistook winning small battles for victory in the war. They never forgot how long and hard they had to struggle—and how many suffered and died—to win basic rights and freedoms.

Did an end to slavery come easily? No, it took 500 years (Mauritania only abolished slavery in 1981), and there are still 50 million people living in modern slavery. Was the right of women and people of colour to vote a quick victory? No, it's taken over 150 years. In Saudi Arabia, women couldn't vote in municipal elections before 2015.

What about gender equality? According to the World Economic Forum, the gender pay gap between men and women is still 40% globally, and on current trends it will take 152 years to achieve gender pay parity. If the reversal of *Roe v Wade* in the US shows anything, it's that women's rights can never be taken for granted.

Ask communities in the Niger Delta if their fight against oil pollution, government corruption and endemic poverty has ever had any relief. Ask the Roma in Slovakia, or the LGBTQ+ community in Uganda, or the Rohingya in Myanmar, or the Uyghurs in China if their battle for equal treatment is won.

So, let us not be surprised at the current wave of anti-ESG sentiment, or the so-called sustainability recession. Let us accept that sustainability is a generational movement for change that needs us to show up every day, in every way, and to fight for what we believe in. Let us not let the bullies and billionaires, the dictators and dystopians win.

Is it hard to keep fighting? Of course it is. Is it tiring to stand up again each time we get knocked down? Absolutely. Which is why we need solidarity. We need to stand together and hold the line. We need to encourage and support one another. Sometimes we may need to cry together, and to cry out together.

And when we win those small victories, we need to celebrate together. When social innovation and green technology gives us an advantage against the enemy, we must embrace it and champion it and scale it. When we lose one fight, we must rise together, and rejoin the battlefield. As Maya Angelou says:

Text within this block will maintain its original spacing when published

*You may write me down in history
With your bitter, twisted lies,
You may trod me in the very dirt
But still, like dust, I'll rise.*

...

*You may shoot me with your words,
You may cut me with your eyes,
You may kill me with your hatefulness,
But still, like air, I'll rise.*

This is our time to rise. We are not called on to be courageous when the way is easy, but when the way is hard. We are not called on to be steadfast and resilient when the world is calm and stable, but when the world is turbulent and volatile. We are not called on to be warriors in times of peace, but in times of war.

And make no mistake: we are at war. We are in a long war to win dignity and respect for all people, regardless of their gender or skin colour or religion or sexual preferences. We are in a sacred war to win the right of millions of species to exist and to leave our children an Earth where nature is flourishing once more.

Will you call on your inner warrior and fight for all these things and more? Will you be the hope for the future, not because you wish it so, but because you take positive actions every day, even—and especially—in the face of adversity? Will you gird yourself, and arm yourself, and look after yourself and those by your side?

Will you choose to join together, to rise together, to stand together, to fight together and, ultimately, to win back our freedoms together? Will you be the one that your grandchildren will be proud of, not because you were flawless, but because you never gave up? Will you never stop trying to be a positive force for change in the world?

I know you will—along with millions of others—and that is why I am hopeful, optimistic even, in the midst of this wild storm. For it is not the size of the challenge that matters,

but the size of our hearts and the strength of our will. It is not the darkness that we should fear, but the power of our light that we should cherish.

For we are the light of a brighter future. And now is the moment to take your light, and pass it on. Now is the time to make your voice heard and to make your presence felt. Now is the time to be your bravest self and to stand up to the forces of darkness and despair. This is your moment to shine.

This is key message of my bestseller, Thriving, now available in paperback

Source:

First published on Purpose Inspired, April 11, 2025. Available at:
<https://purposeinspired.substack.com/p/its-time-to-reawaken-your-warrior>