



SUSTAINABILITY LEADERS NETWORK
Deepening Learning & Practice for People & Planet

Donella Meadows West Coast Fellows Workshop Report

**October 16-17, 2012
Ralston White Retreat, Mill Valley, California**



Participants from back left: Edie Farwell, Mary Roscoe, Ellen Wolfe, Kristi Kimball; from front left: Dayna Baumeister, Dominic Stucker, Julia Novy-Hildesley, Elaine Kohrman, Evelyn Arce, Alice Hartley, and Tse-Sung Wu; not pictured: Elizabeth Soderstrom, Jen Mayer, Jen Sokolove, and Anya Baumeister

Photographers: Anya Baumeister, Edie Farwell, Mary Roscoe, and Dominic Stucker

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The workshop focused on Fellows from the West Coast, complimenting a similar event held in Vermont in February for New England Fellows.

Goals of the workshop included:

- Regrounding in purpose
- Empowering the impact of current work
- Identifying what's needed now for the sustainability revolution

Several themes surfaced during the first check-in circle; for some a sense of well-being that their hard work was paying off; for others too much activity leading to unsustainability. Some Fellows came having achieved a vision they articulated at an earlier gathering and were ready for the next.

Others had just been through or were contemplating a major transition in their personal or professional lives, and wanted a safe space to discuss, reflect, and envision next steps. For many, our reunions are a reminder that they are not alone in their sustainability work and have the support of a vibrant and caring network.

Many report that there is no other group within which they can be as vulnerable – or as reinvigorated. Some come to connect with a colleague working in the same sector, while others seek out the stimulation and innovation that can emerge from engaging with those with different experience and expertise.

Edie and Dominic gave an update on Sustainability Leaders Network (SLN), including the theory of change of simultaneously going deeply into leadership practice with a small, interconnected group – the Fellows – and expanding our reach globally through partners, youth and intergenerational collaboration.



Ellen Wolfe

They outlined specific engagement of Fellows, youth, artists, and farmers through a range of projects including the Robert Gass Daily Leadership Practices, a high school Biomimicry course, the proposed iAct Dialogues for Sustainability, the Art of Sustainability, and a Farmers Apprenticeship.

SLN has also developed 3 online leadership courses for LEAD International and is writing a white paper on leadership in mental health recovery for the Foundation for Excellence in Mental Health Care. The latter is part of an effort to support systems transformation, which includes publishing success stories from Fellows, youth, artists, and farmers on the SLN blog.

Each Fellow presented their work to the full group, often combining reflections on their personal and professional challenges and aspirations. Most asked for strategic feedback or systems analysis on key questions and opportunities, while others presented on successes they have achieved.

Topics ranged from green pharmaceuticals and sustainable apparel to renewable energy, education and philanthropy; from parenting and intergenerational partnership to biomimicry, spirituality, and healing.



Edie Farwell, Dayna Baumeister

Some of the questions that Fellows are grappling with include:

Professional

- I want to be a resource to sustainable clothing designers so that they do not feel alone. How should I go about finding work with a focus on this and apparel supply chains?
- How can I attract the right people into my organization, people who are committed to our programs and share my vision?

- What are the leverage points that make leadership transformative? And how can we better measure the impacts of transformative leadership?
- If we run an intergenerational webinar series on dialogue and leadership for sustainability, on which key themes and practices should we focus?
- How can I claim credit for my professional successes with integrity?

Networks

- I am often contracted by and work with consortia. How can I work better with consortia, especially on collaborative decision-making?
- How can we best tap into the abundance of networks for sustainability?
- What ratio of my time should I invest in nurturing networks vs. doing the work?

Balance and family

- How can I draw on the skills, networks and opportunities I have for my next career steps, while also spending time with my children and maintaining my own health?
- How can I help create a secure, vibrant, and fun life for my children?
- What structures and priorities can I put in place in my life to ensure that I have enough energy to do my work and have enough time to sleep, exercise, read, and be with my kids?

Others invited collaboration:

- Tell me your stories about how you created balance in your life.
- I am looking for help to shape a vision around managing our rangeland in California.
- I welcome input on shaping our foundation's new grant making strategy, especially on transformative leadership and storytelling.
- I invite you to help convene events leading up to and on the Winter Solstice that help bring spirituality and healing more fully into the sustainability movement.

To build on their presentations and empower aspirations for next steps, Edie led the group in a **guided visioning** session. Fellows then roamed in the redwood forest surrounding Ralston to look to nature for inspiration, questions and solutions.

Once each person had found a place that moved them, they **created a piece of art with found materials**, often highlighting observed natural patterns or systems to express their vision. In touring pieces as a group, Fellows described their creative process. For some, the symbolism was already very clear, for others meaning emerged while describing their art piece to the group.



Nature art creations from top left by Alice Hartley, Anya Baumeister, Mary Roscoe, Elaine Kohrman, Kristi Kimball, Julia Novy-Hildesley, Dayna Baumeister, Tse-Sung Wu, Edie Farwell

At the end of our first day together, spouses and children of local Fellows joined us for a **family dinner**. Having kids from 1 to 12 years of age in the house reminded us of the importance of working toward the world we want for generations to come. The place was full of life, energy, and laughter, all essential for the sustainability revolution!

On the second morning of the workshop we **discussed the Robert Gass Daily Leadership Practice project** in which 56 Fellows are currently engaged alongside 60 Biomimicry Professionals from partner organization Biomimicry 3.8. The project consists of receiving daily leadership e-mails over the course of 8 months, divided into a dozen topics.

To help embed the practices, participants can join a monthly webinar, engage in an online discussion forum, journal, and/or confer with their peer coach on applying the practices to real-world personal and professional challenges. The purpose of the discussion was to assess the impact of the project to date, at its halfway point.

Participants reported that the “spectacularly designed snippets” encourage them to be at full capacity in their day-to-day leadership moments, helping them deliver with great “calm, focus, and power.” Several reported the practices help them to be “more effective at bringing forward the world we want to see.”

To discuss emerging themes and what the sustainability movement needs now, Fellows designed **Open Space discussions on next steps for career/life iteration and on societal change**. When we reconvened, groups reported:

Next Career/Life Iteration

- We all go through phases in life in which different visions

can come to the fore and be realized, while others percolate. We don't need to do everything all at once; in fact, doing so can be counter-productive and unhealthy.

- There may be tension in establishing credibility within our current system (for example through earning an advanced degree, a promotion, an award) and simultaneously working to transform that same system.



Mary Roscoe, Evelyn Arce, Tse-Sung Wu

- In living with this tension, many of us consider ourselves “scouts,” forging ahead to bring back visions of a different future, and pathways to get there. Such scouting can occur as a professional at work or as a parent at home.

Societal Change

This group focused on levers that evoke societal change, identifying:

- Charismatic leadership for building shared vision
- Media and messaging
- Social and psychological motivation

A wide-ranging dialogue ensued, touching on ways for policy to facilitate pathways toward our shared vision, the need to adopt ethics in which everyone is a neighbor (because they are), and the importance of good news stories, narrating our vision into reality.



Elaine Kohrman, Dayna Baumeister, Dominic Stucker

The outcomes from the workshop are likely to be far-reaching, manifesting themselves in diverse and unpredictable ways as Fellows pursue their newly empowered visions, re-connections with others, and renewed sense of possibility.

Some immediate outcomes include:

- During our closing circle, all Fellows made specific, short-term commitments on moving toward their visions
- A dozen Fellows paired off for Peer Coaching for the next 4 months
- Two Affinity Groups formed, one on Birthing 2012 and one on Fundraising in this Economic Era
- Two new Fellows joined the Robert Gass Daily Leadership Practice project

- A conference call entitled “My Role in Paradigm Shift” will be held to carry forward the Open Space discussion with the larger Fellows Network

Book and Video List

Fellows’ recommendations of resources on workshop themes:

- Joshua Cooper Ramos’ book *The Age of the Unthinkable: Why the New World Disorder Constantly Surprises Us and What We Can Do About It*
- Maggie de Vries and Renne Benoit’s children’s book *Tale of a Great White Fish: A Sturgeon Story*
- Laura Gabbert and Justin Schein’s documentary *No Impact Man*
- Paul Hawken’s book *Blessed Unrest*
- Thomas Kuhn’s book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*
- Elinor Ostrom’s book *Governing the Commons: The Evolution of Institutions for Collective Action*
- Bill Plotkin’s book *Nature and the Human Soul: Cultivating Wholeness and Community in a Fragmented World*
- Jeremy Rifkin’s TED Talk on *The Empathic Civilization*
- Jeff Scholl’s documentaries *Waiting for Superman* and *Good Night and Good Luck*
- Robert Shiller’s article in the Guardian, *Economic forecasting can’t cope with changing narrative of crisis*
- William Ury’s book *The Power of a Positive “No”*
