

# An Invitation to Start a Social Revolution



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## Mini Review

After having taught psychology for 60 years, beginning in 1957 as a graduate student at Yale University, then at New York University, Columbia University, Barnard College, Stanford University, and finally at Palo Alto University, I look back on my career with deep appreciation for this special gift that I received. I am ever more grateful for the unique opportunity that we teachers each have to learn from, and share in the youthful exuberance of our students who give us much in return for the ideas and intellectual strategies that we offer them in our academic exchange.

I believe strongly that teachers, who go beyond just transmitting information but also inspire their students to use their knowledge, as social change agents, are Everyday Heroes. They should be more treasured by every society, and never taken for granted by students or their parents, or by community and political leaders.

For me, the ideal of education is to contribute to the collective good of society. That means giving back the ideas that have been learned as now reshaped into positive values that oppose evils of all kinds, while also promoting the contract of compassion.

To go beyond what may seem like platitudes, I want to lay out seven specific paths to foster both personal happiness and collective well-being. Each path is based on insights I have extracted from my many years of research on the psychology of time perspective, shyness, evil, heroism, and the power social Situations [2]. So, here are Dr. Z's seven paths to a fulfilling life, both personally and communally.

## Using Time Wisely and Well

Time is our most precious asset, never to be wasted, and always to be used mindfully by balancing its three energy sources: Being well grounded in a positive past that links you to your family, identity and culture; being open to the power of the hedonic present that connects you to the energy flow of the moment, and also in being motivated to succeed to the full extent of your ability in your hope-filled future that in turn, enables you to soar to new destinations.

With that temporal balance comes a new flexibility in adapting to the many situational challenges you will face. Respect and learn from the Past, yours and those of others. Selectively immerse yourself in a Present-Oriented that fosters human connection and compassion, while opening you to appreciate nature and art and friends more fully. Use its pleasures as self-rewards for the hard earned successes you have won, and will achieve by being Future focused. You cannot be successful in life without developing a fine sense of future orientation, which means always weighing the consequences of every decision in terms of risks, costs and benefits that help make your decisions wise in your future and lead to more successful careers.

There is now much research in this field of the psychology of time perspective, that I helped create, to support the conclusion that essential for happy, healthy, meaningful life is learning how to develop a balanced time perspective: high positive past orientation, moderately high future orientation, moderate levels of present hedonism, but with low levels of past negative orientation and present fatalism. Finally, although there is never enough time in our fast paced lives, too tech-centric lives, we each must learn how to MAKE TIME for family, MAKE TIME for friends, and MAKE TIME for personal fun.

## Loving a Life Time of Learning

For several decades, all students have been living a rather privileged life; one filled with the entitlement of being freed from many societal obligations in order to allow them to think, to learn, to reason, to question, and to create. It is now time for all current and graduated students to more fully appreciate that gift by continuing to be a studious student for the rest of their post-grad lives. As they do so, in Life 2.0, they will add on the commitment of making your community and your nation better in every way that you can. For me, my continual joy in being a somewhat ever-older student means that I am always filled with curiosity and wonder, asking why, discovering how, challenging ignorance, and demanding the evidence for all assertions by the "true believers."

## Nurturing Your Passions

In addition to making your usual, must do, To Do list of daily work deeds, try making a second private list of what it is that you really want in life each day. Discover what you really feel passionate about and make that an essential focus and energy source in your life. Doing so means that passionate endeavors will become a source of personal pride, which will help guarantee that your life will never be “meaningless” to you when you look back on it in the future, as too many economically successful business-people have sadly reported. By definition a life planned around one’s passions cannot be a boring life [1].

## Transforming Shyness Into Social Engagement

Practice becoming the socially engaging host at life’s parties instead of resigning yourself to be its perpetually reluctant shy guest.

Just as we all have a choice of being a leader or a follower, we each choose whether or not to adopt a shy persona, or a more outgoing one. Shyness is a self-imposed social restriction that limits others from having access to your inner strengths and virtues because you have created that social barrier. My metaphor for shyness is that it is a self-imposed prison in which one gives up freedom of association and freedom of speech – – the most prized and hard-won freedoms of any democracy. But it is thinking and feeling that makes it so, not any natural law of nature. As I discovered from my Stanford Prison Experiment back in 1971, how easy it is for any of us to play the role of prisoner or guard in our lives. Anyone who is shy, become so by self-definition becomes his or her guard that limits freedom of the prisoner side of the shy person. One unexpected joy of moving on to new venues is that no one there yet knows that you are shy, so you can start all over and fool them into being excited to come to your parties, where you will dance with them, like Zorba the Greek did, in novelist Nikos Kazantakis’ wonderful image.

## Remaking Your Image

It is time to trade in your familiar, comfortable habits for personally challenging novel adventures that can liberate you from the boredom of predictability. From time to time, consider violating the expectations others have about what you are expected to do, or you have come to do routinely and typically mindlessly. To rise above the mundane it is time to take more calculated risks, to learn from your mistakes, to try harder and think wiser the next time around. The simple solution for avoiding cognitive dissonance when your decisions do not work as you had hoped is to practice saying, “I made a mistake. I’m sorry, forgive me, and let’s move on.”

## Treasuring Becoming a Positive Deviant

One source of negative group power is the pervasive pressure of social norms over each of us to not take action in

emergency situations, to not get involved, to mind our own business, to do nothing when we know we should do something. Most of us, when we witness examples of bystander apathy, typically say, “I would have gotten involved!” However, when we are actually caught up in the social drama of the social situation, the majority of us cave into the social norm of being helpless, mindless bystanders. Time to change that: practice being a social deviant in small ways to experience the power others have over you to be what they want you to be-try putting a black dot on your forehead for a day-with an erasable magic marker. When questioned about this out of character marking, simply say, “I just felt like doing it, no big deal.” If you can resist the pressures friends and family and strangers impose on you to get rid of it, you will have gained a new sense of inner power of the ONE over the many. In addition, you will become more aware of how much who you are, what you are, your tastes, your interests, the way you dress, are determined in subtle ways by other people in your life-- all too often, you go along with them in order to get along.

LAST, AND FOR ME, MOST IMPORTANTLY, IS PATH SEVEN

## Becoming an Everyday Hero in Training

Finally, it is time to start a social revolution by becoming a willing social change agent, prepared to change the world for the better– –people, situations, and systems, each day in some way, by standing up, speaking out, and taking action, to do the Right Thing when others are doing the Wrong Thing, or the No Thing. You will make a commitment to challenge all evil in whatever forms it takes, doing so with moral courage linked to righteous integrity. Let the most valued private virtues of compassion and empathy be your guiding light, but let readiness to engage in everyday heroic action be your daily goal and you’re most respected civic virtue. Develop a personal code of honor that you are willing to share with others.

Heroism can be developed, can be taught, and can be trained, like other vital individual characteristics, such as assertiveness and mindfulness. Heroism is acting on behalf of others in need or in defense of a moral cause despite potential risks and costs. Thus, it requires a socio-centric orientation rather than an egocentric one. You will be more likely to notice someone in need if you have developed the daily habit of opening yourself to other people by routinely noticing what others are doing and imagining what they are feeling. One way to do so each day, in some way, is by trying to make other people feel special, respected, and valued--by sharing with them justifiable complements, while acknowledging their unique individuality. Also remember that when people are organized into action networks they carry out the most effective heroism, not as solo warriors. So learn to persuade others to share your vision of what needs fixing, by assembling your buddies into a Hero Squad, to challenge collectively the Evils of Action, such as, bullying, gender violence, discrimination, corruption, fraud, slave labor and sex trafficking, while also opposing the more pervasive Evils

of Inaction, such as ignoring the devastating threats of global climate change, and the failure to remedy the socio-economic devastation on our Native Americans by non action or wrong actions of government agencies. The challenges before all of us are many, the opportunities endless, all awaiting our solutions, youthful energies, and most of all, a glowing Idealism ready to be infused into a new kind of smart and wise social activism that can reshape our society in the next decades. But consider what you can do to act now to challenge the new totalitarian governments that are dominating many nations globally and recently in America as well.

My call to action: Just Do It-But Heroically. I appreciate the opportunity these journal editors (of PBSIJ) have given me to share these personal views with all their readers-and beyond. Go forth in peace and joy and love to remake the world for the better, bit-by-bit, person-by-person, cause-by-cause, and heroic action-by-action [3].

## References

1. Philip Zimardo Website.
2. TED talk: Journey from Evil to Heroism.
3. Social Psychology Network.



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