

Fight for a Better World

In a letter to Harry S Truman in November 1948, Eleanor Roosevelt wrote: “No one won the last war, and no one will win the next.” This is a timeless truth. The only difference sixty years on is that the casualties are on screens everywhere, in our homes, offices and laptops. We see loss of life in daily digital colour.

The image and language of war is a handbrake on human progress. It operates in a horribly negative space. I’m reminded of lines from Leonard Cohen’s seductive hymn, “There is a war.”

There is a war between the rich and poor,
a war between the man and the woman.
There is a war between the left and right,
a war between the black and white,
a war between the odd and the even.
Why don't you come on back to the war, pick up your tiny burden, why
don't you come on back to the war, let's all get even.

Eleanor is right, the “war against terror” will not be won. It can never be won. Not while it is positioned as a war, as a collision of opposites. For all its differences and extremities, humanity is on the same side, a side that will pull together for the right cause, the right message and the right stuff.

“War on Terror” is like “We” and “Them”. It doesn’t wash up well. It pits good people against good people and leaves gaps for the rats. Thirty-five years doing business on five continents backs me on this. I spent eleven years living in the Middle East as a senior executive for Procter & Gamble and CEO for Pepsi-Co. I built seven Pepsi plants in Iraq. In my work and life in the Middle East I found Arab people to be strongly family oriented, strongly driven by emotion, and smart traders and merchants. They are naturals in the organizing idea of the future, the global market economy. Some of the first trademarks can be traced back as far as 3000 years BC to pottery found in Mesopotamia.

The answer to, and the problem of, terror, draw water from the same well: emotion. Emotion is an unlimited resource with explosive power. In a world that is supposedly ruled by cool rationality, metrics, and game theories, humans are actually powered by emotion, not by reason. As I said in an earlier article, reason leads to conclusions and emotion leads to action. No suicide bomber is given simply a rational reason for going on his or her mission.

The real challenge is to channel emotion through language that provides uplift not a downdraft. Martin Luther King did not say: “I have a mission statement”. If you’re a country, company or product trying to be persuasive what are you going

to do? Give your audience a set of reasons to come on board? Or give them a dream to live for? Action is driven by emotion. An inspirational dream is the most powerful force for change there is.

At the time of Eleanor Roosevelt's letter, global idealism was an infant. Since then it has grown up through heaven and hell. We've come out of the most destructive and progressive century in time, what Eric Hobsbawm styled "the Age of Extremes." But the tide of wellbeing *has* risen and technology, in spite of its hijacking by terrorism, has brought all of us face to face. Power is now in the hands of Inspirational consumers and citizens. Everyday drivers who design cars for auto companies and everyday solvers who meet and shift public policy over the Internet. This happened for the March anniversary of the attacks in Madrid.

Whatever your politics, there is an opportunity to move forward in concert. First let's get the language right. Finding the *right* language takes you into new territory. It can create higher orders of relationship, business, product, service, design and performance. As Alan Webber, a founding editor of business magazine Fast Company reminded me, it can create whole new paradigms and categories. We found this with Lovemarks, brands that create loyalty beyond reason. We found that the right language can change the world.

Last month I spent two hours with several US intelligence agencies. I told them the War on Terror is a dead space, literally and metaphorically. No WMDs unearthed. Pictures of torture. Car bombings and assassinations. The War on Terror doesn't have a lot of positive equity. Every reference to terror is an investment in the presence and even the legitimacy of terrorists. Instead I said, turn the tables in a way that promotes an inspirational purpose and at the same time re-positions the enemies of progress. My central message was redefine the mission from "the war on terror" to "a fight for a better world." This moves us instantly into an emotionally positive and inclusive space, where people can see they have a contribution to make, that they are in a battle for progress, not attrition. "Am I up for a war?" No, I said. But a fight – absolutely, count me in for the *Fight for a Better World*.

Change the language, and you change the conversation. Freedom, justice and liberty are abstract terms for most people. To make the world a better place massively expands the field of engagement, the range of interpretations and the points of relevance. It goes after the biggest weapon of mass destruction of all, poverty. As has been said, "The war against terror is bound up in the war against poverty". But this military talk does not invite participation. "Making the world a better place" is an inclusive dream everyone can identify with and tap into.

My second message was to be serious about it. When you're doing things that are seen as unpopular and controversial, you have to run just as hard in the other direction. This means tackling global poverty, hunger and disease has to be as high as anti-terror on America's agenda. Re-branding of American foreign policy

won't shift perception. Not while fifteen thousand Africans are dying a day from AIDS, TB and malaria. Malaria – largely preventable and totally treatable - kills as many children every month as died in the Indian Ocean tsunami.

America does need a fighting force capable of accessing any battlefield in the world. But it also needs a 21st century organization to tackle global AIDS, malnutrition and disease. There are some fantastic programs and organizations on the job but they need more support to achieve faster and more effective results. This effort is the “product” to campaign, recruit for and advertise around the world.

The American Dream will endure through adversity. Let no brand expert tell you different. Young people are drawn to its burning optimism like moths to a flame. The fight for a better world will be inspired, not processed. By irresistible spirits and inspirational players. By the power of one. This is how America changed the world last century. This is how the world will be changed this century.

Inspirational Players say: “we’re not going to take it.” Economist Jeffrey Sachs with his operatic passion to end extreme poverty. Sach’s rock star student Bono and the www.one.org campaign team of Americans rallying Americans, one by one, to fight AIDS and extreme poverty. Mary Robinson heading the Ethical Globalization Initiative in New York. Bjorn Lomborg and the economists who controversially showed how to spend the least to achieve the most: solve HIV/AIDs, malnutrition, trade protectionism and malaria. US\$70 billion would seriously address these calamities that kill millions each year.

The power of one is unstoppable. Like water wearing away a mountain one drip at a time, there are few problems that can't be solved if enough people commit themselves. As individuals. How can you fight for a better world? Take the dream out of your head and into your hands. First, get involved personally. Break the big job down into smaller jobs. Pick the three you can do something about. Do them. Then pick three more. For \$5 you can fund a malaria net that will save a life.

There is an opportunity in proximity to transform the world through global emotional connections. We can make the world a Lovemark, a place of mystery, sensuality and intimacy. Let's leave the war behind us, and join the fight.

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Book: Lovemarks: the Future Beyond Brands (powerhouse Books)