

Creating a Post-Peak Future Worth Living Into

Posted by [Gail the Actuary](#) on October 29, 2008 - 10:06am

Topic: [Sociology/Psychology](#)

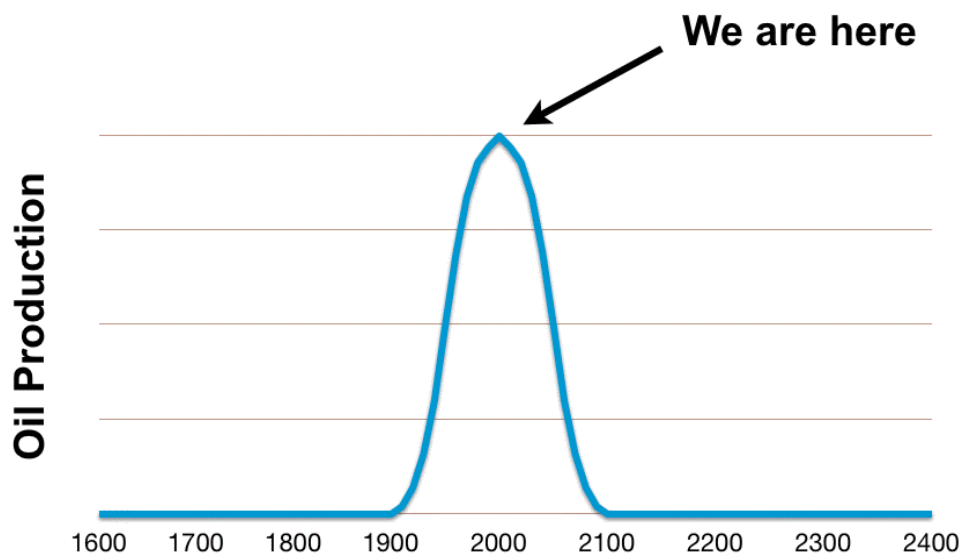
Tags: [future](#), [leader](#), [original](#), [peak oil](#), [role](#) [[list all tags](#)]

This is a guest post by André Angelantoni, known on TOD as [aangel](#). He is co-founder of [PostPeakLiving.com](#) and co-founder of Post Carbon Marin, his community's effort to prepare for peak oil, and a former executive coach and business consultant. He wrote this article to give people one way to navigate through the forced transition to a post peak world we are all going to experience.

The future most people are living into is beginning to disappear. The financial crisis threw the first punch, but oil depletion will deliver the knockout blow. The moment people realize that the society they have known their whole life can no longer function the same way without the energy provided by oil, it will become glaringly apparent that the future will be very, very different. It's not just that we will no longer have fresh food flown in from around the world. Some of the fundamental assumptions held by people living in the rich countries will no longer hold:

- many jobs that have never existed before will once again no longer exist
- retirement, a phenomenon only a century old, will disappear
- accumulating “wealth” will be out of reach for most people
- most children will no longer be able to attend institutions of higher education
- diseases and conditions that are easily treated now will once again claim lives

Once a person has realized that these and many more futures will no longer exist, they will ask themselves the following question: If the future I've lived with my whole life will no longer occur, what will my future be?



People will react in many different ways as they consider the question of what their future will be. Some people will become resigned and despondent, others will become resolute as they

concentrate on the job of making sure they and their family are sheltered and adequately fed. Still others will become happier as they leave the rat race and simplify their life. If you are considering this question, hopefully you will realize that creating the future rather than waiting for it to happen to you will give you a better result. That's what this article is about.

Before continuing, I am going to outline a principle that is a part of the coaching model I use. It is not the only model in the world, but it has worked consistently for me and my clients.

Your Future Gives You Your Experience of Now

In this article, I will operate on the following principle:

The future a person lives into determines how they operate in and experience the present.

This may seem counter-intuitive to you because there seems to be so much evidence that it is the past that gives us our experience of now. For example, don't we feel proud of our accomplishments — and didn't those accomplishments happen in the past? Don't we suffer from events — and aren't those events in the past?

To see that it's our future that gives us our experience of the present, try this simple experiment. Imagine you are holding a lottery ticket and are about to check the winning numbers. You might be interested and cautiously optimistic. As you read the winning numbers you realize that yours is the winning ticket. What is your experience at the moment you realize you've won the jackpot?

If you are like most people, you will be surprised and ecstatic. But has anything — in physical reality — changed in any way? No, it hasn't. But the future you see before you has completely changed and your happiness comes from a new future filled with a life of leisure or travel or the finest things in life.

The same principle operates whenever a future changes. Whether it's agreeing to marry someone, getting a new job or facing a serious illness, in all these circumstances the future determines how you operate in and experience the present.

What about those past events, the accomplishments and tragedies? Don't they impact us in the present? They certainly do, but the impact comes from how they have changed the future that we live into because those events happened. I'll leave it as homework to the reader to determine the future that is created when we experience an accomplishment or tragedy.

People who panic when they learn of peak oil see a terrible future for themselves and society. Although I didn't panic when I first learned of peak oil, I did experience a feeling of dread. I looked into the future and saw the possibility of social turmoil and hunger. This seems to be a common reaction, and most people move through the experience in hours or days as they gradually see that the gloomy future is not inevitable.

Gloomy Futures Are Useful — To a Point

Gloomy futures are often conjured up by your brain without your permission or guidance. Your brain is simply an associative machine that took in the idea of oil depletion, recalled images from its past (perhaps including a Mad Max movie), and plopped the result in your mental lap. Although it may have you prepare in ways you wouldn't normally, this gloomy future can also paralyze you and turn you into a morose individual unable to experience the joy there is and will always be available in life.

If you are unsatisfied with the future your brain invented for you, you will have to create one yourself.

Quality of Life vs Standard of Living

We're almost ready to discuss how to create a future worth living into. I'm going to make one more distinction that should help the transition. With the loss of inexpensive and plentiful oil you are not just confronting the loss of vacations in the Tropics. It will look like the sudden loss of much more than that. But what is it you are losing, exactly?

At this point it's valuable to get yourself clear on what you are actually going to lose. If you don't stop your brain, it is likely to say, "Everything!", send you down a dark tunnel and leave you there. But you aren't going to lose everything; you aren't even going to lose the most important things, as you'll soon see. That's because almost every person tends to make one fundamental mistake (myself included when I'm not paying attention).

We tend to confuse what economists call "standard of living" with "quality of life." The two are not the same, no matter how many vacation advertisements try to convince you otherwise. The standard of living index measures the number of things a person can purchase or possess. This is again useful only to a point. Beyond the very basics of life, like food and shelter, we want things not for the things themselves but for what they give us at an emotional level.

We want money to go on vacation so that we can have fun. But is it necessary to leave town to have fun? We want to send our kids to college so that they can "create a future for themselves." But what does that mean? Are people who don't go to college incapable of experiencing happiness in their life? If your children were healthy and happy, wouldn't you have done your job as a parent? We know that the poor can be happy and the rich can be (often desperately) unhappy.

Things and circumstances fool us into short-term happiness, and then the happiness wears off and the cycle starts again. Have you noticed as your income rose, your expectations rose with them? If you hadn't noticed that, you're in the standard of living trap and you don't even know it.

Creating a Future Worth Living Into

Now we're ready to look at futures worth living into. This future won't be attached to things and circumstances or you'll never get out of the trap. So, as you create your new future, remember to

resist the pull of equating being fulfilled with having things. Many people who have been preparing for peak oil have found that their life has dramatically improved as they have taken on new responsibilities and learned new skills, like growing their own food, even as they started to lower the number of luxuries in their life.

One of the most powerful ways I've found to create a fulfilling future is to distinguish a role for yourself. Roles are powerful because they establish a context to live in and are easy to remember. When we take on a role, we automatically get access to all the properties that define the role. For instance, if I say that I will take on the role of being a loving husband, I don't have to memorize "The Ten Steps to Being a Loving Husband." I will immediately have access to ways of expressing that role I've heard about (like hiding love notes around the house) and I will easily invent new ways to express the role with just a bit of creativity.

You are undoubtedly playing all sorts of roles right now, and there are thousands of roles you can play in post-peak oil world. Your job is to create a new, fulfilling role for yourself. Here are a few basic roles, starting with some roles you may want to avoid.

- **The Victim.** To play this role, you should complain that the world isn't fair and that there isn't enough time to prepare. Talk only about things that we will lose or how other people or groups are better off than you. Unfortunately, this role isn't very attractive and people will try to avoid you — but it is a valid role. I include it so that you can recognize when you are playing the victim, discard it, and choose a different role.
- **The Drama Queen.** Be a Drama Queen by saying, "We are so screwed" or similar things after describing how you see the future playing out. This can be a fun role to play, especially when describing a Mad Max scenario in great detail. Most people will eventually want you to talk about how they can actually prepare for the future. The Drama Queen role can often be matched up with the Victim role to great effect, but people tire of it quickly.
- **The Bystander.** To do a good job with this role, say "what will happen will happen" whenever you hear about something terrible happening, preferably in Spanish. This is actually a good role to keep handy because often events will truly be out of your control, and there is no need to get your knickers in a knot over them.
- **The Leader.** With this role, you see peak oil as an opportunity to make a difference in your community and the world. You can be a leader in thousands of ways, from starting a community garden to inviting friends over to teach them a useful skill you know. The only requirement to be a leader is that you create a future that wasn't going to happen anyway. You don't need to know how to speak in front of crowds and you don't need a commanding presence. All you need is the commitment to create a future that wasn't going to happen unless you became involved.

You can add these roles to any that you are currently playing (parent, student, entertainer, etc.), and you can switch at any time. Of course some roles will give you better results than others.

Being a leader can be an immensely fulfilling role and one I wholeheartedly recommend, especially since we are going to need many local leaders very soon. I'd like to see the leadership positions filled with people who see it as way to serve the community rather than to enrich

themselves materially. But that doesn't mean you won't get benefits by being a leader, and there should be some benefits. For example, being a leader means that you will create your own support network faster, and you will gain information about the world earlier than others, allowing you to prepare better.

Many people shy away from being a leader because they think it is a burden, but they have it backwards: the Leader role can be freeing because small inconveniences stop being annoying — as a leader you'll have bigger, more inspiring goals on your mind.

Conclusion

In this article, we looked at how your experience and actions in the present are a function of the future you are living into. We also saw that your brain will invent a gloomy future given no direction: To have a fulfilling future to live into, you'll need to take charge. Then we noted one of the most common mistakes people make: confusing the economists' standard of living with quality of life. Last, we looked at some roles that you might consider taking on, particularly the Leader role.

Ultimately, the purpose of this article was to point out that many of the roles you are playing now are no longer going to hold, and that you will need to take charge. Take a moment and ask yourself, "What kind of fulfilling role can I create for myself in a post peak world?"