

## Can a recession be prolonged by fear?

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I've become so sick of hearing the word "recession" lately. You can't help but notice how prevalent it is. Just the other day I was listening to yet another radio news report about the recession in Canada, and I was surprised to discover how angry and frustrated I felt. I haven't lost money in the stock market, had my livelihood threatened or watched a home devalue. Yet the word "recession" sounds frightening to me. I began to wonder how many other people were feeling the same way and what the collective impact might be.

I decided to do a little recession research and was surprised to discover just how much weight "consumer confidence levels" carry in creating and prolonging a recession.

Imagine watching the news one night. The top story profiles yet another layoff at Air Canada. It's the 3rd layoff story you've heard this week, and the experts are predicting record high unemployment levels across multiple industries. While your job or business may not be in jeopardy, you might feel anxious enough to cancel your 2 week vacation to Mexico in March, or hold off on purchasing new equipment for your business "just in case."

Meanwhile, thousands of other people across the country are coming to the same conclusion, sending more shockwaves through the marketplace. The flow of money begins to slow, leading to more layoffs and business closures and more dire news coverage. We're perpetuating a downward cycle.

I heard recently that one of the hottest items in the US right now, is a home safe. Consumer confidence in the banks has been shaken to such a degree that people have literally taken to stashing their cash at home.

A few weeks ago, when I heard Rush Limbaugh had decided not to participate in the recession in the US, I went hunting for the story on the web. While I know his comments received a lot of criticism given the fact that he had just signed a multi-million dollar radio deal, I was pretty sure he was talking about choosing not to participate in the "downward cycle" we all create by responding to the economic situation with fear.

No one can erase the pain and suffering of people who have lost jobs and are facing financial ruin, but running for the hills and hiding our money in our mattresses because we're afraid of what could happen to us only increases the likelihood that it will. Our collective responses to events form our cultural reality.

Just a couple of months ago in Washington DC, we witnessed an example of what can happen when people respond with hope, joy, relief and optimism. The world was invited to watch America's first Afro-American president sworn into the Oval Office. The pure momentum generated around this man is staggering. Remember the sea of people out front of the White House? The tears on the faces of the crowd in Chicago the night he was elected? All around the world, people have responded to this event with delight. Obama himself referred to the power of our collective reaction when he said in his inaugural address that the people have chosen "hope over fear."

We, as a people beyond national definitions, are poised to make powerful change. But even with this much raw possibility unleashed, the nay-sayers are still sniffing around for dirt. After the election, media focus immediately shifted to the dark road ahead, wondering aloud if Obama could pull it off.

Obama appears to understand the destructive effect of negative reactions and referred directly to this in his inaugural address when he said that there are "some who question the scale of our ambitions." He was

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quick to identify that their memory is short and that the ground has shifted beneath them. Of course it's going to be challenging for Obama. This is probably the most difficult job on the planet right now, which means he needs continued support more than ever. If we break ranks and start picking for flaws the second he's ensconced in the Oval office, we tear the very fabric of the culture we've just created for ourselves. This is not about Obama. It is about how we react to him.

Yesterday, someone asked me if I thought Obama would be assassinated. I'd heard this before and it made me uneasy. Not because it could happen, but because of how easily we become fascinated with the negative side of a story.

If you're interested in consciously co-creating a cultural reality of hope, joy, happiness and peace, here are 5 simple steps to help you safeguard yourself from the proliferation of negative influences in the media.

## **1. Pick and choose your exposure.**

Bored or unconscious consumption of TV, radio, newspaper and the internet make us extremely vulnerable to an incredible assortment of questionable influences. Start thinking in terms of mental nutrition. What kind of diet produces anxiety and restlessness? What promotes peace and well-being? Learn to discern the difference and choose accordingly.

## **2. Think of the news in terms of a buffet.**

There's plenty to choose from. If you always go to CNN, "test drive" 4 other news sources for a week. And pick something outside the "big news" circle.

## **3. Watch, listen and read with a flexible and critical mind.**

With practice, you can tone your "critical muscle" by asking yourself a few simple questions: Is there another side to this story? What do I feel about this story? What does it mean to me? How am I choosing to respond?

## **4. Do the legwork.**

If a particular story gets your attention (negative or positive), empower yourself by getting out there and talking to people about the issue. Beware of parroting what you've already heard the journalists say and risk sharing and inviting individual opinions.

## **5. Stem the flow of negativity within yourself.**

When we see something in the news that affects us deeply, our outrage, frustration or sadness often compels us to share what we've seen with others. Sharing is a natural part of being human; however, without a conscious awareness that our emotions have been incited, we unknowingly pass on a "jolt" to someone else, perpetuating the negative news grapevine. To prune the grapevine, share your personal experience with phrases like "I'm really upset by something I saw on the news and I want to explore what's going on without passing on negativity."

If you take a moment to consider how your reactions to situations and events shape our cultural reality, you may choose to eschew the fear-mongering. Lean instead towards hope, optimism and joy, and become part of a powerful cultural shift towards positivity.

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