

Imagine Humane Technology

How can technology operate for the common good?



OBJECTIVE

Imagine the possibilities for humane technology by envisioning solutions that advance lasting, systemic change.

PART

1

What is the role of young people in changing the system?

Humanity is up against some major problems: growing wealth inequality, the catastrophic impacts of climate change, discrimination, and a global pandemic we were utterly unprepared for.

To solve these problems, we need to understand each other better, to be able to tell what's true and what isn't, and to work together at large scales across communities and nations.

Technology, with its ability to amplify our efforts and to reach large numbers of people, can do a lot to help with all this, both at the individual and societal levels.

And yet, our current social media technologies spend far more energy on ways to capture and monetize our attention than on solving big problems.

This situation has led technology into a moment of reckoning as more and more social media users, politicians, and technologists are agreeing that these products are unhealthy for many individuals and for society as a whole.

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Your generation has grown up with social media. Your willingness to create and consume content has led to enormous profits for technology companies because they see you as easy to manipulate. While our brains are still developing, we're all more vulnerable to peer pressure, social comparison, and tricks that hijack our attention.

You know all these problems from personal experience, and your insights have a critical role to play in the movement that solves them.

CONSIDER:

- If you were the CEO of one of these companies, what would you do differently?



PART

2

What will it take to create the conditions for better technology?

Because social media is doing so much to distract, divide, and downgrade us, fixing it will help us to solve our other problems.

You can be a powerful advocate for systemic fixes to our broken social media environment. Your voice can:

- **Support regulation:** As governments around the world wake up to the harms of the attention economy, new regulations are being proposed that can change the way

technology is incentivized. Good regulation can make business models less profitable and allow room for new and less destructive models to emerge. Many of the lawmakers considering this legislation are highly motivated by the harms playing out in the lives of their children and grandchildren. Young people speaking authentically about your experiences are able to powerfully move lawmakers in ways that lobbyists and research studies are not. When lawmakers feel pressure from parents and kids, change happens much faster.

- **Keep the pressure on:** As we've learned, companies respond to financial incentives. When large numbers of people stop using a product, switch to a better product, or request new features, companies respond because losing users can hurt their revenue. This is known as user demand.¹ Platforms also respond to press, to people like you telling your stories about the impact technology is having. You can share your story through [MySocialTruth](#) or by getting involved with an advocacy group like [Log Off](#).
- **Change the way technology is built:** The technologies that dominate our world today, platforms like Facebook and Snapchat and Google, were built by young people. Many of them were engineers with narrow world views operating from harmful extractive paradigms. It doesn't have to be this way. We can build technology that helps us be more focused, balanced, and aligned with our intentions. Technology that gives us the capacity to move from moments of outrage to moments of shared understanding. Technology that helps power and resources flow more fairly across society instead of concentrating on just a few. Organizations like [LookUp](#) are supporting young people in making these shifts.

The trillion-dollar social media industry is powerful, but when all of us push to change the system in these ways, the tide can turn quickly. Whether you change your social media habits, share your story, or come up with an idea for a healthier technology, your voice will make a difference in this movement.

¹ To make a change like this in your use of technology, check out the Make a Change tool.

REFLECT:

Technology designed to capture as much attention as possible from as many people as possible creates major societal harms. We need deep, systemic reform that will fix our broken technology environment.

- What is one role you might play in bringing about change?

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PART

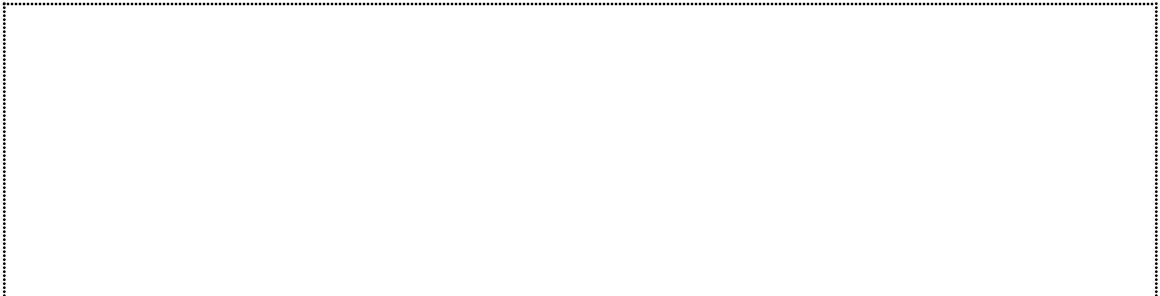
What is technology for?

3


A critical part of demanding change to a healthier technology environment is considering what future we want to get to. While fixing the problems with social media can reduce harm, imagining something even better can create stronger possibilities. To begin this process, consider one of the most important questions that people spend the least time on.

CONSIDER:

- When are you *really* happy?



- How do you define happiness?



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Happiness means different things to everyone, but many definitions and wisdom from philosophers and religions point to some type of **contentment**.

When you're content, you already have what you need. You're not seeking anything, and you're not wanting the moment you're in to be different somehow.

The deepest contentment comes when we are immersed in an experience that leads us to a place we want to be. We may feel contentment if we skip studying for a test to watch a show on Netflix, but we know that contentment now will lead to anxiety later. When we are deeply content, what is best for us in the moment and what is best for us in the long run feel aligned.

CONSIDER:

- What are some times when you've been content recently?

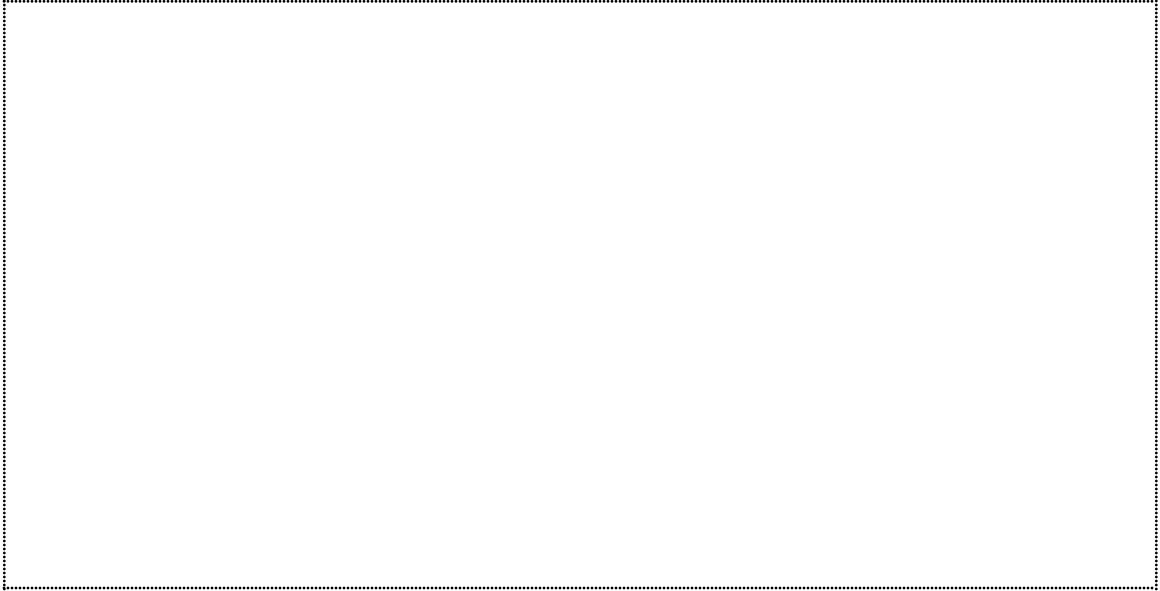


Unfortunately, content people generally aren't good for businesses, which constantly need to show growth to their shareholders. This is where marketing and advertising come in: they consistently demonstrate why last year's product or trend is now terrible, and why what's new is the best thing ever.

Most of the media and technology we immerse ourselves in are playing this game, especially social media platforms, which are almost completely funded by advertising. While all of us are pulled into discontentment and distraction, businesses prosper.

CONSIDER:

- How would technology that helps you and your loved ones find contentment look different from the technology we have today?



Just as an organism can't thrive for long in a failing ecosystem, a human can't thrive for long in a society that is distracted, disconnected, disinformed, and divided. On top of helping individuals find contentment, imagine technology that helps to create conditions for a more equitable and engaged society:

- We need technology that enhances our capacity for focus, shared understanding, and deep collaboration.
- We need technology that strengthens our capacity to tackle our biggest global challenges.
- We need technology that protects our common good and our own wellbeing so we can be of service to each other.

Imagine a shift to **humane technology** that supports our wellbeing, democracy, and shared information environment, and increases our capacity for problem solving.

PART

4

Imagine humane technology.

What if we built technology on a very different set of principles, like the ones below?



CONSIDER:

(If you're working in a group, it may be helpful to answer these questions together):

1. Which tenets are particularly important to you? Why?



2. If you were building a new social media platform using these tenets, what would its features be?



3. How would it be different from our current social media platforms?



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Humane technology is about much more than just writing code. It needs contributions from a wide range of disciplines, for example:

- **Psychology**: how does technology interact with our minds?
- **Sociology**: how does technology affect how humans interact with each other?
- **Art**: how does visual design affect our interactions and emotions?
- **History**: what can we learn from the past to inform our present decisions?
- **Economics**: what financial forces affect product decisions, and what economic effects do products have?

Whatever your interests are, you can probably help to advance humane technology in ways you might not have imagined. Technology needs your talents and new ideas to shape its future.

CONSIDER:

- What does thinking about technology in this way make you want to learn and/or do?



We've learned how technology can distract us, divide us, and downgrade our collective ability to solve problems when it's built to extract our attention for profit.

Imagine a future where these paradigms have shifted. A future where continuing to operate unsustainably is impossible. A future where technology helps us align our actions with our intentions, enabling us to be more free, focused, patient, and secure as we solve tough problems together.

A powerful movement is building to make this future a reality. But it can't succeed without you. This is your moment to demand change from global leaders and technologists, and to help create the future you want to live in.