

Voice and Exit Manifesto:

How to Change the World

by Max Borders



VOICE AND EXIT MANIFESTO: HOW TO CHANGE THE WORLD

GUIDE 1.0

MAX
BORDERS

This PDF is best viewed using [Adobe Reader](#). If you are having trouble accessing the hyperlinks, copy the footnote URL into your browser.

INTRODUCTION	3
ON VOICE & EXIT	4
TRUTH TO POWER	5
OPT-OUT CULTURE	5
FLOURISHING FIRST	6
GO FORWARD WITH OPTIMISM	8
CRITICIZE BY CREATING	8
HOW CAN YOU DISRUPT?	9
INVENTING THE FUTURE	10
ALERTNESS, CREATIVITY, AND KNOWING YOUR TYPE	11
THE RED QUEEN	12
THE POINT OF THE JOURNEY	12



Disclaimer

This guide is for informational purposes only. The author and Liberty.me make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this guide and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. Liberty.me is not engaged in rendering legal, accounting, investing, medical or other professional services. If professional assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought. Neither Liberty.me nor the author shall be liable for damages arising herefrom. The fact that an organization, book or website may be referred to in this work does not mean that the author or Liberty.me endorses the information the organization, book or website may provide or recommendations it may make.

INTRODUCTION

Partisan politics is dying. That's not to say there aren't people doing it. But partisans are not the future of freedom in the world. They're merely locking themselves into opposition while a new movement emerges—promising to swell up around them and overwhelm the institutions they guard.

The rest of us, with all of our differences in life plans and personal designs, will be forging ahead, forming new networks, communities, and new ways of living beyond today's status quo.

Partisans
are not the
future of
freedom in
the world.

To some, this may sound rather chaotic. To others, it's an exciting vision. But the future—this great unfolding of people looking for a better life (the right fit, the right flourishing)—will happen, even as it takes some unpredictable turns. No one knows what the future will look like, but as tech guru Alan Kay said once, “The best way to predict the future is to invent it.”

And that's the reason for this guide.

ON VOICE & EXIT

I'm the cofounder of an annual event experience also called [Voice & Exit](http://voiceandexit.com/).¹ My cofounder Seth Blaustein and I started Voice & Exit because we wanted to start a movement—one built on infectious optimism and the power of good ideas.

Some of the themes may sound familiar to you. Other themes may cause you some cognitive dissonance. But once you see what we're driving at—and maybe you already do—you'll be able to understand, internalize, and act. I have certainly changed my perspective since adopting the basic ethos and approach, which may be a little different from what you're used to.

The first major step for me was to accept a simple truth: the social world changes through two forces—persuasion and coercion. There are no other forces. There might be mixes, hybrids, and matters of degree. But the bottom line is that people only change if you either threaten them or convince them to go along with your way. So at some point I had to ask myself, Am I a person who is fundamentally about peaceful means or about coercive means?

Once I had accepted that I am committed to peaceful means of making social change, I got into the dynamic outlined by Albert O. Hirschman in his seminal treatise *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty*. The idea is this: “Exit” means if you don't like some social arrangement you can leave it at fairly low cost, perhaps to try something new. “Voice” means that if you don't like some social arrangement you can speak out with the hopes of making improvements or repairing relations. Hence Voice & Exit. These are the two primary mechanisms for people who are about peaceful change. And they can be powerful in the face of power, too, as we'll see. So the central goal for our purposes is to find creative ways to reduce the costs of exercising both voice and exit.

Some may argue that in presenting the “Voice & Exit Manifesto,” I have given “loyalty” short shrift. Perhaps. But my view is that loyalty is only good when some healthy mix of voice and exit have succeeded first in contributing to human flourishing.

Loyalty to paternalistic, often violent institutions has had its day. The spell of nationalism and “blood and soil” thinking is losing its jujū as people become more interconnected. Loyalties of the 20th century, like jingoism and patriotism, have been primarily in the service of power and

Loyalty to
paternalistic, often
violent institutions
has had its day.

¹ <http://voiceandexit.com/>



empty tribal thinking. Sure, they serve their function. Indeed, history has shown loyalty can be a social adhesive in the face of uncertainty and calamity. But it's time for seeing these dynamics anew. Voice and exit are ascendent.

So we decided to start an annual event to explore, celebrate, and *embrace peaceful* ideas that involve noncoercive means of change—but that event is based on the thinking outlined here. In that sense, Voice & Exit is transpartisan and transpolitical. And so is this manifesto. Of course, we invite you to participate because there is perhaps no better articulation of this vision than the Voice & Exit event experience itself. Short of that, however, I want to go deeper—perhaps to offer a guide to the basics of opt-out culture and speaking truth to power.

TRUTH TO POWER

I used to laugh at this phrase. I first heard it in college as campus agitators would chant politically correct slogans they'd learned in class. But I decided to appropriate it, because in the context of the peaceful-versus-coercive-change distinction we touched on above, it fits pretty well. Exercising “voice” is fundamentally about asking really good questions—sometimes subversive questions—in the face of some status quo. Is this status quo working for you? Is this status quo working for us? And if you trace this status quo to its roots, do you find people with hopes, dreams, and willing hearts? Or do you find police power? Because often arrangements we thought were working to the benefit of everyone are proping up power structures that make things worse than they might otherwise be.

Speaking truth to power is about asking fundamental questions: Who chooses? Who pays? Who benefits? And then, of course, is it just? Depending on your perspective, two people may come to very different conclusions in asking such fundamental questions. And that's okay. But we think those who embrace *peaceful* means of making social change will find a home in our culture and in our movement. But it starts with asking some tough questions—first of yourself, then of others, then of the sources of power.

Speaking truth to power is about asking fundamental questions.

OPT-OUT CULTURE

But, you may be thinking, I already use voice. I'm constantly speaking “truth to power” among my friends and on social media. And that's wonderful. By all means, keep it up. But keep in mind



that you may have some options for exit, too—perhaps more than you think.

In giving you some ideas about opt-out culture, Jeffrey Tucker and I wrote what could be a definitive overview in “[Fifty Ways to Leave Leviathan](#).”² But in the interests of keeping your attention, I’ll invite you to consider a simple set of “exit” questions that should work for your particular circumstances—which will differ by nation and by household:

You may have some options for exit, too—perhaps more than you think.

- **What are the costs of exiting this particular situation, social arrangement, product, or service?**
- **What are the current alternatives to this particular situation, social arrangement, product, or service (read: places to go)?**
- **What are the benefits or at least potential benefits of exiting this particular situation, social arrangement, product, or service and entering another? And,**
- **Are you uniquely positioned to create opportunities for exit (including offering something new to “enter”), both for yourself and others, in this particular situation, social arrangement, product, or service?**

Thinking through these questions means opportunities to change the world.

One person thinking through these questions might mean an opportunity to create a better life on some dimension. A million people thinking through these questions means opportunities to change the world and leave it far better than we found it.

That, folks, is a movement.

But why in the world would we want to ask such questions at all? Why would anyone ever want to participate in opt-out culture?

FLOURISHING FIRST

The answer is simple. You want to be happy, healthy, and fulfilled. And unless you’re some sort of utility maximizing robot, you want others to be happy, healthy, and fulfilled, too. In the Voice

² http://www.fee.org/the_freeman/detail/fifty-ways-to-leave-leviathan#axzz2neKb4Lui



& Exit movement, we call this pursuit of happiness, health, and fulfillment “human flourishing.” And the thing is, nobody knows better than you how you flourish.

Human flourishing is a pretty abstract idea in some respects and deeply personal in others. It’s like Louis Armstrong purportedly said when asked what jazz is: “If you have to ask you’ll never know.” And yet part of asking the question, what’s human flourishing? on a continuous basis helps us get closer and closer to finding it for ourselves and in the wider world.

Nobody knows
better than you
how you flourish.

According to positive psychologist Martin Seligman, human flourishing on an individual level consists in aspects like positive emotion, engagement and interest, meaning and purpose, self-esteem, optimism, resilience, and positive relationships with others. How do you do in these areas? At this point, readers might be wondering, *Is this some kind of self-help book?* Of course, it depends on your point of view. But someone who cannot take a good, honest look at these dimensions of his or her own life might not be terribly well equipped to sally forth into the world

We all have to
work on ourselves
before we work
on the world.

speaking truth to power and participating in opt-out culture. So, we all have to work on ourselves before we work on the world. And if you want to go deeper, there’s perhaps no better way to self-assess on the flourishing dimension than in the area of positive psychology. (See also Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi.)

Our movement needs leaders—not hierarchical overlords, but standard-bearers. And only the self-reflective can be truly effective agents of change. So ask yourself: In which areas do I need the most improvement? And in which of these areas am I doing well? And in which areas do I feel confident to help others improve? In a sense, you’re doing double-duty. Flourishing is important stuff. And there is no more credible advocate for change in the dynamics of human flourishing than someone who is honest about his or her strengths and weaknesses. Interestingly, you may find at the end of going through the list and ranking these areas, you have discovered something new that should have been obvious to you all along. The starting points of our growth should be found in questions about our own human flourishing (i.e., what makes us happy, healthy, and fulfilled).

Our movement
needs leaders—
not hierarchical
overlords, but
standard-bearers.

Now, once you have discovered your strengths and weaknesses



in these areas, you can get to work. Only after you are doing well and finding your path, should you set to work on making social change. *And once you have, you have an advantage.* Instead of looking for the reasons why people are wrong and why the world is such a shitty place, you can come equipped with the lenses of flourishing. In doing so, you will be received as an optimist and a powerful advocate for the good. Such is absolutely essential to making the world a better place as an *entrepreneur* or *social entrepreneur* (that is, one who uses peaceful means of making change).

The starting points of our growth should be found in questions about our own human flourishing.

GO FORWARD WITH OPTIMISM

There is nothing more infectious than a positive outlook. If you find yourself stewing in the poisons of negativity and pessimism, search for the antidote first. You know that person who always brings people down when they're around? Maybe he's a perpetual critic? Or have you ever had a fun friend who was going through a breakup or a rough time? None of these characters is necessarily a bad person. But they can be particularly ineffective when it comes to group dynamics. They're downers. It's no different for social dynamics. And their mien is not what movements are made of. Optimism is way more powerful and we have to seize it.

There is nothing more infectious than a positive outlook.

CRITICIZE BY CREATING

In the spirit of optimism, I'd like to suggest that criticism can be healthy in small doses, but not by itself. One who only criticizes is a particularly unhelpful sort because he draws attention to the shortcomings of some arrangement but has nothing to offer as a replacement. In other words, he either gives us no alternatives or defaults to some abstract principle that doesn't readily connect to the lives of those he's criticizing. That's why the most effective form of criticism is one who can *show the way to something better*. As the great master Michelangelo is supposed to have said, "Criticize by creating."

Criticism can be healthy in small doses, but not by itself.

Criticism through creation is fundamentally transpartisan and transpolitical. This may be dis-

appointing for those who work in public policy, politics, or political advocacy. And again, I suppose someone has to do this sort of stuff. But adherents to the “Voice & Exit Manifesto” are interested in something pretty different. They’re not looking for utopias to force onto others, nor are they interested in participating in the white paper-industrial complex. They’re looking for radical new communities into which to invite others. They’re looking for new social designs, human architectures, and social operating systems³ that can balance a number of different conceptions of the good. And they’re looking for ways to innovate our way to a more peaceful and prosperous world.

Adherents to the ‘Voice & Exit Manifesto’ are looking for radical new communities — new designs, human architectures, and social operating systems.

Criticism through creation is a kind of DIY outlook. And while we might readily acknowledge that big changes should affect the rules that peoples around the world have to live under, I suggest that the best way to change the rules is to advise people of alternatives that show their current rules are obsolete. It’s a nonlinear way of thinking. But linear thinking has given us arguing, entrenched interests, gridlock, and partisan rancor. We need an army of optimistic disruptors.

HOW CAN YOU DISRUPT?

As another way of putting matters, the high priests of opt-out culture are the disruptors. There are all sorts of ways of making disruptive change—and, indeed, the phrase does get tossed around quite a bit. But most of the various senses of disruptive innovation that I’m aware of work for our purposes, and we have to remember that “exit” implies something new and better to “enter.”

The high priests of opt-out culture are the disruptors.

First there is Clayton Christensen’s original sense of a disruptive innovation. Christensen’s idea is that someone would create a product or service to supply an underserved or ignored market—very often the poor. For example, if a company makes high-end mobile devices, a disruptor could come along and create a less expensive, no-frills version. Netflix has been a disruptor when it comes to cable television. And in medical care, inexpensive, no-frills “Minute Clinics” started popping up for people who had easy-to-treat ailments and who very often paid out of pocket. (Why pay a doctor \$175 for an

Disruptive innovation is poised to challenge old ways in industries like education.

³<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h1Oe4EeFWAg>

office visit just to get a strep test?) Disruptive innovation is poised to challenge old ways in industries like education, too.

Then, of course, there is the sense offered by those unaware of Christensen, who are simply enamoured of innovations that emerge to replace large incumbents or entrenched interests. This, too, is a fine sense of disruption for our purposes.

Finally, there is the sense offered by James C. Scott in his complementary volumes *Seeing Like a State* and *Two Cheers for Anarchism*. I don't recall whether he actually uses the term disruption. But it would be perfectly apt, for his version is about fundamental social change in the face of entrenched power structures. In *Two Cheers for Anarchism*, Scott writes,

Acts of disobedience are of interest to us when they are exemplary, and especially when, as examples, they set off a chain reaction, prompting others to emulate them. Then we are in the presence less of an individual act of cowardice or conscience—perhaps both—than of a social phenomenon that can have massive political effects. Multiplied many thousandfold, such petty acts of refusal may, in the end, make an utter shambles of the plans dreamed up by generals and heads of state. Such petty acts of insubordination typically make no headlines. But just as millions of anthozoan polyps create, willy-nilly, a coral reef, so do thousands upon thousands of acts of insubordination and evasion create an economic or political barrier reef of their own.

All of us can be disruptors in any of these senses. But it requires doing more than jaw jaw. It requires inventing the future.

INVENTING THE FUTURE

What's all this about inventing the future? Well, by now you've heard of Satoshi Nakamoto, the pseudonym for the person or persons who gave the world bitcoin. Of course, we have no idea whether we'll be spending bitcoins like greenbacks in five years, but as of this writing it's not looking too bad. At some point Satoshi had to have a vision, then telescope in and out in the process of coming up with the bitcoin source code, all the while imagining a network

To invent the future, you not only have to be able to diagnose the problems you see around you but to imagine a world in which those problems have been solved.



that would link up with other networks in a fantastic and dizzying array of trades, exchanges, and payments.

So to invent the future, you not only have to be able to diagnose the problems you see around you but to imagine a world in which those problems have been solved. Then, perhaps you have to reverse engineer the solution—back from the wonderful future scenario to the steps it takes to get back to the future via all the persistence, patience, and ingenuity required in the now.

Not everyone can invent the future—at least not in the Menlo Park sense. Some of us are good at imagining the future and letting others work at developing it. Others of us are great at implementing, but we need to hitch our work wagons to a visionary. And all of that's all right. But as Nike ads say, we have to “just do it.”

ALERTNESS, CREATIVITY, AND KNOWING YOUR TYPE

What are the qualities of those who would participate in inventing the future?

First, we need the creatives. These are the folks who see the world not as it is, but as it could be. They're the visionaries whose disposition is to iterate in their minds, combining and recombining elements of the world to create new things with new uses. They're the dreamers, the “crazy” ones. And a movement rooted in the idea of maximizing human flourishing needs these dreamers.

A movement rooted in the idea of maximizing human flourishing needs these dreamers.

Then you have the “alert” entrepreneurs. Israel Kirzner thought this special sort of person could position himself in the real world and engage in a kind of discovery process. This process involved alertness to opportunities for simple arbitrage or sharing the visions of the creatives and realizing them through putting resources, capital, and people together in such a way that could make the world a better place. And again, a movement rooted in the idea of maximizing human flourishing needs these go-getters.

Now, not everyone is going to be a visionary or an entrepreneur, though these folks will certainly lead the way. Massive-scale collaboration means there will be a place for all sorts of people with all sorts of talents, abilities, and levels of contribution. If you believe Bijoy Goswami and Malcolm Gladwell, pretty much everyone under the sun falls into one

of three categories—that is, in terms of how they relate to others.

- **Maven** (ideas): Motivated to gather knowledge and share important ideas.
- **Connector** (people): Motivated to create and maintain relationships between/among people.
- **Evangelist** (persuasion): Motivated to persuade others and/or get others onboard.

So which type are you? Each one of these is important to the unfolding of a movement, and combined they can be unstoppable. Once you've discovered your type—and perhaps your secondary streak (for example, Maven/Evangelist)—you can seek out others who complement your type. Then you can really get busy.

THE RED QUEEN

Sometimes movement building can seem like a rather long and arduous process. Indeed, sometimes it seems like there are people out there—quicker, more talented, and better funded—who, once we've taken our movement forward a step, are prepared to push us right back where we started. Or, as Lewis Carroll's Red Queen said, "Now, here, you see, it takes all the running you can do, to keep in the same place."

And that is why, once we put flourishing first, we should never, ever think of there being a stopping point. There will be no day of victory. No point in time that we can dust off our hands and call it done. There is only the process of seeking, striving, and finding flow in everything we do. We are working for the future, to bequeath a great inheritance to people we may never meet.

Once we put
flourishing first, we
should never, ever
think of there being
a stopping point.

THE POINT OF THE JOURNEY

The point of the journey
is not the destination. It
is the journey itself.

So the point of the journey is not the destination. It is the journey itself. The paradox of building a movement is that you're working for something bigger than yourself — but enjoying yourself at every step along



the way. Despite how rather collectivist this sounds, the rewards of working for this—for posterity, for our kids, for those around us—lie in our DNA, to be unlocked when we do it. We'll flourish more and more as we go along, enjoy moment by moment a spring whose seeds are being planted right here, right now.

Consider a passage Jeffrey Tucker and I wrote together:

Now that you see the machinery in operation, step back for a moment. Imagine that the world spinning through time has been like an onion. Over the years human beings have wrapped layers of progress around our blue orb. First it was the Stone Age, then the Agricultural Age, then the Industrial Age, then the Commercial Age. Now we live in the Connected Age.

In this most recent era, a lot of interesting stuff is starting to happen—the most interesting of which is the increasing obsolescence of the State. ... Our knowledge is crowdsourced, and we never stop learning from each other. We are integrated as in one global, self-ordering city. A few people are starting to see that the circumstances of birth and culture are contingent and the lines are blurring. National boundaries are less tied to the people within them.

The cost of connecting with other like-minded people is going down. Each of us in our private spheres of activity can get on with the business of interacting without the need for terra firma or permission. It's as if we're creating communities in the sky and commerce in the ether. It's nobody's business because millions of us simply make it so. It's the ultimate form of democracy.

Our job is not to sit back and watch the show.

A self-fulfilling prophecy is only as good as those who believe in it

Our job is not to sit back and watch the show. Our job is to hasten the transition.

You see, there's a sense in which all of this is inevitable. But as active participants, we can help to shape the unfolding. And a self-fulfilling prophecy is only as good as those who believe in it. That means it's not going to be easy. Nor is it

going to happen in a flash. As you and I develop, reconfiguring our thinking around a new

age of connection, freedom, and radical community, we will have to maintain our eternal vigilance. Those who crave control find ways to insert themselves between us as we pursue what the great Leonard Read called “anything that’s peaceful.”

But they won’t prevail. There may be setbacks in the near term. Eventually, everyone will start to enjoy the benefits of flourishing. They will find their own voices and opportunities for exit. And the whole idea of utopia built on coercion will turn upside down and inside out as free people create a thousand parallel utopias in peace, freedom, and global connection.



MAX BORDERS

Max Borders is editor of the *Freeman* and co-founder of Voice & Exit. He is also author of *Superwealth: Why We Should Stop Worrying about the Gap between Rich and Poor*. A writer and innovator with a decade of experience in the non-profit world, Max works daily towards a condition of peace, freedom and abundance for all people.