

# IT'S TIME

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by Joe Smerkers

There is an awakening occurring throughout the world. There is a revolution brewing. One by one people from all walks of life are reclaiming their lives. Reclaiming their freedom.

Long ago as children we found our world a different place. Ours was a world of hopes and dreams and balance. All things were thought possible.

But on this Labor Day of 1996 we must face the harsh reality that the lives of many hard working men and women of good character have not played out the story envisioned so many years ago.

We followed in the footsteps of our parents who told us to work hard, get a good education, and be loyal. We gave of ourselves only to become a commodity item, acquired and disposed of at the whim of the business cycle.

We brought new ideas and energies to our jobs only to find that entrenched bureaucracies and misguided policies sapped our spirit and our resolve.

We have been change agents and champions, coaches and influencers, drivers and facilitators only to find dysfunctional cultures intact.

We worked longer, pushed harder, and put into practice the best that our teachers and mentors could give - only to discover that we improved everything but our lives.

We listened and learned and did what was expected. Losing in turn our sense of oneself. Losing in turn our hopes and dreams.

Losing in turn our freedom.

But, there is an awakening occurring throughout the world. There is a revolution brewing. There is an army forming. An army of leaders who still believe in Camelot and windmills and dreams.

An army who believes we can prosper - and make the world a better place. An army who believes we can create and build businesses -

and operate with integrity. An army who believes we can compete and win - and maintain balance in our lives. An army who believes we can transform institutions and communities - and act in the common good. An army who believes we can achieve our full potential - without sacrificing our souls. An army who believes all things are possible if we dream the impossible and engage every spirit.

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Listen so ever carefully and you can hear the quiet voices asking: Why Not?

Listen and you can hear the shackles of fear and coercion being cast aside, releasing once again the fullness of our human possibilities.

Listen and you can hear the faint sounds of a springtime renewal. A renewal of values and hope misplaced during a long winter's despair.

Listen and you can hear the sharing of strength, the reenergizing of forgotten goals.

Listen and you can hear the voices of two growing to voices of many, joining in community to make the impossible possible.

Listen and you can hear the awakening. Listen and you can hear the army forming, the revolution brewing. Listen and you can hear the sound of freedom.

Ours is an army of leaders - empowered by faith, nourished by deed, measured by difference, challenged by destiny, paid by self-worth.

Ours is an army united in purpose - to leave a legacy of difference, to transform ourselves, our institutions and our communities, and create a better world in which to live and work.

To our friends who may ask, what is the bottom line, let me be clear. We march not to improve it but to redefine how it's measured. We march not to improve the quality of products but to transform the quality of the human condition. We march not to rework tired

old methods but to reframe the debate. We march not to counsel but to demonstrate a way.

The time for action is at hand. It's time to step forward and take back our work areas and our schools; our communities and our nation. In the words of a friend, we do not want to turn dictators into benevolent despots. What we want is our freedom.

Many of you, I know, are fighting the good fight. My respect for you - for the obligations and responsibilities you carry - has only increased as I have journeyed forward. Time and resources are scarce, and the quest for meaningful change and balance has left some battered and weak. And in truth our journey to freedom is long.

So I ask you now to look around at your workplace, your community, and your family. Look inward and ask: Is this all there can be? Is this the sum purpose of being?

When our children's children look upon us - as they will - will they see a generation imprisoned by fear, held hostage to circumstance, handcuffed by status?

Or will they see a generation of leaders who bequeathed to their children a legacy of hope and difference?

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So let us go forth as one in community. Let us find purpose outside of our Self. Let us be symbols and models and carry our message of hope in words and deeds. Let us find fortune in the service of others. Let us take risks in the faith of our convictions.

And lest we forget let us be mindful that failure forever beckons us to its door. We ask for strength - each in our way - to put aside distrust and welcome all to our journey. We ask for faith so in the heat of our struggle we hold our values steadfast. And we ask for the courage to not abandon our goals for token gifts of good fortune.

Ours is a vision of hope inspired by those who have gone before and nurtured by those that journey among us. Ours is a vision propelled on the winds of aspirations and

dreams. Ours is a vision rooted in confidence that all things are possible if we choose to dream the impossible. And, ours is a vision grounded in the reality that what we have is not worthy of our best efforts.

I say to you now that I still believe in Camelot and windmills and dreams.

I believe that one day in every corner of the world a multitude will rise up and with many voices sing out with hope for the future.

I believe that one day in our factories and our villages, in our homes and our offices the limiting bonds of coercion and manipulation will be gone and we will be free to achieve our potential.

I believe that one day men and women of reputation and character will feel safe to stand tall - naked in front of the world clothed only in the truth of their message and substance of character.

I believe that one day people will put aside their prejudices, and their anger and their self-purpose and join together in common and just cause.

I believe that one day our national and institutional leaders will let go of politicized ends to engage in shared and substantive purpose.

I believe that one day men and women of power will come together as equals and in every seat find a leader of character, vision and purpose.

These are my hopes that I share with you today - hopes based on faith that our freedom is but one step away.

Listen and you can hear the sounds of endings. Listen and you can hear the sounds of new beginnings. Listen and you can hear the sounds of ego leaving. Listen and you can hear the sounds of faith rekindled. Listen and you can hear the sounds of integrity flowering. Listen and you can hear the sounds of ideas flourishing. Listen and you can hear the sounds of productivity exploding.

Listen and you can hear the sounds of leadership.