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Cartoon: Arcadio Esquivel

**OK, we get it! But are we being effective?**  
**– The Qualicum Institute Node is calling for leadership**  
**Directors of The Qualicum Institute**

MAHB has joined the ranks of the environmental movement, which, for over 50 years has been hard at work telling us that the global environment is a mess. We get it! The trouble is that even a glance in the rear-view mirror reveals a natural world increasingly spoiled by humans with societal collapse now a very real possibility. We need a new approach and are convinced that the leaders of MAHB have the expertise, resources, and contacts needed to replace our old methods with revolutionary actions.

This revolutionary approach should be about selling not telling. It is time for a widespread marketing campaign to sell the fact that the only viable way forward is towards a steady state economy where humanity strives to live within ecosystem limits. This means selling carrying capacity and selling the concept that quality of life cannot be hitched to never ending growth and our relentless consumption of nature's bounty.

The MAHB has contributed by describing the “problem”; however, more descriptions are not what’s needed. We need a consistent, compelling vision of a different path and we need leadership that helps to inspire action in order to get us there. The various Nodes and Associates could be a part of that vision delivering the identical, core message at the grass roots level.

The problem is with the “we”—the “we who get it.” “We” are too small, too limited and too easily marginalized and ignored. “We”, the scientists, environmentalists, and concerned citizens who get it, do not make political policy, policy that is currently in a well rutted track on the road to more economic growth. Even with help from MAHB, individual Nodes and Associates will never be able to effect change at the scale that is required if MAHB continues to restrict itself to a supporting role, to a role of simply telling the story. There is real opportunity for MAHB leadership to sell the story on a grand scale in order to build a groundswell of people demanding from the polity, policies that will ensure a future for ourselves, our children, and our grandchildren.

An organization taking on a challenge of this magnitude will face a daunting task. It will need to develop a long-range plan of attack. It will need to include a diversity of people with skills in

communication and marketing techniques capable of reaching a broad audience. It will need high profile people with a level of credibility able to withstand unrelenting scrutiny. It will need a reliable source of funding capable of maintaining an effective ongoing campaign.

“We” understand that winning public support is crucial because the policy makers are not prepared to initiate action without that support. Past experience has revealed a key insight not previously recognized: a growing realization that the “problem” is a human one more than a scientific one. Although scientific evidence is an essential ingredient, it is often overpowered by human emotion when the information is unwelcome. It is easy for passion and ideology to trump reason.

A recent MAHB blog entitled *Time for a New Environmentalism* by Erik Assadourian and an article in *Nature*, *Bridging the Science-to-Society Gap* by Tony Barnosky et al., are examples of the kind of thinking that is needed to begin to deal with the major challenge confronting environmentalists today. That is, how to translate the message from science into meaningful public policy.

There have been many mass movements organized throughout history that may inspire ways we can undertake this challenge. The missionary religious movements mentioned by Assadourian and some of history's great revolutions might provide some inspiration. More recently, the no smoking revolution, backed by strong science, garnered a critical mass of people sufficient to force the polity to enact policy for the benefit of all. What were their effective means and how might we apply them to our task?

Aspects of the documentary series, *Years of Living Dangerously*, produced by James Cameron, may be worth emulating. For example, Cameron employs famous actors as correspondents, people such as Matt Damon and Harrison Ford, who are used to selling a story each time they appear on-screen. People who, for whatever reason, are listened to by the masses.

Likewise there are numerous currently active organizations that could be emulated or even recruited into this project. Bill McKibben's 350.org is one group that is doing great work to get this message out. The Democrats' grass roots movement Organizing for Action (OFA), is another currently active group that might be emulated or even be a candidate at some point to help carry the environmental message. Another group, Bold Nebraska, led by Jane Kleeb is having some success in opposing the Keystone Pipeline, joining both liberals and conservatives in a common cause. They offer inspiring stories of how grass roots groups can gain political influence. Imagine the effect if they and “we” were repeatedly delivering the same message.

MAHB can become a leader in the formation and recruitment of such groups to take up public-based action to gain public support for policy changes. This is no small task!

The MAHB, it's leaders, Nodes and Associates are well positioned to become a catalyst for political activism. It is time for “us all” to become agents for change, for the sake of humanity. Continuing as we have over the past 50-years will, at best, lead us to where we are today with a continuing decline in the life support systems of the planet. We need a revolutionary change in “our” behaviour; nothing less will suffice.

*The Qualicum Institute ([qualicuminstitute.ca](http://qualicuminstitute.ca)) is a society for ecological, social, and economic sustainability. We work to help establish sustainable Vancouver Island communities. We believe that healthy, just, and economically stable communities, that live within the limits of the biosphere, can provide a high quality of life for us all.*

*MAHB-UTS Blogs are a joint venture between the University of Technology Sydney and the Millennium Alliance for Humanity and the Biosphere. Questions should be directed to [joan@mahbonline.org](mailto:joan@mahbonline.org)*

MAHB Blog: <http://mahb.stanford.edu/blog/are-we-being-effective/>