



The Economy Survey:
 ChangeThis
 Readers Respond

In November of last year, we sent out a survey to gauge the mood of ChangeThis readers and see if you could help provide some solutions and encouragement for ourselves and each other. After many months of immense change, both in the country as a whole and within our small company, we have finally finished sifting through those responses.

We made the following three inquiries: “In one word, sum up how you feel right now;” “How is this affecting you?” and; “What are you choosing to do about it?” The 1400 replies we received to this survey are further proof, beyond the intuitive, that work is life and that the personal is the professional. Some people used creative metaphors to express their situations. Others used humor. Some enumerated their action plan. Some ranted. Some marveled. Some refused to accept a doom and gloom outlook and endeavored to see the possibilities that come with change. There are some trends, of course, and there were ample frustrations—with capitalism and ageism, with excess and politics.

The cover of this manifesto is a word cloud of the most common responses to that first inquiry, “How do you feel right now?” and each paragraph hereafter is a different individual’s response to the third question, “What are you choosing to do about it?”

So, read on, dear readers, read on... to commiserate, to raise your spirits, to hope, to cry, to worry some more and unburden yourself. Read on.

These are *your* answers.

Leaders and businesses can no longer survive in cruise control mode...

“I work for Gallup and our daily pulse poll (gallup.com) shows that 60% of people have a ‘poor’ view on the economy and 75% believe it is ‘getting worse’. I plan to share with leaders what people are thinking and feeling and help them see the tremendous opportunity to create the future for people. **I believe the current status of the economy is bringing a healthy gut check for consumers.** This creates a need for them to ‘wake up’ and engage in helping create global change. Leaders and businesses can no longer survive in cruise control mode, and must focus on helping them emotionally engage their employees and customers.”

“Trying to influence my clients and those around me to acknowledge the reality of emotions that are associated with these tough times ... and to be courageous and lead—**lead as an executive, as a manager, peer, front-line employee, as a mother, father, son, brother, sister, and to be strong while not denying emotions.**”

“We have not changed our lifestyle dramatically, though we have always lived below our means. Money that we might have invested previously we are now using to upgrade our house, which seems to make more sense than putting it into a stock market where fundamentals seem to no longer matter. While we have always been net savers and that will not change, it is clear that my wife and **I will have to work well beyond normal retirement age now to ensure anything like a comparable standard of living** to what we enjoy now.”

“**I’m choosing to use this as an opportunity to reevaluate what I want, who I am, and how I am going to approach the next year.** Times are tough, and I’m going to keep trying to take a practice pursuit of things interesting.”

“We are recruiting heavily. **I plan to double my team strength over the next 3-4 months.** We are also winning newer clients who are buying into understanding the need to pay more for value added services which they do not need to carry on their books as a fixed cost.”

“I am saving more and contributing larger amounts to accounts I have earmarked for retirement. I have a garden to supply my family with vegetables and berries (to cut down on the high cost of healthy food). I am slowly selling those possessions that I no longer need (to convert clutter to cash). I have requested that I no longer receive advertising by mail and immediately discard catalogs that I have not ordered (to avoid buying things I don't need). My husband has been carpooling for over a year and I take my bike to do local errands. I am trying to educate my husband's children about how to do more with less. But come what may, **I will still try to contribute to the causes I support,** perhaps by volunteering instead of sending a check.”

“When you squeeze an orange, you get the sweet juice. **The changing economy is squeezing me into becoming aware of what's most important to me.** It is helping me move from a financial-success-oriented mindset to a more balanced principles-centered, authentic & happy way of living.”

“Same as '87 and '97. Trim the fat and go into hibernate mode. We will be looking for work that can sustain a smaller and harder working enterprise. No doubt we will eat into our reserves but we will control the burn rate to an acceptable level. As per '87 and '97, there will be lots of work available but less money to pay for them. So, downsize to the 'core' (with pay cuts) and out-source as much as possible. **And, when we surface on the other side, we will reward the employees for their loyalty, belief and patience.**”

“Gads, I can't compete with 17-year old kids doing web design. I can't program anything in Ajax. When I apply for a job, all goes well until the interview. No one wants an older guy any more. It doesn't matter that I used to be senior vice-president and director of a joint-venture company, there's no call for that anymore. **What am I going to do? I don't know.** I don't know.”

“I’m spending more time talking and planning finances with my family. I’m using it as an opportunity to teach my kids about money and responsibility. We are going to implement budgets for all family members. As for our investments, I’m not focusing on them, just letting some time pass and let things shake out a little more before we consider adjusting our strategy. As for work, I’m ever more grateful to be employed. I make sure to acknowledge my boss and the many things he does to support me more often. I take more time to ensure that customers get the service and support they deserve. I wished on a shooting star the other night for an expedient end to these uncertain economic times. **HOPE. CHANGE. RESPONSIBILITY.**”

“As the President/owner of a mid-sized business, I am choosing to hold on to our cash. This year for the first time in a long time, we will not share profits or shareholder dividends—even though we’ve made a profit. The good news is that we have a profit, but we’re definitely down from last year. I feel like I am doing the same thing on a personal level. Holding on to cash. And holding my breath. As a high growth, innovative company, new business in terms of incoming calls are still very strong, but no one is pulling the trigger. **Everyone is trying to keep going as if it is business as usual, but on some gut level I know it’s not.** My searching thoughts have turned to ‘how can we take advantage and adapt’ to this newfound world we are facing. What services can we offer or how can we spin them to make them relevant in TOUGH times?”

“For right now, drink.”

“Fight! There is a ton of opportunity out there for people who refuse to get beaten down. **Having the right mind set is critical.** We got so much going for us and I refuse to see the glass as half empty...”

“I am brainstorming about how I can collaborate more, how I can centralize my passions and skills and **band together with others to co-create sustainable services and products** which are in harmony with nature, human principles, and which are cost effective and efficient... what I have been doing for a while yet with more focus and commitment than ever before.”

“I am choosing to live in a way that makes a lasting, sustainable impact to the world at large. I don’t succeed every day. **It is a constant and hard conversation I have with myself.** What I choose to do is slow down and think and take kinder action: kinder action to my neighbor, to my family, to my community, to myself. I bought a mug to fill my coffee. I gave up plastic bags. I cut back on my cell phone plan and rely more on the liberty of the Internet to connect. I chat more with neighbors. These are a few of the ridiculously trivial ways I am choosing to handle the current state of affairs. These choices are selfish. They are about my need to create a better world for myself. I desire to live in a world with less material satisfaction, that is more thoughtful and more compassionate. I desire tolerance. I desire deeper more meaningful connections in business. The only answer I have is to emulate the wisdom of far greater spiritual leaders and strive to be that change. While I fail many times, I gain peace in growing.”

Now is the time to add an entrepreneurial bow to my arrow, working evening and weekends to create an additional career...

“I was born to a farming family and learned as a child that, when there are droughts, you tighten your belt. You spend less. You find new and additional ways to create income. **Now is the time to add an entrepreneurial bow to my arrow;** working evenings and weekends to create an additional career that can either supplement or replace my corporate career, should things go wrong there.”

“I’m making the choice to take steps to increase my profile and personal brand. While I’m relatively secure in my position, **I’m reconnecting with a number of relationships across my network.** I’m making the choice to improve my personal financial position and make do with less. I’m making the choice to stay positive and consider what kinds of innovation make sense for me and my company during this recession that will set us up for success in 2009 and beyond.”

“I am choosing to remain positive and optimistic about the future economy—we have been in down turns before and the resilience of the people of this country found ways to get us back on track. The difference is that we need to find a new track this time. I am actively working on my business plan to get transformational leadership training off the ground. **The difference now is that rather than focus on what the business can do to enrich me, I am looking at what the business can do to help heal the planet and it’s people.** I am replacing the traditional capitalistic model with a more socially conscious model. I am also writing to my Senators and Congressmen to implore them to demand accountability from those who receive loans and bailouts and to help those at the bottom rather than the top.”

“This crisis has truly been a wake-up call. I no longer take my ordinary middle class lifestyle for granted. I am choosing to make a spending priority list, which is essentially no-frills. I am choosing to discipline myself to stick to the above list. I am saving, rather than spending, to make up for the loss of my retirement funds from the recent debacle. I am paying off debt as rapidly as possible. **I am finding fun in simple pleasures.**”

“I am choosing to be a little more thorough in my planning, and a little more demanding of those who would perform a service for me. I still intend to create the product offering I envisioned a year ago, but must take into account a diminished lending environment, and the increased necessity for thoroughness in my preparations and delivery. **But, there’s more time for practicing and preparing.**”

“I am choosing to take a positive perspective. I trust that if I exercise my talents and continue making my unique contribution to the world, then I will have more than enough resources at my disposal. My concern is that we, as a society, come to value people, planet and profit equally, rather than weighting one over the others. **The future of our economy depends on small business owners becoming the best versions of themselves and working together instead of competing with one another.** I believe this will form a foundation of ‘virtual’ corporations replacing the profit-driven, Titanic, industrial-sized, modern entity in which our trust is eroding.”

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“There is nothing I can do. **I control my spending and always have, and as a result I’m getting screwed.** I feel like I’m getting screwed because I have always been thrifty and lived well within my means, and now I see people who have not done that benefiting from extended credit, forgiveness of loans and interest, and other things that I am not able to partake in simply because I did the right thing.”

“We are refining our competitive position, including adding new products and services, and adjusting prices (upward!) where possible. We are increasing marketing through our network of clients and referrers. **We are sharing more financial performance data with our staff so that they are aware of our position and how they contribute to our financial performance.** For the first time (!) we have articulated a performance (billing) goal for every staff member. We are trying harder to pay down revolving debt.”

“**Suck it up. Ride it out.**”

“If I can stay away from the depressing media, I find myself looking for opportunities that arise when the all the cards, once in a neat little deck, have been thrown up in the air. **Although it can be painful, it gives one an opportunity to take stock in one’s life up to this point.** To reconsider having one’s work actually MEAN something. A reminder that your life can become better if you make others’ lives better. Sounds a little ‘Peace Core-y’ I know. But what the heck, I’m child of the 60’s where we worked to be ‘part of the solution, not the problem.’”

“Take an even closer look at ‘elective’ spending; recycle more; conserve more; **most importantly, not panic.**”

“I am choosing to see this slowdown as temporary. I am choosing to see this as an opportunity for real change. Sometimes you have to hit bottom to be able to see how you got into a mess and choose another way to get out of it. I’m applying this personal growth change-curve principle to our systems-wide growth change-curve. I am listening to whomever I have on the phone, trying to see how I can help them, and asking for who I can talk to in the company who might be interested in systems development. I am examining my own fears and working to heal them and really leaning into my spiritual practices. **When it gets too hard, I take a break—enjoy nature and reconnect—then get back on track.**”

“Build alternative revenue streams, expand my skills and minimize my costs. I think this round of the straight, clean career path for the chosen is over, or at least available for much fewer. I’ve had success solving problems for people in the past. **I believe that over time, the pressures of a ‘screwed up’ economy will drive focus more to results and less to optics.** Long term that’s good for me. Short term, it’s hunker down time as the trendistas look for a next wave to save them. An example is the US auto industry, which has been structurally unsustainable for at least 30 years. Now we’re going to ‘save it.’ Nonsense. There’s plenty of business out there making and servicing vehicles people want, for people willing to be paid what the work is worth.”

There’s no longer time for
waiting, thinking,
reconsidering.
Just doing one’s things.

“Now it’s really time to make decisions and to go straightforward! **There’s no longer time for waiting, thinking, reconsidering. Just for doing one’s things.** And stop reading newspapers/ listening to the same old stories of an old, dying economy”

“Refocusing on my core business, which is to develop new companies with new products for an new/next/ open/blue ocean markets and targeting new/very anxious consumers. **It’s time to create a new kind of heart-driven economy: Business 3.0.**”

“I am going to hone my skills and build my portfolio while maintaining low profile. **In about two years I think the economy will hit the bottom, and that is when I'll start reaching out for different but risky activities.** I will also pay less attention to financial news since they are going to jump at me no matter what, and instead focus on my family's mental, physical, and financial well-being. From now on I will pay for stuff and services with cash, not relying on loans. The sub-prime loan crisis gave me a permanent doubt toward borrowing my future. Otherwise, life goes on.”

“I am choosing to remain a one-person source of energy. In these trying times, most of my clients are happy to find someone upbeat who can steer them to positive avenues of growth. Because we are on the verge of a new surge in business, despite the media and politicians' gloom, **I have decided to invest in my own creative ideas, as well as the stock and real estate bargains that are available almost everywhere.** When people give up hope, they lose their creativity and drive, so I am making a concerted effort to expand my creative ideas and drive myself to develop them into useful products, services and concepts. I need to take ACTION, ACTION, and ACTION. No, I'm not a positive mental attitude disciple. I simply feel that there is a tremendous amount of opportunity in this country for anyone willing to think creatively and work intensely to develop promising ideas into reality.”

“We are forging ahead with confidence and optimism. Our business is growing and 2008 has been our best year in our eight-year history. A 13-person marketing/design firm, we have rented office space for the past 8 years; we plan to purchase and renovate a building in 2009. **It's a great time to buy, assuming we can obtain the financing.** From a business development perspective, we plan to maintain our marketing campaign and intensify our sales push with the intention of separating ourselves from our competitors who are likely pulling back on such activities.”

“In a nutshell: 1) Sticking with my day job because it is with a very stable organization that provides a decent safety net, even though it is not exactly what I want to do forever. 2) **Keeping in place those plans that will allow me to become more self-secure and entrepreneurial when the opportunity presents itself.**”

“Slow down. Look more; and leisurely. Breath more slowly, deeply and delightedly. Move more; notice more; talk slower; smile more. **Shut off TV—especially the news and financial channels.** Smile foolishly when people become too serious(-ly negative) about the economy and self-convincing with brilliant reasoning—as if i am listening to a knotty fiction. :) See where people are not seeing, or running away from. Go against the ‘herd.’”

“First, I am trying to remember to be grateful for the job and paycheck that I have. Feeling grateful feels more positive than listening to all the bad news and then creating my own anxieties about the economy and worrying about losing my job. Second, **I’ve really stepped up my game at work and it feels great.** The overall goal is to be seen as too valuable to let go if there are layoffs. Finally, I am helping my family realize you don’t have to spend money to have fun. For example, rather than going to the movies last weekend, we went on hike in the woods at a metro park. We packed a snack and had a picnic. Plus we had more fun than going to the movies.”

“I’m using my intuition and my nerve to make bolder decisions. Nothing previous applies to what we are facing. This is a bold new time to try out fresh ideas that would have been unconventional and risky six months ago, but what do we have to lose? **Traditional methodologies won’t apply.** I’m shedding my physical surroundings (office lease, 9-5 presence) to function in a 24/7 virtual model where I connect and communicate with clients, etc. via the Internet.”

“I see the current economic so-called “crises” as very teachable moments that may actually be blessings in disguise. I am trying to find ways to help quickly spread hopeful ideas for changes we can all start implementing right now to respond to the realization that much of our culture has been pushing us to behave unsustainably. **We need to strengthen our ability for local/regional self-reliance in as many areas of our society as we can.** This means rethinking, revitalizing, and relocalizing as much as possible our systems of food production/distribution/consumption, economics/trade, education/trade skill guilds, health care, housing, transportation, and even community building and governance. We have to cut out economic drains that siphon money out of our local economies.”

“The world will do what the world will do. It’s how our company and our employees choose to see it. We can react in essentially two ways. The first choice is rather dreary. Cut the marketing budget and hold on to the pennies we have. The second choice is a little scarier but certainly more exciting. **Look for ways to expand and offer our customers more value (they are suffering too).** It’s easier to be afraid but it’s certainly more fun to be excited.”

“Go beat this crisis by working harder, smarter, and focusing ever more on the core of our business. **I keep on remembering that every crisis is also an opportunity.**”

“I see the current economic atmosphere as an opportunity. When people sense that things aren’t going well, they take a close look at what they’ve been doing, and then they look for new ways to do what they were doing before, only with less risk. One word in that statement points to the reason why I’m hopeful—‘look.’ When times are good, people get caught up in their daily lives; they go on ‘automatic,’ which doesn’t make them receptive to new people, new ideas, or new vendors. It’s hard to get them to ‘look’ at what you have to offer. **I sense that in today’s climate people are more willing to shed old ways of doing things and consider something new—if, and only if, it holds a promise to save them money or garner a better result.** It’s the uptick of the ‘fight or flight’ response to fear. If they choose to fight, I might be able to sell them a better weapon. If they choose to flea, they might run to what I can offer.”

“I am choosing to remain positive and optimistic about the future; I am choosing to focus on what is important to me and build my strengths and capability in those areas; I am choosing to trust in my instincts that things will always work out for the best; I am choosing to associate with those who share a positive and optimistic outlook; I am choosing to make the world a better place through my efforts and passion; I am choosing to influence the world view that the state of the economy is inextricably linked to our individual and collective happiness; **I am choosing to live.**”

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

The ChangeThis community is worldwide and, as you have read in these pages, committed to effecting change in their lives and in the world. There are approximately 30,000 active subscribers to ChangeThis and between 50,000 and 90,000 PDFs are downloaded each month. If you're interested in contributing to the site, go to <http://www.changethis.com/submit> or contact Dylan Schleicher at dylan@800ceoread.com.

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BORN ON DATE

This document was created on March 4, 2009 and is based on the best information available at that time.

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