



March 28, 2023

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By Marcy Franck

## Happy National Optimism Month!

Welcome to the most delightful national observance that no one has ever heard of. Say what you will about its lack of ribbon or parade, but you've got to admire the way it believes in itself enough to reckon it'll catch on one day. Simply by existing, it proves its own point.

You might even call it stubborn, how it shows up year after year hoping to become more than a hashtag that pauses nary a doomscroller's thumb. But "stubborn optimism" is a climate optimist's favorite flavor.

It appears in the title of a [book](#) co-authored by Christiana Figueres, who led international climate negotiations after discussions totally, devastatingly collapsed at the UN's annual climate conference in 2009. Back then, no one—not even herself!—thought an agreement was possible. But six years later, at the very same conference, 196 countries signed the Paris Agreement, committing to limit global warming to 1.5°C.

What changed? She realized that "[Impossible isn't a fact, it's an attitude](#)" and that she needed to change the world's attitude, too. Guess what she did on her first day as the UN's Official Person in Charge of Saving the World? She panicked. But then she persisted, world leaders pulled together, and now we have an internationally shared goal for our future.

None of us is charged with saving the whole planet (way to be an overachiever, *Christiana*), but we do have the responsibility to "work carefully and patiently on your one piece," as she says. Finding that piece, and the mindset to pursue it, feels like a great way to celebrate National Optimism Month, the little holiday that could.

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## Jedi mind tricks for climate optimism

### ***These are not the excuses you've been looking for.***

You can [learn optimism](#) by challenging thoughts that don't serve you. Let's take a page from Ms. Figueres' book (p.43, actually) for strategies to challenge our thoughts about climate change.

#### **When your mind tells you:**

- **It's too late**, remember every fraction of a degree we prevent makes a difference.
- **It's too depressing**, remember that tackling huge challenges can be thrilling, and can give your life meaning and connection.



- **We can't fix a broken political system**, remember throughout history people have overcome incredible odds to achieve transformative change.
- **You are too small to make a difference**, remember that systems do shift and all small actions make a contribution.

## Sidebar from a catastrophic thinker

### *When stubborn optimism isn't enough.*

I was thrilled to chat with [The Optimism Institute's Blue Sky Podcast](#), but I was nervous about one question I knew they'd ask: Where does my own optimism come from? The thing is:



That's me, standing on a case of Y2K survival guides.

- **I'm spectacularly good at catastrophic thinking** (I gave all my friends Y2K survival guides, for example) and it feels vulnerable to admit it. But I'm not the only one, so [I was honest](#) in my answer.
- **I can be optimistic** by separating rational fears from irrational fears.
- **It's rational to fear** the climate impacts that are here to stay; it's irrational to assume the whole planet will become unlivable.
- **I also focus on the [quadfecta](#) of climate hope** working in our favor—the U.S. finally has the solutions, public support, political will, and funding to tackle climate head-on.
- **Then I plug away at my one small piece** (you're reading it) and just keep swimming.

You can listen to our [whole conversation here](#), or just the bits about [why our Center focuses on optimism](#), [how forces bigger than us](#) try to convince us we're doomed, or some thoughts on [teaching climate optimism](#) in the classroom.

## Optimism without action is just a bandaid

### *It might make you feel better but it won't solve the problem.*

Enter the “changeable optimists,” who believe in a better future but know it'll take some elbow grease. They're the heroes in [“We need the right kind of climate optimism,”](#) a tough-love pep talk about our future.

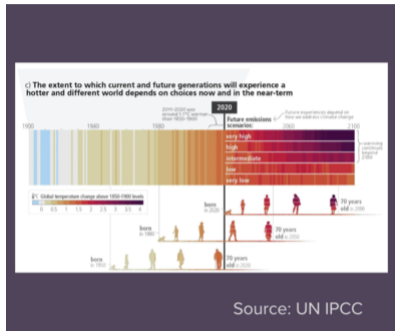
### **Highlights:**



- **People who think** the future is changeable believe they have power to mold it, so they do.
- **Being optimistic** but dissatisfied is the road to progress.
- **Scaring people** into action doesn't work.
- **Complacent optimism** is as dangerous as pessimism.



- **Speaking of elbow grease:** Our Director Dr. Aaron Bernstein has the greasiest elbows we've ever seen. On May 21, he'll join the CDC to become the nation's highest-ranking public health official focused on environmental health. In this exciting new role, he'll bring his expertise and passion for protecting communities to the American people. Our loss is America's gain! Watch [this space](#) for a job posting for our new director.



- **Changeable optimists believe “the future can be shaped by decisions we make today.”** Case in point: The UN created a [must-see graphic](#) that depicts how “The extent to which current and future generations will experience a hotter and different world depends on choices now.” We should tuck it into the picture frame of any child we love.

## Progress always feels impossible until it becomes reality

*And opportunities to help are everywhere.*



- **We've talked a lot about our new climate laws in this newsletter:** We've called them [a BFD](#) and we've called them [sexy](#). We could butter their butts and call them biscuits, but they remain America's biggest-ever investment in climate action.

- **Because of them, America's power grid** is projected to generate [80-90%](#) of its electricity from clean sources by 2030, and projects funded by these laws are breaking ground in [every state](#).



- **But did you know that nearly every application for funding** came from “a champion who, frankly, just browbeat cities and states into doing a project”? According to Jigar Shah from the DOE, [champions are rarely elected officials](#); they are people like you and me.

- **Similarly, he said it's not superintendents who've been championing grants** to replace dirty diesel buses through EPA's [Clean School Bus Program](#). Almost all champions are parents who don't want their kids to breathe toxic fumes at school.

- **So, who's ready** to become a champion? [Learn how](#)

## News you can use

**If you are sidelined in environmental conversations,** the gritty optimism of [Black Girl Environmentalist](#), led by two of our [Climate Creators to Watch](#), empowers Black girls, women, and non-binary folks by increasing inclusion and representation and by highlighting how the pursuit of racial and climate justice is [deeply connected](#).

**We're thrilled that Zahra Biabani,** another one of our Climate Creators to Watch, will release her book [“Climate Optimism, Celebrating Systemic Change Around the World”](#) on April 11. It explores climate actions, why they matter, and how you can get involved.

**Mark your calendars for Harvard Climate Action Week May 8-12:** This week will bring together thousands of leaders from government, business, civil society, and academia to work together on climate solutions. [Explore events here](#)

P.S. If you're not in the mood for optimism...



...and reading this issue makes you feel like a Goth in an un-gothly place, then check out our issue on hope instead.



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**Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health**

401 Park Drive 4th Fl. West, Suite 415

Boston, MA 02215

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