

# Forbes

## The Remarkably Hopeful Trends All Smart Leaders Should Know

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Bill Gates calls himself an “impatient optimist” and has retained his positive outlook even in the worst days of the pandemic.

During a recent [interview](#) for GeekWire, Gates was asked what gives him hope.

Although the coronavirus is a “gigantic setback,” he said, “progress will continue to take place. The basic framework that life is getting better is one I believe in deeply.”

The ‘framework’ that Gates refers to is visually depicted in the [new book](#), *Ten Global Trends Every Smart Person Should Know*.

I recently spoke to the book’s co-author, Marian Tupy, a Cato Institute scholar and editor of the website, [HumanProgress](#).

We discussed what some of the positive trends are, why most people don’t know about them, and why knowing the trends makes people better leaders.

### Plan For The Future Of Field Service With Digitalization

Many people are depressed, anxious and angry. Yes, they have every reason to be. But keep in mind that great leaders see the world as it is and not *worse* than it is.

“The world is, for the most part, actually getting better,” says Tupy.

The global trends that Tupy and other progress authors say are worth celebrating are the result of the ‘great enrichment,’ a phrase coined by historian and economist, Deirdre McCloskey.

For nearly all of human history almost everyone was poor. Extremely poor. In the last 200 years, however, something extraordinary has happened. The march of progress has shot straight up.

- The size of the world’s economy has grown more than a hundredfold.
- Extreme poverty plummeted from 84% of the world’s population to under 10% today.
- Famines have all but disappeared outside of war zones.
- Cancer death rates have been falling every year since 1991.
- Most of the world is better educated, better fed, more literate, and have more entertainment options than any time in human history.

There’s much, much more. Progress made in the workplace, society, and healthcare has been nothing short of stunning.

Just take a look at vaccines, “the most effective healthcare innovation ever devised,” according to Tupy.

For thousands of years humans have suffered from deadly diseases with no knowledge of where they came from, how they spread, or how to treat them.

In one remarkable chart, Tupy and co-author Ronald Bailey show that it took 3,348 years to develop a vaccine for polio (since the first observed cases in 1500 BC). It took 3,296 years to develop a vaccine for smallpox (a disease that killed 500 million people in the 20th century alone).

Now consider this remarkable fact: human trials for a coronavirus vaccine began just four months after the virus was first identified.

If a safe and effective vaccine is discovered this year or early next year, it will be one of the greatest medical breakthroughs in all of human history. That’s worth celebrating.

### **Most People Don’t Know About the Trends**

Deirdre McCloskey once wrote, “For reasons I have never understood, people like to hear that the world is going to hell.”

She’s right. And we owe it to a mental shortcut in our ancient brains.

Our cave-dwelling ancestors who felt threatened by a rustling in the brush and ran away were those who lived to tell the tale. The ones who were happy to greet whatever was hiding didn’t fare as well.

“Because of this instinctive negativity bias, most of us attend far more to bad rather than good news,” writes Tupy. “The upshot is that we are again often misled into thinking that the world is worse than it is.”

The ‘news’ doesn’t help. In fact, it amplifies our bias toward the negative.

Bad news is dramatic, catches your attention, and is shared on social media far more often than positive developments.

Since smart people are voracious consumers of news and information, they tend to be bombarded by the worst possible news. Instead, they might want to pay more attention to the slow and steady upward arc of progress.

Full disclosure. I was a television news anchor for fifteen years. My job was *not* to elevate your leadership skills. My job was to keep you hooked to the show.

During one of my early television gigs, I pitched an idea for a weekly interview series about notable and inspiring people who lived in the area. The TV station was located near Pebble Beach, California, where many celebrities and former business titans retire or own second homes.

The powers that be approved the show, but scheduled it in the unenviable time slot of early Sunday morning. Why? Good news doesn’t attract viewers.

Truth be told, my spirits soared when I left the daily drumbeat of pessimism that pervades broadcast news.

Steady progress is not ‘news.’ You have to seek out evidence of progress in books and sources that track such data. In other words, be intentional about the information you feed your mind.

### **Why Leaders Should Study Positive Trends**

The late statistician Hans Rosling, one of Bill Gates’s favorite authors, took regular surveys of people around the world every year and, every year, got the same results.

“Every group of people I ask thinks the world is more frightening, more violent, and more hopeless—in short, more dramatic—than it really is,” he said.

Rosling believed that seeing the world as it is—and not worse than it is—fills people with conviction and hope that future progress is possible. Hope fuels innovation.

“This is not optimistic thinking,” Rosling said. “It is having a clear and reasonable idea about how things are. It is having a worldview that is constructive and useful.”

According to Tupy, “You can’t fix what is wrong in the world if you don’t know what’s actually happening.”

Successful leaders take a positive view of the future based on the real progress of the past.

One caveat. If you’re optimistic about the future, some people might label you a Polyanna, an excessively cheerful person who overlooks the real problems we face.

They couldn’t be more wrong.

According to Harvard psychologist Steven Pinker, “Progress does not mean that everything gets better for everyone, everywhere, all the time. That would be a miracle, that wouldn’t be progress.”

Famed scientist Carl Sagan once said, “Despite our limitations and fallibilities, we humans are capable of greatness.”

Studying the trends that have made our lives better—even in a pandemic—is not an empty exercise. It reminds us of what we’re capable of and offers hope that big problems can be solved.