

CHANGE HERE NOW

PERMACULTURE SOLUTIONS FOR PERSONAL
AND COMMUNITY TRANSFORMATION

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11. THE EDGE OF CHANGE

The most valuable leverage points for change are usually found where our vision of the future overlaps with what's currently considered acceptable.

In ecology, the edges between two ecosystems are called *ecotones*, and they are dynamic places of chemical, material, and genetic exchange. The line of contact where waves lap up on a beach or a thicket of shrubs breaks into an open meadow functions like a crowded bazaar: species from both sides mingle with species that only exist on the line, and all of them form new alliances, intermingle, and swap everything from nutrients to parasites.

Human society is chock full of these ecotones, where the mingling of groups is at the leading edge of change. Think of frontier trading posts between two civilizations, urban neighborhoods on the cusp of gentrification, or the linguistic mash-ups of creole and pidgin languages.

As a SACRED ACTIVIST, one of the most important edges to pay attention to is the line between one's PERSONAL VISION and what's currently practical—the edge between the ideal and the possible. Stray too far ahead of the rest of your community, and you'll find yourself standing lonely in a field, isolated by your idealism. Settle for the easy way out, on the other hand, and you may end up lost in the jungle of misguided solutions, perpetuating injustice and exploitation under the pretense of positive change. But the sweet spot where the ideal and possible intersect is a powerful leverage point for change.

In political science, the range of ideas currently acceptable in public discourse is called the *Overton window*, after a twentieth-century Michigan think-tank leader named Joseph Overton. According to Overton's theory, it doesn't matter how much charisma you possess or how many lobbyists you have—if your idea falls outside the Overton window, it's dead on arrival. If you're an advocate of gun control, for example, you may believe in your heart that repealing open-carry laws is an important and necessary measure but also know that it

falls outside the Overton window of what the legislature and voting public will accept. On the other hand, strengthening background checks is just within the Overton window, giving it a chance to succeed. Eventually, you may be able to open the Overton window enough to allow a discussion of open-carry laws—just not yet.

Overton windows are also a helpful tool for thinking about change at much smaller scales. Within any group, large or small, there is a set of ideas and behavior currently considered acceptable—which may or may not be in 100 percent agreement with your personal values. In HUMAN POLY CULTURES, this is represented by the dynamic tension between elders and radicals. In a REGENERATIVE ENTERPRISE, it is found in the negotiation between generating income and achieving the mission. In all cases, the key to maximum impact lies in

THE EDGE OF CHANGE



the range of ideas
 acceptable within your community + personal vision:
 the world you want to create

Part 1. Vision for a Permanent Culture

knowing the Overton window for a given situation and working within it to enact your vision.

APPLYING THE PATTERN

Which elements of your PERSONAL VISION are within the Overton window of society as a whole? Of the community where you live? Of the organizations in which you work? Which elements are outside the Overton window? Which are on the edge? How might you engage your community in a productive way to move THE EDGE OF CHANGE?