
Building the Future:

A TOOLKIT FOR THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE

By Steve Boruchowitz

The Future. We dream about it. Worry about it. Sometimes try to avoid it.

It's really better, though, to think about it.

Many organizations are asking futurists to speak at their meetings, as CLEAR and many others have done in recent years. Once we looked on futurists as no better than astrologists or science fiction "nut cases." Futurists now are relied upon to provide ways of looking at our world, with the hope of defining what that world will look like.

But you don't have to be a professional – or even amateur – futurist to think about the future in a meaningful way. The basic concept to keep in mind is that the future doesn't just happen. We can create it. Not necessarily an easy task, but easier if we have some tools to help us.

By examining trends in all aspects of our world -- such as demographics, technology, the environment, religion, entertainment and other cultural trends -- we can project (as opposed to predict) the future. If we don't like what we see, we change one or more of those trends to make them conform to what we prefer. Some books and articles aren't even designed as "futurist" works, but because they help us think, or work, or play better and more creatively, I have included them.

Five years ago I provided the first "toolkit" for CLEAR members, and thought it was well past time to update it. A lot of fantastic ideas have been generated, and I wanted to make sure this "kit" really was a useful tool. I didn't remove many of the "old" entries, as they are still valid for helping to inspire creative thinking. I've categorized the resources and also created a "Top Ten" list giving you some of the very best examples of how to think about and create the future you want.

Happy Futuring!

Steve's Top Ten List: If you only read 10 things, make them these!

10. "Strategic Planning Tools for Futurists." Herb Rubenstein, CEO Growth Strategies Inc. <http://www.growth-strategies.com/subpages/articles/061.html>

While not necessarily the most recent of such efforts, this is a very thorough review of the types of tools you can use to help plan the future. Growth Strategies has a great deal of information available on their website. I found this to be a particularly useful article.

9. The Medici Effect: Breakthrough Insights at the Intersection of Ideas, Concepts, and Cultures. Frans Johansson. Harvard Business School Press, 2004.

This book is an historical look at how a strong set of intellectual tools can lead to breakthroughs. It is hard to know how to classify it – part business book, part management text, part sociology work. One reviewer puts it this way: The "intersection" is the place where different cultures, domains and disciplines stream together toward a single point.

8. Our Final Hour. Martin Rees. Basic Books, 2003.

As the title implies, this is a rather pessimistic look at the future of the Earth. It proves you don't have to agree with someone's view of the future to find the information useful. It also offers the hope that by thinking of all the possibilities, you can choose the one or ones you like best, and try to eliminate the other ones.

7. Inevitable Surprises: Thinking Ahead in a Time of Turbulence. Peter Schwartz. Gotham Books, 2004.

While aimed primarily at business audiences, this book helps demonstrate that wringing your hands or shrugging your shoulders is not only counter-productive, it isn't necessary. Many corporations are making great efforts to anticipate the good, bad and ugly that the future might hold, and developing solid plans for dealing and changing them to make their companies more competitive (and that means survive).

6. FutureThink: How To Think Clearly in a Time of Change. Edie Weiner and Arnold Brown. Pearson Prentice Hall, 2005.

Edie Weiner and Arnold Brown are a great team and give a most enjoyable presentation, so catch them if you can. This is one of their most recent works, and helps bring futures tools into the rapidly changing first few years of

the 21st Century. If you are serious about anticipating your future and managing the consequences, this is the book for you.

5. [A View from the Year 3000: A Ranking of the 100 Most Influential Persons of All Time.](#) Michael H. Hart. Poseidon Press, 1999.

I love this kind of writing! See yourself in the future, looking back at a time period that is really the *next* 1000 years. I have included this in the Top Ten because it is a great example of how this type of storytelling can generate great ideas.

4. [Out of the Blue: Wild Cards and Other Big Future Surprises.](#) John L. Peterson. Arlington Institute, 1997.

John Peterson is a leader among professional futurists. While nearly 10 years old, this book still represents best practices in thinking about things you normally wouldn't think about. When something appears to most people as "out of the blue" it isn't always that shocking to everyone.

3. [The Singularity Is Near: When Humans Transcend Biology.](#) Ray Kurzweil. Viking Adult, 2005.

Almost reads like science fiction, but is a convincing view of the future that would make Captain Kirk and the Federation proud! You can decide for yourself whether this is a future you want. In any event, this is a great example of how thinking about the future is a good idea.

2. [The Clock of the Long Now: Time and Responsibility.](#) Steward Brand. Basic Books, 1999.

Written by a man who is an inventor, designer, biologist, army officer, and an early multimedia artist, this is a challenging work about how it is irresponsible to think only in the short term, while also arguing strongly about retaining information and historical knowledge. Clearly a multi-dimensional look at how we should anticipate and build the future.

1. "Coming to Grips with the Future." Joseph Coates.
http://www.josephcoates.com/pdf_files/277_coming_to_grips.pdf

There is no doubt in my mind that Joe Coates is a true genius. He challenges you to think hard about yourself and the world around you. I remember hearing one of his presentations at a World Future Society meeting about new research into the brain, including the development (or lack thereof) of teenagers. It was four years before anything like it appeared in the "popular" press. That article is included in the general list. I chose this one because it is a more general topic. Read anything you can by Joe Coates.

I have grouped the remaining suggested readings into five broad categories. By no means do I consider my groupings to be flawless; however, they will give you a general idea of what to expect in each one. The items in each group are merely in alphabetical order.

CREATIVITY

Being able to stimulate the creative juices we all have can take some effort. While you think you might not be creative, everyone really is to some extent. This collection helps demonstrate either how to tap those creative forces within you, or shows you what others have done once they have.

Cracking Creativity: The Secrets of Creative Genius. Michael Michalko. Ten Speed Press, 1998

Creating Your Future: Five Steps to the Life of Your Dreams. Dave Ellis. Houghton Mifflin, 1998.

The Creative Problem Solver's Toolbox: A Complete Course in the Art of Creating Solutions to Problems of Any Kind. Richard Fobes. Solutions Through Innovation, 1993

The Creativity Force in Education, Business, and Beyond: An Urgent Message. Berenice Bleedorn. Guide Press, 1998.

The Infinite Resource: Creating and Leading the Knowledge Enterprise. William E. Hallal (Ed.). Jossey-Bass, 1998.

The Manager's Pocket Guide to Creativity. Alexander Hiam. HRD Press, 1998.

The Positive Power of Negative Thinking. Julie K. Norem. Basic Books, 2001.

Raising Lifelong Learners: A Parent's Guide. Lucy Calkins with Lydia Bellino. Addison-Wesley, 1997.

The Search Conference: A Powerful Method for Planning Organizational Change and Community Action. Merrelyn Emery and Ronald E. Purser. John Wiley and Sons, 2004.

What If? Thought Experimentation in Philosophy. Nicholas Rescher. Transaction Publishers, 2005.

FUTURE TOOLS

This is mostly a collection of fairly technical approaches and tools for the professional futurist, but don't let that scare you! The Marcus Buckingham work, *The One Thing You Need to Know*, almost made my Top Ten list, but was just a bit too specific a subject. It is indicative of the less technical items on this list.

Even if you think you know all there is to know about brainstorming, check out the JPB Group's work.

[Anticipate the World You Want: Learning for Alternative Futures.](#) Marsha Rhea. Scarecrow Education, 2005.

BrainStorming Tools and Services, the JPB group. The JPB group currently comprises JPB Creative Co, Ltd (Bangkok, Thailand) and Bwitibvba (Erps-Kwerps, Belgium).
<http://www.jpbc.com/services/index.php>

[Business @ the Speed of Thought: Using a Digital Nervous System.](#) Bill Gates. Warner Books, 1999.

[Five Regions of the Future: Preparing Your Business for Tomorrow's Technology Revolution.](#) Joel Barker and Scott Erickson. Portfolio Hardcover, 2005.

[The Career Chase: Taking Creative Control in a Chaotic Age.](#) Helen Harkness. Davies-Black, 1997.

[Choosing the Future: The Power of Strategic Thinking.](#) Stuart Wells. Butterworth-Heinemann, 1998.

[Competitive Intelligence: Scanning the Global Environment.](#) Robert Salmon and Yolanie de Linares. Economica, 1999.

[Comprehensive Planning for the 21st Century: General Theory and Principles.](#) Melville C. Branch. Praeger, 1998.

[Exploring Your Future: Living, Learning, and Working in the Information Age.](#) Edward Cornish (Ed.). WFS, 1996.

[Foundations of Future Studies: Human Science for a New Era. History, Purposes, and Knowledge \(Volume 1\).](#) Wendell Bell. Transaction Publishers, 1996.

[Foundations for Future Studies: Human Science for a New Era. Values, Objectivity, and the Good Society \(Volume 2\).](#) Wendell Bell, Transaction Publishers, 1996.

[The Future Is Ours: Foreseeing, Managing and Creating the Future.](#) Graham H. May. Praeger, 1996.

[Future Vision: Ideas, Insights, and Strategies.](#) Howard F. Didsbury. World Future Society, 1996.

"Futures: The journal of policy, planning and future studies," available from
http://www.Elsevier.com/wps/find/journaldescription.cws_home/30422/description#description

[Futures Concepts and Powerful Ideas.](#) Richard A. Slaughter. DDM Media Group, 1996.

[The Futurist Directory: A Guide to Individuals Who Write, Speak, or Consult About the Future, Millennium Edition.](#) World Future Society, 2000.

[Futures Studies: Methods, Emerging Issues, and Civilisational Visions.](#) Sohail Inayatullah and Paul Wilderman. Prosperity Press, CD-ROM, Version 1.0

[Insider's Guide to the Future.](#) Edith Weiner and Arnold Brown. Boardroom Books, 1997.

An Introduction to TRIZ – The Russian Theory of Inventive Problem Solving. Stan Kaplan, Ideation International, 1996.

Invention of Impact: Scenarios. Thomas J. Frey. DaVinci Institute, 1998.

The Knowledge Base of Futures Studies. Richard A. Slaughter. DDM Medical Group, 1996.

Leadership and Futuring: Making Visions Happen. John R. Hoyle. Corwin Press, 1995.

Learning from the Future: Competitive Foresight Scenarios. Liam Fahey and Robert M. Randall (Eds.). Wiley, 1998.

The Macmillan Atlas of the Future. Ian Pearson. Macmillan Reference, 1998.

Navigating the Future. Mikela Tarlow with Philip Tarlow. McGraw-Hill/Contemporary, 1998.

Predicting the Future: An Introduction to the Theory of Forecasting. Nicholas Rescher. SUNY Press, 1998.

Preferred Futuring: Envision the Future You Want and Unleash the Energy to Get There. Lawrence L. Lippitt. Berrett-Koehler, 1998.

Scenario Planning: The Link Between Future and Strategy. Hans Bandhold and Mats Lindgren. Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Scenario Planning: Managing for the Future. Gill Ringland, Foreword by Peter Schwartz. Wiley, 1998.

The Sixth Sense: Accelerating Organizational Learning with Scenarios. Kees van der Heijden. John Wiley, 2002.

Smart Choices: A Practical Guide to Making Better Decisions. John S. Hammond, Ralph L. Keeney, and Howard Raiffa. Harvard Business School Press, 1998.

Strategic Management for the XXIst Century. M. Reza Vaghefi and Allan B. Huellmantel. St. Lucie Press, 1998.

Strategic Planning Workbook for Nonprofit Organization. Bryan W. Barry. Amherst H. Wilder Foundation, 1997.

Strategic Safari: A Guided Tour Through the Wilds of Strategic Management. Henry Mintzberg, Bruce Ahlstrand, and Joseph Lampel. Free Press, 1998.

Team-Based Strategic Planning: A Complete Guide to Structuring, Facilitating, and Implementing the Process. C. David Fogg. AMACOM, 1994.

Technology in Context: Technology Assessment for Managers. Ernest Braun. Routledge, 1998.

INTERDISCIPLINARY THINKING

There were just some items that I could not easily categorize into one topic or another, so this is sort of a “catch all” grouping. I really believe it can be

counterproductive to think of ourselves as a certain type of worker, scholar, etc. Having a great deal of cross-disciplinary thinking is a plus for anyone, especially those who want to be leaders in their field. [Blink](#) and [Collapse](#) are two excellent examples of how free-flowing thinking is often superior to neatly packaged approaches to problems.

[And Suddenly the Inventor Appeared](#). Gerald Altshuller. Altshuller Institute, 1996.

[Anticipatory Management: 10 Power Tools for Achieving Excellence into the 21st Century](#). William C. Ashley and James L. Morrison. Issue Action Publications, 1995.

[Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking](#). Malcolm Gladwell. Little Brown, 2005.

[The Causal Layered Analysis \(CLA\) Reader](#). Sohail Inayatullah (Ed.). Tamkang University Press, 2004.

[Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed](#). Jared Diamond. Penguin, 2005. Explores the collapse of some great civilizations and asks what the implications are for the future.

[The Complete Book of Survival](#). Rainer Stahlberg. Barricade Books, 1998.

[Conquering Uncertainty](#). Theodore Modis. McGraw-Hill, 1998.

[Guidelines for Excellence in Strategic Analysis](#). Andy Hines and Peter Bishop. AMSI Press, 2005.

[Hines' Integral Futures: Breadth Plus Depth Equals Foresight with Insight](#).
<http://www.profuturists.com/docs/Hines.pdf>

[The Leadership Revolution](#). Herb Rubenstein, due out in 2006.

[Critical Mass: How One Thing Leads to Another](#). Philip Ball. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004.

[Finding Flow: The Psychology of Engagement with Everyday Life](#). Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi. Basic Books, 1997.

[Global Mind Change: The Promise of the 21st Century](#). Willis Harman (Ed.). Institute of Noetic Sciences, 2nd Edition, 1998.

[The Hidden Intelligence: Innovation Through Intuition](#). Sandra Weintraub. Butterworth-Heinemann, 1998.

[Hiding the Elephant: How Magicians Invented the Impossible and Learned to Disappear](#). Jim Steinmeyer. Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003.

[The Limits of Privacy](#). Amitai Etzioni. Basic Books, 1999.

[Making a Compelling Case for Change](#). Rick Maurer (available from www.beyondresistance.com)

Managing Complexity: Work, Technology, Resources, and Human Relations. James C. Stephens. Lomond, 1997.

The New Organizational Wealth: Managing & Measuring Knowledge-Based Assets. Karl Erik Sveiby. Berrett-Koehler, 1997.

New Thinking for a New Millennium. Richard A. Slaughter (Ed.). Routledge, 1996.

On Becoming a Servant Leader: The Private Writings of Robert K. Greenleaf. Don M. Frick and Larry C. Spears. Jossey-Bass, 1996.

Power Tools: A Leader's Guide to the Latest Management Thinking. John Nirenberg. Prentice Hall, 1997.

Preparing Students for the 21st Century. Donna Uchida, Marvin Cetrone, and Floretta McKenzie. American Association of School Administrators, 1996.

Questioning the Future: Methods and Tools for Organizational and Societal Transformation. Sohail Inayatulla. Tamkang University Press, 2nd Ed. 2005.

Radical Evolution: The Promise and Peril of Enhancing Our Minds, Our Bodies and What It Means to Be Human. Joel Garreau. Doubleday, 2005.

Reflections on Life. Walter P. Kistler. Foundation for the Future, 2003.

The Rocket Company. Patrick J.G. Stiennon and David M. Hoerr. The American Institute of Aeronautics and Astronautics, 2005.

Rosabeth Moss Kanter on the Frontier of Management. Rosabeth Moss Kanter. Harvard Business School Press, 1997.

Shaping the Next One Hundred Years: New Methods for Quantitative Long-Term Policy Analysis. RAND Pardee Center for Longer Range Global Policy and the Future Human Condition. RAND, 2003.

"Understanding the Accelerating Rate of Change." Ray Kurzweil and Chris Meyer.

<http://www.kurzweilai.net/meme/frame.html?main=/articles/art0563.html>

Visionary Leadership: Creating a Compelling Sense of Direction for Your Organization. Burt Nanus. Jossey-Bass, 1992.

The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many are Smarter than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies and Nations. James Surowiecki. Doubleday, 2004.

SOCIAL TRENDS

An essential element to the casual or professional futurist's repertoire is being able to spot social trends, often in advance of everyone else. I remember John Peterson telling me that one of the best ways to do this, when you are traveling, is to read the local paper. Many trends begin at the grassroots level, and if you

are in Dayton, Ohio, for example, you may spot a trend because of an article that seems similar to one you read last month in Atlanta, Georgia.

[Age Right: Turn Back the Clock with a Proven, Personalized Anti-aging Program.](#) Karlis Ullis with Greg Ptacek. Simon & Schuster, 1999.

[Beyond Malthus: Nineteen Dimensions of the Population Challenge.](#) Lester R. Brown, Gary Gardner, and Brian Halwell. W.W. Norton, 1999.

[Competing in the Third Wave: The Ten Key Management Issues of the Information Age.](#) Jeremy Hope and Tony Hope. Harvard Business School Press, 1997.

[Conscious Evolution: Awakening the Power of Our Social Potential.](#) Barbara Marx Hubbard. New World Library, 1998.

[The Copycat Effect: How the Media and Popular Culture Trigger the Mayhem in Tomorrow's Headlines.](#) Loren Coleman. Paraview Pocket Books, 2004.

[The De-Voicing of Society: Why We Don't Talk to Each Other Anymore.](#) John L. Locke. Simon & Schuster, 1998.

[The Foresight Principle: Cultural Recovery in the 21st Century.](#) Richard A. Slaughter. Praeger, 1995.

[Fray Dawn: How the Coming Age Wave Will Transform America-and the World.](#) Peter G. Peterson. Time Books, 1999.

[Free Market Fusion: How Entrepreneurs and Nonprofits Create 21st Century Success.](#) Glenn R. Jones. Cyber Publishing Group, 1999.

[Funny, I Don't Feel Old! How to Flourish After 50.](#) Carter Henderson. ICS Press, 1997.

[Future Revolutions: Unraveling the Uncertainties of Life & Work in the 21st Century.](#) David Mercer. Orion Business Books, 1999.

[Future Trends in Microelectronic: The Road Ahead.](#) Serge Luryi, Jimmy Xu, and Alex Zaslavsky (Eds.). John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999.

[The MeWe Generation.](#) Lindgren, Furth and Luthi. Bookhouse Publishing, 2005. Available at amazon.co.uk.

[Threshold 2000: Critical Issues and Spiritual Values for a Global Age.](#) Gerald O. Barney with Jane Blewett and Kristen R. Barney. CoNexus Press, 1999.

"Towards the Creative Society: 21st Century Social Dynamics." *Foresight*, Camford Publishing, Vol. 2, No. 1, February 2000.

[Travel That Can Change Your Life: How to Create a Transformative Experience.](#) Jeffrey A. Kottler. Jossey-Bass, 1997.

"Trends and Forecasts for the New Millennium." *The Futurist*, August-September 1998.

VISIONS OF THE FUTURE

There are a great many of these. Don't confuse visions of the future with predictions, though. Visions are often completely off base; sometimes they are frightfully accurate. No matter what their eventual accuracy turns out to be, detailed visions such as these help us generate our own thoughts and plans about the future.

[1999 State of the Future: Global Challenges We Face at the Millennium](#). Theodore J. Gordon. AC/UNU, 1999.

“Brain Science Will Change.” Joseph Coates, 2003.
http://www.josephcoates.com/pdf_files/270_HR_and_Brain_Science.pdf

[Cheating Death: The Promise and the Future Impact of Trying to Live Forever](#). Marvin Cetron and Owen Davies. St. Martin's Press, 1998.

[Frontiers of the 21st Century: Prelude to the New Millennium](#). Howard F. Didsbury, Jr. World Future Society, 1999.

“Future Humans” – workshop proceedings, 2003.
http://www.futurefoundation.org/documents/nty_pro_futurehuman.pdf

[Future War: Non-Lethal Weapons in Modern Warfare](#). John Alexander. Foreword by Tom Clancy, Thomas Dunne. St. Martin's Press, 1999.

[The Future of Management: All Roads Lead to Man](#). Robert Salmon, Translated by Larry Cohen. Blackwell Publishers, 1996.

[Living in the Third Millennium](#). Konrad M. Kressley. Factor Press, 1998.

[The Longevity Strategy: How to Live to 100 Using the Brain-Body Connection](#). David Mahoney and Richard Restak. Wiley, 1998.

[Millennium: Rendezvous with Future](#). Carlos Hernandez and Rashmi Mayur (Eds.). International Institute for Sustainable Future, 1998.

[The Millennium Report](#). David Wolfson (Ed.). 2000CDN/Infinica Inc., 1998.

[The Next Fifty Years: Science in the First Half of the Twenty-First Century](#). John Brockman (Ed.). Vintage Books. 2002.

[The Next Twenty Years of Your Life: A Personal Guide Into the Year 2017](#). Richard Worzel. Stoddart, 1997.

[OCTAVE: Analytical Bibliography of Future Oriented Studies in Western Europe \(1993-1995\)](#). Hugues de Jouvenel (Ed.). Futuribles International, 1996.

[Scanning the Future: 20 Eminent Thinkers on the World of Tomorrow](#). Yorick Blumenfeld (Ed.). Thames and Hudson, Inc., 1999.

[A Short History of the Future](#). Warren Wager. The University of Chicago Press, 1999.

[A Short History of Nearly Everything](#). Bill Bryson. Broadway, Special Edition, 2005.

"Small Security: Nanotechnology and Future Defense," by Dennis M. Egan and John L. Petersen, March 2002, National Defense University.

<http://www.arlingtoninstitute.org/library/Small%20Security.pdf>

Technology and the Future of Health Care: Preparing for the Next 30 Years. David Ellis. Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999.

"Where Science Is Headed," by Joseph Coates, 2003.

http://www.josephcoates.com/pdf_files/271_Science_16_Trends.pdf

"What Will Our Houses Look Like?" Wes Jones. *Visions of the 21st Century*, time.com reports, February 21, 2000.

Which World? Scenarios for the 21st Century. Allan Hammond. Island Press, 1998.

"Will robots learn to build their own future?" Robert Adler. *New Scientist*, September 11, 1999.

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