
Overcoming Pessimism: Stop Watching the News

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The Tech Blog

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Presented By



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Abundance for all is within our grasp.

This transformation from *scarcity to abundance*, from *expensive to demonetized*, from the *rich to everyone*, is happening in every industry—everywhere on the globe.

But this positive trend can be hard to see because of how our brains evolved and our inherent negativity bias.

Since the dawn of humanity, a privileged few have lived in stark contrast to the hardscrabble majority. Past leaders raised in a linear and scarcity mindset believed that the gap could never be closed.

But in reality, this gap *is* closing—fast. Exponential technologies are resource-liberating mechanisms, uplifting humanity, and redefining prosperity.

If these trends continue, we will soon have the ability to meet and then exceed the basic needs of every man, woman, and child on the planet.

In today's blog, the third in our series based on my upcoming book *Scaling Abundance*, we'll explore the influence of this ingrained pessimism and look at a few examples of how this bias has distorted our view of progress.

Let's dive in...

We're Wired for Pessimism

The wiring of our brains (100 billion neurons, 100 trillion synaptic connections) evolved to serve our ancestors, Homo sapiens, on the savannas of Africa. The result is **“default operating software” that**

is optimized around fear and scarcity that made us fit for survival 100,000 years ago—not the streets of Madison Avenue today.

Every second of every day, our senses bring in way more information than we can meaningfully process in our brains. As a result, our brains take shortcuts in an effort to manage this information overload, shortcuts that lead to something known as “cognitive biases.” One of these is known as a “negativity bias,” wherein we routinely pay 10 times more attention to negative news than positive news.

The center of this predilection towards pessimism is an ancient structure in the brain known as the amygdala, which reviews everything we see and hear for danger. Situated in the temporal lobe, this almond-shaped structure functions as our early warning system, vigilantly scanning the constant flow of information for any hint of danger that might jeopardize our existence.

What was once useful in scanning for snakes or lions is now on overload as we are bombarded by a ceaseless stream of news and information, all vying for our attention.

And of course, the news media knows that, feeding us 10-to-1 negative-to-positive news ratio to capture our eyeballs. This is why the old newsroom adage, “If it bleeds, it leads” holds so true even today.

It’s hardly surprising then that we find ourselves in a state of heightened pessimism, often feeling as though the world around us is spiraling out of control.

The amygdala, a piece of ancient neurotech designed for immediacy and acute threats, is not well-suited to our modern world.

The dangers we face today are often probabilistic—economic downturns, potential terrorist attacks—and our amygdala struggles to distinguish between these abstract threats and immediate, tangible ones. Worse still, our amygdala is designed to stay on alert until the threat has completely disappeared, a condition that rarely occurs with these probabilistic dangers.

This creates a perpetual state of siege in our minds, further reinforcing our amygdala's negativity bias.

My advice? Stop watching the evening news... the “Crisis News Network” (CNN).

You can get everything you need from a 10-minute glance at Google News headlines. Curate what you let into your mind.

You couldn't pay me enough to have some editor or producer decide what I see and how I train my brain's neural net.

3 Examples of Our Negativity Bias Gone Wrong

One effect of our negativity bias and pessimism is that it warps our perspective of what's possible.

We can see amusing examples of this on a wonderful website called [Pessimists Archive](#).

Below are a few of my favorite examples:

1. Predictions of AI Causing Doom Date Back to at Least the 1950s

Dr. Norbert Wiener, a pioneer in artificial intelligence (AI) during the 1950s and 1960s, voiced serious concerns about the potential impacts of advanced machines.

His perspective provides a historical context to today's moral panic about AI. In his speech to the American Association for the Advancement of Science and in his subsequent paper, *Some Moral and Technical Consequences of Automation*, he warned that machines, given their rapid advancements, could potentially outwit and dominate humans, echoing predictions made by Samuel Butler back in the 1860s.

Moreover, Wiener, in his book *Cybernetics* (1948) and in a rejected op-ed for *The New York Times*, forecasted a dystopian future marked by mass unemployment due to automation, and even voiced concerns about autonomous weapons. He warned that our wishes may not always align with what we ought to wish for, implying potential misuse of AI.

This historical view shows the recurring nature of moral panics around technology, emphasizing the value of historical perspectives. Wiener's warnings, much like those of his predecessors and successors, haven't come true yet, but each era believes its circumstances to be unique.

2. Headphones Were Once Controversial and Caused Societal Panic

In the 1980s, Sony's Walkman stirred societal panic and fierce controversy as it introduced small, light headphones for everyday use, prompting similar reactions as those evoked by more recent vision-based wearable tech like Google Glass and the Oculus Rift.

The Walkman's ability to enable users to create their personal sound bubbles ignited a frenzy of worry and criticism about increasing individualism, social disconnect, and intellectual stunting. Some critics drew absurd comparisons, equating the device's usage to indulging in a "nonstop... masturbational fantasy," or likening it to the euphoric drug "soma" from Aldous Huxley's book *Brave New World*.

These fears culminated in regulatory actions across numerous states, imposing restrictions on using the Walkman while driving, cycling, and in some cases, even crossing the street. Woodbridge, New Jersey enacted a law with hefty penalties, making headlines globally. An act of defiance against this law by Oscar Gross, a retiree, gained national attention, highlighting the absurdity of the regulations. However, a tragedy involving a pedestrian wearing a Walkman while crossing the street exacerbated public fears.

Looking back today, these concerns appear overblown and highlight the importance of placing modern-day moral panics about technology in a historical perspective. Over time, society has accepted and adapted to the integration of such technologies.

3. Air & Space Travel was Once Considered “Vain” and “Wasteful”

Technological advancement has often faced skepticism and criticism, and this pattern is evident in the context of manned flight and space exploration.

In 1901, George W. Melville, a high-ranking engineer for the U.S. Navy, deemed the pursuit of manned flight a frivolous fantasy with a poor return on investment. A couple of years later, *The New York Times* predicted human flight was a million years away. Yet, mere weeks after this prediction, the Wright Brothers made their historic flight. However, the achievement was dismissed as an extravagant toy for the wealthy.

The cynicism extended to space travel. When President Eisenhower announced the first U.S. satellite program in 1955, it was ridiculed as a waste of public funds. The 1960s moonshot by Kennedy also faced resistance. A coined term, "moondoggle," implied it was a futile endeavor for national prestige. However, despite the naysayers, the Moon landing in 1969 won worldwide excitement.

Today, similar reactions are observed towards the private space race, reflecting societal discontent towards wealth disparity and tech moguls. These historical instances of skepticism towards technological milestones underscore the notion that radical innovation is often met with cynicism before its potential is fully realized.

Why This Matters

Technology is a force that converts scarcity into abundance, over and over again, enabling a world with an abundance of capital, energy, communications, computation, food, water, shelter, healthcare, and knowledge.

Living in a world of ever-increasing opportunities and abundance means you should not fear the future or resent an opportunity you've missed.

Next year will bring more.

I'm on a mission to liberate us from our unhealthy scarcity mindset by sharing *example after example* of growing abundance that will train your neural net towards a more positive and hopeful outlook.

In the next blog in this series, we'll look at what it takes to make the shift from pessimism to optimism and I'll share a story about one of my favorite authors.



Abundance360 is a dynamic community of entrepreneurs, CEOs, and investors who seek to go big, create wealth, and uplift humanity.

Here are a few of our members. If you'd like to be among this group, you can request an invite below.



Chip Wilson

Founder of Lululemon

Major donor to the Healthspan XPRIZE. His Massive Transformative Purpose (MTP) is “Elevating the world from mediocrity to greatness.”



Sanja Kon

CEO and Co-founder of Utrust

Exited her crypto payments company Utrust. Named Top 100 Women of Future by Mission Impact.

Request an Invite to the A360 Membership

I discuss topics just like this on my podcast. Here's a conversation I recently enjoyed:



A Statement From Peter:

My goal with this newsletter is to inspire leaders to play BIG. If that's you, thank you for being here. If you know someone who can use this, please [share it](#). Together, we can uplift humanity.

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