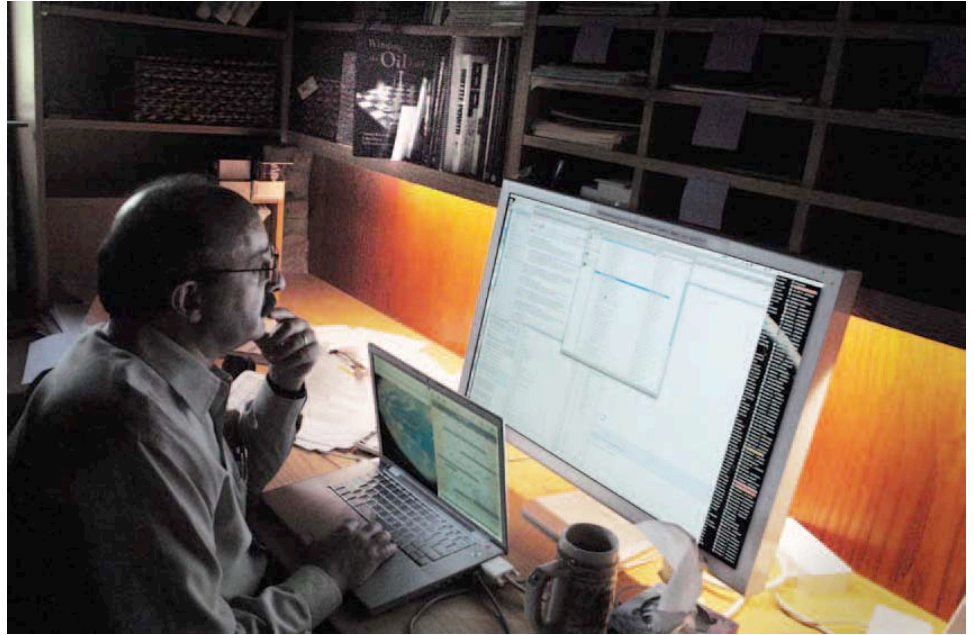


Applied Hope

by Amory B. Lovins

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The early bioneer Bill McLarney was stirring a vat of algae in his Costa Rica research center when a brassy North American lady strode in. What, she demanded, was he doing stirring a vat of green goo when what the world really needs is love? “There’s theoretical love,” Bill replied, “and then there’s applied love”—and kept on stirring. At Rocky Mountain Institute, we stir and strive in the spirit of applied hope. Our ninety people work hard to make the world better, not from some airy theoretical hope, but in the practical and grounded conviction that starting with hope and acting out of hope can cultivate a different kind of



world worth being hopeful about, reinforcing itself in a virtuous spiral. Applied hope is not about some vague, far-off future but is expressed and created moment by moment through our choices.

Applied hope is not mere optimism. The optimist treats the future as fate, not choice, and thus fails to take responsibility for making the world we want. Applied hope is a deliberate choice of heart and head. The optimist, says RMI Trustee David Orr, has his feet up on the desk and a satisfied smirk knowing the deck is stacked. The person living in hope has her sleeves rolled up and is fighting hard to change or beat the odds. Optimism can easily mask cowardice. Hope requires fearlessness.

Fear of specific and avoidable dangers has evolutionary value. Nobody has ancestors who weren’t mindful of saber-toothed tigers. But pervasive dread, currently in fashion and sometimes purposely promoted, is numbing and demotivating. When I give a talk, sometimes a questioner details the many bad things happening in the world and asks how dare I propose solutions: isn’t resistance futile?

The only response I’ve found is to ask, as gently as I can, “Does feeling that way make you more effective?” To be sure, mood does matter. The last three decades of the twentieth century reportedly saw 46,000 new psychological papers on despair and grief, but only 400 on joy and happiness. If psychologists want to help people find joy and happiness, they’re looking in the wrong places. Empathy, humor, and reversing both inner and outer poverty are all vital. But the most solid foundation we know for feeling better about the future is to improve it—tangibly, durably, reproducibly, and scalably.

At RMI we're practitioners, not theorists. We do solutions, not problems. We do transformation, not incrementalism. In a world short of both hope and time, we seek to practice Raymond Williams's truth that "To be truly radical is to make hope possible, not despair convincing." Hope becomes possible, practical—even profitable—when advanced resource efficiency turns scarcity into abundance. The glass, then, is neither half empty nor half full; rather, it has a 100 percent design margin, expandable by efficiency.

In this Annual Report, my colleagues outline the latest steps in RMI's long journey of applied hope. As signs of RMI's effectiveness proliferate, our challenges are chiefly those of success—of needing ever more discriminating focus as the world moves our way, demanding that our limited resources be rapidly scaled to serve nearly infinite needs. We can't do everything; doing just anything may miss the mark; doing nothing is unacceptable; but doing the right things at the right time can make all the difference. We are intently engaged in discerning and reaching those goals. In a world so finely balanced between fear and hope, with the outcome in suspense and a whiff of imminent shift in the air, we choose to add the small stubborn ounces of our weight on the side of applied hope.

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