

by
MARSHA LINDSAY
CEO & Chief Analyst
Lindsay Foresight & Stratagem

PREFACE

It was a thrill: 200 business leaders gave me a standing ovation for a presentation made at Madison Magazine's Best of Madison Business event on February 22, 2024. A standing ovation is the ultimate compliment a keynoter can receive. Yet it was one of two "ultimates" related to the event. The other? Being named one of Madison's "visionary leaders."

Wanting to live up to the honor, I decided that the topic of my presentation should be a gift to Greater Madison that I was well-suited to make: a strategic playbook to create competitive advantage for the area long into the future. Obviously, it was a big hit.

This is an annotated transcript of my presentation as it was recorded.

Editing has been done to aid in brevity, readability; presentation visuals added to aid understanding.

To create the strategic playbook, I used the same process I do for my firm's clients: I researched emerging *marketplace* dynamics, emerging *marketing* dynamics; analyzed them in light of Madison's future strengths and weaknesses; identified the *essential* challenge to be overcome to keep the community viable – able to retain and attract employers, talent, capital and opportunity. Finally, I cast strategies which, over the next 5-10 years, would resolve the challenge, keep Madison growing; give the community's economy and quality of life competitive advantage *on the world stage.*

The master strategy? I branded it "The Madison Ethic." Its value proposition is only possible because of Madison's unrivaled network of smart, industrious and innovative businesspeople, researchers and scientists. (They have a track record of coming up with solutions to global problems, then exporting them to the world.) In the playbook, I allude to what we would need to invest in to deploy the strategy; how we would market it.

The prep of this strategic plan was a professional pleasure. But the standing ovation was especially rewarding because I so wanted to do right by the community that has given me so much, that brought out the best in me; that helped me achieve what some might call the American Dream.



So, while Greater Madison is saluting *me*, with this strategic playbook for its future, I'm saluting the community right back.

Can you see me, Madison? I'm standing, applauding, whistling!
It's an ovation for *you*.



FOREWARD:

Introduction by President of Greater Madison Chamber of Commerce Zach Brandon

Marsha Lindsay has the power of foresight. By nature a cultural anthropologist, she is laser-focused on human motivation and its convergence with marketing, commerce and culture. She is a student and a teacher of what is next and what is best.



If you have her business card or you've seen her website, you'll note her logo is a telescope. A tool to see far. When I say foresight, many of you probably think that it's the ability to predict what will happen, the oracle of what might come or what will come. But her icon is not a crystal ball. She is not a fortune teller. When I use foresight with regard to Marsha, I mean "site" like the optical device at the end of a rifle. A guide that helps you find the right direction for your future. If you were to distill Marsha's work down to two words, which is no small feat (but I tried), it would be "Aim here."

Now, Marsha's bio is way too long for me to share in detail. She is a serial entrepreneur. She is an author. She has worked with global brands like Procter & Gamble, Samsung, Kohler, PepsiCo, Mercury, Marine, 21st Century Fox, just to name a few. She has accomplished in many ways more than most of us could ever imagine. And she's done more than most of us ever will.

But more importantly, her work matters. She has done so much in her career that I once asked her, "How do you accomplish all these things?" I asked her, "How do you become the first for so many?" She looked at me and stared into my eyes and said, "I just didn't know I couldn't." She just believed that she could.

One of Marsha's crowning career accomplishments was the founding of Brandworks University®. If you don't know, for 25 years, Brandworks U was an annual, multi-day master class that was hosted here in Madison. It attracted hundreds of people from all around the world – big and small brands – to understand marketing, branding and future concepts. My first Brandworks was the 23rd, in 2013. I still have the textbook. Last night I looked at my notes from her keynote. She spoke about the deluge of data that was coming. I don't think she knew how big the deluge was going to be by now, but she talked about its coming, and there were many takeaways. I wrote them in pencil. But there was one that I wrote in indelible ink: She said, "Change your self-concept." And then I wrote in my notes "Change Madison's self-concept." And from that moment on I have been rifle-focused on Greater Madison's brand: A city of Seekers. A city that's ground level for the next big thing.

It all started with Marsha saying, "Aim *here*."

She has taken to stages around the world, but today she is at home, on *this* stage. So, friends, please join me in welcoming my good friend and my "siting" instructor, Marsha Lindsay.



KEYNOTE

I want to thank everyone in this community who has lit a path for me; thank those who've shown a light on me over the years, calling out a particular talent I evidently have: Connecting dots.



It turns out I'm pretty good at researching and identifying emerging marketplace dynamics (new business models, changes in consumer behavior, tech trends) and their implications. I am good at researching and analyzing emerging marketing dynamics: what no longer works in marketing, what's next and best for competitive advantage. I analyze all these things, identify issues and opportunities, and when done recommend to my clients that – where their future is concerned – they aim *for this particular opportunity*. Naturally, when Madison Magazine Best of Madison Business asked me to keynote, I did the same thing: I researched the current and future dynamics of Greater Madison's situation. After completing the analysis (essentially, connecting dots), I cast a strategic playbook on what can keep us viable, competitive, and growing “profitably” for years to come.

TODAY, I'LL TELL YOU WHERE I THINK WE SHOULD “SET OUR SIGHTS” FOR THE FUTURE.



But first I need to ask you all a question. How many of you were *not* born in Dane County? Look around: Almost everybody in this room *moved* here.

In moving here, what were you seeking? Your best life? Your best self? The next big thing?

These are what I was looking for when, at 23, I came here to grad school: I was determined to be a college professor. I was going to do research, then teach the findings. But something happened. When applying my research findings as a freelance marketer, the work that resulted was really effective. So, I dropped out of the PhD program, starting a company that became known as Lindsay Stone & Briggs. Its work was also very effective, attracting national clients, and multinationals.



Sadly, the company closed in 2020. I still mourn that. I had passed a torch there to my partners in 2016, and in 2017 started the firm I have now: Lindsay Foresight and Stratagem. I help organizations around the globe identify their competitive advantage. It's amazing and rewarding, so much so that I cannot wait to get up every day and get to work.



And yet, what's really amazing about it all is that the life I lead was totally *unexpected*. I grew up in a small Wisconsin town of 1,000 people where I was cautioned as a kid, "Don't expect too much out of life." Yet, when I moved to Madison, it brought out the best in me. This community afforded me a great education, opportunity, encouragement. It helped me create a life which many would deem The American Dream.

It's been a privilege to return the favor; to try and give something back to the community.

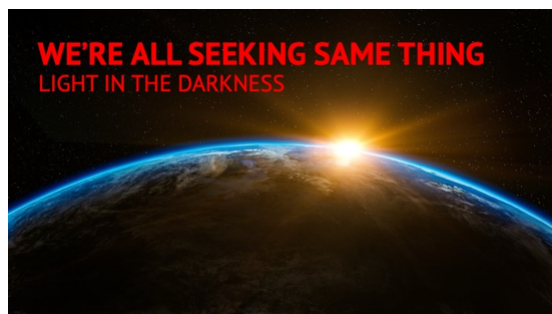
For example, when Zach became head of the Greater Madison Chamber, one of the first "give-backs" was working to identify the components of Madison's brand.



Among the findings: We have an inordinate number of people here who are "Seekers"; people characterized by their drive to gain knowledge about themselves and the world. And I mean *drive*: They're highly motivated to discover big things, be a part of them! They have a fear of missing out on them. They want to be at ground level for the next big thing. Does that sound like you? It certainly is me.



And if you're a seeker like me, you know that one's drive to seek knowledge does *not* diminish with age. Like Lauren Bacall, who at 70 said, "I am not a has been, *I am a will be*," I will be seeking the rest of my life. *What* am I seeking? It's the same thing all of you are seeking – what everyone seeks. That is –



light in the darkness. A way for all of us to live in harmony with each other on this little planet.

We're seeking hope for a *brighter* future. Not just for ourselves, but for our kids, for our communities, for all the world's people.





It's true that, here in Madison, we're fortunate. We have a quality of light and life that's pretty remarkable. I don't have to repeat all the "Best of" awards Madison has won. But one of my favorites over the years is from the BBC. They called Madison "one of the world's five best university towns." And yet –

FOR DECADES, MADISON CULTURE HAS BEEN MOCKED



For all the good we have here, we have often been ridiculed as being *so* different from other communities as to be "77 square miles surrounded by reality."

The mockery makes no sense because – in the last three years alone – reportedly 29,000 people have moved here *precisely because we are so different from the place from which they originated.*

They moved here seeking their best life, their best self, the next big thing for themselves and their family. In fact, in the last decade so many folks have sought a better life here that, technically, Madison cannot hold them all. They've had to live *beyond* the borders of Madison. They now live across all of Dane County. By my calculation, this means we're no longer 77 square miles surrounded by reality.



We're now 1197 square miles surrounded by reality. 1197 square miles of quality of life most others don't enjoy. It now appears fewer people are making fun of us. Instead, they envy us. We have what they don't have: a dynamic economy, educational opportunities.

Where other communities' hospitals are closing, here we have amazing healthcare. While other

communities still have slow-to-no-Internet service, here I enjoy 1 gig that runs down the street where I live. In other communities there are few opportunities to rise. But here, opportunities abound. (A prime example of this is all that's happening on Park Street, where so many are devoting their time and money to enable people to rise and achieve the American Dream.)

The lives so many are living are not like those we live here. Their reality is not a good one.

You could say that the reality other communities are experiencing IS the problem.



A GRIM REALITY CHALLENGES MILLIONS

In so many places, the local economy is failing. Kids go away to college but, seeing little economic advantage to returning home, they don't.

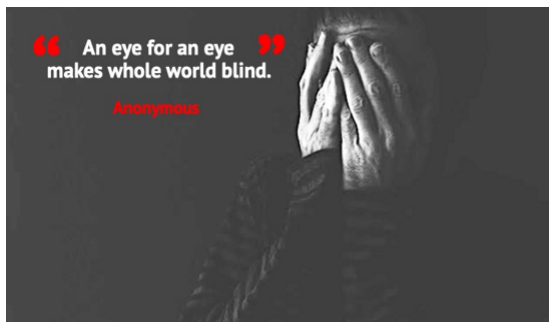
With an aging population and fewer workers, employers move elsewhere. The housing market collapses. Groceries and other retailers close. Unemployment grows, along with disillusionment, blame, violence. Emotional distress grows, along with drug use, physical abuse, suffering, hopelessness.



The dysfunctional behavior is everywhere. Yet the word “dysfunctional” does not seem sufficient to describe the verbal abuse, the humiliation, the bullying, the crass behavior, the death threats happening in so many places. Those suffering from these behaviors have a resentment that festers inside of them. Anger foments across neighborhoods. Amplified on social media, it spreads across

communities, gets leveraged by mercenaries, opportunists and others seeking justification for more destructive behavior.

The result is a dark shadow that grows over communities.



This dark shadow is covering up the light, not just here in the U.S., but around the world.

Don't you wonder how it's all going to end? *If* it's going to end? One wise person's prediction: An eye for an eye eventually makes the whole world blind. Unaddressed, an eye-for-an-eye attitude will eventually kill – and in many places has already killed – civil society as we know it.

Acts of revenge are becoming the norm. Distrust and dysfunction have become a vicious cycle.



Why?

Because kids learn it!

They watch what we adults do. They model our behaviors. So, with each generation, the darkness grows, taking up residence in people's very souls, whole neighborhoods, entire cultures.



DISTRUST, REVENGE AND DARK HEARTS ARE BECOMING NORM



Darkness has become endemic.

Systemic.

And yes, because emotions are contagious (science has proven that), what we *actually* face is another pandemic.

The pandemic of darkness even threatens to shadow our region.



As we've all witnessed, pandemics easily spread across borders and eventually oceans.

Even here, we must be on guard for pandemics that start elsewhere.

Unless something significant is done to treat and quell the dark and contagious behaviors happening in other places, then even in Greater Madison we will start to experience what can only be termed the *New Dark Ages*.

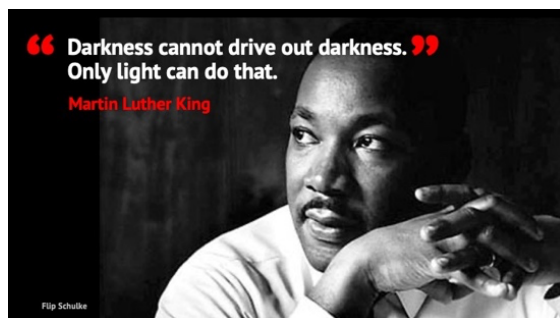
Given how quickly pandemics spread, all too soon chaos could reign everywhere.

All will be dark.



The world desperately needs to find a strong antidote to this darkness – a powerful counter agent. Fortunately, there is one!

A POWERFUL COUNTERAGENT TO DARKNESS EXISTS!



It's called light. As the Reverend King once explained: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness. Only light can."

It's true.

This means –
The *whole world* could use a big dose of light.
And soon.





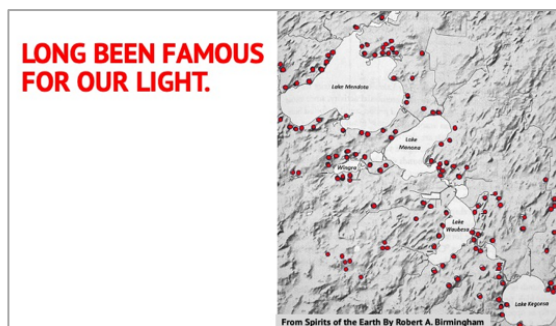
Soon, because until the name calling, threats and eye-for-an-eye mentality end, there's no way for us to have the kind of discourse necessary to solve *other* big problems in the world: Hunger. Global warming. A concerning rise of mental illness. The inability of so many to be self-sufficient and “rise.”



You all know physics. But let me remind you that it's a tenet of physics that *light cannot reproduce itself*. Photons cannot reproduce themselves. This means the only way to create more light to fight the darkness is for each of us to give off more light ourselves; take the light we see in each other and reflect it back.

RESEARCH FINDS MADISON HAS LONG BEEN FAMOUS FOR ITS CURATIVE LIGHT

In doing research for this strategic playbook for Madison's future, I discovered that thousands of years ago, indigenous people chose to settle beside our four lakes, deeming the air, earth, water of what we now call Madison so powerful a connection to the cosmos that it “rebalanced and harmonized their spirits; renewed the world and lifeways of their people.”



A great book titled *Spirit of the Earth* explains that our region's power to renew is why our brothers and sisters – the Ho Chunk – built so many effigy mounds here, *leveraging* the region's light.

Isn't that a great way to think about the 1197 square miles in which we live? As a place that can renew and “harmonize people's spirits”?

GREATER MADISON'S ABILITY TO HEAL CONTINUES TO THIS DAY



You already know this if you saw the recent coverage in *Travel and Leisure* magazine naming Madison the most neighborly city in the U.S. The article notes: “In these challenging times, when Americans report increasing loneliness and division, neighborliness represents unity and hope. Good neighbors *heal* our society's biggest wounds, starting with the smallest friendly gestures.”



MADISON IS ALSO INHERENTLY QUALIFIED TO BRING LIGHT TO FIGHT DARKNESS

When traveling the world, Zach talks about the amazing nature of the people we have here. He calls it an “*unrivaled network*” of really smart, industrious and innovative people; savvy businesspeople and great scientists (especially at the University of Wisconsin here, one of the world’s top public research institutions). Zach makes a strong case that, for decades, Madison has been ground level for the next big thing.

It’s true. Madisonians have long initiated research that leads to breakthroughs in all kinds of areas. Here, we consistently tackle the world’s big problems; then export the solutions around the globe. And when you add this to our region’s curative light and healing neighborliness, perhaps it’s our responsibility to tackle darkness.

PERHAPS IT’S MADISON’S VERY DESTINY TO LIGHT UP THE WORLD

When the University of Wisconsin was founded here in Madison, its very mission was sifting and winnowing in pursuit of transformational insights and discoveries, then teaching them beyond

WISCONSIN IDEA

To make the world better,
pursue transformative insights and discoveries,
then teach them so they reach far beyond the
boundaries of University of Wisconsin classrooms.



campus borders to improve people’s lives everywhere. This ethic is fundamental to who we are here. In 1904, then University President Charles Van Hise branded the ethic the *Wisconsin Idea*.

It’s inspired what I refer to today as the *Madison Idea*: What we as a community can do to light up the world.



Just like the University of Wisconsin devotes itself to transformative insights and discoveries (and a commitment to teaching them beyond the borders of Madison), what if – as a community – we devoted ourselves to the pursuit of insights and discoveries *to transform the darkness*? And then taught them in a way that could improve the reality of people’s lives *far beyond our 1197 square miles*?

Centuries ago, there was a concept called The Protestant Ethic. It was a set of behaviors *deemed best for the common good* which spread around the world and changed the trajectory of history.

In the 1940s, a UW professor named Aldo Leopold conceived of The Land Ethic, a moral principle based on the inherent truth that you cannot separate the health of people from the health of the land on which they live. His book, *The Sand County Almanac*, published 75 years ago, brought the ethic to life. Today, The Land Ethic is THE principle for “right and wrong” behaviors in service to environmental stewardship. Now, what it takes to *accomplish* The Land Ethic has evolved (and will continue to) over time. But by definition, the moral principle driving the ethic is universally relevant; timeless.

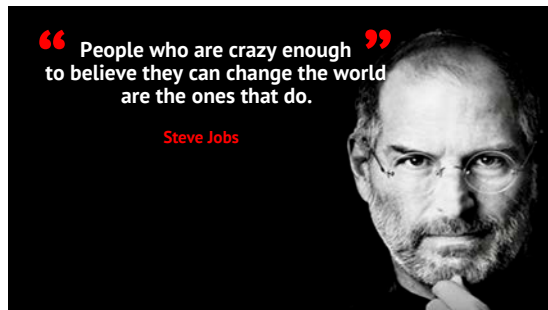




I'm suggesting the same thing here: The Madison Ethic: A universal and timeless ethic concerning the moral imperative to bring light to the darkness; to BE the light.

It would be named for the community where it was studied, where breakthroughs concerning it took place, where the people of the community perfected the “how-to” by living it themselves. Where, like those committed to the Wisconsin Idea, people choose to teach the ethic in such a way that it impacts the lives of people far beyond the community’s borders.

Can I see a show of hands of those who think I'm nuts? Anyone?



In my defense, it was Steve Jobs who noted that the people who are crazy enough to think they can change the world are the ones that do.

(As a sidenote, I learned a few years ago from my friend Doug Moe – the Madison-based award-winning author of numerous critically acclaimed nonfiction books, as well as thousands of newspaper columns

and magazine articles – that Steve Jobs was conceived in Madison. He was born to two UW students who later gave him up for adoption. To me, this is just more proof that big things are conceived in Madison; things *so big* that, in fact, they do change the world.)

There’s plenty of evidence that world-changing ideas are conceived in Madison. Just a partial list would include Harry Steenbock, who figured out how to infuse food with vitamin D, improving



the health of billions of people. And James Thomson, who derived the first human embryonic stem cell line. Madisonians crazy enough to think they could change the world have tackled all kinds of big challenges, such as how to give young girls a better start in life (so they have more confidence); how to use blood to detect several cancers far earlier than they would have been in years past; how to better

track poverty statistically, and thus how to better fight it.

For some time, people in Madison have been on a mission to change the world with their art, their architecture. One UW professor has committed his life to research that is leading to the improved mental health of thousands. One outgrowth is the training of people around the world in a kind of “mindfulness” that can lessen stress. Another UW professor has committed his life to researching the power of forgiveness and how to compel people to practice it. He’s



created, vetted and perfected a curriculum for kids K through 12 on how to forgive. For some time, it's been taught in places like Ireland. There, the curriculum has contributed to – of all things – an outbreak of peace. (Talk about a contagion of light quelling the darkness!)

My point? Do not for one minute doubt the ability of this community to come up with a big way to fight – even cure – the darkness spreading around the globe.

And do not doubt my ability to brand it or offer a strategic playbook by which it can actually be accomplished. But first –

SUMMARY OF WHERE WE ARE

Our situation: A damning darkness so contagious it even threatens our way of life here in Greater Madison. Thus –

The challenge the strategic plan must resolve: How to quell the darkness at least to the degree that some semblance of civil society can exist, so productive discourse can take place to tackle hunger, global warming, mental illness; enable a peaceful and productive life for our children.

An insight that resolves the challenge: We in Greater Madison are uniquely qualified to address the challenge, perhaps even destined to the task.

How can we accomplish this? With this playbook, which not only brings light to the world but *also* brings competitive advantage to our community.

A STRATEGIC PLAYBOOK TO CURE THE DARKNESS IN A WAY THAT GIVES MADISON A VERY BRIGHT FUTURE



It has three main prescriptives:

1. Identify and embrace behaviors already proven to mitigate darkness.
2. Discover and perfect new cures.
3. Teach The Madison Ethic of light to the world.

We'll take each of these in turn.



ONE: IDENTIFY AND EMBRACE BEHAVIORS *ALREADY* PROVEN TO MITIGATE DARKNESS



What's already proven to work is something I know a thing about. I've had years of scholarship in the arts and sciences that address *how* people process information. This started in grad school and continued through 50 years of experience in marketing which, after all, is the professional practice of changing people's conversations, attitudes, behaviors.

Research and evidence have revealed some interesting things that people often find surprising and quite helpful. For example: Some neurobiologists have concluded *we all evolved* to come to

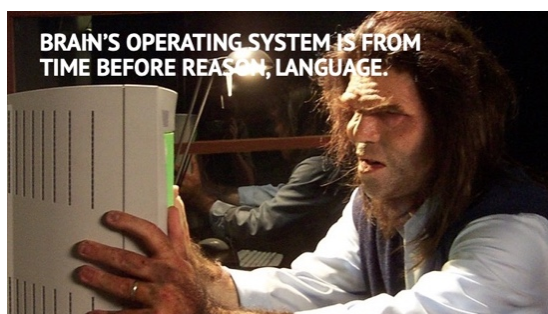


every conversation with an intent to try and change the other person to *our* point of view. It's suggested that we do this because, as cavemen, our very survival depended on getting folks to join us in hunting the woolly mammoth for food; to fight threatening tribes; to secure the best person with whom to mate.

One of the researchers I most revere is at the NYU School of Business, Jonathan Haidt. His specialty is the *evolution* of moral reasoning. He notes, "We evolved not to learn from other's reasoning, but *to try and gain advantage* in influencing them to our point of view." His research



shows that even today, our moral reasoning is based on gut feelings – emotions – rather than logic. This is because of our brain's operating system. It has not changed in 100,000 years.



Many pundits claim technology has changed how our brains operate, but this lacks evidence. From Harvard to MIT and UCLA, this matter has been studied. The universal conclusion is that our brain's operating system may be exposed to more information, and exposed much faster, but what has not changed is what the human brain does with the info. It's the same as with information *before* we had language, *before* we had logic, *before* our brain evolved to have complex reasoning skill.



Said another way: None of us think as we think we think. Rather, we go around noticing all kinds of things in life without realizing what we're taking in. But all along, our subconscious jumps to conclusions and judgements, irrationally.

YOU CAN'T REASON PEOPLE OUT OF A POSITION THEY DIDN'T COME TO BY REASON.



This is one reason it's almost impossible to reason people out of their opinion on something. *It is because it's most likely they didn't come to their opinion by reason in the first place.* Rather, it was formed subconsciously and based on very little info, or wrong info, and not logic.

Another evolutionary truth: Because it was necessary for survival, we evolved to align with the opinions

and beliefs of our tribe even if, over time, we could sense those beliefs might be irrational or wrong. That's because to visibly disagree or expose the weakness of one's tribe was to risk being exiled from the tribe. This meant facing the wilderness alone. Exile was a death sentence.



This is still true today. If you tell a person they should take a position *contrary* to that of their tribe, they'll get defensive. They'll be loath to vary from tribal opinions, no matter how wrong or irrational they are. Instead, they'll cling even to that which they sense is wrong or irrational, so as not to be cast out in *today's* wilderness, where the big threat is not physical survival, but emotional. Their fear of today's

wilderness is justified: Today, not feeling part of a community is a leading cause of mental breakdown. It leads to all kinds of dark behaviors like mass shootings in schools.

The reality of this innate tribalism means we can't reason others out of something they didn't come to by reason in the first place. It also means that a very popular mode of questioning today – where a question is meant to reveal a person's lack of facts or logic (I call it the “gotcha” strategy) – only creates darkness between you and the other person.

STOP ASKING THE KIND OF QUESTIONS THAT MAKE PEOPLE DEFENSIVE. ASK THE KIND THAT PROMPTS THEM TO QUESTION THEMSELVES.



In contrast, one approach showing promise is to ask a type of question that prompts a person to privately question their own thinking. For example, if I say to my friend Ichabod, “On a scale of one to ten (10 being you entirely agree), how would you rate your agreement with the statement *Putin is really doing right by the Russian people?*” Maybe Ichabod says 8. So, I sincerely say to him (I do not laugh at him or

judge), “Why not a 10? Why not a 5?” Because Ichabod has not yet come to his position by reason, he will then mumble something. But over time, he will be haunted by my sincere request



for a rationale for his rating. In an effort to justify his “8” he will consciously start to notice more and different kinds of information. Maybe even seek it out. And if there is merit to what he finds, he just might change his mind, and his opinion of Putin. And then, similarly, Ichabod may ask questions of his fellow tribe members, getting them to question what they thought to be true as well. As we know, when a critical number of tribe members feel the same way (for example, if they see a potential source of light that can brighten their future), inevitably things change.



Stephen Hawking noted, “An individual’s ability to change is a sign of intelligence.” Fortunately, in the Greater Madison community we have a lot of really intelligent people. We can change ourselves. That’s important. Because **it is only by first changing ourselves that we bring about change in others.**

This is why the strategic playbook to bring light to the darkness includes some behaviors we may want to personally embrace. One is that which I just noted – **a new approach to asking questions.** Others you will recognize as coming from the Abrahamic tradition, and others from Buddhism. Almost all have now been proven by the social sciences to work. I invite you to embrace them going forward.



The first is the most basic. **Start every day by imagining the encounters you're going to have and how you can add light to every one of them.**

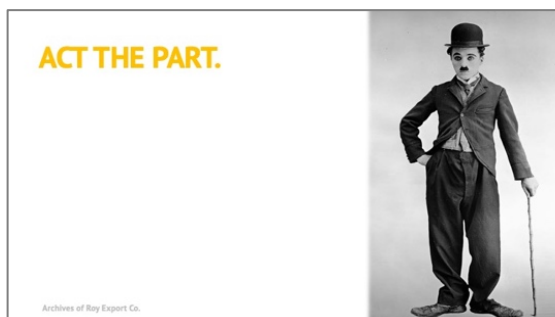
Make this a habit.

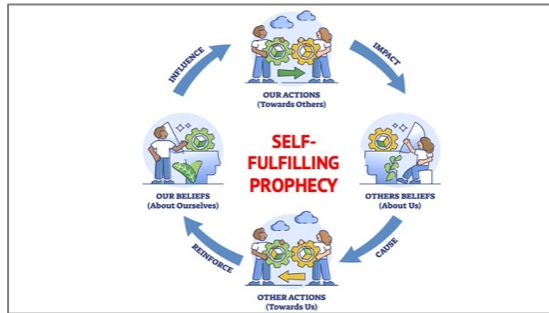


Then, if in any encounter someone tries to engage you in darkness, try to be Atticus Finch. **Be unprovokable. Be the adult in the room.**

No matter how difficult it is, hold your resolve.

Even if you deem it inauthentic to respond as the adult in that situation, **act the part.** How many of you have been in community or school plays? If you have, then you know it requires you to assume a role; rehearse and rehearse it. *With enough rehearsal, you become who you are pretending to be.* The role’s behaviors become habituated. This is one reason that, over time, “acting” kind and virtuous helps make us so! This truth is related to one of the most scientifically studied psychological phenomena.





It's called The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy.

Here's how it works: If you think you're a victim, it's a self-fulfilling prophecy that you'll actually make it so. By expecting to see mistreatment everywhere you look, you'll perceive it even where it doesn't exist.

Then, by the way you react to others (whining, blaming) for what you imagine, you'll actually make yourself undesirable to be around. This will result in a

lack of friends and a lack of opportunity. But the victimhood will be of your own doing.

In contrast, if I believe myself blessed, I'll see the blessings all around me, even where they don't exist. By being a grateful, optimistic person, people will be attracted to me. They'll seek more opportunities to be with me, to have me on their team. And, lo and behold, I'll have more opportunities! *The increase in luck I experience will be something I brought upon myself.*

Expecting people to treat you like a victim or expecting people to see the best in you are two examples of the sheer power of expectations. This power is why placebos are often effective in alleviating pain and sickness: People expect to be better, and they become better.¹

The lesson? **Expect the best of others and you'll not only find it, but you'll also help it come to be.** Expect the worst, and you'll help bring it about.



This is why other behaviors in this, the playbook's first prescriptive, include "**Do not whine. Do not make excuses. Do not blame others.**" These have long been tenants of good character. But the reasons *why* they're important deserve to be called out: All three behaviors are emotional and thus contagious. Each foster more of the same: Excuse after excuse gives

others permission to make excuses. Suddenly no one has to take responsibility for anything. Blame just triggers a contagion of blame, which festers resentment and calls for retribution. This eye-for-an-eye mentality then spreads like a pandemic, infecting the whole world with a kind of blindness that's impossible to cure.

¹ If you want to explore the power of expectations, here's a party trick. Some of my friends in the audience have experienced this. You take a regular bottle of beer and pour half in one glass and half in another. Then, out of sight, you take one glass and put in it a few drops of red food coloring. You set the two glasses out for a taste test. People will tell you they think the redder beer tastes better, richer, more fulfilling. They may even rave about the cherry notes. Yet the two glasses are the same bottle of beer except for the color. Color alone made them *expect* to experience something richer, more fulfilling, cherrier. Their expectations were self-fulfilling.





Now, if you're going to infect the people around you with *anything*, infect them with laughter. **Make others laugh.** That's the kind of contagion you want.

And to the premise that each of us *wants* to be a good person: Not so long ago, Illinois Governor Pritzker delivered an insightful speech at a Northwestern University commencement.



He made a compelling case that the cruelest people in any room are always the least intelligent; that you can always spot the *most* intelligent people because they're the ones who **find a way to be kind.** "They've overcome their animal instincts," our prehistoric brain. They're able to be the adults in the room; able to radiate light that transforms others.



Another part of the playbook has to do with how we talk with each other: Truly "attend to them." In other words, **give whomever you're with your full attention.**

New York Times journalist David Brooks, who covers the social decline of America, argues in a great new book he's written that driving the rise of depression, suicide and crime is a deep-seated feeling in a massive number of people that they are NOT seen.

Think about what this means: People will *not*

abandon their dark thoughts until they feel seen, and known, and valued for who they are, *just as they are. To imply to someone already in darkness that they are wrong to be there, and the only way out is your way, is morally abusive.*

In contrast, feeling seen is a comfort in and of itself. When you attend so much to a person that you truly see them, it's a moral act. So, when you do make the effort to truly "see" others, look for their light. (Talk about a moral perspective, which should be part of The Madison Ethic!)



Mr. Rogers explained that when we **look for the best in a person,** it's a self-fulfilling prophecy: We *will* find it. He argued that to look for a person's light is to do something sacred.

When you see it, call attention to it –





Reflect the light back to the person who's the source of it. Amplify it.

For someone to see in themselves the good another sees in them is a gift. It disperses some self-doubt and relieves some darkness from their soul.

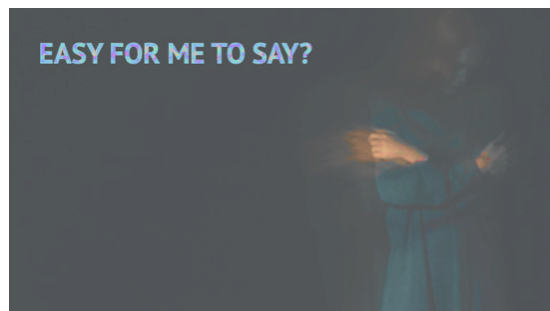
Another tenet of the playbook detailing best practices for quelling the darkness: **Practice what you preach**. Especially in politics today, it's hard, as this editorial cartoon illustrates so well.



If you want the other side to speak better of you, start by speaking better of *them*. (Remember: One's ability to change is a sign of intelligence.)

Another thing the playbook stresses is the need to **practice mercy, compassion and forgiveness**.

Some of you might say, "But Marsha, I just can't forgive *that* person." And then add this, "Marsha, how dare you stand up there – so privileged – and assume *that* person worthy of forgiveness!"



Well, if you think I've always found it easy to forgive, you don't know me very well. I may not be who you think I am. I too, have been wronged; I felt a victim, felt shame, blame, a desire for retribution. In college I was date raped. In my 20s, I was sexually attacked by a client. In the course of my career, I've been spat upon. I had a client *fabricate* a reason not to reimburse me over \$1,000,000. And because of that, I

had to lay off most of my employees. I didn't know how the company could survive. It took a judge two years to make the client pay.

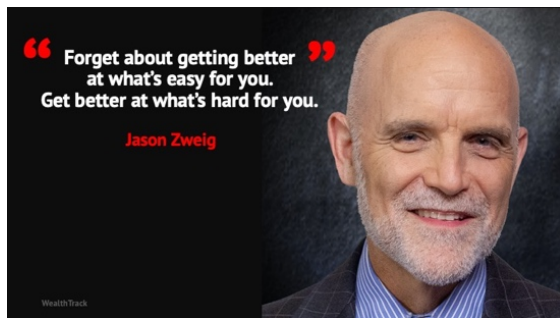


Throughout my life I've experienced great anger and resentment. I've had darkness take over my soul. But I learned the power of forgiveness, mercy and compassion. Actually, I learned it from a lot of you in this room, from a lot of people in the community. People in Madison showed me the light, pulled me out of a dark place. Was it easy for folks to forgive *me* and show *me* mercy and compassion? No. Was it easy

for me to fight my way back? No. Do I slip back every once in a while? Of course.



To forgive – and to do many of things required to fight the darkness – requires us to *choose to do the hard things*. If you talk to all those with expertise on how to have a better life, they *all* say:



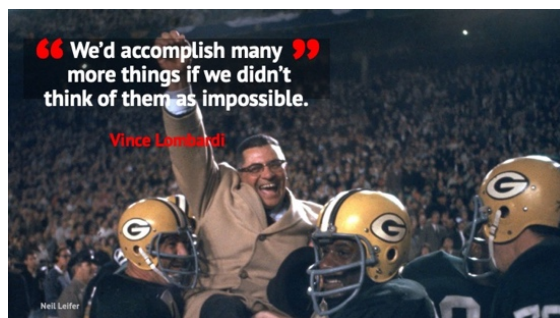
“Forget about getting better at what's easy for you. Get better at what is hard for you to do.”

It is easy to love people when they're lovable. It's hard to love people when they are most unlovable. We must show others the light over and over until it lights their path.

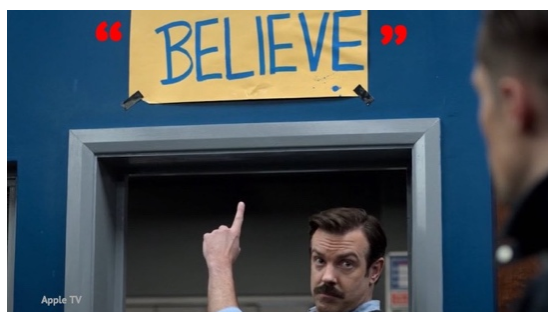
Keepers of light know that it's especially hard to keep the light on in a storm. And let's face it, the storms around us are getting worse. They're lashing at every aspect of society and darkening many people's souls.



But that's precisely why the world needs light-keepers who *commit to keeping the light on, even when it looks like it's going to be pretty tough to do so*; even when it looks like it might take years. Even when you may never know if a person will ever see the light. Even when it seems impossible.



But as Vince Lombardi, the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers, advised: “We'd accomplish many more things if we didn't first think of them as impossible.” *Believing* you can do something is, of course, a choice. But choosing to believe creates a self-fulfilling prophecy. *Choose to believe*.



A great deal of research *and* experience *has proven* this. It's why athletes practice belief, repeating mantras like “I can do this.” It's why Secretaries of State Colin Powell and Henry Kissinger held optimism as a best practice of leadership. It's because by expecting to find a way to make things better you actually make it so.

This is why “believing” is so powerful a force: It has a multiplier effect. What if Dr. Martin Luther King had said, “You know I have a dream, but *I don't believe* you folks are up to it.” *Believe in others*. It inspires them to rise to the occasion.



Now – I have a dream that Madison can be ground level for reversing the world's darkness. I believe we can do it, too. It's why the second of our playbook's three prescriptives is to advance scientific discovery of what can quell the darkness.

TWO: **DISCOVER AND PERFECT NEW CURES**



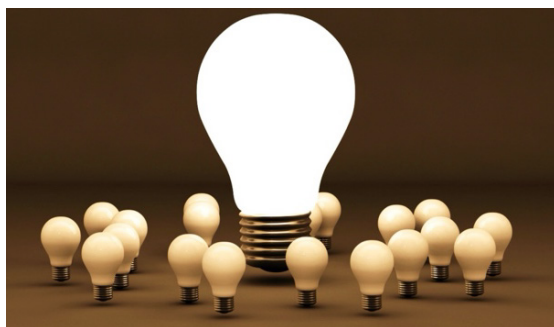
Madison should initiate and lead a concerted research effort to discover what can create the most light: What can reverse the darkness that haunts people's souls. Curative methods that are not only effective, but which also work quickly.

Then, because Greater Madison has so many Seekers (those wanting to be at ground level for the next big thing), let's make Madison a living laboratory: As a community, let's perfect and model what works. Let's practice the Ethic we preach.

The third prescriptive?



THREE: **TEACH THE MADISON ETHIC OF LIGHT TO THE WORLD**

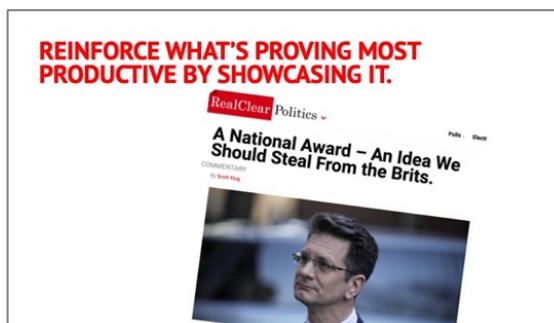


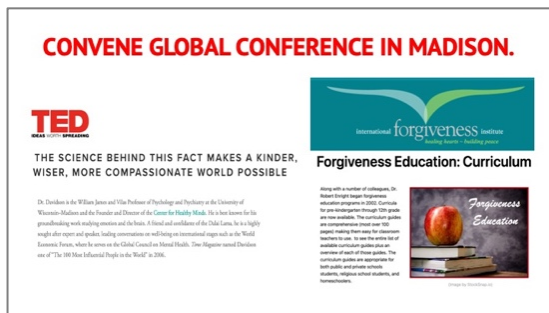
Teach the cures and best practices we've perfected in our living laboratory.

Teach with examples: Our former U.S. Congressman Scott Klug recently shared news of an award in Britain for civility. When you think about civility, it's essentially *bringing light into a conversation*.

Why couldn't we give an award for civility to a U.S. politician or someone in public service? Let's give the award at an annual conference – one where we also teach attendees from around the world what works to bring light and fight the pandemic of darkness.

Let's convene this global conference right here in Madison.





Neil Heinen, (Greater Madison's long-time conscience) reminded me that, when Vanderwall did some research on our community a few years ago, it was determined that "convening" is among our strengths.

So, let's *convene* an annual conference to teach things like what UW-Madison Professor Richie

Davidson has found can make people kinder; teach teachers from around the world the K-12 curriculum that UW-Madison Professor Bob Enright developed that is now proven to equip kids with the skills to forgive and thus change the course of the world.

The conference could invite speakers like David Brooks. We could feature the three women of The Faith Club. (Their book, titled *The Faith Club*, is an eye-opening and heartening read.) One of the three is a Christian, another a Jew, another a Muslim. Their children were all classmates.

Wrestling with their children's preconceptions and prejudices of their respective religions, these mothers decided to get to know each other. In the process, they became best friends, because they discovered the degree to which they – and their religions – are far more similar than different. (How's that for a beam of light?)



Ahh, similarities! As my grandson often remarks: "There is only one race. It's the human race."

Young people often connect dots others don't yet see. Youth must be among those invited to share their light-bearing insights at our annual conference.

MAKE THE CONFERENCE MADISON'S ANNUAL SIGNATURE EVENT

The strategic playbook calls for the conference to be annual: A signature event for the community. The learning it provides can be something we become famous for around the world.

It would attract visitors just like the "Ideas Festival" does for Aspen; just as the Sundance Film Festival has done for Park City, Utah – a small and hard-to-get-to community. It would drive our



fame, just like the World Economic Forum does for Davos, where for three weeks every year, the things discussed become news all over the world.

And consider this: Every year, South by Southwest in Austin brings in millions of dollars. In 2023 alone it was \$381,000,000. This happens every year. Wouldn't that kind of economic impact be a great lift to Greater Madison?



THIS PLAYBOOK GIVES MADISON COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE IN ATTRACTING ATTENTION, TALENT, OPPORTUNITIES, INVESTMENT CAPITAL

This is a playbook that identifies and addresses a huge unmet need (light to quell the darkness). It meets the need with a flywheel of value creation for the world: scientific breakthroughs and thought leadership likely to beget more breakthroughs.



And with an annual conference that reports breakthroughs and teaches best practices, the playbook creates a flywheel of opportunity for Greater Madison, too. Each year, who is speaking, best practices being taught, conference publications, videos and social media would attract attention. Increased visibility of the community would lead to more visitors, a glow that attracts talent, investment,

good fortune. (After all, what employer, worker, or VC wouldn't want to invest in a community famous for its one-of-a-kind quality of light and life?)

All of this could resolve a challenge from which the area has long-suffered: A national study we did for Zach a few years ago discovered we were not on the radar screens of most U.S. business decision-makers. And of *those that did know Madison existed*, only 14% could say anything material about our community. Such a lack of awareness inhibits Greater Madison's growth and limits our future economy. (Without awareness, we never get into the consideration set of

employers hoping to expand, or workers considering a move, or people planning a vacation.)



Not just any strategic plan for the community's future can deliver awareness, preference, competitive advantage and a strong ROI. This one can, because it addresses what *everyone* is seeking:

Light in the darkness.



With this strategic playbook, yet again Greater Madison would be ground level for the next big thing: A new reality for many. Relief and hope for millions.

Hope for our community's future, too.



ARE YOU A DOUBTER, OR A BELIEVER?

Some of you in the audience think it might be hard – maybe impossible – to enact such a playbook for Madison’s future, for the world’s future. But let me remind you, those crazy enough to want to change the world are the ones that do. Greater Madison has long been famous for discovering solutions to the world’s biggest problems and exporting them; teaching them beyond our boundaries.

For any doubters of the community’s ability to do an annual signature event: Zach mentioned in my introduction that for 25 years my firm held just such an annual 3-day conference – an *international* conference – here in Madison. Every year, about 400 made a pilgrimage from around the globe to learn the next big things about effective marketing. They took home what they learned, putting it into practice for their benefit.

WHO AMONG YOU WILL BE CATALYSTS?



There’s no reason Greater Madison couldn’t do the same – create, curate, market and host an annual signature event on The Madison Ethic™, an ever-more-enlightened set of behaviors *deemed best for the common good*.

All of you in the audience today would be exceptional catalysts in making this strategic playbook happen –

because you’re businesspeople. And *fundamental* to business is a focus on what it will take to get better every day, every month, year over year. Mere survival requires every businessperson get better at the things that give them competitive advantage in the marketplace.



To put this in perspective, if the businesses of Greater Madison do not get better at *maintaining* the light we already give off, and *generate more light* to fight the encroaching darkness, then we could lose the quality of life we have. And if we choose to distinguish ourselves by being an exceptional source of light, then we’ve inoculated ourselves to future threats.

Would you consider sparking more light in the community?

If the spark doesn’t come from you in the business community, then who? We all know that so many of our traditional institutions are no longer what they used to be; that people no longer believe in society’s institutions, no longer trust them to improve their lives.

But research by Edelman, the Global PR firm, finds people *still trust business*. Not only do they trust we can make a difference, *but they’re also actually counting on us* to deliver some form of light for the darkness they face.

So, who among you will be the playbook’s catalysts?



At the very least, you can spark light-producing behaviors at home and at your place of work, in



schools, in places where we volunteer, in our neighborhoods. And with the first prescriptive of the playbook – behaviors already proven to add light – you have a set of *best practices to have a better life*. To lead your best life. A playbook of behaviors to teach your kids how to have *their* best life. A playbook of behaviors to take all the wonderful things about Madison that make us great and help us be even

better; be the best we can possibly be. Why, if just 10,000 folks in Madison were to adopt the playbook's recommended behaviors, things would get lighter and brighter here. But even if just 1,000 people embraced the playbooks recommendations, it would lift us all.

WILL YOU EMBRACE AND LIVE THE MADISON ETHIC?

I know the difference it can make. I stand before you today as proof of the transformative power of the light Madison uniquely provides those seeking a better life for themselves. How the light this community radiates helps people become their best selves.

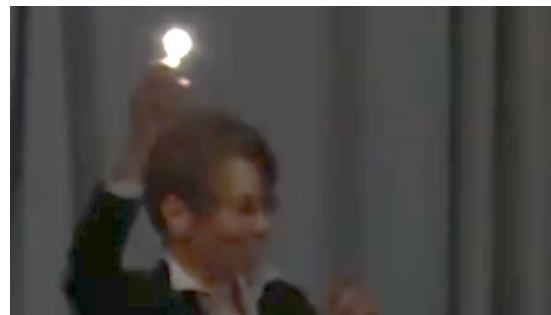
In fact, all of you here today have proven it, too. I've observed you, greeting each other with



warm handshakes and hugs. I've heard your laughter. I've seen you fully "attending" to what others have to say; watched you being neighborly, healing each other in ways you don't even realize. I've witnessed you bringing light to the darkness; finding the light others give off. Reflecting it back. Amplifying it. Without realizing it, you've been exemplifying The Madison Ethic, making each other feel better about

yourselves, the future, and this place we call home.

As I said earlier: It's a principle of physics. Light can't reproduce itself. For the world to have more light requires each of us to generate more of it. **If you want to join me in fighting the dark - as the old saying goes - don't put your light under a barrel. Rather, let your little light shine!**



Room lights turn down. [Bruce Springsteen Music Plays: Let your little light shine.](#)

Across the room, battery driven lightbulbs appear – people holding them over their heads, swaying them to the music.

When the song ends, room lights come back on. The audience stands in ovation.

