**Center for Humane Technology | Your Undivided Attention Podcast**
**Episode 18: The Stubborn Optimist's Guide to Saving the Planet**

Christiana Figueres: There was so much hope that this would be the moment when countries would actually agree on a global framework to address climate change.

Tristan Harris: Today on the show we have Christiana Figueres, who's intimately familiar with the high stakes of climate change negotiation. She became the United Nations top climate official after the failed Copenhagen Climate Summit in 2009.

Christiana Figueres: That session ended up in blood, in screams, in tears and heads of state leaving ahead of time. It was just total disaster. Little did I know that I would then six months later be called upon to pick up the pieces from the garbage can and say, "Right, you figure out what to do with this mess."

Tristan Harris: As one of the main architects of the Paris Agreement, she helped bring more than 195 countries on board to meet the climate change goals. How do you negotiate something that is a global problem and harness and jujitsu the emotions and injustices and the feelings of being burned from all of these different countries to take a common action for a common purpose, for a common future. Christiana is author of the new book, *The Future We Choose: Surviving the Climate Crisis,* co-written with Tom Rivett-Carnac to outline how a radical shift in mindset can and must lead to a shift in action.

Tristan Harris: Now you might be wondering why would a podcast that's normally about how technology is impacting society interview a global climate change expert who negotiated the Paris Accords? It's because whether we act on climate or not, or on the timescales that we have depends on what 3 billion people believe about it. Is it real or is it urgent or is it just an exaggeration by the media? Is there a way to do it without breaking economic growth? Democracies depend on the public opinion and consensus of their population and right now technology is controlling what we believe.

Tristan Harris: In a study of 200 of the top climate videos on YouTube, almost half promoted conspiracy theories about climate change and climate engineering. And even when news feeds try to inform us, we get infinite fear porn of apathy and learned helplessness and eco-anxiety. So we can't solve climate change without fixing the attention economy. The second reason we wanted to talk to Christiana is about how do you change an industry against their own business and economic interests? How do you negotiate against the self-interests of different nations? It seems impossible because in this case, individual behavior change isn't enough.

Tristan Harris: You think that with coronavirus, with the entire economy just turned off completely that we would have met the Paris Accords for this year, but so far we've only reduced emissions by 5.5% which is less than the reductions targets for one year. So if we're going to solve climate change, we're going to need a miracle way in which all of us, every one of us and all business and all technology companies and each one of our behaviors add up to tackling this global problem. And that's why Christiana's story is so important.

Tristan Harris: I'm Tristan Harris.

Aza Raskin: I'm Aza Raskin and this is Your Undivided Attention.

Christiana Figueres: At my very first press conference, I was literally speaking the mood of the world when some newspaper person asked me, "Ms. Figueres, do you think a global agreement is ever going to be possible?" To which I immediately retorted, "Not in my lifetime." And that not in my lifetime is probably the most important sentence I have ever uttered in my lifetime because it made me listen to myself. I verbalized something that was being felt by everyone, including myself, but once I heard me verbalize it, I realized that I couldn't accept that as a reality because the consequences of not having a global structure to address climate change were so, so destructive and such a huge threat to human existence, let alone to the balance of nature and all ecosystems that I just decided, "Well, no way, not on my watch are we going to continue with that attitude."

Christiana Figueres: That's when I started to change my attitude, which was a huge piece, right? Just to change my own attitude and then started injecting what I came to call stubborn optimism into the whole negotiating system and gradually pulling more and more and more stakeholders into that space to move from a concept of impossible to the concept of possible, then probable, then likely and then delivered, check mark. Not an easy process, but one that had to be done. I think it was absolutely clear that it had to be done. It was necessary. It is not sufficient. Having a structure and a framework, or you could call it a business plan, right? If the whole convention work operation, we would call it, right? So we have our business plan. Okay, but a business plan that remains in written form on the shelf does no one any good. And so it's necessary to have the business plan, but it's got to be implemented, which is where we are now.

Aza Raskin: We often say that the business model of the tech companies is ads. It's grabbing our attention, but that's I think, still is slightly misleading. It's the monetization of small changes to our behaviors, our beliefs and our biases and both climate and the tech companies and tech platforms need behavior to change in order for them to keep going as a business and for us to keep going as a species. And it strikes me, the tech companies are pushing, well, whatever grabs the most attention, not about what's good for us as humanity. And it seems like another just fundamental tension we're going to have to solve.

Christiana Figueres: Yes, I accept that point and at the same time I have been fascinated by the dramatic changes in individual behavior that we've seen over the past month or two. We have seen systemic changes through government policy, but also behavior changes that none of us would have thought would be possible for each of us individually, let alone for half of humanity. So now the coronavirus is tragic, we are losing thousands of lives, millions of livelihoods, millions of livelihoods and incomes and jobs. So I don't want to underestimate that. And at the same time it does seem to me that it's a very important exercise if you will, human exercise. It's almost like humanity has gone to the gym of behavioral changes. We're doing this weight lifting in that gym. The difference between this dramatic change in behavior that we've seen and the dramatic change in behavior that we have to see for climate change.

Christiana Figueres: The difference is that there is a very clear association of imminent threat in the coronavirus. That's one type of risk, right? If you look at the quadrant of risk, they are up there in that quadrant of high probability and high impact. But it wasn't until people started dying on a daily basis that we actually understood that there was an

imminent threat. That is the challenge with climate change. Climate change is also a high probability, in fact the highest probability, the highest impact. It is like the mother of all risks because of the probability and the impact. But it's not an imminent threat. It is a threat that takes months, years, decades to be felt by everyone. And it is not experienced co-terminously at the same time by everyone. It is experienced by Australia and then by the Amazon and then by Siberia and then by the small Island States.

Christiana Figueres: So it's not a coterminous threat and impact and that is what makes this so dangerous, so frustrating because the threat is orders of magnitude worse than what we're dealing with now. So this is almost a bitter foretaste of what we could have with climate change if we don't address it properly. But despite the fact that we are going to have orders of magnitude more suffering and more destruction and more lives lost and more jobs lost, it's not an imminent threat and so it's that sense of immediacy is the piece that I am frankly sitting here chilling on because it is understandable from a human perspective, from a human psychology perspective, we are definitely wired to react to imminent threats. With that we have done, ever since we climbed down off the trees, right? That imminent threat is exactly what we are so well trained to react to.

Christiana Figueres: However, we also have a frontal brain, not just our limbic brain and what happens in the frontal brain, the more developed brain, that we are not able to bring about the depth and scope of behavioral change that we know we must have when the threat is there confirmed by science. We already have ramping up evidence, exponential evidence every year and yet the threat is not imminent. So I'm really chewing on that one. I'm really chewing on that one because I think that is the biggest difference there between those two.

Tristan Harris: The problem of climate change, as you just said, is our brains are perfectly equipped to not see it, meaning the geometry of how we feel and see exponential curves. We were not evolved to see exponential curves to look at chronic and diffuse impact as opposed to concrete and immediate impact. If I try to wrap my brain around it, we've got species loss in the Amazon, we've got coral reefs, we've got nitrogen runoff, we've got ocean acidification. If I actually dig into it, my brain just starts to get overwhelmed and yet we need to find a relationship, a psychological relationship to it. And I think what's fascinating in your work is, like you said, it's not just about having the business plan, it's about psychology. Getting the psychology of the 195 members and the Paris Accords. So if you take us back a little bit, you were there in Paris and it looks like there's no way to get people to agree. How did you wrangle the emotions and the brains? And the thinking and the sense of solidarity among people who theoretically were not having it.

Christiana Figueres: I only think that our responsibility when we know that we need to affect change is not to turn away from the threat to see it understand the threat that is there, the risks that are there and not stop there. There is another side to the coin, especially on climate and the other side of the coin is everything that we can co-create that is so much better than what we have now. The fact that we can have cities that don't have air pollution, the fact that we can avoid the 7 million deaths of people who die from air pollution, the fact that we can have much better transport, the fact that we can have much better energy generation and not just more dependable and

cheaper and cleaner, but actually we can bring energy generation to the almost 1 billion people around the world who don't have any electricity and hence are still under the poverty line because energy is so basic to any kind of wellbeing.

Christiana Figueres: The fact that we can regenerate soils, the fact that we can not just protect standing for us, but that we can reforest as opposed to deforesting, right? The fact that we can bring so much more human health and planetary health, human resilience and planetary resilience, all of that whole package we can do through acting in a timely fashion on climate change. And that is why I think it is so important to hold both of these realities at the same level at the same time. One reality is the fear of the dystopian world that we will all have tastes of, which we're already having right now, but we can also just barely, just barely if we move quickly enough and that actually will be decided over the next 18 months. So we can talk about that, but we can set the conditions for a world that is so much better than what we have right now.

Christiana Figueres: And technology is a part of that, I should say well-managed technology is a part of that, but we have to be able to open our minds to that possibility and manage technology properly so that we can get to that world. So it's entirely possible, entirely possible. And we have to wrap not just our imagination, but our visualization, which is stronger than imagination, right? Our visualization. We have to be able to visualize what these cities will look like. Green, clean, efficient cities. What are they going to look like? What are the rural areas going to look like when we have a planet that is green again? What are the oceans going to look like? We have to be able to visualize that and then figure out how do we use everything that we have, technology, finance, policy, and behavioral changes to get us to that world.

Christiana Figueres: That is entirely possible. And that's the process that we used to get to the Paris Agreement. Honestly, I knew that we were going to get an agreement a year before because I had already spoken to everybody. I knew what they were looking at and we knew we had enough common ground. The last year was spent just in increasing the ambition, but we are today with respect to the world that we could create. We're basically at the Copenhagen stage, right? We're basically at the breakdown stage in which we are feeling so desperate and so helpless and so hopeless that it's very difficult to think ourselves out of this box. But it is entirely important to do so. We have to be able to visualize what it is that we can do and then get our act together to do it.

Aza Raskin: To combine one of the least hopeful things I know and then immediately follow it up with I hope is going to be one of the most hopeful things I know.

Christiana Figueres: I like this. Okay.

Aza Raskin: So least hopeful is when we as human beings are confronted with an existential risk as an individual. There is a JAMA study, Journal of American Medical Association of 150,000 Americans have a stroke or cardiac event and what they need to do to get better are exercise, stop smoking, eat a little healthier. Less than 50% of people do any one of those three things and only 4.3% of people do all three. That seems deeply unhopeful to me and yet...

Christiana Figueres: Well hold on, Aza. Hold on. You've given me the two extremes. Can you also give me data in between how many people do two things?

Aza Raskin: 30%.

Christiana Figueres: That's not bad.

Aza Raskin: It's not bad, and I've heard you describe, visualize, make tangible and feelable what that new world could feel like. It's hard to really feel what it would be like to be on the other side of your health state. It takes a lot of work to get there and if you could touch it, feel it, experience it, I think many more people would be able to do it.

Christiana Figueres: Very true, very true. It's very difficult to catapult ourselves out of the perceived reality that we're in right now into a different reality that we first have to create in our minds before we can create in physicality, right? But that's the magic. Just think of the most evident example, right? John Kennedy said, "In 10 years we're going to put a man on the moon." He had no idea how that was going to happen. Neither did any of the NASA engineers, but they just said, "Right, we are going to head for a man on the moon in 10 years." So that was not an experience reality for them. That was a reality that they visualized, that they first corrected in their brain what they deemed to be possible, and then they just work like hell to remove all of the obstacles. But that is to me, the process of where we as humans can break through ceilings and self-imposed barriers of what is possible and what is impossible because we tend to think that the only thing that is possible is the currently experienced and well known and most traveled and most trodden.

Christiana Figueres: Well, yeah, of course we agree that that's possible because all of us are experiencing it. That is not the limitation of what is possible. That is just the limitation of the experienced. That is where we already are. So to take ourselves first in our head into the future, and for me to first decide, "How am I going to feel when I'm healthy? How am I going to live in this world when it's a healthy world?" You first have to put that in your head and then work toward it. The fantastic thing about that Aza, the fantastic thing is that, I don't know if you guys have had this experience, but for me, every time that I do that and I do it with little things and I do it with bigger things, what is mind-blowing is that once you get to the other side, the reality that you've created is more than usual, better than what you imagined.

Christiana Figueres: That is amazing and the only way that I explained it to myself is that, our limbic brain continues to restrict us even though we make a very conscious choice of, "I'm going to move away from that. I'm going to use the other part of my brain. I'm going to catapult myself into the future." There's still that limiting brain that is going like, "Really? Are you sure? Are you really sure we're going to get there?" And it just pulls us back, right? But once we climb out of that box and we envision it, and then we create it, then the fantastic thing is that there is a systemic reaction that occurs that especially if several people, or even better, if many people are doing that same exercise.

Christiana Figueres: Then there is a co-creation of that better world, that better situation, that better whatever, that better experience that because several people or hopefully many people are moving toward that energetically, then one plus one plus one actually turns out to be six and great. That's the incredible power. That is the incredible power of this retraining of our brains and refusing to accept limits that are the result of our current experience as opposed to the possibilities that are the result of us thinking ourselves into a better world.

Tristan Harris: And is that what happened at the Paris Accords? How did that transformation happen? I think taking people into that mental spiritual transformation I think would be very helpful.

Christiana Figueres: Well, honestly, Tristan, it's not terribly easy to explain, but I'm going to try. I'm going to try. At that press conference, I personally decided, "Right, I have to change my thinking about this. I have to let go of the limiting thought that a global structure is never going to be possible." Why? Because I knew that from a moral point of view, that is unacceptable. There's no way that I wanted under my watch to commit future generations to that destruction. So just because it was morally unacceptable, I said, "Right, take the high road here and first of all, change my own perception of this." So I had to do a lot of internal work to be honest with you, a lot of internal work to change my perception. Then work with the 10 to 12 people who were closest to me, the management team at the convention to do all kinds of work with them to begin to re-motivate them because they have worked very, very hard for the disaster in Copenhagen and they were in the trash bin, right? Completely de-motivated. So take them out.

Tristan Harris: And this is psychological work between all of you?

Christiana Figueres: No, this is all kinds of things. Honestly, it even starts with structure. It starts with figuring out what the working conditions are. What do the kitchens look like? What do the bathrooms look like? What are the offices look like? And what food is being served in the cafeteria? It starts with everything even physical, but then also a lot of team building and a lot of working about where's the limitation? Who will help? Identify a limitation that you want to break through and just get into that set of mind of breaking through limitations. But it goes all the way, as I say, from your physical environment all the way to even that in and everything in between. And then working through...

Aza Raskin: Do you have any examples of that? Of the ways you would bring a team through these limiting beliefs, identifying the making a safe space in which people can talk about them, I think it would be really helpful to hear some of those specifics.

Christiana Figueres: Well, one thing that I can share is that the secretariat that I was leading has the responsibility of devising strategy for negotiation of every year. And so when we were devising the first and the second and the third, and each strategy is obviously under constant revision, there was one person in that very close management team that was always negative and just didn't believe that anything was going to be possible. "Here's the big strategy. This is what we're going to do." "Oh no, that's not going to be possible." And at first it irked me terribly and then I decided wow this is the most important person on the team. So I pulled him aside and I said,

"Would you be willing to be the permanent Cassandra on the team, please? Even if you agree with what we're saying, please do not verbalize that.

Christiana Figueres: Please exercise, discipline and trying to really figure out what are all the weaknesses of anything that we suggest, anything that we put on the white board, anything that we're thinking, please just puncture that constantly, constantly, constantly because we need to be challenged to move toward higher and better ways of thinking and acting and strategizing." And unless there's someone constantly pushing that, then you fall into the known of the known and true and we know that the known was not going to be enough. So honestly he became such a valuable part of the team. Now I told the team, right, he is going to do this for us and let us understand that as a positive contribution.

Christiana Figueres: Yes, it can seem irky. Yes, it can be frustrating, but I have given him this task and let us all understand that it is a very important task and honestly I am so grateful to him because he really did point out early on what the weaknesses could have been and then the rest of the group was called upon not to dismiss what he was saying, but to figure out how do we mitigate that risk and how do we think of related risks and mitigate those ahead of time. So you can see that the group is given the task of collectively examining everything for its strengths and weaknesses and being into a constant improvement process that we then expanded beyond the management team to the whole team of 500 people that work at the secretariat.

Christiana Figueres: And then we brought the government, our negotiators in, right? Once I slowly invited all of the country representatives into that kind of thinking, "We're going to make this possible. There are many problems on the way, but we're going to figure out how to address each of these barriers." Over time it was evident to me that we were moving as a system, which is both the UN people, 500 UN employees plus all of the government representatives of which there are thousands. It's 195 countries but some of them have thousands on their teams. Some of them only have two or three. Just to make things a little bit more complicated, then I invited other stakeholders, representatives of private sector, corporations, finance sector, the tech sector, the science, the spiritual communities, the women's groups, the youth groups, the insurance companies, all of them because they're all going to be affected. An expanding circle.

Tristan Harris: Where did this happen? Where was this exactly?

Christiana Figueres: The headquarters of the Convention is in Bonn, Germany. But what I'm describing was a five year process. All the process toward Paris.

Aza Raskin: What I hear you doing with the naysayer is we all have internally in our minds that voice of doubt. Like the thing that's tapping us on the shoulder like, "It's just really going to work. It's not going to work." And it's important not to dismiss it and push it away. It's important to turn to face it, listen to it and incorporate it. You are designing the relationship you are having with the voice of doubt and instead of making it you more fragile by ignoring it, making you anti-fragile by incorporating it. That's so inspiring.

Christiana Figueres: Yeah, whatever comes out is definitely stronger because someone is pointing out weaknesses and there's collective wisdom as to how to address that weakness.

Tristan Harris: The psychology of negotiation and getting everybody, especially around the historical responsibility that you've talked about, that people have different views of what they're historically responsible for kind of aligning all of that together? There's a parallel in the tech industry where, let's say you started your company with the advertising business model that we now know to be corrosive to societies, but you've been an early polluter, which got you into this big billion dollar, trillion dollar market cap. And now we're saying you can't use that business model, but now the newcomers have to somehow get to be as big, but they can't use the same polluting methods. And so there's this similarity about how do we walk that path.

Christiana Figueres: Interesting, wow.

Tristan Harris: There is just so many aspects of this that I would love to tap into. We have a situation where we profit from the problem in the tech industry where the business model is the problem. And so it's like, well, our economic growth seems to be the problem with climate change because it's so directly tied to emissions and you're shaking your finger at me. So what is the truth of the matter there, Christiana?

Christiana Figueres: In my mind, I play around with one sentence summaries of the Paris Agreement. And there are many, but one is precisely this, that not only can we but we must decouple economic growth and especially wellbeing, which is a better definition than economic growth, must decouple wellbeing from the growth of greenhouse gases. So when you look at the curve of GDP over the past 50, 100 years, you see that that curve has been going in parallel with the growth of GHG. So basically GDP has been equivalent to GHG and that has been so mostly because of the burning of fossil fuels, which is at the basis of power generation, heating and cooling and all of that.

Christiana Figueres: Now, that was fine for the past century because we didn't know that we were causing as much damage as we are, but that is no longer fine and in fact it is no longer necessary. It perhaps was necessary last century because we didn't have an alternative, but today we have the alternatives, right? We have all of the renewable energies that are coming down in cost. Solar has come down 85% in costs, wind a little bit less, but also on track. And when you have as cheap or cheaper alternatives that do not cause greenhouse gas emissions, then you know that you have to de-link, you have to decouple because not doing so is actually going to cause a drop in GDP. If we get to the point where we have exceeded the absorptive capacity of the atmosphere in GHG, in greenhouse gases and we're almost there, then pushing further on GDP that is based on greenhouse gases is actually going to cause a dramatic drop in GDP.

Christiana Figueres: So in order to continue and to still have space for economic growth for developing countries, and I underline that in red three times because we are still bringing people out of extreme poverty in most developing countries. So for developing countries it is particularly important that they are able to continue their economic growth and prosperity, bringing wellbeing to all of their people without the

attendant greenhouse gas emissions. And we have the technologies and we know what the policies are. So not only can we pursue more economic growth in developing countries, but we must. What that actually means is that developing countries have to be supported in their access to all of these alternative energies.

Aza Raskin: One of the things I was thinking about when you were talking earlier about how we as humans find it difficult to course correct until we're right on top of the pain that we need to feel. And I think one of the roles technology can play is like a pair of glasses that we put on because it's through technology that we make sense of the world, and especially now in COVID times, it's through technology that we see all of the rest of the world. So if those glasses then can help us individually and collectively see the world that we're moving into, the dystopian one, right? If on Google Maps you could see every time you looked at it, the flood lines in 10 years, that brings the future into the here and now. And the other thing it could do is paint that picture of what the better world would be like. And something I really wanted to hear from you is that visualization of the better world. Like what should we as technologists be helping build towards?

Christiana Figueres: Wow, you've just painted a fantastic task for Google. Can you imagine if you could do what you just said, go into Google Maps and see your town 10, 20 years from now under two scenarios Aza, right? Under two scenarios, under the irresponsible scenario and under the responsible scenario.

Tristan Harris: The point of our work is really the technology is the sense-making apparatus for the world and everybody relies on Google Maps every single day to make sense of how they think about their own geography. Everyone relies on Google to think about search and imagine this two paths approach that you just said was embedded across all products that you use every single day. So Facebook, instead of showing you basically nothing about climate or climate denial or in some cases, climate fear. Imagine that each time climate shows up in a newsfeed, it's the if we do nothing versus if we do something and then it actually has the actions that are visible for us to take where it shows me everyone else who's doing work on climate change, joining the extinction rebellion groups, taking action. LinkedIn in controlling the sense-making of how we see every business in the world could actually be the mass coordination infrastructure for drawing down emissions.

Tristan Harris: So next to every business profile you could go to Allbirds Shoes and you could say, "Well what is the climate footprint for the entire fashion or shoe industry?" And say, "Well here's the progress bar." Just like they say, "Fill out your profile at 70% complete. If you add in your education status, we'll go to 80% complete." They could do that for companies and say, "Hey, for this company is actually 20% on their draw down pathway to zero to 2050 this is what they would need to do and by the way, here's the button to actually message the head of sustainability at that company right now because LinkedIn knows exactly who that person is." Linkedin could be the mass coordination infrastructure for all business to get to zero emissions. Amazon could show you a circular economy. Here's neighbors who have that same product instead of buying it on Amazon. You could actually use the tech industry to be the mass recirculation of essentially a closed loop materials economy and a zero emissions economy. I'm just curious what you think of that vision.

Christiana Figueres: I want to know who's signing up to do this. I have my paper ready to sign, whose signature is going to go on that. That is so exciting.

Tristan Harris: So let's do this. It's so funny because when we were talking about this interview, I was saying, we want to organize the San Francisco Accords where the San Francisco Accords are getting the entire tech industry together in a room and say, "Look, if you're taking these actions on the coronavirus, because you're starting to say this misinformation is deadly, and so we're going to actually take a more curated stance on how to give people lifesaving communications. Why aren't they doing that with climate change? If we're putting $2 trillion into the economy to try to keep it afloat because of coronavirus, why aren't we doing that to fund all the transition to climate change? We could get the tech industry together at a table and say, "Here's a vision for what we could do collectively to be the sense making and choice making apparatus that all of us, that 3 billion people put over our eyes and our brains every day to see reality through and see a reality that's optimistic instead of pessimistic. That's action oriented instead of passive learned helplessness. So we get learned hopefulness instead of learned helplessness.

Christiana Figueres: Exactly. Exactly. Okay. I totally love this. When are we starting this? I'm in. I am so in.

Aza Raskin: Here's one of the fundamental problems for making the San Francisco Accords work is it takes values for Amazon or LinkedIn or Google to say climate change is real and we have a joystick for human behavior. We want to steer people... and Google is not going to do it until Amazon does it. Amazon's not going to do it until Apple does it. It's a multipolar trap.

Christiana Figueres: But here's the question back to you. Would they be willing to accept and admit in public that they do have their hands on the lever of human behavior?

Tristan Harris: Well, that's actually the interesting thing about the coronavirus is that they've been forced to recognize that the consequences of misinformation are life and death. With climate change, the consequences are also life and death. It's just on a longer time horizon. So this is the opportunity to say, "Look, if they're doing it with coronavirus, let's do it again now with climate change because if you thought flattening this curve was the problem, we have a much bigger curve."

Christiana Figueres: You just wait. Exactly. What coronavirus has done for climate changes and it's put it on a time warp, right? You see the real timeline and the real impact. But this is a huge exercise, a huge global exercise in how we're going to deal with these high impact, high probability, global risks that facing. And I do think that it is from a human evolution point of view. This crisis has to be the learning ground for climate, if not for other things as well. Okay. So what are we doing? When are we doing it? What's the next step? I am so in for this.

Aza Raskin: Well, it seems like you were putting down a playing card. You were saying the first playing card is have companies admit or sign up to, say that they have their hands on the steering wheel. How do we do that? What's the first step? How do we go about making that happen?

Tristan Harris: I mean, we could get a climate pledge right from the tech companies. We have Microsoft already making a commitment to spend billions of dollars to draw down their legacy emissions. We have Amazon saying that they're going to meet the Paris Accords on a faster timeline themselves through their own actions. There's small little actions happening in tiny little places, but what we need is a coalition of, instead of the 195 countries basically 15 or so major tech companies go from being a thing that dismantled democracy all around the world to redeeming yourselves. You are in a position to save us if we can get a pledge from all the companies do what they can do.

Christiana Figueres: In a way, they're already walking in that direction during this recent crisis. They're already in the gym of responsibility and they're lifting up baby weights but I think our invitation is it's time to move up to the adult weights.

Tristan Harris: Just as you said, they've been lifting the weights. So for example, they've all set up these coronavirus task forces across their company saying, "Hey, let's get the Facebook events team. So when you create an event on Facebook, it recommends, hey, you should think twice before going out and organizing an event because that's not safe right now in the time of coronavirus." These cross setting teams for coronavirus could be cross setting for climate change. And so each company they already have a coronavirus task force. Let's build the climate task force and saying, "What are the aggressive ways we can move the world towards mitigation, resilience, better preparedness, using their platform?" Facebook could help coordinate social change in communities joining and starting Facebook groups, getting five friends to switch to a credit union to divest from banks that support fossil fuels. You could have so much action being coordinated from tech companies if they took a powerful positive stance.

Aza Raskin: I think we just heard Christiana volunteer herself to be the lead negotiator for the San Francisco Accords.

Tristan Harris: You can fly to San Francisco once we get off quarantine we'll make this happen.

Christiana Figueres: Well we can't fly right now, but no guys, I think that this idea that you're putting on the table is so critical and has such potential, huge impact that we really shouldn't just let it go. So Tristan, this is very clear for you in your mind. Would you be willing to write a one page description of what this is and then you can get it to Google I'm sure, I can get it to Amazon. Who can get it to Facebook?

Tristan Harris: We can get it to the relevant to the relevant places.

Aza Raskin: I'll get it to Facebook.

Christiana Figueres: Okay. So who's doing what by when I am so in, I can't tell you.

Tristan Harris: I'm so excited. We will literally follow up with you, I'm sure the next 48 hours about how to do this.

Christiana Figueres: Okay, but I have to say we have to move quickly on this because all of these companies just like governments are putting together their recovery packages, all of which have to be clean and green, but companies are also already designing how they are going to lift out of the coronavirus crisis that has hit them. And this should be part of the lift out.

Tristan Harris: This is the green strings attached.

Christiana Figueres: Exactly.

Aza Raskin: Do you want to bring us to our future home? I'm feeling very inspired. This moment of agency, what is the payoff? What world do we get to live in?

Christiana Figueres: Yeah. It's so exciting, Aza because in the book that we wrote *The Future We Choose*, we literally devote two chapters to the two options of the worlds. One is the world of disaster and destruction. The other, which was actually pretty easy to write by the way, because there's a lot of literature and a lot of scientific evidence or scientific projection rather for what that world would be like. It was a little bit more difficult to write the other world because we humans haven't put that much thought into what would it be like to create a better world? So that was a little bit more difficult, but it is so much of a better world. So picture this, Aza. Picture that you walk out of your door and what you feel is that you're walking into a forest because the air is so clean and so beautifully moist and the temperature is perfect. And you walk down the street and you walk in an almost silent city because you don't have all of that noise pollution from internal combustion engines.

Christiana Figueres: You have vehicles that silently drift from one destination to another and you have few of these vehicles because they're all shared. They're smart, they're interconnected, and hence they are absolutely efficient in transporting you. Should you have to transport yourself because what we have learned in the past few months is that we don't necessarily have to transport our bodies to work. We can actually work from other areas, from home or from shared offices, but there will be less transport needs and so much better transport. So first of all, you don't have to drive your own stupid car. You probably don't own your stupid car. You just get transport as a service as opposed to as a good and you are serviced in your transport needs. So you can sit there and you can get your work done, you can meditate, you can chat with the other people in the vehicle.

Christiana Figueres: But the result of this for urban planning is that there is much less need for roads, parking area and therefore much of the area of previous roads is actually now devoted to greenery. So you'll have so much more green in the cities. Many of the parking places are now devoted to growing vegetables or growing flowers because you don't need all that parking. Obviously, roofs of buildings are either covered the solar panels or also producing the food that is necessary for the building. Picture that every building is actually almost going to be a self-sufficient unit because they will be able to grow them. Substantial parts of the food that they need either on the roof or hanging from their windows. They will of course be able to produce all the energy that they use because we will have this paint that you can cover any surface with that will produce solar energy.

Christiana Figueres: So, without taking up any more space, you can produce the energy that you need. And of course we're going to have very efficient water recycling. So for food, energy and water, all of these buildings are going to be practically self-sufficient buildings, clean buildings where people don't get respiratory diseases from, re-circling dirty air in and out and so much more silent living in cities. In the 1800s there was something called the great stink in London because that city and many other cities of that period were so incredibly stinky because the rivers and the sewage system were just complete disasters. And then of course we brought the engineers and now we don't have stinky cities anymore. Well we have a few but not most. Well we don't tend to think of cities as being noisy cities, but they are. Cities are incredibly noisy because of the internal combustion engine.

Tristan Harris: And dirty, yeah.

Christiana Figueres: And dirty. The air pollution that is created, right? 7 million people still dying of air pollution, mostly in cities, mostly because of the burning of fossil fuels. So picture efficient, clean, silent transport, and only the necessary transport and provided as a service. Picture cities that have so much more green cover in them and picture cities that are actually sub organized into small communities that are joining together to produce their own food and picture, of course, for the rural areas, much more efficient agriculture. None of the sprawling inefficient agriculture, but picture really, really efficient concentrated agriculture that is producing top quality food. And here are the two that for me are the most important. Picture, Aza if you will, a world in which every human being has access to energy, no matter where they live, no matter in what isolated part of Africa, Asia or Latin America, every human being has clean, cheap, if not completely costless energy.

Christiana Figueres: Picture if all of them have access to clean water picture if all of these people have access to food and all of them have access to health services because the tiny little clinics way out there now have renewable energy powering them and therefore you can have clinics that you have refrigerated, medicines that have air conditioned rooms for women to be able to have their children, et cetera. Can you imagine how the quality of life of in particular the 1 billion people who are today still in poverty, how much their quality of life will improve? That to me is even more exciting than the beautiful silent, clean cities that we're going to have.

Tristan Harris: I may just want to add to that. I think that vision is beautiful. Imagine a tech industry that is entirely signed up to helping to make that transition happen for the whole world.

Christiana Figueres: Yay.

Tristan Harris: And just for listeners to be clear, not because of techno-utopianism and tech's going to build it and solve it. Just that as they shape our sense making and choice making, that instead of showing us infinite feeds of clickbait, that feedback helplessness, they actually help us be with each other and connect in ways that help us produce that reality. So the agency lives in us, but the technology makes it possible for that agency to move much faster than it could have ever moved without the tech industry's help. Christiana, I know we're probably out of time. This has been such an amazing conversation. I'm so glad we are going to make this

happen. We have to make this happen. It's an honor to meet you finally. And I'm really looking forward to our next very soon conversation to make this happen.

Christiana Figueres: Wonderful.

Aza Raskin: It's such a such a pleasure. We're always thinking now about how changes in perspective really do change everything. Like when there was the man on the moon, those years when we were all dosed with the overview effect, that's when the EPA came into existence. Noah came into existence, the environmental protection movement and so the question we're asking at this fundamental level is yes it's technology, but it's much deeper question of what does it take to have another one of those moments?

Christiana Figueres: Well, and just to push a little bit farther there, I mean we could ask what does it take for humanity to have one of those moments or we can decide this is the moment that we've been waiting for.

Tristan Harris: I agree.

Christiana Figueres: Coronavirus has actually pulled the rug from so much, right? I mean there is nothing that is standing today the way that was standing just a month ago. So instead of asking ourselves, "What is it going to take?" I think we just decide this is what it takes and this is it and now is now.

Aza Raskin: I love that.

Tristan Harris: I agree that we have what we need right here with the coronavirus to make it happen.

Aza Raskin: Well said.

Tristan Harris: Each tech company now has a coronavirus task force that is now been implementing changes across their products to deliver lifesaving communication, avoiding misinformation, helping people take actions in their community. That was a coordinated effort. And imagine that we had all the tech companies at this moment say, "You know what? Coronavirus was just a warning sign. It was just the flexing the muscles. What we really need to do is flex our muscles to flatten the much bigger curve of climate change." Let's say we got them together in a Zoom call that was later referred to as the San Francisco Accords and we got them to sign a pledge saying we have the power to mitigate climate change and then we are making collective commitments as an industry to take the vast resources, ingenuity, engineering talent and product impact directly on how people see the world to basically enable mass coordinated action.

Tristan Harris: What could that look like? We have companies like Microsoft that are already donating more than a billion dollars to basically drawing down all of the emissions of their company since their founding. Imagine we got the top 10 tech companies to match what Microsoft is doing. Imagine we got the social media companies. So when you log in to say if you are in a zip code where we know there's been a

climate event or climate disaster, that people were invited to share a video of how that disaster affected them because we know that if that spreads, people can't deny it when they see their own friends and family who were affected by it.

Tristan Harris: We could imagine a world where LinkedIn, which controls the reputation of all businesses on earth where people work for, where they don't, that they started framing the business pages in terms of their progress to hit to zero emissions by 2050. And by the way, if you want them to take an action on that progress bar to take them from 20% or draw down to 25%, LinkedIn can put the button that says, "Here's how to message the head of sustainability at that company right now and help you organize petitions and actions." You could have Facebook show climate policies that basically were effective in other places and let you copy and organize climate policies for your own city right now.

Tristan Harris: We can have actions that don't just let you put a bandaid on the problem. So acute solutions to acute problems. We can have instead systemic actions. Actions that deal with the incentives that are really at play that perpetuate a extractive and polluting economy. The tech industry is better placed in the world on the timelines that we have to make this change. This is what shapes the sense making and choice making of 3 billion people and instead of having it be this fictitiously neutral platform, that when it pretends to be neutral actually leads to far worse outcomes. We can have it consciously say, "Our job is to come up with sense making and choice making that created a surviving and thriving civilizational model."

Aza Raskin: What I think is fascinating about talking with Christiana is, in 2009 Copenhagen 15, the climate conversation, it failed and her job given to her six months later was to put it back together and she was able to succeed with the Paris Climate Accords and she turns to us and says, "The way to begin is with a pledge where the tech companies take responsibility." Admit that they are constructing our social world and hence just that admission that their hand is on the steering wheel is enough to get started. It's the way to start overcoming the game theory of we can't do it as Amazon until you move as Google, which won't move until Apple moves, which isn't going to move until Amazon moves.

Tristan Harris: We actually saw the same thing with the tech company's actions on coronavirus. No tech company wants to be the first mover to take down certain kinds of misinformation or conspiracy theories. The companies didn't want to act by themselves on contact tracing and much like with climate change where you can't have one country say we're going to do the green energy thing and then it's going to take an economic hit of 10% to our GDP and the other countries don't. That's the multipolar trap. They need to all agree to move together. And so if you have one company say, "Hey, we're not neutral." And the other companies say, "No, we're just a neutral platform anyone can post anything. It's likes and shares. That doesn't work." So we need a world where all the tech companies move together with the climate pledge and that's what we need to do next.

Tristan Harris: So if you want to be part of what's next, go to humanetech.com/climate to learn more.

Aza Raskin: Your Undivided Attention is produced by the Center for Humane Technology. Our executive producer is Dan Kedmey and our associate producer is Natalie Jones. Noor Al-Samarrai helped with the fact-checking. Original music and sound designed by Ryan and Hays Holladay, and a special thanks to the whole Center for Humane Technology team for making this podcast possible.

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