



today:tomorrow

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THE NEW MEGATRENDS SHAPING OUR FUTURE

It would be difficult to overstate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and ensuing events on the global mindset. People are shaken by the immense uncertainties we face. Between the ongoing health threat, climate change, armed conflict in Ukraine and elsewhere, and the continued global rise in extremism, misinformation, and hate, it can be challenging to know what to worry about first—and yet, there are also signs of light. The “great awakening” of the pandemic has pushed people to reassess their lives and the direction in which society is moving. Realities that went unquestioned for decades—among them, the 9–5 onsite workweek and racial and economic inequities—are being reevaluated. Many people have discovered they were unhappy with their pre-pandemic “normal” and are intent on creating a better way forward. Tens of millions have made major changes in the past two years, including [quitting their jobs](#), [switching careers](#), or [relocating](#) to new cities, towns, or even countries.

When we hunkered down at the start of the pandemic, I began to take stock of where we were as a society and what the next two decades would bring. The result is *The New Megatrends: Seeing Clearly in the Age of Disruption* (Penguin Random House,

May 2022). The book contains hundreds of trendsightings and also identifies 10 megatrends, which I share below. Few, if any, will surprise you. We already feel them to one extent or another. The trick now is to figure out how to turn that knowledge to advantage.



1

MOTHER NATURE IS ANGRY AS HELL— AND HAS EVERY RIGHT TO BE.

I start with the most obvious: a megatrend we tried for decades to ignore but whose threat is intensifying and causing even entrenched climate deniers to [reconsider](#) their stances. Extreme weather events and the soon-to-be swollen ranks of climate refugees are at long last waking people up to the devastating potential of climate change, and more of us now seem willing to do our part to forestall further planetary warming. We can see that resolve in the recent embrace of [electric vehicles](#), [slow fashion](#), and [plant-based meat](#). As more of us aim to adopt a lower-impact

existence, smart tech will enable us to measure individual carbon footprints so we can see day by day what impact our actions are having on the spaces and species that matter to us.

2 THE CHAOS OF NOW AND NEXT IS TURBOCHARGED, POSING A CONSTANT CHALLENGE TO OUR MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING.

As chaotic as life was prior to 2020, it now feels even more uncertain and unpredictable—and that is exacerbating mental health issues globally, with rising levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and alienation.

The consumer response will go beyond standard approaches to mental healthcare. It will include what I'm calling a "prepper lite" movement, with lots of stockpiling but without the militant views and arms caches that characterize the extreme end of this trend. People also will vie to be more self-sufficient, including by learning practical skills (e.g., light carpentry, vegetable gardening, auto repair, first aid) and investing in power generation technologies. And we'll see far more people de-digitizing their lives, including by quitting social media platforms and disabling Wi-Fi for extended periods. As the metaverse develops, we can expect escapist worlds to emerge—virtual spaces in which we can immerse ourselves in meditation, sound and scent therapy, and other means of instilling tranquility as a break from the chaos.



3 THE WORLD HAS TWO SUPERPOWERS, AND NEITHER IS EQUIPPED TO DELIVER THE FUTURE WE NEED.

The United States and the People's Republic of China continue to vie for economic and political supremacy. The real question, though, is not which of these two countries will dominate in the decades to come but whether *any* single country can do so. Given the immense existential challenges our world faces, can the historical dominance of nation-states be sustained—or do we need to rely on a multinational approach that includes the active cooperation of the largest corporations? Think of how many nations were involved in the pharmaceutical response to COVID-19 or the (nearly) unified global response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

More and more, we see the need for what I call the "multi" mandate: Multilateral. Multinational. Multilingual. Multiracial. Multiplatform. Multigenerational. The world is far too complex for individuals and organizations to tackle alone.

4 **DESPERATE TIMES REQUIRE PLANS BORN OF DESPERATION, INCLUDING A BUNKER MENTALITY AND A BATTEN-DOWN-THE-HATCHES *MODUS VIVENDI* MINDSET THAT INCLUDES EXIT STRATEGIES.**

With our world on fire (figuratively and literally), each of us is forced to ponder some sort of escape plan. A central question is not just where to escape but with whom.

With families distanced physically and emotionally, geographic ties fraying, and more people claiming not to have close friends, to whom can we turn when times get tough? That was a question many people had to answer during the pandemic lockdowns. Some discovered that without their usual work community, they were quite alone.



Cohousing in intentional communities is going to explode. Shared spaces make sense for economic and environmental reasons and because people are hungry for a sense of connectedness and purpose. The approach makes it easier to share resources (from table saws to cars), form childcare and eldercare collectives, and create innovation hubs and high-tech co-working spaces for remote workers.



5 **THE PRESSURE IS ON TO ESTABLISH CLEAR SWIM LANES IN A WORLD INCREASINGLY BLURRED AND BLENDED.**

Home and workplace. Male and female. “In real life” and virtual. News and entertainment. Borders are breaking down, and absolutes have become muddled.

As our world blurs further, expect a countertrend—the always present yang to the yin. This will include attempts to reestablish traditional gender roles (they will fail for the most part), more pushback against employers’ and clients’ infringement on personal time, and strictly enforced tech-free zones.

6 SMALL BECOMES THE NEW BIG AS WE SEEK TO SAVOR THE SIMPLEST PLEASURES AND MASTER MINUTIAE.

In a time marked by never-ending chaos, we all want to feel a measure of control. So instead of tackling a massive issue like climate change, we might settle for ordering groceries from Misfits Market or another seller of food that would otherwise go to waste. We might downsize to a more manageable home or declutter the home we have. It is a mechanism that helps keep us sane.

How will this need for control and security manifest in the next two decades? Expect a new iteration of the simplicity movement that blends smaller and fewer with state-of-the-art. Above all, expect that instead of asking the old question “Will it scale?” we will ask: “Will it human-scale?” “Bigger is better” is an ethos incompatible with a world on edge.



7 THE NEW LUXURY IS THE SIMPLEST OF ALL: SECLUSION AND RESPITE.

In a society cluttered by overconsumption, uncertainty, and emotional burdens, having time to oneself and the space to establish a sense of order and calm is precious. Privacy, security, unstructured time, and seclusion will be the ultimate luxuries.

For many city dwellers and suburbanites with funds to spare, off-the-grid tiny homes in remote locations will be the new “second home,” offering not just nature and a respite from modern life but a place to escape natural disasters, civil unrest, and contagion. And whereas the 1950s were all about the move from cities to suburbs, the next great migration will be to the exurbs—areas with lower housing density and a slower lifestyle but that are close enough to major urban hubs for remote workers to commute to the office or a client location on occasion.



8 EQUITY IS THE NEW BATTLE CRY.

Economic disparity has been a cultural constant, but it is garnering more attention for the simple reasons that inequity is no longer so easy to hide and is growing exponentially. This statistic from [Oxfam International](#) puts it in perspective: Just 252 men hold more wealth than all 1 billion women and girls in Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean *combined*.

The great awakening of the pandemic has turned the public's eyes to inequities of all kinds and motivated many more people to push for change. We'll see more Mackenzie Scott-style philanthropy, prioritizing immediate effect and grassroots organizations rather than legacy-building. And we'll see more people seeking opportunities to address racial and economic injustices with their purchase choices.

9 IDENTITY IS MUTABLE.

Rigid gender roles and definitions of femininity and masculinity are giving way to a mix-and-match flexibility that simultaneously heals wounds and opens up battlefronts.

This malleability goes far beyond gender and sexuality. Virtually nothing about a person's identity, family dynamic, career

progression, or lifestyle can be assumed. That affords more freedom but also contributes to the unsettledness so many feel. Psychologist Barry Schwartz's "paradox of choice" applies equally well to life decisions as to an overabundance of options on supermarket shelves. Sometimes "more" is a burden.

10 SELF IS AT THE CENTER.

With social and cultural institutions in flux, our focus has turned inward, emphasizing personal experiences, growth, and branding. People will endeavor to create or join institutions and systems in which individuals "like them" are front and center—both to safeguard their interests and to devise and implement what they consider the best solutions to societal problems.

Among other impacts, younger generations will take a modular approach to education and career. Think: Grow with Google—type career certificates and apprenticeships rather than diplomas. Side hustles rather than giving one's all to an employer. It is a new variation on the Me Generation, but one born not of self-centeredness but of the realization that life satisfaction comes from self-empowerment and control.

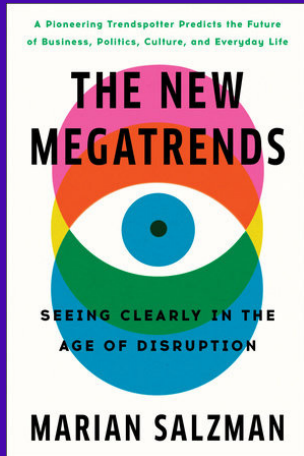
Some may come away from these trendsightings with a sense of pessimism or even doom. I instead heed the wisdom of Cervantes: "Forewarned, forearmed; to be prepared is half the victory." Recognizing the deficits of our modern existence is a critical first step in setting them right.



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“In a world of half-baked hot takes, Marian Salzman is a true seer. ... This is a book for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and anyone who wants a clear-eyed understanding of how the cultural winds are changing.”

—Andrew Yang, bestselling author of *Forward*

“THE NEW MEGATRENDS is clear-eyed, a little bit terrifying, practical, and inspiring. It is exactly the book we need right now as each of us tries to make sense of the world ahead.”

—Brooke Shields, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Marian Salzman expertly connects the dots between the incredibly accelerated development of information technology, the radical transformation of media, and changing global demographics, and makes a case for the trends that will shape the next twenty years. Remarkably researched and framed for maximum clarity, THE NEW MEGATRENDS will help decode the cultural changes that lie ahead.”

—Fernanda Romano, chief marketing officer, *Candy Crush*

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“The genius of Marian Salzman is that she knows the difference between inertia and momentum and can process countless inputs in order to tell you what is coming and what matters.”

—Steve Clemons, editor at large, *The Hill*

“Long known for her third eye as a global trendspotter, Salzman’s must-read book synthesizes the events of the past few decades, from technology and politics to climate and polarization, to paint an insightful, educated, and entertaining look at our potential future. This should be mandatory reading for both leaders and concerned citizens.”

—Lee Woodruff, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“Whether you’re a global CEO, running a startup, or just someone who cares about the future of our planet, you won’t find a more essential forecast than THE NEW MEGATRENDS. Marian Salzman has done a masterful job weaving together personal insights, current events, anecdotes, and history for a riveting vision of the future.”

—Bob Jeffrey, entrepreneur and former CEO, *Advertising Global*; former CEO, *J. Walter Thompson*

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