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BECOMING A FORCE FOR GOOD:
BUILDING HABITS TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Sam Horn

There are two stories going on, all around us, every day. There's the bad news. There's the good news.

The question is this: Which story will we feed? Which story will we lead?

Will we rant, rail, and rage about what is wrong? Or will we create, collaborate with, and contribute to what's right? What is ours to do?

Pablo Picasso said, "The meaning of life is to find our gifts; the purpose is to give them away."

The good news is, when things go wrong, we don't have to go with them. We can use our agency to be the good news in a world of bad news.

All we have to do is ask ourselves on a daily basis:

"Which story will I feed?"

"Which story will I lead?"

"What is mine to do?"

"How will I use my gifts to be a force for good and make a difference, today and every day?"

MAY THE FORCE FOR GOOD BE WITH YOU

Force is what gives us power; it is an energy field created by all living things that surrounds us, penetrates us, and binds the galaxy together.

–Obi-Wan Kenobi

My son Tom recommended I start my new book, *The Force for Good Project*, with this *Star Wars* quote he found on–wait for it–Wookieepedia.

I'm glad he suggested this because the first thing I did upon launching the Force for Good Project was look up the definition of the word force.

I was surprised to discover it is defined as "oppositional, push/pull energy." Hmm … I understood that; I just didn't agree with it. The premise of my book is that force doesn't have to be oppositional; it can be aligned. Force doesn't have to be push/pull energy; it can be partnering/proactive energy.

How about you? Up until now, have you perceived force as making someone do something against his or her will–as controlling, coercive, combative energy?

That type of aggressive force is a Force for Harm because it focuses solely on getting what we want–regardless of our impact on others.

I hope that I can help you see how force can be something we do with and for people, not to them–and that creative, cooperative, contributing energy is a Force for Good.

WHO WAS YOUR FORCE FOR GOOD MENTOR?

In influencing others, example is not the main thing; it's the only thing.

–Albert Schweitzer

I asked every person I interviewed for The Force for Good Project, "Who modeled Force for Good behavior for you or taught it to you?" That question serves many purposes. By identifying someone who said or did something that has positively and enduringly shaped us, we know from experience that being a Force for Good matters, and we're motivated to be this and do this for ourselves and for others.

For example, I'll always be grateful to my parents, Warren and Ruth Reed, for being my Force for Good mentors. Here's just one of the many ways they did this.

I was active in 4-H growing up. One winter evening, it was time to feed my rabbits. However, freezing rain was falling, and I didn't want to go out in the cold and get wet.

I pleaded with my parents, "Can't I do it in the morning?"

They looked at me. They didn't scold, and they didn't lecture. They just said four words: "Do the right thing."

Busted. They knew that I knew what the right thing was. And they knew I just didn't feel like doing it. That wasn't an excuse.

That's what being a Force for Good is: asking ourselves, "What is the right thing to do?" and doing it, even when it's metaphorically cold and rainy and we don't want to.

There are two stories going on, all around us, every day. There's the bad news. There's the good news. The question is this: Which story will we feed? Which story will we lead?

Thank you, Mom and Dad, for instilling in me the understanding that being a good person means choosing to act in integrity, take responsibility, and exercise my agency to do the right thing—even when I don't want to and even if it's not recognized, reciprocated, or rewarded.

Because being a Force for Good is its own best reward.

WHAT DOES IT LOOK LIKE TO BE A FORCE FOR GOOD?

All you have to do on any given day is just get up and do your best, and try to find joy in your day, and try to contribute in a meaningful and positive way.

—Reid Wiseman

Did you watch the "to-the-moon-and-back" mission of NASA's Artemis II crew? It was thrilling, wasn't it? As I witnessed the outpouring of universal appreciation for astronauts Christina Koch, Jeremy Hansen, Reid Wiseman, and Victor Glover, I realized why people were "over the moon" about how they showed up.

They were walking, talking, floating examples of the top five ways to be a Force for Good. What do I mean by that?

Well, a pattern emerged from my interviews. While there are hundreds of different ways to be a Force for Good, five specific ways emerged again and again from people's stories.

I codified those into an easy-to-remember acronym so you can be a F.O.R.C.E. for Good—for yourself and for others—in just about any situation. Whatever is happening, choose to:

F = Facilitate harmony: Turn conflicts into win-win-win collaborations.

O = Open doors: Don't wait; initiate 1+1=11 options and opportunities.

R = Right wrongs: Don't complain about problems; create and contribute solutions.

C = Celebrate life: Stop griping; start gratituding. (It's not a verb; it deserves to be.)

E = Exercise agency: Transform passivity into proactive action.

PLEASE ANSWER THESE FIVE FORCE FOR GOOD QUESTIONS

The important thing is to not stop questioning.

–Albert Einstein

I agree with Einstein. Please take a few moments to ask and answer these five questions to put you in this story so this topic becomes even more personally relevant and meaningful.

1. Who modeled Force for Good behavior for you or taught it to you? A parent? Teacher? Coach? Boss? Spouse? Pastor? What did they say or do that impacted you?

2. When and how have you been a Force for Good for yourself and for others?

3. Have you encountered a Force for Harm person or experienced a Force for Harm situation? How did that affect you? What did you learn from it and resolve to do as a result?

4. Is it sometimes challenging to be a Force for Good? Why? What do you do to recommit to acting in integrity, taking responsibility, and exercising your agency?

5. What tips do you have about why it's important to be a Force for Good–no matter what–and how we can do that?

Bonus tip: You might want to bring up these questions over a meal or on a walk with friends, coworkers, or family members. Many people who have done so told me it led to an intriguing, rising-tide conversation everyone appreciated.

BEING A FORCE FOR GOOD ISN'T ALWAYS EASY; IT'S ALWAYS WORTH IT

Freedom is what you do with what's been done to you.

—Jean-Paul Sartre

A final note: Many of these Force for Good'ers I interviewed for the book have dealt with "character-building" circumstances that could have caused them to become jaded or cynical.

They could have ranted and railed about what happened or given up and become bitter about what Sartre called "the facticity" (the unfortunate, unchangeable aspects) of their lives. Instead, they transcended the "facticity" of what happened by asking themselves:

- "What can I control? Does getting angry or upset about this serve any good purpose?"
- "What kind of person do I want to be? What quality of life do I want?"
- "What is mine to do in this situation? What will serve a good purpose?"
- "How can I use my time, attention, and resources to make a positive difference?"

And even when they were tempted to go down the anger/outrage rabbit hole, they remembered they had the freedom to be a F.O.R.C.E. for Good and chose to:

Facilitate harmony. **O**pen doors. **R**ight wrongs. **C**elebrate life. **E**xercise their agency.

As a result, they are reaping the rewards of being people they can be proud of, and they're making a positive difference for themselves and others.

Force doesn't have to be oppositional; it can be aligned. Force doesn't have to be push/pull energy; it can be partnering/proactive energy.

If that sounds good to you, I'd like to share with you one of the interviews from *The Force for Good Project*.

ADOPT FORCE FOR GOOD HABITS

When I was a boy and would see scary things in the news, my mother would say to me, "Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping."

–Fred Rogers

Scott M. Curran is a social impact lawyer who advises clients like the United Nations, Newman's Own, and Starbucks Foundation on how to do *Better Good* (the name of his book and podcast).

In our interview, he shared a story I'd never heard about Mr. Rogers. He said, "Many people are familiar with his famous quote about his mom telling him to 'look for the helpers.' But few know that after 9/11, PBS producers pleaded with him to come out of retirement to film a series offering guidance to adults and children on how to deal with the trauma.

"Rogers was initially reluctant to say yes, because he wasn't sure what he could say about a tragedy of this magnitude. The producers reminded him he had addressed people's fears and confusion following the space shuttle Challenger explosion and it had helped so he agreed.

"In his televised segment, he comforted people with 'We are all called to be tikkun olam, a Hebrew phrase that means "world repair." Thank you for whatever you do, wherever you are, to bring light and love to your neighbors and to yourself. Together, we can repair the world.'"

BECOME A HABITUAL HELPER

Unless someone like you cares a whole lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not.

—Dr. Seuss

I said, "I love that Mr. Rogers didn't just suggest that a way to repair the world is to look for helpers; it's to become a helper. Scott, what started you on your path to being a helper?"

"When I was ten years old, my fourth-grade teacher pulled me aside and said, 'It's such a good thing your mom volunteers so often at school.' I wasn't quite picking up what she was putting down, and asked her to repeat it. She said, 'It's good of your mom to help out.'

"That may seem simple, but it was a new insight to me. Up until then, I thought it was 'normal' for parents to pitch in. Hearing an adult call it 'good' made me realize that being and doing good aren't things we do by accident; they're things we do on purpose."

I asked, "Why is it important to be and do good, on purpose?"

"I've got an unexpected answer to that. I recently had a chance to meet astronomer Neil deGrasse Tyson and complimented him on his quote 'The geek shall inherit the earth.' I told him, 'As a four-time space camper who's never stopped looking at the stars, it's an honor to meet you.'"

"He smiled and said, 'Next time, start with space camp. That's the best part.'"

I said, "Scott, I didn't know you were a space geek."

"Yes, it's part of my why. I agree with the Artemis II crew who shared their belief that we're all passengers on Spaceship Earth for a finite period of time in an infinite universe. We're in each other's orbits, whether we like it or not. For us to survive and thrive, we need to be good, do good, and take better care of our planet and each other—or else."

HOW DOING GOOD BETTER CAN BECOME A HABIT

Your habits shape your identity, and your identity shapes your habits. Every action you take is a vote for the type of person you wish to become.

–James Clear

"What's an example of how we can be good, do good, and take better care of our planet?"

"I was at a football game last night. Someone had dropped a plastic bottle on the ground and left it there. That's a small thing, and it would have been easy to walk on by, but I told myself, Do more good, better. Now.' So, I went back, picked it up, and put it in the trash.

"If each of us does one good thing every day, it adds up."

"Scott, I'm so glad you're bringing up the compound effect of how little things add up to big impact. The world's problems can sometimes feel overwhelming, insurmountable. But anyone can pick up a piece of trash. It's free, it takes seconds, and it matters.

"And in case anyone thinks these micro-actions don't matter, they might be interested in the research from the USC Habit Lab that found that 'regular, small actions are more effective than sporadic, intense efforts in forming lasting habits.'"

Scott said, "That's why it's so important for us to (1) adopt the identity that, 'I am a Force for Good,' and (2) to do 'small' good things whenever we can, wherever we can. Doing good becomes a habit. It's just who we are and how we show up."

I added, "You're reinforcing what James Clear says in his *Atomic Habits* work. He says, 'A habit is a behavior that has been repeated enough times to become automatic.'"

Scott added, "Exactly. That's why, the more we do good things, the more automatic it becomes, which means we keep doing good things. It's our identity and our habit."

"And it's a virtuous cycle, a self-reinforcing feedback loop, isn't it? One positive thing leads to another, which leads to another, and we create a continuous upward, ever-expanding spiral of good."

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT TO DO GOOD SMALL THINGS, REPEATEDLY

We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence then, is not an act, but a habit.

–Aristotle

I said, "Scott, on your *Better Good* podcast, you interview changemakers who are repeatedly, purposely doing good things. Can you please share a story of one of them?"

"Dr. David Fajgenbaum, founder of the nonprofit Every Cure, is an inspiration to me and to everyone fortunate enough to know him.

"He contracted a rare ailment called Castleman disease when he was a medical student. He spent months in the hospital and nearly died five times.

"His doctors told him there was no effective treatment and no clear path to one anytime soon.

"In David's words, he decided to 'get off the sidelines and act.' As he said, 'I could no longer hope someone else, somewhere else, would perform research that would lead to a breakthrough that could save my life.'"

Scott continued, "David began researching existing medicines to see if any could be used to treat his disease. Not only did he find one that saved his life and has kept him in remission; he and his team have identified many already FDA-approved drugs that are now being used to treat rare diseases."

I said, "What a shining example of how doing something good for ourselves often evolves into being a Force for Good for others."

Scott said, "That actually is the mission of my work: I imagine a world in which every individual and organization has everything they need to do more good every day in every way—in their life and work—to leave the world better than they found it."

"Well said, Scott. Well said."

Force can be something we do with and for people, not to them—and that creative, cooperative, contributing energy is a Force For Good.

HOW ABOUT YOU?

- Who taught you to look for helpers and to become a helper?
- What's your identity? Would you call yourself a Force for Good? Why or why not?
- How will you start doing good small things repeatedly so they become a habit?

I want to end by circling back to the womanifesto I shared in the introduction:

We're surrounded by two stories every day: bad news and good news.

Which story will we feed? Which story will we lead?

Will we rant, rail, and rage about what's wrong?

Will we collaborate with, contribute to, and create what's right?

What is ours to do? What is mine to do?

How will I use my agency and gifts to be a Force for Good?

If you're having one of those kinds of days, understand you're in that liminal space between stimulus and response. What you do in the next few minutes matters.

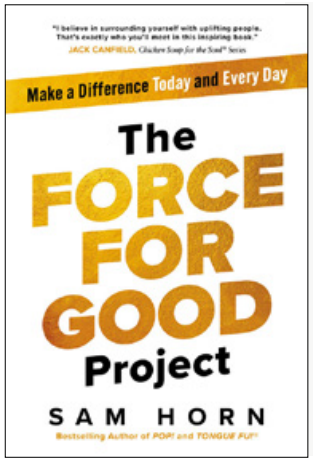
I hope you choose to **F**acilitate Harmony, **O**pen Doors, **R**ight Wrongs, **C**elebrate Life, and **E**xercise Agency.

Every single time you choose to do any of these, you are choosing to be a F.O.R.C.E. for Good.

That is ours to do. And this is yours to do. Best wishes.

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Info



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