



8 handshakes



Plato, in his book *Republic* outlines a system for getting the best possible leaders - his idea was that philosophers rather than generals or merchants should steer the human ship.

what is it?

It's a new idea about how we choose people to represent us. Our current systems haven't delivered peace and prosperity for most of the world, or solutions to dangerous global problems such as environmental damage, food security, corruption, war and the accumulation of nuclear weapons. Blatant dictators are out of fashion, but modern democracies aren't really democratic, because money buys power. Think professional lobby organisations, ownership of the media, corporations and investors threatening to take their business elsewhere, corporate/political friendships, ex-ministers getting jobs with corporations, corporate board members invited into cabinets, political donations etc., and sometimes political and corporate leaders are the same people - including most of the US cabinet. So voting doesn't work, because we're not allowed to vote for where the real power is. And revolution doesn't work because a) there's always a blueprint for a new society - a utopian vision - and revolutionaries are often willing to use violence against anyone who gets in their way (Stalin, Mao et al), and b) they always forget their promise to re-distribute power after they've seized it. Pure democracy might not be a good idea either. Majority decisions are not necessarily right. The majority used to support slavery, for example. Plato said that rule by the majority wouldn't work, as most people don't really understand the issues. This is still true - more people are interested in sport and celebrities than politics. It's too complicated - genetic modification, nuclear power, global finance, international law, health, energy, the internet, artificial intelligence, religion, science etc. etc. People have jobs, kids, lives - who has time to really understand even one of those subjects? So let's introduce a system where we can be sure that the big decisions are being made

by the most intelligent, compassionate and incorruptible people. After all, those decisions are being made anyway, but are they being made by the right people? Our current system doesn't put the most intelligent, compassionate and incorruptible people into positions of power. We have to have a better way of choosing our representatives. And the only way that their qualities can be assessed properly is by face-to-face contact. Here's the idea:

1. At the base is an ongoing monthly meeting of 15 neighbours; not a business meeting, but a barbecue, film, walk, talk, picnic – a social, so that people get to know each other.
2. Most of us are perceptive enough to pick out a person that we think is intelligent, compassionate, and incorruptible. The person that most people in the group think fits that bill goes forward to represent the group at the next level – another ongoing meeting of 15 representatives from 15 groups of neighbours - the 'street' level, say.
3. If this process is repeated upwards, there would be just 8 levels, from neighbours to planet, believe it or not (hence 8 handshakes).
4. The system would have to grow organically. It can't start at the top, because the people already at the top won't allow it. And it can't be started at grassroots, because of political apathy.
5. So we start in the middle. We need just 15 committed people in every town, who meet and send someone to the next level, and so on to the top.
6. We'd then have a pyramid without a base. It would only go down to the town level. Nevertheless, it should have some very good people at the top, with a high media profile.
7. These people would make decisions and come up with ideas that could be compared with the real decisions that our current leaders are making. If most people judge these decisions to be better, then they may decide that this is a better system too.
8. Then it's up to us to spread the word that these people would be better leaders: internet campaigns, fliers, articles, word of mouth - to put them in the public eye.
9. Hopefully, more people would then want to take part, so meetings below the town level would be organised, to send representatives to replace existing town members; and so on down to grassroots.
10. When the system is in place, as a parallel, shadow system of governance, there can be a consolidation period to see how it works, and



to iron out as many practical problems as possible.

11. And then we stop voting in the current system, removing its legitimacy. Voting figures often hover around 50% in Western countries (due to the lack of real choice). When it falls to below 10%, how can its leaders claim any legitimacy? In the internet age, surely the system in which most people are active will replace the system that most people are ignoring? There's been an 'Arab spring' recently - why not a world spring?
12. And finally, another idea of Plato's is that our leaders shouldn't get much money – they should live very simple lives, so that they can't be corrupted. Their reward is that they are steering the human ship.

potential benefits

- democracy upgrade – we've had universal suffrage, secret ballots and checks and balances – this is the next step
- better leaders – chosen for intelligence, compassion and integrity, not ambition; they can't be corrupted with money, because they won't have any; these will be better people to make decisions about the big issues that could have devastating effects for all of us
- it's a system designed to end war
- face-to-face is a better way of assessing representatives
- neighbours get to know each other, look out for each other, swap and share things etc.
- everyone has a group of people to discuss aspects of their life with
- reduces fear everywhere - at the local level people get to know each other, and at the global level the threat of war is removed
- it will unite us rather than divide us - and we all know that divided we fall
- we can at last get leaders who will make good decisions for everybody, not just for themselves or their own people
- no parties, campaigns or left v right; there's nothing left or right about having better leaders, and 'vote for me!' will disqualify you (it's good qualities we're after, not ambition)
- there's no blueprint or utopian plan of how society should be; we just get the best leaders, and they can decide

- freed from the shackles of striving for military security and competing with other countries, our leaders will be able to think freely, to weigh up different paths, and to make rational decisions, rather than being in an economic and military straightjacket
- the public won't need to have a deep understanding of all the issues – they just have to be a good judge of character - and most people are

what can I do?

The Transition Network and Tea Party and Occupy movements have shown that in an age when ideas can spread virally, large movements can quickly spring up from the local level. The practicalities of how the system works will eventually be decided by using the system itself, but we need to have some rules in place to get it started. Here's what you can do straight away:

- This is only a very rough overview; read more details, practicalities and objections at lowimpact.org/message.php; then debate, criticise, and suggest improvements
- print out this factsheet and distribute it, talk to friends, send them a link; let's get debating

We'll build a dedicated website with a wiki to help people find their nearest group, or start one. Also in the pipeline are: advisory board; book; festival; roadshow; network; videos; fliers; articles; talks & presentations. There will need to be a constitution (with things that can't be changed by the leaders alone – e.g. their income). Everything else can be decided using the system itself. We just need to start, and see what happens.

resources

- see lowimpact.org/message.php for more info
- Plato, *Republic*, various translations – G.M.A. Grube's is considered a good one
- John Keane, 2009, *the Life and Death of Democracy*, huge and comprehensive
- Greg Palast, 2002, *the Best Democracy Money Can Buy*
- Robert Peston, 2008, *Who Runs Britain?*
- bilderbergmeetings.org – 'off the record' meetings of 'leading citizens'
- occupytogether.org – the Occupy movement
- teaparty Patriots.org - the Tea Party movement

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