

ADVERTISEMENT
Advertise with
Stuff

more national stories from stuff



sponsored
How often should we book an eye test?



Much diplomatic capital was wasted on rescuing two



Beloved Kiwi sportsman Wiremu Weepu dies in



Two people win \$500,000 in Lotto draw, as Powerball

paid content

[about this content](#)



Pensioners Over 60 Are Eligible For These New Hearing
Hear Clear



The Best Men's Shoes for Walking and Standing All Day
FU Comfy Orthopedic Shoes

Recommended by

Put aside the grim. Here are lots of reasons to feel optimistic (and to make them happen)

Anna Fifield . 05:00, Oct 29 2022



Get more
Here at Stuff
contributor
impact in Ki

We have no bandwidth at all for [Tigray](#) or [Syria](#), although we are [cheering on the brave young women of Iran](#).

Here at home, [rising interest rates](#) are about to inflict serious pain, and it's hard to find [a kilo of bog standard cheese for less than \\$16](#). The hallmarks of our political discourse are pettiness and negativity and our national characteristic these days often feels not like kindness but like meanness.

READ MORE:

- * [Here's how to be happier in a 'doom and gloom' world](#)
- * [Why small moments of joy could be the secret to happiness in life](#)
- * [How to not catch a bad mood](#)

And then there's the [prevalence of mis- and dis-information](#), and the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic that has [killed 6.6 million people globally](#) and the lingering fear that this is now our new normal.

ADVERTISEMENT
Stuff

Psychologists in the United States are talking about ["hope fatigue"](#) – people are becoming used to having their hopes crushed and are settling into disappointment as the default.

Yes, we are surrounded with reasons for concern and alarm, and it's natural for people – including newspaper editors – to feel overwhelmed by the constant tide of grim news.

the antidote

Five happy things in the news, delivered weekdays



Yet there are many people around us who see reasons to be optimistic and many reasons to think that we, individually and collectively, can bring about positive change in our communities and our wider world. They are not foolhardy Panglosses, but people who practise ["realistic optimism"](#).

[Realistic optimism](#) involves setting achievable goals and working towards them. Realistic optimists are aware of the challenges and know the road ahead is rocky. But they know that action needs to be taken and believe that success is possible.

American psychologist Mara Karpel described it this way: "We focus on the best actions to take or work at accepting those things that cannot be changed. With an optimistic attitude, we can handle almost any situation if things don't work out the way that we wish. We embrace the idea that 'this too shall pass'," she [wrote on the Huffington Post](#).



Get more
Here at Stuff
contributor
impact in Ki



SUPPLIED

Psychologist and disaster mental health management expert Dr Sarb Johal says we should be active participants not bystanders.

Sarb Johal, a Wellington-based psychologist and speaker, says realistic optimism means trying to overcome cynicism and pessimism without being all Pollyanna-ish.

“It’s easy to feel like flotsam floating on the ocean, even as a small country it can feel like that at times, but we are active participants in the world, but we can ask ourselves what sorts of things we can change,” Johal says.

“In crisis and emergency management, we say ‘look for the helpers’. Don’t just stand around but look to help the helpers,” he says.

“How can we learn from this in our lives and assist rather than just letting bad things happen?”



Get more
Here at Stuff
contributor
impact in Ki



SUPPLIED

Wellington-based author and psychologist Karen Nimmo says that instead of thinking 'I can't' we can say 'How can I...?'

[Karen Nimmo](#), another Wellington-based author and psychologist, agrees that we can take a constructive approach.

ADVERTISEMENT
Stuff

"There are things that we can do to create more optimism, like constantly turning towards things that are good in our lives and shrinking the amount of time spent wallowing," Nimmo says.

"Instead of thinking 'I can't' we can say 'How can I...?'"

As the editor of the *Dominion Post*, I often find myself talking about the challenges facing the media industry – from the [global internet giants gobbling up our revenues](#) and the youthful preference for TikTok, to [the looming newsprint shortage](#). Not to mention the [growing aversion to news](#) that brings us down.

But despite all of this, I feel optimistic about the future of journalism.

The past three years of Covid have shown us that factual, sober, science-based reporting can literally mean the difference between life and death.



Get more
Here at Stuff
contributor
impact in Ki

The same applies, on a longer timeframe but even more existential crisis, with climate change.

The world will still need and want careful, fact-checked journalism – although the way it is delivered will almost certainly look different.

So I go about my days optimistic about journalism and believing that we journalists can and are making a constructive and positive contribution to our world.

I asked a bunch of people whose thinking I admire to tell me what they feel “realistically optimistic” about.



SUPPLIED

Jess Berentson-Shaw says that if we can imagine it, we can make it happen.

Jess Berentson-Shaw, Co-founder of The Workshop, a research institute focusing on public narratives

If humans can imagine it, we can make it. I know this because all the ways we live and move ourselves and goods about have been made by humans who imagined it.



Get more
Here at Stuff
contributor
impact in Ki

world that we love. And we won't trade off our kids in order to keep cars, trucks and vans and goods moving quickly through our streets.

I know making big changes is challenging. Turning visions into reality requires mindset shifts in society. It needs us to build people's belief in the possible, which in turn builds the will of decision makers to redesign our systems. That takes graft, more graft than it should to do the right things.

And humans have a long and glorious history of working hard together to make the most important things happen.



SUPPLIED

Holly Bennett says she is optimistic about the future of te reo Māori because it is now firmly etched in the fabric of modern Aotearoa.

Holly Bennett (Te Arawa, Ngāti Whakaeue, Ngāti Pikiao), Director at Kaitūhono Ariki consultancy

In 2004 I was 14 years old choosing my subjects for NCEA Level 1. I wanted to do te reo Māori. I'm not a native speaker and thought by studying te reo Māori I would be able to kick-start my language journey.

I went to a mainstream public school in the eastern bays of Tāmaki Makaurau. I was told that I would be the only person in the class, so they wouldn't be offering te reo Māori as a subject. I brought this kōrero home to my Pāpā, who said I had two options: *"You can fight them on this, because you have a right to be able to learn te reo Māori, however it takes energy and effort to fight these institutions my love. Or you can choose another subject and just accept that your school hasn't done anything for its Māori students other than wheel you out when ERO comes to visit."* I chose the latter, to my own detriment.

I am now 32 years old and two years into learning te reo Māori with a privately held institution. However, I am



Get more

Here at Stuff
contributor
impact in Ki



BRYA INGRAM/STUFF

Jim Salinger, who helped uncover global warming, is optimistic we can take some steps to counteract it.

Jim Salinger, internationally renowned climate change researcher

I have now been on the climate journey now for 47 years from when I uncovered global warming in the New Zealand region in 1975. Since the 1850s, the global land mass has increased by 1.8C, and the global oceans by 0.8C and becoming more acidic.

ADVERTISEMENT
Stuff

Yet I remain optimistic as a citizen of planet Earth living in the suburb of Aotearoa, as movements are afoot. The trends in public awareness were the discovery of global warming around 2000, then unfortunate push-back during decade 2010 from the oil industry and various other right-wing groups who were either in denial, or decided it was "bad for business".

From Gen-Xers who had little activism, there has been a huge growth in both awareness and climate activism from Gen-Y and Z(oomers) together with a few insightful boomers. The younger groups are now of voting age and will demand immediate change.

Despite probably 2C of warming, or a wee bit more, as a citizen of this global suburb, I remain positive it is survivable in these southern climes and that we can implement the large necessary changes required.



Get more
Here at Stuff
contributor
impact in Ki



RYAN ANDERSON/STUFF

Disinformation researcher Kate Hannah says she is “especially optimistic for those young people”.

Kate Hannah, Founder and Director of The Disinformation Project Aotearoa

There is a section in Rebecca Solnit’s *Hope in the Dark* called “we are the monument”, which touches on the ways in which the rebuilt city of San Francisco, post the devastating 1906 earthquake, holds the memory of what happened, and the transformation that is possible: “the rebuilt city, the eventual rise of disaster preparedness, the people who go on with their everyday lives...”

It is this – the willingness of people to show up, to rebuild, to learn, to go on living ordinary lives – which fills me with hope, in the face of the unrelenting everyday horror of hate, violence, division, war, contempt, and lies which I study and try to understand.

Despite the backlash, despite concerted efforts to promote lies and divide communities, ordinary people turn up, roll up their sleeves and get to work, with intent and focus on the world we inherited and now pass on to our children. I am especially optimistic for those young people, who explain things to me now with kindness, who have immense capacity for hope, and compassion, and the realisation of a more just, more inclusive Aotearoa.

From these disasters, some of our own making, let us remember that we are also the people who save one another in extraordinary times.



Get more
Here at Stuff
contributor
impact in Ki



SUPPLIED

McGuinness Institute chief executive Wendy McGuinness says happiness is overrated and being optimistic is underrated.

Wendy McGuinness, Founder of the McGuinness Institute, concentrating on New Zealand's future

We are a young country – Māori and Pākehā alike came here not simply to explore the world but to create a new world. I think this combination of explorer and maker means we are pragmatic, curious, and ever so idealistic. In a complex and uncertain world those traits are exactly what is needed to respond positively to the challenges we face.

“What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger” comes from an aphorism of the 19th-century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. In my experience, I feel most alive when I am most challenged. Being challenged builds confidence, and with confidence comes optimism.

I think happiness is overrated and being optimistic is underrated. I work hard to be optimistic, but I don’t work hard to be happy. Optimism is the input and the process, happiness is the output (sometimes).

ADVERTISEMENT
Stuff

Realistic optimism is having confidence in yourself, your family and your wider community to tackle the challenges we face. While some will only see risk and failure, others will see those same risks but focus on solutions and opportunities. I choose to believe the future will be better than the past because we wish it and we want it. I am optimistic about Aotearoa New Zealand because we are practical, curious, and hardworking; we enjoy a challenge, and we like to make things happen.



Get more
Here at Stuff
contributor
impact in Ki



SUPPLIED

Roger Dennis says “realistic optimism” means that you acknowledge the scale of the challenge and actively work towards solving it.

The case for ‘realistic optimism’

By Roger Dennis, consultant on future thinking, strategy and innovation.

The Cold War, The Population Bomb and The Ozone Hole. Resolving these challenges once seemed insurmountable, and for some people it felt like humanity was doomed. However, we’re still here, and how these issues were addressed provides insight into how we can successfully navigate our way through current global challenges.

The Ozone Hole now falls into the category of an “anti-catastrophe” – a potential disaster that has been avoided.

The term “anti-catastrophe” was [referenced](#) in a 1972 report by The Institute for the Future, a Californian think-tank. The expression describes “low-probability developments that derive their expected importance from their highly beneficial rather than their highly detrimental implications.” To illustrate, the report gave the example of the development of a new source of cheap energy.

In the seventies this would have seemed like an impossible achievement, but one that would have created tremendous gains. Today, the rapidly falling cost of solar places cheap energy firmly in the category of an “anti-catastrophe”.

While the Ozone Hole no longer attracts front page coverage, today there are other issues that attract similar attention. These include climate change, war, the rise of artificial intelligence and the decline of democracy.



Get more
Here at Stuff
contributor
impact in Ki

and was instrumental in ending the Cold War. His experience meant that he had a unique insight on how to approach seemingly insurmountable challenges. Shultz said that "I have seen time and time again that there are some big problems and we deal with them effectively."

Researchers have a term to describe this – it's called "realistic optimism." It means that you acknowledge the scale of the challenge and actively work towards solving it.

ADVERTISEMENT
Stuff

Realistic optimists expect the path to success will be difficult, and anticipate some of the problems that might occur. Like all good futures thinking, the power of this approach does not come from accurate predictions, but from the difficult conversations that arise when considering how to navigate potential future issues.

The opposite approaches to realistic optimism include cognitive paralysis, where thinking about the future is considered too hard, and conscious ignorance.

At the moment the world has many problems including threats to democracy, climate change, inequality, deforestation, ocean acidification and the pandemic.

To address these challenges and create more anti-catastrophes we need more realistic optimists.

How does this story make you feel?



Angry



Concerned



Don't Care



Sad



Happy



Love

400 journalists work for you at Stuff

We're 100% locally owned, and our team is of the people, for the people.

We publish more than 200 articles a day - for you - covering everything from local politics to world news. **And those articles are free.**

If you value what we do, become a supporter today.

Support Stuff's journalism today



Get more
Here at Stuff
contributor
impact in Ki