

When did life become so hard?

We talk about crises, costs, AI and fears about the future – and barely notice how the small, beautiful things are disappearing from our conversations.



Yesterday, I was sitting with a dear friend, and at some point we realised what we had actually been talking about the entire time. Work. Money. People we are worried about. Getting older. The political situation. Companies cutting jobs. Artificial intelligence and the question of which professions will even still be needed in a few years. Bills, responsibilities and all the things we urgently still need to get done. And on and on it went... A perfectly normal conversation, then. Haha... Except that, when you think about it, there was not much that was beautiful about it.

And suddenly I wondered: Where have all the beautiful things gone? Going to the cinema and looking forward to it all week. An afternoon in a café. A book you allow yourself three whole hours to read. Spontaneously inviting friends over for

dinner. Taking it easy on a Sunday. Sitting in the garden doing absolutely nothing. Planning a little trip. Listening to music. Being bored. Yes, even boredom. When was the last time we stared out of the window because we were bored, without immediately reaching for our phones?

Things Weren't Always Easier in the Past

I do not want to romanticise the past. We, our parents and our grandparents had worries too. In some cases, far more existential ones than we have had. Although that seems to be changing again. But for many people, life had clearer boundaries. Work was work. The end of the working day was the end of the working day. The news arrived with the morning newspaper and the evening news. If you had trained for a profession, you could reasonably expect to remain in it for a long

time. Not always happily. Not always fulfilled. But with a certain degree of predictability.

Today, we carry the entire world around in our pockets. Every crisis. Every war. Every economic forecast. Every round of job cuts. Every technological breakthrough. And, of course, everyone else's perfect life as well. We know more. But because of that, we carry more too.

A World in Constant Transition

On top of that, many things really are shifting at the same time right now. AI is changing jobs and entire professions. Companies are under pressure to cut costs. Society is ageing. Digitalisation is accelerating our everyday lives. Certainties that seemed self-evident for decades are becoming increasingly fragile. We cannot simply smile all of that away.

Someone who is afraid of losing their job does not need an inspirational quote about positive thinking. Someone under financial pressure cannot pay their electricity bill with joy and optimism. And yet, I believe we make a mistake when we allow all these changes to continue working away in our minds around the clock. Because then something strange happens: we try to control an increasingly uncertain world by exercising even more control. We plan more. Think more. Worry further into the future. Optimise ourselves. Keep ourselves informed. Prepare for possibilities that may never happen. And eventually, even an ordinary life begins to feel like a crisis management centre.

Perhaps the Future Begins Somewhere Else

And yet, this new era might force us to ask a completely different question. If machines take over more routine work in the future, if careers become less linear and if work perhaps loses some of the importance it has had until now, what should become more important instead? Perhaps

precisely the things we are currently neglecting so badly. Time. Friendship. Curiosity. Creativity. Community. Leisure. The ability to notice a beautiful moment at all.

Perhaps our task in this new era is not only to prepare people for new professions. Perhaps we also need people who can guide others through change without allowing them to lose themselves in it.

Life Is Still Allowed to Be Beautiful

After my conversation with my friend, I kept coming back to that one thought. We cannot simply stop the major changes of our time. We cannot put AI back in the box. We cannot personally control economic developments. We cannot abolish ageing or order the world each morning exactly the way we would like it to be. But we can make sure these things do not take over our entire lives.

Perhaps we should go to the cinema more often. Order the good cake. Drop by a neighbour's for an unplanned cup of coffee. Waste an entire hour doing absolutely nothing. Meet people and, for once, not talk about everything that is difficult right now.

Perhaps we even need a little more boredom again. Not as an escape from reality. But as a reminder that reality is bigger than its problems. Besides, the best thoughts and ideas often come when we are not thinking at all.

The world is allowed to be complicated. Your entire life doesn't have to be. Take this as a small, loving reminder to make a switch.

The Switch Column by Monica Deters

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