

# From words to action

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Why do I only get involved and do something to help when something affects me personally, whether directly or indirectly? When I'm virtually forced to take action due to pressure or a negative experience? Wouldn't it be more far-sighted to give something back to society at a time when things are going well?

At the moment, lots of people are talking about 'what needs to be done'. For years, it's been a constant refrain that 'they' ought to do this or that. But every single day gives us a chance to realise that it's actually down to us. Anyone can find something that they can do to make a difference. Individuals, families or big organisations can take action according to their own individual means. Things are better than ever in Germany – and yet there is a feeling that things are out of kilter, that there's a disbalance between those who act and those who simply talk. But if we want to maintain our values and prosperity and make progress as a society, we need balance. We don't have time for any more excuses like 'I can't make a difference' or 'Someone else will take care of it'. We can't always wait till we come under pressure or experience hardship ourselves before we start putting the principle of give and take into practice. It's down to us to step in and take action when it's urgently needed.

### A SENSE OF COMMUNITY REDUCES PASSIVITY

In the next 4,380 days up until 2029, many of us could find a way to personally contribute and make a difference. It could become almost second nature to help others and provide mutual assistance, which would bring more balance to our society. As history has taught us, creating an active, tangible sense of community reduces passivity. It's about building a better future for our children, for ourselves in our old age, for our society. Over the longer term, public appreciation and recognition will help to promote people getting actively involved in good causes. So too will the sense of identity we develop in future. Polarising populist movements call on politicians and businesses

to act – 'they' should do something, 'they' need to finally make some changes. This kind of attitude is widening the gulf that we can see at the moment, and stands in the way of us actively doing something as a society. The consequence is a state of passivity where we expect other people to take care of everything.

### TAKE ACTION TO BRING ABOUT CHANGE

The generations coming up behind us are asking lots of questions. They're no longer prepared to accept disbalance, they don't see the point in hesitating, wrangling over the details, waiting around. They're done with talk and ready to actually do something, and they're actively shaping the face of our future. They're gathering in city squares and standing up for Europe. They're communicating online, where they can share their views quickly, directly and transparently. They're founding companies that embrace a 21st-century approach to education and training. Nobody's telling them to do it, and they're not only doing it because things got tough for them personally. Rather, it's a result of the things they witness every single day, and a voice inside them saying crystal-clear: 'We need to take action to bring about change. We need to actively shape our society and our lives. And we need to do it now!'

Established political parties will find themselves faced with a new generation of young voters who ask, 'Why should I vote for this or that party?' I've been thinking about where this will lead us. Disbalance. Them and us. Putting material things ahead of helping other people. Self-centred attitudes. Everyone's talking about the gulf they can sense in our society. Can I make a difference? Should I join a political party? How do we get from words and good intentions to actual action? What am I contributing to society? Of course, we're all already contributing in our own little way. At work or in our social lives, with our families, partners and parents. But what if we have the resources to go beyond that and really make a difference, according

to our own individual means and abilities? If one day you were asked, 'And what have you done to change things?', could you give an example of something, however small it might seem? I used to do the odd small thing to help out every now and then. But one day, when I was sitting out on the balcony in the glorious midsummer sunshine reading reports in the newspaper about the Elbe floods, it forced me to think long and hard. I got in my car, and three hours later I was at a collection point in Wittenberge shovelling sandbags. Volunteers came from far and wide to lend a helping hand. Afterwards, I asked myself: where can I contribute something? What can I do to make a difference while things are going well, rather than waiting for a crisis to strike?

After reading reports about the Montessori method of education, which puts the focus squarely on the children themselves, I started volunteering a few hours of my time a year to help groups set up Montessori classrooms. Another time, I wanted to make a small donation. But what cause should I support? Since I'm a big sports fan, I made contact with the Paralympic swimming team in Berlin, where children and young people with and without disabilities train side by side. They urgently needed support. I still volunteer for them to this day and have kept making small financial contributions.

#### ANYONE CAN TAKE ACTION ACCORDING TO THEIR OWN PERSONAL MEANS

And in my professional life, I had the opportunity to work on a CSR programme as a mentor and coach, allowing me to pass on my knowledge to newly established companies. What this shows is that everyone can take action in their own individual way, according to their own personal means and abilities, whether by providing financial support, sharing knowledge or actively volunteering.

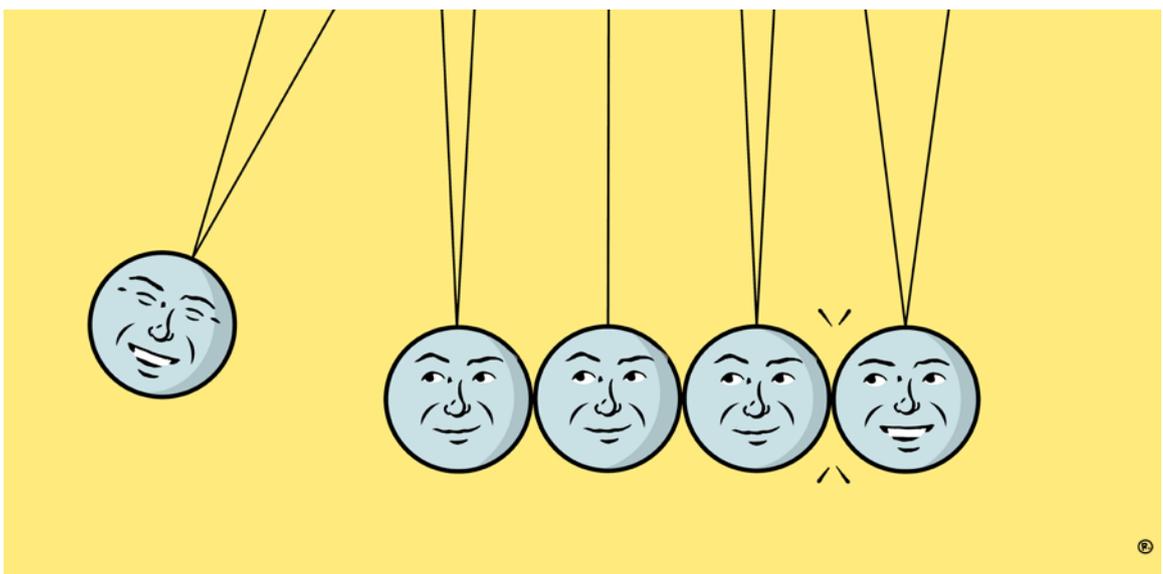
#### *The decision is down to us.*

One of the most important things is to talk and write about the things that you do to actively make a difference, and share your experiences of volunteering and helping out. I've often seen how difficult it is to encourage more people to become active. The challenge, we might say, is how to wake society up, how to shake it out of its lethargy and impotent frustration.

#### *So what should we do now?*

We should be more mindful and attentive, put ourselves to the test, ask, 'What can I do to shape the face of the future?' Each of us in our own individual way according to our own individual means, without having to be pressured into it or waiting for a crisis to come along. Let's do more than just talk – let's get out there and do something! Every single day brings a fresh opportunity to do so – and we have 4,380 days in total until 2029. And after so many thousands of individual opportunities, the principle of actively helping out and giving something back will hopefully have been firmly enshrined by then, showing just what we're capable of as a society. There are plenty of different areas where we can make a difference with our efforts and initiatives; two key areas where particular support is needed are education and care. Anyone can take responsibility, help shape the society we live in, move from words to action – not for 'them' or for 'us', but for everyone. Because by actively helping out and contributing something, we can change society and shape the future for each and every one of us.

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