

# Reform “the System”: A Manifesto

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## SUMMARY

*Most Americans believe “the system” is rigged — and they’re right.*

Across our institutions, our culture, and even in our own habits, the Top-Down Machine keeps reproducing domination, submission, and inequality. It divides us, drains us, and pushes people to chase status instead of community. Yet most of us want the same basics: safety, dignity, economic security, a fair chance, and a life where we matter.

A different path is possible.

If compassion-minded people unite — not around an ideology, but around shared values and real relationships — we could reform the Machine from the bottom up. The core strategy is simple: small, face-to-face circles that build trust, support personal growth, serve their communities, and link into a larger network of like-minded circles, building a movement committed to fairness, democracy, and joy.

This Manifesto sketches the system we’re up against — and the future we could build together. If this vision resonates, read on — and consider joining the effort.

Below is the full text of the Manifesto.

Related:

- **Sign the [Pledge for Bottom-Up Power](#)**
- **Learn How to Start a Small Team**

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Most Americans believe the system is rigged — and they’re right. Our crises — economic, cultural, political, environmental, personal — are tied together by a deeper pattern. As described in the Systemic Introduction, a **Top-Down Machine** shapes our institutions and our habits, teaching domination as ambition and submission as survival. The faces change; the system remains.

Yet most people want the same basics: safety, dignity, economic security, opportunity, family stability, meaningful work, and a sense of belonging. A different path is possible. If compassion-minded people unite — not around a single ideology, but around shared values and real relationships — we **could** begin reforming the system from the bottom up.

## The Opportunity

Across the country, members of an informal “compassionate humanity community” are already helping people, improving conditions, and resisting injustice. But we are scattered — drops that could become a river.

If we unite, we could:

- Build a network of small teams that model respect and equality.
- Shift power from top-down systems to bottom-up communities.
- Welcome everyone willing to reduce suffering and advance fairness.
- Start wherever we are, with whoever is ready.

## The Problem We Face

The Top-Down Machine shows up everywhere:

bosses treat workers as disposable; schools reward compliance over learning; politics answers to donors rather than voters; wealth concentrates; families buckle under strain; violence spreads; culture glorifies status and mocks compassion; entire communities are left behind.

These aren’t isolated failures. They flow from the same win-lose engine — step on those with less power, bow to those with more.

Public life distracts us with saviors and scapegoats. We blame presidents for everything, but leaders operate inside systems that outlast them. Naming the Machine doesn’t excuse bad actors; it clarifies why simply swapping managers won’t fix what’s broken.

## **Trump**

MAGA politics amplifies domination openly. It promotes hierarchy, demands loyalty, and pushes policies rooted in exclusion and power-over. Some propose CEO-style rule over city-states run by elites. Abroad, bullying replaces partnership. This isn't a departure from the Machine — it's one of its clearer expressions.

## **The Solution: A Bottom-Up Community**

Despite the harm, people everywhere are already building alternatives:

- worker-owned cooperatives
- mutual-aid networks
- community-rooted schools
- violence-interruption programs
- neighborhood assemblies
- co-housing communities
- peer-based addiction and mental-health support

These efforts show what's possible when people share power instead of hoard it.

## **A Vision of a Different Society**

A society rooted in fairness, dignity, and shared responsibility would mean:

### **Everyone Meets Basic Needs**

Living wages, affordable housing, childcare, healthcare, and education.  
Local economies keep wealth circulating.  
Family farms thrive.

### **Work Becomes Fair**

Strong unions, shared governance, employee ownership, meaningful oversight.

### **Communities Grow Strong**

Community-rooted policing, student voice in schools, safe neighborhoods, time for art and service, mental-health support, trustworthy institutions.

### **Government Works for People**

Face-to-face meetings between officials and voters.

Citizen assemblies.

Partnership abroad instead of bullying.

Money out of politics.

Fair elections.

Responsive infrastructure.

### **We Treat Each Other as Equals**

Respect, listening, honesty, conflict resolution, shared decisions.

Families and communities practice mutual empowerment.

## **Next Steps: How We Build It**

The core unit: **small, face-to-face teams** — three or more people who meet regularly, build trust, support personal growth, counter disinformation, and practice collaborative leadership. These teams federate upward into regional circles, coordinating committees, and national networks.

A movement of movements, rooted in humility and shared purpose, could begin shifting the balance of power toward democratic communities.

### **Shared Commitments**

- Treat everyone with respect.
- Confront domination and submission in daily life.
- Stand for equal worth.
- Bridge divides.

- Reduce suffering.
- Build solutions together.
- Balance top-down with bottom-up power.

## **A Moral-Spiritual Ground**

People of faith and secular humanists can meet on shared ground: serve others, honor dignity, respect the living world. We need a moral awakening — not just in others, but in ourselves. Through reflection, honesty, and shared practice, we can resist the Machine's training and live more fully as equals.

## **Practices by Arena**

**Personal:** gratitude, rest, nature, examining bias

**Social:** listening dyads, integrity circles, shared meals

**Cultural:** uplifting media, group listens, independent journalism

**Economic:** support unions, co-ops, local farms; respect picket lines

**Environmental:** refuse-reduce-reuse, conserve, eat less meat

**Political:** peacekeeping teams, citizen assemblies, community dialogues, grassroots party reform

## **What Success Could Look Like**

Family farms flourish.

Workers unionize and build cooperatives.

Students help design their learning.

Congregations elect clergy.

Addiction programs scale with peer support.

Institutions earn trust.

Democracy advances.

People experience dignity, fairness, and shared power.

## **Moving Forward**

No savior is coming. History doesn't bend without people pushing.  
But we could push — together.

If we wake up, face reality, support each other, and build trust through honest struggle and shared risk, we could meet real needs and cultivate a movement of movements.

A Bottom-Up Community won't be perfect — but it could be powerful enough to counterbalance the Machine and make life better for everyone.

*The question is simple: Do we want to try?*

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“For a deeper exploration of the system described here — its roots, its psychology, and its pathways for change — see the [Systemic Chapter Introduction](#) of [Holistic Democracy](#).”