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[00:00:00] **Nate Hagens:** Good morning. I am between trips, and I had a few hours and wanted to comment on goings-on in the world, which would've seemed like a Twilight episode to Rod Serling and others not so long ago. In the last week, we had a Microsoft outage. We had an FAA outage that affected some of the meetings that I had.

[00:00:28] We had an NSA outage. We had an Apple outage. People, not TGS followers, people in my normal universe, are calling me, asking if they should stock up on food and water. I think regular viewers here know that the fragility of our system exists, though we haven't been talking much about cyber and disconnects of the complexity underpinning our system.

[00:01:01] So today, this is just a brief reflection on what's going on and maybe kind of a part two, unofficially, because I haven't really thought about it and I'm gonna do it in real time here, of the downslope rules of the carbon pulse. Last week, we talked about the societal and civilizational downhill rolls, downhill rules, also downhill rolls.

[00:01:30] And in the next coming weeks, I'm gonna talk about what this means for humans and also our ecology. But what this means for organizations and institutions is something that I'm interested in. So, a brief recap of what I think is going on. It can't be random that these five things happened, and not only that, but it was pretty obviously a targeted takedown of Jensen Huang at NVIDIA.

[00:02:04] I don't know what's happening, and if I did, I probably couldn't... Well, I definitely couldn't share it publicly. I think this is not acutely dangerous in the near

term. I think there have been AI agents getting more and more control and power, and the defense to stop them is much slower and more expensive.

[00:02:34] So it's kind of an uneven risk in a Tainter-esque sort of way. I think what happened last week is more of a trend than a signal, but I think what's interesting is there have been lots of these cyberattacks this year, but they haven't been publicly announced. And what I learned, especially with the Ukraine war, is there's a difference between the thing and the story and the narrative of the thing, especially with respect to Israel and the US and Iran.

[00:03:09] There is always now more than we are aware of. There's a story, and there's a story behind the story. My understanding is that highly encrypted systems need a lot of downtime and maintenance, and so there are going to be gaps, and the gaps that happened in the past week or so were publicized, most notably the FAA one.

[00:03:44] I think this all relates to control, and Milton Friedman famously said something like, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." And I think when these crises happen, there are factions who have utopian stories about their own goals and objectives that are kind of dystopian for everyone else, and they use these opportunities to gain more power.

[00:04:14] One thing we do know is there have been increasing regulations from the Treasury. Chinese open weight AI models are being outlawed. So there has to be kind of a story that AI is dangerous. Open weight models are catastrophically dangerous, so we need to control them. There needs to be centralized control, which means control under the big Western AI companies.

[00:04:47] And so there's some power thing going on there, and I don't fully understand it. But I think every two years we swing back, Democrat, Republican, and I think that continues until it doesn't. And the one thing that I've said, directly

or indirectly, is we're headed for authoritarianism. It's either left or right authoritarianism, and both of those poles must be avoided to keep an open society, and that's kind of my philosophical view.

[00:05:32] So I think there's power stuff going on behind the scenes. Another, you know, interesting analog is that people in our culture always assume that money equates to power, and I suspect that might change in the same way that it changed when the Soviet Union collapsed and twenty years ago Putin told the oligarchs of Russia, "Stay out of politics, stay out of national security.

[00:06:02] You can make obscene amounts of money, and I don't care." And I think China is very similar, but obscene wasn't allowed. You can make decent amounts of money. I think that may be coming to the West, where the national sovereignty, security of the nation, is going to wield a larger amount of power over the pure oligarchs.

[00:06:33] Again, I don't know what's happening, but some of this definitely rhymes. On top of that, we hear that Costco is sold out of twenty-three of twenty-six of their models of generators. People are buying pallets of water. In the last couple months, we had many European countries advertise to their citizens that they should stock up on things.

[00:07:02] Personally, I think the Superorganism is so strong and resilient that there's nothing big planned that's coming. This is all in a way to generate fear, and fear allows for more rules and oversight boards and, you know, directed coordination. I think that's what's going on. More broadly, of course, resilience and prep make sense.

[00:07:39] I just don't think there's AI agents about to ruin our lives in a complex way, but it sure does show you the "for want of a nail, a kingdom was lost" story in a few days. But nothing really bad has happened. Yet, having said all that, it really

does make me wonder about the rigidity of our current organizations and institutions.

[00:08:12] And if I had to brainstorm on what an organization of the future would look like relative to the brittle but incredibly efficient and profitable organizations of today. So I think the first little check mark would be something I talked about a couple weeks ago in my personal Frankly on the things that let me function at my best, and that would be slack and robustness, as Olivier Hamant said.

[00:08:52] To have buffers and spares and cash on hand and more than one way to do each critical job. I think organizations that have slack as opposed to uber efficiency are going to have advantages. Another would be flexibility. We need the purpose of the org to stay constant, but you have to be able to change on a dime when events happen in the world.

[00:09:22] I don't think we have much of that. Another rule for the downslope, organizationally, might be less extractive of the world and also of its own people, and our modern organizations are not like that. Another would be to be owned or funded in a way that protects the mission rather than optimizes for short-term results.

[00:09:57] That would entail not a lot of debt or leverage and having wide boundary capital involved in the organization that isn't looking for immediate or only financial returns. And I think that's how an org would build slack before it was needed. And I probably could think of a lot more.

[00:10:25] Well, one would be the importance of having a robust network of colleagues in kind of a nested alliance, kind of like groups of nested islands of coherence, because that would help avoid blind spots. It would allow you to share and pool resources and intel. And then there's an emergence that comes from that.

[00:10:53] I think there's more, and I would love for people in the comments to offer their suggestions on what the downslope rules would be for organizations in the world. But what I was really thinking about on my hike just now with my dogs is that organizations are comprised of individual humans or of teams of humans.

[00:11:22] And I really have been thinking about this: what type of human would an organization really seek out in this liminal space between growth and post-growth, between the upslope of the carbon pulse and the downslope, between the era of mulligans and do-overs and the time when things are gonna get tougher for most of us?

[00:11:57] I think the first thing is to be supremely dedicated to the more-than-human predicament and the systemic situation that society faces. There's someone on my team who told me that the reason he does this work is because when he gets older and eventually has grandchildren and they ask him, "What were you doing when the signs of this metacrisis were happening?

[00:12:33] What didn't you do, Grandpa? Why didn't you help?" And he is obsessed with wanting to do what he can and shout to the rafters and help society and the biosphere avert the worst of what's ahead, and that's why he's on my team. But I think dedication, which means whatever org you're with, you can't be steered away by more money or status because what you're working on is more important than that.

[00:13:09] And that's not for everyone, but I think that sort of drive and dedication is gonna be important going forward. Number two, competence, wide boundary competence. That involves being practical to be able to fix or run something, but it also means being able to do a bunch of things and be very good at the thing that you are contributing to the team and continue to learn and hone that craft.

[00:13:46] I think there's a lot of people on the upslope, where we had perpetual mulligans, that are marginally competent, and I think the bar is gonna be raised for all of us, and not everyone's gonna reach that bar. Number three, I think maturity, stability, being grounded, Zak Stein would say post-tragic, the ability to be wrong and process that out loud and be good under conflict, because there's gonna be a lot more conflict.

[00:14:26] And, yeah, to be mature, stable, grounded, I think is important. As I mentioned earlier, on the left versus right pendulum thing, I think the ability to be transpartisan and tolerant and patient with other people's views is going to be critical for organizations. I guess I would include systems-aware, metacrisis-aware, and not to the level of many of the TGS viewers, but just understanding, you know, flying up high enough and looking down at the aerial view of what's happening in our world and how human behavior and energy and money and ecology and biodiversity all kind of fit together and what we face, because it gives you an aerial view to view the challenges of the organization with a little bit wider perspective.

[00:15:30] And then I think a sense of humor is going to be essential in these times, as it has been in all human times. So I think that's my list after I had this little dog walk that feels pretty essential to me for an organization on the downslope of the carbon pulse. And by the way, my organization, the Institute for the Study of Energy and Our Future, is hiring for an office manager plus, that would be someone near Minneapolis, as well as a video editor.

[00:16:12] So if all those six criteria apply to you and you are interested, drop us a line at hr@iseof.org. I have a lot more to say on the rules of the downslope and many other things. I'm just catching my breath between trips, and I will continue to watch what's going on in the world with interest, but I'm also not gonna overly watch, 'cause there's things to do.

[00:16:43] I'll talk to you next week.