

NAVIGATING THE PERFECT STORM – INTERVIEW WITH EVERT-JAN OUWENEEL



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The Perpetual content team recently sat down with Evert-Jan Ouweneel from World Vision to get a macro-perspective on our world as it is today. He discussed where we're headed and what it will take to steer our planet towards a more sustainable future.

According to Evert-Jan, rapid change brings instability. Today, traditional democratic structures are giving rise to forms of populism and insularity that are ill-equipped to deal with big, global issues.

He explains that while the West is fearful of immigration flows, and of losing economic supremacy, emerging economies see new hope due to an unprecedented access to capital and new technologies.

The following insights are taken from the interview with Evert-Jan (see above) and from his recent presentation to PCT clients in Perpetual's Sydney offices.

A MULTITUDE OF CHALLENGES

Evert-Jan cites a whole range of issues that face the globe today - the growth of China's economy, the relative decline of the West, the rise of artificial intelligence and climate change.

He suggests that the biggest problem today is that we're good at getting angry at one particular problem, while in reality we need to deal with them all.

"It requires a scaling of our thinking, and finding a new way of dealing with complexity, that we can look at these different issues, see how they're interlinked, see patterns, see how we can solve them, without getting too nervous about them."

THE DEMOCRATIC BLIND-SPOT

Politics abhors a vacuum, and Evert-Jan argues inaction has seen the rise of the populists. They offer easy solutions and pander to a fanciful vision of the past. He argues that it's this insularity that is holding us back from solving the biggest and most pressing issues.

"We won't be able to serve our self-interest as nations, without fixing the planet. But currently, democratic countries are choosing leaders to serve the self-interest of the nation. Unfortunately, there's no democracy choosing leaders and holding them accountable for the global interests."

A PROSPEROUS CENTURY

But don't think Evert-Jan is a pessimist, he encourages us to stay positive and highlights several huge leaps forward.

“Consider this, in 1800, 90% of the world lived in extreme poverty; everywhere, even in the West. Today, it’s only 10%. Can you imagine, in just two hundred years? Most of the progress happened in the last two decades. That means all these people that felt this economic progress, starting to live an early stage of middle-class life. They are not fearful like us in the West. They’re hopeful.”

FINANCE AS A SOURCE OF STABILITY

Perpetual Investments has been part of Australia’s growth story since 1886. Evert-Jan Ouweneel says that the finance sector has very different role to play that may have become the norm over recent decades.

“You need a very predictable financial sector for entrepreneurs to feel safe to take risks, to move forward, so they know they can rely on that very stable system.

I would say, it’s not all that exciting, but a boring, predictable financial sector is the best way for others to be entrepreneurial.”