

Davos 2009

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A New Generation Charges Ahead

The architect R. Buckminster Fuller once said, “We are called to be the architects of the future, not its victims.” A group of young visionaries are thinking the same thing as they, along with older executives and world leaders, descend on Davos, Switzerland, this week.

These creative destructors, all under 40, have been invited to share their imagination, energy and courage in trying to solve some of the most serious problems the world has faced in decades. They will be front and center in both managing and attending many of the sessions at the meeting. Here are three of them to keep an eye on.

Peter L. Corsell, 31, chief executive officer of the clean-technology company GridPoint, went to Davos for the first time in 2008. This year he’s chairman of its Global Agenda Council on Alternative Energies.

Corsell tells Forbes.com, “We would like to enable utilities to move ... to a more dynamic self-optimizing smart grid.” He’ll be on a panel with Google’s Larry Page, the Pulitzer Prize-winning energy expert Daniel Yergin and Mayor Boris Johnson of London, among others. They will be envisioning the energy systems of the future, and Corsell says those systems will emerge from alliances among businesses in clean tech, information technology, telecommunications, renewables, storage and transportation.

The World Economic Forum has selected 15 information technology companies as 2009 WEF Technology Pioneers. Tideway Systems is one of them, and its founder and chief executive, Richard Muirhead, 37, is a recognized

green authority who sits on the board of the Good Earth Trust. He has worked to promote the adoption of high-quality, low-cost, environmentally sound technologies in construction, energy, water treatment and sanitation.

Muirhead will participate in panels on promoting stability in the financial system and reviving global economic growth. He may also attend a session on catalyzing the next wave of growth through innovation, science and technology.

A third young entrepreneur to watch at Davos is Neal Goldman, 39, co-founder of Uhuru Capital Management. He says he’s looking forward to both learning about and contributing to new approaches to tough global challenges. Uhuru seeks to give its investors healthy financial returns while promoting economic and social development around the world. The firm’s goal, he says, “is to create a return-enhancing strategy, if you will, out of that. ... You form some very unique relationships out of information flows.” Goldman says he hopes that more people in the investment world will adopt his commitment to being commercially competitive while doing good in the world.

The future of capitalism will rest more and more with such adventurous young entrepreneurs. They’ll be meeting one-on-one with seasoned--indeed, war-weathered--tycoons sometimes twice their age. If you can teach an old dog new tricks, these guys may be the ones to do it.