

Preface

Less is More. A startling proposition. The authors in this book, who have been writing and thinking about Simplicity for years, will explain. Hearing from these writers and thinkers is tremendously exciting, and you'll find answers to many of the crises we're facing.

First and foremost, Simplicity is a response to the crisis of our planet. The Earth cannot survive our abuse. In our pursuit of *more*, we've used too many resources, severely polluted the planet, and now we're changing the climate, bringing disaster.

The pursuit of *more*, has brought us a broken economy — with greed, corruption and injustice undermining our nation. When we pursue *more*, without limits, the society breaks down.

What's more, research shows that the pursuit of *more*, doesn't even make people happy! Happiness has declined as our affluence has increased.

Less is more, brings well-being to people in many ways.

When Americans use less, the rest of the world suffers less because countries can serve their own peoples' needs. When rich people have less, a middle class thrives, giving everyone a better, safer quality of life.

And finally, *less is more*, brings individual satisfaction. When you have too much, you savor nothing. If you get a new shirt each week, what's special about that? But an occasional new shirt can truly be enjoyed. Ultimately, using less

means we turn away from material things to the true source of happiness: caring for other people.

The writers in this book offer profound new insights into an age-old philosophy. Throughout history, mainstream religions and wisdom traditions have understood the importance of Simplicity, but most people have failed to grasp it. Now our problems are forcing us to consider it.

What is Simplicity? Simplicity is a complex concept, but at the core is voluntary limitation of our outer wealth so that we can have greater inner wealth. Research, history and personal experience show that you can't pursue both at the same time. The belief that being rich will make you happy is simply wrong, yet it continues to hold us captive.

What do people involved in the Simplicity movement do? Usually, people have focused on individual actions: reducing spending so they can work less and have more time for the things that are important to them. Thus, a life with less — less work, less stuff, less clutter — becomes more: more time for friends, family, community, creativity, civic involvement. Less stress brings more fulfillment and joy. Less rushing brings more satisfaction and balance. Less debt brings more serenity. *Less is more.*

But individual change is not enough — it's necessary, but not sufficient. We must create a movement that leads to policy changes. We need policies regulating corporate behavior, work hours, the wealth gap and sustainability. Government must protect and empower, as Berkeley professor George Lakoff says.

But ultimately, Simplicity is no longer just a quaint philosophy for the few. Boston University professor Andrew Bacevich argues that Americans are now in a "crisis of profligacy." In his book *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism*, he shows that America's consumerism — our belief that we can have anything we want, with

no limits — is destroying our nation. First, our identity as Americans is diminished: “If one were to choose a single word to characterize that identity, it would have to be *more*. For the majority of contemporary Americans, the essence of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness centers on a relentless personal quest to acquire, to consume, to indulge and to shed whatever constraints might interfere with those endeavors.”

We have prided ourselves on being a country that stands for the ideal of freedom. But that, too has been warped. Bacevich warned: “For the United States the pursuit of freedom, as defined in an age of consumerism, has induced a condition of dependence — on imported goods, on imported oil and on credit. The chief desire of the American people, whether they admit it or not, is that nothing should disrupt their access to those goods, that oil, and that credit.”

This attitude has led us into acceptance of “war without end” because we cannot continue in our consumerism unless we control oil — indeed, control the world. But as everyone can see, the United States’ path has led to failure. We can no longer have what we want or do what we want.

Thus, Americans as a whole must grapple with the idea that “less is more.” They must come to understand the idea that living more simply will bring great rewards to themselves, to our country and to the world.

Ultimately, we must change our belief system: Americans believe that “you’re on your own,” “every man for himself.” With this belief comes a cutthroat, irresponsible, uncaring society. But we’re beginning to understand that we will survive only if we come to believe that we’re *all in this together*, that we need each other. Embracing Simplicity is part of that transformation.

We’ll explore this transformation in four parts. First, *definitions*. We’ll define “Simplicity” more fully and see how

fascinating this complex concept is. Every one of these authors sheds a different light on it.

Then we'll look at concrete *solutions*. What are people doing? It's fascinating to see how people are living more simply — cutting back on their expenditures, their use of energy, the time-wasters in their lives. In particular, it's exciting to see how the emerging community “localization” movement is bringing a new energy and vision to Simplicity.

Next, we'll explore the *policies* we need for a culture of Simplicity. In particular, we'll look at policies for reducing the wealth gap and cutting back on work hours.

Finally, we'll explore what's needed for lasting change. It's not enough to use compact fluorescent bulbs, buy organic foods or drive a Prius — we need a social revolution. And getting involved in this revolution may be one of the most fulfilling things you can do. What do we need to do? It's time to talk. We must revitalize dialogue and democracy. Use this book! Use it to start study groups and workplace discussions. Talking together brings you together.

So we'll explore Simplicity from several angles. As you'll see, there's overlap in all the essays because Simplicity touches all of life. When you make a change in one area, you make changes in others. If you start to walk more, for instance, you help the planet by reducing car emissions, save money on gas, get to know your neighbors and, of course, become a lot healthier!

The authors have been involved in Simplicity issues for a long time. A lot of us have come to know each other over the years, and we've inspired each other. So we can say, without hesitation, that one of the benefits of being involved in this movement is that the people are really, really nice! We love these writers, not just because of what they have to say, but because they are wonderful, charming and, often, funny people.

Of course, all of us have been inspired by one man, and his words can best set the tone for this work.

Thoreau tells a story that captures the essence of what we're talking about. In *Walden* he writes of

a strong and beautiful bug which came out of the dry leaf of an old table of apple-tree wood, which had stood in a farmer's kitchen for sixty years...from an egg deposited in the living tree many years earlier still...which was heard gnawing out for several weeks, hatched perchance by the heat of an urn. Who does not feel his faith in a resurrection and immortality strengthened by hearing of this? Who knows what beautiful and winged life, whose egg has been buried for ages under many concentric layers of woodenness in the dead dry life of society...may unexpectedly come forth...to enjoy its perfect summer life at last!

Reading these words, we can't help but feel that the idea of Simplicity may, like the beautiful bug, be emerging at this time.

— Cecile and Wanda