

Simplicity *and* Success

Creating the Life You Long For

Bruce Elkin

**141 Seaview Road, Saltspring Island, BC V8K 2V8
250 537-1177 belkin@saltspring.com**

Concept

*“I would not give a fig for the simplicity this side of complexity,
but I would give my life for the simplicity on the other side of complexity.”*

Oliver Wendell Holmes

Bestseller lists regularly include books on simplicity and books on success, but today’s readers hunger for lives that embody *both*. However, by defining simplicity as a solution to stress and complexity, many simplicity gurus point readers toward relief, not lasting results.

Complexity is not a problem, and seeking relief is far from the best way to create a life. *Simplicity and Success* will show readers how to integrate simplicity and success by shifting their focus from solving problems to *creating what matters*. It will show them how to move from merely getting rid of what they *don’t* want, to bringing into being what they truly *do* want. Moreover, it will help them embrace the richness of life’s complexity and move through stress to the focused simplicity on the other side of that complexity.

This book will speak not just to simplicity seekers but to the rest of us—the millions of downshifters, cultural creatives, and frustrated boomers who research shows yearn for a simpler, yet richer and more integrated life but do not *yet* know how to create it.

Bruce Elkin is a personal and corporate consultant who specializes in “creating simplicity through focused integrity.” His articles, workshops, speeches, and consulting have helped thousands to create the lives, work, and relationships they truly want.

In *Simplicity and Success*, Elkin will explore the limits of problem solving, provide engaging descriptions of the creative process, share impactful stories of people crafting simple yet successful lives, and offer challenging exercises for self-reflection to help readers develop the desire *and* the tools to integrate conflicting values in support of simple yet rich and successful lives.

Most important, he will show readers how to *sustain* results in spite of adversity, ensuring that the rich, focused simplicity they create becomes an enduring way of life.

About The Book

Simplicity: Lasting Trend or Shifting Tide?

Downshifting. Cashing out. Living simply. Faith Popcorn says these trends are “hot.”

Fetzer Institute researcher Paul Ray estimates that 24 percent of US adults—44 million people, 60 percent of whom are women—are already “Cultural Creatives,” strong advocates of self creation, spirituality, ecology, and simpler lifestyles. “We are at the threshold of a Great Divide,” claims Ray, “The transformation is happening right in front of our eyes.”

But wait! Haven't we heard predictions like these before?

We have. Back in the seventies, Harris polls claimed that *most* Americans wanted to consume less and preferred non-material pleasures. A 1976 Stanford Research Institute (SRI) report speculated that there could be 90 million individuals practicing “voluntary simplicity” by the year 2000. “(A) major transformation in the goals and values of the United States,” SRI suggested, could occur “in the coming decades.” Instead, we got the eighties, that ignominious decade of unbridled greed, competitive consumption, and “looking out for #1.”

We might have suspected that would happen.

“Again and again,” said David Shi in *The Simple Life*, “Americans have espoused the merits of simple living only to become enmeshed in its opposite.”

Simplicity *is* a hot trend, but why, in spite of the all the books, articles, new magazines, and workshops available to simplicity seekers, do so many tell pollsters one thing then do another? Why is it so easy to espouse simplicity yet embrace its opposite? Moreover, how can we integrate values and actions to *create* a simple, sustainable, and yet satisfying form of success? Simplicity and Success will shed new light on these core questions.

The Limits of Conventional Simplicity Approaches

Most simplicity seekers are not aware of the self-created structures that underlie their day to day choices and action. They don't realize that the forms in which they unconsciously arrange ideas, beliefs, fears, values, desires, and aspirations become organizing structures which give rise to surface behavior. They don't see, for example, that this kind of underlying structure gives rise to oscillations between competing values such as simplicity and success. Moreover, they do not know how to transcend those

structures in favor of structures that consistently lead them to what they truly want in their lives, work, and relationships.

Most simplicity books ignore these oscillating patterns and the deeper life structures that give rise to them. *Simplicity and Success* will address *both* by bridging four gaps in current simplicity approaches.

1 First, by focusing on surface-level, problem-driven change, most books force readers to choose simplicity *or* success. Overwhelmed by stress and clutter, readers focus on getting rid of what they don't want. They simplify by cutting back, clearing out, getting rid of, and eliminating. It works, but only for a while.

When simplicity gets in the way of success (as it often does), most refocus on striving.

When striving becomes too stressful, they shift back to simplicity. Back and forth they swing, fearing that they lack discipline and commitment, desperate for a way out of their dilemma. Frustrated by these confusing swings, many abandon their pursuit of simplicity.

This will be the first book to help readers understand that oscillating between competing desires does not result from lack of discipline or personal weakness. They will see that such behavior is a natural outgrowth of the way they've arranged those desires in relationship to each other. They'll see that success is not achieved by choosing one desire over the other, nor by trying to balance the two in some sort of tentative seesaw stasis. They will learn to consciously create life structures that embrace simplicity while still honoring values such as challenge, engagement, and achievement. They will transcend the *simplicity vs. success* dilemma by developing the capacity to *create* all of what they truly want.

To do so, they'll need to bridge the gap between "Why?" and "How?"

1 Most authors provide readers with *either* an inspiring discourse on the value of simplicity *or* a long list of practical "how-to's" for cutting back. They tell readers how to get rid of what they *don't* want, but do not show them a *systematic way* to bring into being what they *do* want. Only one simplicity book attempts such a *strategic* approach—*Your Money or Your Life* by Joe Dominquez and Vicki Robin—and it is fast approaching the million selling mark. *Simplicity and Success* will help readers integrate the *whys* and *how's* of simplicity by equipping them with the skills and framework of the creative process, the most powerful—and lasting—*way* of producing results that we know.

Furthermore, too many simplicity and self-help authors prescribe specific skills for achieving specific kinds of success. However, today's readers require more powerful, generally applicable skills. They need skill that can be applied to a wide variety of

undertakings and which combine to produce the capacity to create what matters—independent of problems and circumstances. This book will be the first of its kind to introduce readers to such high-level “generic” creating skills. Such skills will enable more than just a privileged few to create the kind and quality of simple success they long for.

1 “Simplicity seems to be a foible of saints and occasional geniuses,” said, Quaker reformer Richard Gregg, “but not something for the rest of us.”

The third gap in the simplicity literature occurs because most simplicity books target those who are *already* successful, those who can afford the option of choosing significantly simpler lifestyles. Most readers don’t have that option. Although simplicity appeals to them, they are still struggling to be successful.

Hope for “the rest of us” could lie in *downshifting* (living on a little less income to achieve more time, less stress, and more balance). It appeals to a broader range than the more austere forms of simplicity. But the difficulty with downshifting is that it is, too often, merely a temporary response to stress or economic circumstances. In spite of the hype about Cultural Creatives and voluntary simplicity, Juliet Schor, author of *The Overspent American*, cautions that, “The voluntary simplicity movement is too small to be represented in the downshifter surveys I have conducted.” ***Simplicity and Success*** will show downshifters how to wrap their lives around what truly matters to them. It will show them how, by aligning vision, values, and actions in support of what most matters to them, they can create—and sustain—the rich, focused, and elegantly simple forms of success that they long for. It will also help them deal with the most challenging gap, that between problem solving and creating.

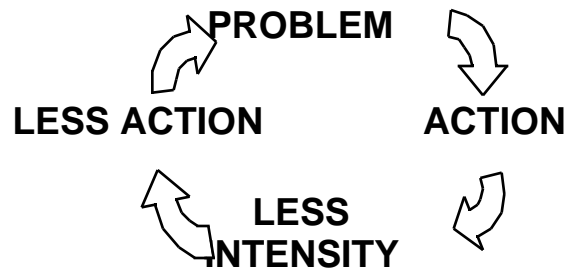
1 Developing *the capacity to create what matters* is the difference that makes *the* difference in this approach. The generic skills and structure of the creative process can help simplicity seekers transcend oscillating structures. It can help them bridge the gap between why and how. Moreover, it can help them focus their actions on consistently bringing into being the rich, full, and fulfilling kind of simplicity, they long for.

It’s a mistake to see simplicity as a *solution* to problems or complexity. We see this flaw in “Lose Weight Now” approaches to diet, and in “Fix your life” forms of self-improvement. In *Living the Simple Life*, Elaine St. James uses *fourteen* problem-focused phrases such as “cut back,” “get rid of,” “reduce,” and “eliminate” in the three pages she devotes to defining simple living. However, getting rid of what you *don’t* want rarely leads to you creating what you *do* want.

In ***Simplicity and Success***, readers will see that that letting problem solving drive the action prevents them from creating the lasting simplicity they long for. They will

also see that the key to crafting simplicity in a complex world is focused choice and alignment of actions in support of what truly matters. They will see that there is a world of difference between complexity that is forced on them and complexity that is freely chosen.

Involuntary complexity is forced on us. Merely reacting or even responding to it leads to distracted effort. Driven by problems and circumstances, involuntary complexity confuses, even overwhelms people. Making problem solving the focus of a life-long, self-improvement project leads *not* to fulfillment but to frustration. Problem solving is driven by a desire for relief, not results. It is driven primarily by the *intensity* of a problem and a desire to lessen or eliminate that intensity. Aspirin, for example, gets rid of the intensity of headache pain. However, relieving the pain allows a sufferer to continue doing the things that caused it. Eventually the pain returns. In this structure, the sufferer oscillates between worse, then better, then worse, etc...



In this structure, action is taken, relief is generated, but lasting results are not created.

The same pattern can hold for simplicity seeking. Cutting back reduces the intensity of stress and complexity for a while. With the pressure off, people drift back into old habits of striving and accumulating only to experience renewed stress and a renewed desire to simplify. The oscillating structure that underlies such a problem-focused approach leads not to lives that readers long for but, rather, to Thoreau's "lives of quiet desperation."

Voluntary complexity on the other hand is freely chosen and focused. A potter throwing a thin-sided pot or a wood worker hand-crafting a delicate cedar-strip canoe also experiences complexity. However, because it is freely chosen, that complexity brings a focused simplicity to their task, and to their lives.

Readers of *Simplicity and Success* will see that *creating* makes the complicated simple. They will realize that the art, music, science, and other enduring results on which our civilization rests, were *not* solutions to problems. They were *creations* that someone loved enough to bring into being.

“All the great things,” said the poet Robert Frost, “are done for their own sake.”

Readers will see that the keys to transcending problems and complexity (and the gaps in the simple living literature) are to:

1) envision their lives as *creations* they want to bring into being—simply because they would *love* to live such lives, and

2) develop the capacity to create what matters—independent of problems, circumstances, and adversity.

“The creative process,” says Robert Fritz, author of *The Path of Least Resistance* (and with whom I trained and worked for ten years) “is the most powerful and most successful approach to human accomplishment.”

Experience the Difference

Try this exercise to see the difference between a problem-focused stance and a creative approach. Close your eyes. Think about the three worst problems you currently face. Focus on those problems for a few moments. See them in detail. Then note how you feel.

Now, focus on three things you would *love* to see in your life but that don't yet exist. Don't worry whether they're possible. For now, imagine that they *do* exist. Focus on those creations, fully created. See them in detail. Then note how you feel.

When people in my workshops focus on problems they feel down, depressed, even helpless. However, when they focus on *creations*, they feel energized, excited, and ready to act. In which stance would you prefer to live and work?

Skills For Creating Almost Anything

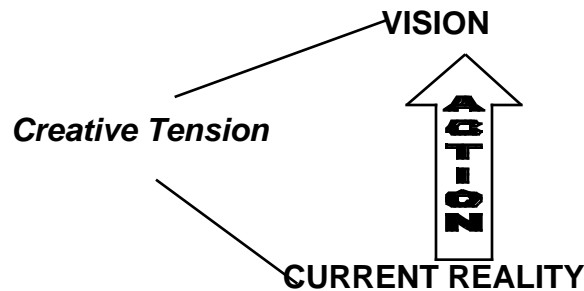
While there is no magic formula for creating, *Simplicity and Success* will outline six major elements that make up the form—the framework—common to all kinds of creating.

- **Vision:** A clear and compelling mental picture of completed results.
- **Current Reality:** An accurate, objective description of the current state of results.
- **Creative Tension:** Attraction arising out of the gap between vision and reality
- **Creative Action:** Experimenting and inventing in support of desired results.
- **Learning from Experience:** getting feedback, making adjustments, trying again.
- **Completion:** Finishing fully, acknowledging results, and celebrating success.

Readers will see that what makes creating so powerful is not just its inventiveness but its structure, which embraces *and* transcends problems in favor of results. Problems,

adversity, and complexity become part of current reality. They no longer drive the action; vision does.

The diagram below shows how creator's orchestrate creative tension by choosing actions that consistently support their vision— independent of the problems in current reality.



“Developing the capacity to create what matters, in spite of circumstances,” wrote Dottie and Gerard, a couple who took part in a *Simplicity and Success* workshop, “has not only focused and simplified our lives, it’s made us *more* successful. Because we are better at dealing with stress, we get more done. We feel more optimistic than we’ve ever felt.”

Market Possibilities

Simplicity and Success comes at a most important time. Although there are hundreds simplicity books, most are reactive, surface-level treatments of simplicity as a solution to problems. Many have realized the limits of these approaches and hunger for structurally sound ways to organize choices and actions in support of what truly matters. This book will appeal to those seeking to integrate personal fulfillment and meaningful work, to those who want to integrate spirit and soul into their daily lives. It will also speak to all those who are eager to craft a simpler, saner life out of challenges like jobs, children, personal and professional ambition, saving for retirement, and the desire to leave a lasting legacy.

Many are intuitively moving in this direction. Recently, for example, while browsing my local bookstore, I was surprised to find books on money and investment displayed beside best-selling guides for simplifying life and enriching the spirit.

“What kinds of people,” I asked my bookseller, “buy these different books?”

“The same people,” she said, smiling sweetly.

I must have looked perplexed, because she touched me gently on the arm and said, “There’s a convergence of interests, dear, a kind of shared vision emerging.”

Simplicity and Success will be a readable 50,000-word book that helps readers realize this shared vision. It will be aimed not just at the millions who own simplicity

books and want more creative skills, strategy, and structure. It will also appeal to the millions more who think about downshifting and the millions of self-help readers who are tired of problem-focused “victimology” approaches to life creation. Above all, it will appeal to category-crossing, mainstream readers who would *love* to create a simpler, saner, more rewarding form of life, if only someone would show them how to do so. [See About the Market, About Promotion.]

The Shape of the Book

Simplicity and Success will be divided into five sections. Together, they’ll show readers how to craft their own form of simplicity on the other side of complexity.

Part One: Integrating Simplicity and Success will examine problem-focused simplicity strategies and the pattern of ebb and flow they generate at individual and cultural levels.

Part Two: The Problem With Problem Solving will look at six limitations that prevent problem solving from being a solid foundation for producing lasting results. It will also examine the deeper structure which gives rise to these limits.

Part Three: The Skill and Structure of Creating will introduce the skills, structure, and dynamics of *creating*. Readers will see that *creating* and *creativity*, although related, can be two different processes and lead to radically different results.

Part Four: The Practice of Creating What Matters will show readers how to apply the form and skills of creating to actually crafting what matters. It will show them how to bring into being the essential elements of the life they long for—alone and together with others. They will learn to learn from experience and to meet adversity with grace and resiliency.

Part Five Transformation and Transcendence will show readers how to be happy with what is even as they craft what they most want. They will imagine the effects that a successful life of sustained simplicity might have on themselves and the world.

Summing Up

Readers, from dedicated simple lovers to downshiffters, Cultural Creatives, and the rest of us will be attracted to the simple, practical, yet integrative vision of *Simplicity and Success*. They will come away from this timely and helpful book with:

- A clear appreciation of the differences between problem-solving and creating as foundations on which to create a life;

- An understanding of how the structure of their lives gives rise to surface behavior, and why the simpler structure of creating produces more lasting results than problem-solving;
- A framework that integrates purpose, visions, and values with day-to-day actions;
- A practical way to embrace and navigate complexity;
- A powerful way to learn from experience, and overcoming adversity;
- A way to transcend oscillating patterns of behavior in favor of patterns which consistently lead to lasting results;
- A strategy for integrating body, mind, heart, soul, and spirit *without* having to change or deny currently held beliefs; *and*
- A set of simple, effective, and practical skills for clarifying, bringing into being, and sustaining what matters in all areas of their lives—alone and in the company of others.

Readers will see that integrating simplicity and success is not a rigid regime they must impose on themselves. They will see that the *structure* of creating allows the *process* to be open, flowing, that they can create a space in which what they want is most likely to happen. “We cannot direct the wind,” says an old saying, “but we can adjust our sails.”

Simplicity and Success comes at exactly the right time to broaden the simplicity movement, to boost it to a new level. It will provide critical next steps for the millions who have downshifted and millions more who contemplate doing so. It will give simple lives *and* the rest of us a practical way to align our values of simplicity and success so that they support each other. It will show readers how to create what matters in a way that honours who they truly are even as they strive to become that which they glimpse in their most perfect moments.

About the Author

I am both expert and experimenter in this field. I have helped thousands of individuals, businesses, and organizations master and apply the skills of creating to producing results that that matter in. I’ve also struggled personally with the challenges of shaping and sustaining a simple, yet rich and focused life for 25 years. I know what it means to walk my talk, and not.

I have described these challenges and creative ways of meeting them on TV talk shows on CFCN-TV in Calgary, on *The Morning Edition*, *The Noon Show*, and *The Drive Home* on CBC Vancouver, on electronic forums such as the *Center for A New American Dream’s* “Conversation on Consumption.” Producers of CBC TV’s *The*

Nature of Things with David Suzuki, Man Alive, and Country Canada have interviewed me. I have given keynote speeches to international conferences of educators and business people in Canada and the US. I contributed briefing notes to Peter Senge's bestseller, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*.

I have published articles in national and international magazines such as *The Simple Living Quarterly* and The Simple Living Network's on-line *Newsletter* (which boasts 160,000 subscribers), *Queens Quarterly*, and *The Journal of Experiential Education* as well as in local and regional magazines such as *PIQUE, Island Parent, The Higher Source, and Whole Life Journal*. I have published articles on personal development in *Explore Magazine, Canadian Camping, The Gulf Islands Guardian, and the Banff Crag and Canyon*. Articles describing my approach to life and work have been published in the *Toronto Star, the Globe and Mail, Victoria Times-Colonist, Vancouver Sun, The Province, Calgary Herald, Calgary Albertan, and the Gulf Islands Driftwood*.

As well as offering workshops on *Simplicity and Success* that receive rave reviews from participants, I conduct training for corporate executives and managers through my consulting firm *Summit Strategies*. Clients range from high tech start-ups, to university faculties, to *Fortune 500* giants like *ALCAN, Motorola, and Ciba-Giegy*. With publication of Meg Wheatley and Myron Kellner-Rogers' *A Simpler Way* (1996) and Bill Jensen's *Simplicity: The New Competitive Advantage in a World of More, Better, Faster* (2000), creating simplicity through focus is fast becoming an important trend in the corporate world.

About the Competition

Most simple living books fall into one of four categories:

- ***Philosophical and inspirational tomes that espouse a vision of the simple life.***

Voluntary Simplicity, by Duane Elgin (William Morrow and Company, 1981), *Simplicity*, by Mark Burch (New Society, 1995), and *Choosing Simplicity* Linda Breen Pierce (Gallagher Press, 2000) are important because they inspire people to consider simplicity, but none shows readers how to actually make the shift from where they are to where they want to be.

- ***Prescriptive, 101-ways-to-simplify primers that list specific action steps.***

Most simple living books fall into this surface-level, how-to category. Elaine St. James and Sarah Ben Breathnach's books, *The Simple Living Guide*, by Janet Luhrs (Broadway Books, 1997), and *The Circle of Simplicity*, by Cecile Andrews (HarperCollins, 1998) are excellent at what they do, but they do too little. They help readers cut back clutter and get relief from stress (for a while) but do not alter the life

structures that give rise to stressful, cluttered lives. I believe readers crave the practical skills needed to make real, lasting change.

• ***Academic analyses that examine current reality as it relates to simple living.***

Bill Devall in *Simple in Means, Rich in Ends* (Gibbs Smith, 1988), and *Living Richly in an Age of Limits* (Gibbs Smith, 1993) adds the principles of the deep, long-range ecology movement to the argument for simple living, but his tomes and others like them appeal mostly to students and academics. The market for these kinds of books is extremely limited.

• ***Skill-Based Books that Integrate Trends***

Three excellent books do offer systemic approaches based on strategic skills.

The philosophy behind *Your Money or Your Life*, (Penguin Books, 1992) the bestseller by Joe Dominquez and Vicki Robin, is similar to *Simplicity and Success*, but is not as systematically spelled out. Nor are the steps integrated into a generic framework for creating and sustaining a variety of results. In *How To Want What You Have* (Henry Holt and Co., 1995) cognitive psychologist, Timothy Miller shows why practice is the key to producing lasting change. He offers skills for wanting what you have and thus being content with a simpler life. However, he does not address the notion of *creating* what you *do* want.

Philip McGraw's best-selling *Life Strategies*, (Hyperion, 1999) integrates strategy and action to help readers "do what matters." However, neither it nor the other two books address the effect of deeper life structure on surface strategy and behavior, or the difference between solving problems and creating results.

In summary, there is a critical gap in the literature that *Simplicity and Success* will fill.

No other book provides readers with a dynamic framework for organizing and *creating* their own way of living simply. No book shows readers how to integrate conflicting desires and values into a fulfilling whole. No book addresses the differences between problem solving and creating. No book accepts that complexity is an integral part of life and best embraced and transcended, not eliminated. Moreover, no book focuses on helping readers shift the underlying structure that guides their surface behavior and actions. Only *Simplicity and Success* offers the critical skills and structure needed to bridge the gap between intention and action, and to create—and sustain—the simplicity *and* success readers most deeply long for.