

Radical Simplification: Letting go to Let-in

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<This article is inspired from David Whyte's life and his reflections called, "[Beginning](#).">

"Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated." — Confucius.

Simplification starts with a deeper wish for a new beginning. Whether it's a journey of personal change, or organizational transformation, we want to let go of old because it has expired its time and not serving us anymore. The problem, however, is, we never go far enough.

Probably, the inconvenient truth is better hidden behind the curtains of essential and necessary, and we protect ourselves from the pain of the unknown. The poet, David Whyte wrote, "*Perhaps, because taking a new step always leads to a kind of radical internal simplification, where, suddenly, very large parts of us, parts of us we have kept gainfully employed for years, parts of us still rehearsing the old complicated story, are suddenly out of a job.*"

Once while attending a meeting of an NGO, David Whyte asked his colleagues, "Have you seen David?" The team was stunned as there were not expecting any other David. David was unconsciously searching for himself. This episode made him realize that he is overwhelmed with many essential tasks while underserving the food of his core. He needed radical simplification.



Radical Simplification requires asking three simple questions:

- What is the core task?
- How can we release?
- Where to find the courage?

What is the core task?

Somewhere hidden deep in the trenches of daily life, adjustments, and compromises, the core hides behind the curtains of "urgencies" we keep on putting. It stands there, though not still. Shouting for our attention, we find it in moments of solitude or unacceptable crisis. The first step of radical simplification is to make space for that core to come out to the front.

It reflects our inner values and shapes the world we want to thrive in at an individual level. On a business level, it takes the shape of core-competency-based strategy work. The purpose is the same, to take a step back and look at the bigger inner picture. What do we want? Where would we like to head? The answers ironically could be radically simple.

For David Whyte, the journey was about doing what he loves the most, poetry.

He dedicated himself to being a poet, which he calls a verbal art form to create silence.

How can we release?

The release is to identify the parts that do not serve the core. *"There occurs in effect, a form of internal corporate downsizing, where the parts of us too afraid to participate or having nothing now to offer, are let go, with all of the accompanying death-like trauma, and where the very last fight occurs,"* wrote David.

As humans, our existential fear of death makes letting go difficult. Deeply embedded in our psyches, the termination of projects or structures built on our hard work evokes a known feeling of losing a loved one.

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William Faulkner equates the proactive termination of a loved piece of writing to fit in a bigger storyline as "*killing your darlings*," highlighting the need for a sacrifice for the greater good.

The deeper self-reflection of questions like "what is preventing us?" can provide answers at the individual level. What is required is to be radically honest with ourselves. On a business level, one needs to question everything which is not directly linked to the core. Why are we doing what we are doing? The preventive measure should be set as we release what no longer served us. Why did we choose it in the first place? Can we even remove the behavioral patterns which made wrong choices?

The focus on poetry meant releasing other initiatives for David, which he was considerably attached to. Serving the world through resolving systematic issues or supporting different non-profit organizations were noble tasks but not the core of David. Poetry, even though not a money-making profession of current times, was where he belonged. "*Do what you love, and money will come*," he was told. Only the first part of the statement seemed relevant for a long time; however, perseverance, talent, and courage finally paid off.

Where to find the courage?

Johnathan Ive said. "*Simplification is one of the most difficult things to do.*"

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The seemingly small step towards simplicity is full of emotions, past traumas, attachments, and fears. What if we are wrong? As the status quo is an option, can we postpone the decision when we know more? Are we going to hurt people by such decisions?

The courage is to go ahead even if the answer to all these questions could be a potential yes. Failure could be an option, however at times, not trying is not. If Andrea Bocelli has not given up law to pursue music, the world would have missed a beautiful voice. If Steve Jobs had given up the core of innovation, Apple would have been a commodity product. The courage comes with knowing the core. What are our values, what makes us unique, and what can we offer to the world? The rest all could be just distracting noises, whether as an individual or organization.

Radical simplification takes the necessary step to cancel those noises and focus on the core; which could provide new meaning and purpose to existence, just like to David Whyte. "It is always hard to believe that the courageous step is so close to us, that it is closer than we ever could imagine," wrote David Whyte.

In Conclusion:

Leonardo Di Vinci said, "Simplification is the ultimate sophistication." The simplicity imparted the qualities of timelessness to his work, that provided space for every generation to make their own contextual understanding. Simplicity was the only tool for that polymath to unite the diversities of his interest and thoughts.

Whether a complex organization or a struggling entrepreneur, focusing on the simple core provides alignment to the inner purpose and brings clarity to the outer world. Knowing what we want, releasing what has expired, and having the courage to show up as we are, make all the difference.

Radical simplification is about being true to oneself. "*and this very simple step is all that is needed for the new possibilities ahead,*" wrote David Whyte, simply a poet.

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About the Author

Deepak is the founder and CEO of Meaning Quotient - MQ Learning. He stands at the intersection of Technology (MTech - India), Business (MBA, HSG Switzerland), and Humanity (MA, Philosophy, California; coach CPCC, ACC). With 15+ years in the corporate world, he has held Executive positions (COO, Director) in Consulting and Multinationals like Accenture, Deutsche Post DHL, and Zurich Insurance Company.