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Personal MCG and Cultural Identity

Some of the discussion about MCG has been about the reasons for MCG to be voluntary. For example people don't want to be told by others how to live. What if we take reason a step further and design an educational workshop in which people develop their own personal consumption goals. If people have access to the right measurement and analysis tools, they might come up with their own targets that are close to being in-line with what the experts would have assigned to them anyway. There are benefits from setting your own goals. In the legal world, mediation works better than going to court because the parties have ownership in creating the outcome. They are not told what they should do by a judge. Making people come up with their own solution ensures that they understand the reason behind those solutions. As a result, they are more willing to abide by their self-dictated resolution over the long run than they would be if that same resolution was suggested to them by the judge.

We can provide some global resource facts and population and demographic facts as well as some easy to follow methods for analyzing those figures. Then we can let people do their own calculations and make their own conclusion about what those facts mean to them. Let them choose their own reduction schedule if they don't want to make a drastic change.

Developing a personal consumption goal will require people to make deep introspective looks at how they actually gain a sense of self worth from their consumption. I see consumption behavior as being similar to an addiction. We don't usually think about why we are really consuming what we do. In the end, all behavior is a result of either a conscious or sub-conscious belief that consumption is a way to reduce pain and gain pleasure. However, often our beliefs don't match the facts of the situation. We are not always happier because of our consumption. In fact, measurements of happiness within cultures are often reduced based on the overall per-capita consumption levels for that culture. In the United States, our culture makes us believe that consumption makes us happy. This belief is part of a shared cultural identity. Even thinking about reduce one's own consumption below the standards set by our culture creates a fear about not fitting in with our peers. We fear not having a cultural identity. We might think to ourselves, "What will people think of me if I am different from the rest?"

When reducing consumption is an inherent part of a rustic vacation retreat or a camping trip, it is then acceptable to live with less. In these settings we actually pay money to trade in our lifestyle for one based on a less consumption. Yet our identity with our home everyday culture makes people afraid to make their vacations permanent. People usually can't provide a good rational reason why they don't make their rustic vacation permanent. Yet they envy those that do. When I moved to the Caribbean, I heard people say "I wish I could do that, but I have the car and house payments, so I can't afford to give up my high paying job." In other words, fear

of alienating the source of our cultural identity keeps us from adopting a less consumer based cultural identity that we might actually enjoy more. These fears are not rational, but they are real and they are deeply engrained in our minds. We need to address this process of changing consumption behavior similar to the way people overcome addictions. It's by becoming clear about the truth of the consequences both externally and internally.

An all or nothing consumption target set by international experts is not the best way to beat an addiction. Perhaps people can choose to reduce just a little the first time around. Then this will create a cultural shift. This will make it easier to create bigger self consumption goals the next time they analyze themselves.

I can see this being a process that is presented as an evening church group activity at churches around the world. If certain churches organizations make this workshop available in all their churches around the world, it would give people more connection to its global impact. We just need to develop a training manual for the group leader (someone from within their group). Again, the less we provide suggested individual consumption levels, the better. Participants will determine what they think a fair amount of consumption is for various types of consumption. The amount they come up with may not be a globally sustainable amount, but in reality, nobody can be sure of the correct amount is exactly. Then the participants can look at a list of impact measurements that have been associated with different activities. The participants look at their life to see how they compare. If they see how much they are over consuming, they may decide to tweak their numbers and lie to themselves to justify their behavior. That's ok too. It's simply the process of people starting to look at the numbers that should be our goal. If they are happy with this process, we will keep them coming back. If people are turned off by the process, they may never come back.