

No One Is Talking About Civilization's Biggest Problem

Douglas McKee

Civilizations create problems. The bigger a civilization becomes, the more complex and expensive the problems become. A civilization only survives as long as it can solve the problems it creates. This is the reason no civilization, ever, has survived.

There is a lot of evidence showing we are at a tipping point. We have 10-20 years to solve the problems this civilization has created, or it, like all others in history, will fail.

Nearly everyone believes the headline grabbing problems are the most important facing humanity. They really do need solutions, but they are the just the tip of the iceberg. The long-term sustainability of civilization has more to do with a problem no one is talking about.

I call the problem *The People Paradox*. There are more people on the planet now than ever, but fewer of them have the skills to create lives that are either tolerable or sustainable.

Each successive generation for the last eighty years has had more emotional problems, more anxiety, divorced more, used more drugs and alcohol, and committed suicide more often than the one before. The evidence shows this is due to deteriorating life skills.

Society's response has been an attempt to treat the results, but none of the established systems for treating these problems are even slowing down the increasing incidence.

What most people don't realize is that individual lives are the glue that holds civilizations together. When we thrive, they thrive. When we fail, they fail, and we, all of us, are failing in record numbers for the same reason. We no longer have the skills to solve the problems in our personal lives.

Our relationships don't last. Our family skills have almost vanished. Our negative emotions are out of control. And our choices are creating more problems than they solve.

The biggest problems facing mankind are not external, they are internal.

We are genetically hardwired for close, personal, and nurturing relationships. When we have them, we can thrive. When we don't, we can't, and our personal distress affects every other aspect of our lives.

The root of the problem is that all civilizations have been built on competition. Competition is a contest between two or more entities in which the goal cannot be shared. In Biology it goes even further, saying the competition harms both contestants.

Competition also rewards aggression so the most aggressive become the leaders and their skills can only lead to disaster. That's not an opinion, that's a history lesson.

We have been conditioned to compete for everything with everyone since we were tiny children. We compete with the people we love. Even our children have to compete for our time and affection.

Competition is about "my" agenda. It is not about "our" agenda. Competition does not unify us, it separates and isolates us. Our culture has turned competition into a religion. Either you are a winner, or you are a loser.

Another driving force of our current problem is the personal technology we have created. It is amazing, but it is making a serious problem even worse.

We are already having problems forming stable relationships and, for too many, personal technology has become a replacement for real personal and nurturing relationships. We focus on interacting with it rather than each other. There is no substitute for face to face.

Can Wisdom save Civilization? It hasn't in the past. But if we approach wisdom just a little differently, it might.

Civilization is the transmission of knowledge and skills from one generation to the next. If that transmission does not happen, the knowledge and skills are lost, and the civilization collapses. That is basically what has happened to us. We have lost the skills that got us here.

Unless we transform our lives, our entire civilization will fall apart because, just like our personal lives, our relationships, and our families, we no longer have the skills we need to make the kinds of choices that can keep it together.

How can we approach wisdom in a way that makes it an integral part of a sustainable solution? A workable definition would be a start.

My definition for Wisdom is, "the freedom and ability to make the kinds of choices that evolve your life and benefit the planet." Using this, wisdom can be seen as a skillset for consistently making very good choices. We do not have time to wait until we reach an ultimate understanding of the processes. We must take what we know works and use it.

A wisdom skillset also offers the only possible way to empower enough people, quickly enough, to change the trajectory of civilization.

We already have the skills, and we use them every day, but they need upgrading to provide much more accurate and sustainable results.

I have asked hundreds of people to tell me if the following statement is true or false. "At least 95 percent of the problems in your life come from three things: relationships, emotions, and making choices." To date, *everyone* has answered "true," so I accept the statement as accurate.

That may not seem important as it applies to all of us. However, the key to the solution for our deteriorating social skills lies in understanding the reason it does happen to all of us.

At the moment of conception, we not only inherit our physical characteristics, we inherit the environment into which we will be born. As a fetus, helpless baby, and developing child, we are completely subject to the levels of skill with nurturing, nutrition, coping, and perspective present in our family members, their friends, their religion, and their diet.

The development of our skills with relationships, emotions, and making choices begins at the moment of conception, peaks at eighteen months, is mature before we start school, and will not change significantly after seven.

We will learn the skills that basically determine the choices we will make the rest of our lives by watching and copying the behaviors of the people in the tiny, limited environment into which we were born.

Considering the impact it will have on us, and through us on future generations, it is reasonable to consider this our *Environmental Genome*.

As a very small child, we blindly accepted our experience as an accurate depiction of the world and our place in it, because *we did not have the ability to evaluate, or change*, what we were learning. We had no voice and we had no choice in what we learned.

Who we are today is a composite of the skills that were present. The vast majority of our choices are automatic habitual reactions dictated by those early experiences.

We have been taught that making radical changes in our thinking is incredibly difficult. That has not been true since we became human 200,000 years ago. Our brains are built for change. If that was not true, we would be part of the fossil record, not studying it.

THE solution is to get on the other side of the curve and learn updated versions of these skills. One of the most important things is to realize the three major life skills are almost entirely interdependent, reaching conclusions based on input from all three.

Trying to upgrade one of the skills nearly always fails because it does not change the skill level of the other two. We must update all three at the same time to produce significant and sustainable improvement.

With better skills, we can create and enjoy more close and nurturing relationships, think in ways that create fewer negative emotions, and make consistently better choices.

As our skills get better, our lives and our choices will improve. It will also change the Environmental Genome into which children are born, and they will have models with better skills from the beginning.

More functional versions of the skills are available and are taught using the same format used to teach, or upgrade, any skill, *Concepts* and *Procedures*. Consider the consistently accurate results of skills we learn that way, such as driving.

The upgraded skills will produce better results. Deliberately practicing them will overwrite the ones we learned before we started school and eventually they will become our new habits.

Even though the next 20 years may be extremely challenging, we desperately need individuals who can think clearly in the face of adversity. That will be the best option for finding and developing long-term sustainable solutions for the rest of the problems facing our civilization.

Since our children will become who we are, the best future for them is to be conceived and raised in an environment that contains, and models, the skills they will need.

In solving the People Paradox, our children will be the ultimate beneficiary. They will be equipped with better life skills to continue the work of changing the course of civilization.

So, to save our civilization, we must become the kind of people we want our children to be.

An article of 1500 words is barely enough to introduce a radically different approach to empowering you with better life skills and solving the greatest challenge facing mankind. If you would like more information, click here [Douglas McKee](#)

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