*Issue 12*

*"Anyone can make things bigger and more complex. What requires real effort and courage is*

*to move in the opposite direction---in other words, to make things as simple as possible."*

Whether making things simple requires greater effort and courage than making them bigger

and more complex depends on the sort of effort and courage. Indisputably, the many complex

technological marvels that are part-and-parcel of our Lives today are the result of the

extraordinary cumulative efforts of our engineers, entrepreneurs, and others. And, such

achievements always call for the courage to risk failing in a large way. Yet, humans seem

naturally driven to make things bigger and more complex; thus refraining from doing so, or

reversing this natural process, takes considerable effort and courage of a different sort, as

discussed below.

The statement brings immediately to mind the ever-growing and increasingly complex digital

world. Today's high-tech firms seem compelled to boldly go to whatever effort is required to

devise increasingly complex products, for the ostensible purpose of staying ahead of their

competitors. Yet, the sort of effort and courage to which the statement refers is a different

one--bred of vision, imagination, and a willingness to forego near term profits for the prospect

of making lasting contributions. Surely, a number of entrepreneurs and engineers today are

mustering that courage, and are making the effort to create far simpler, yet more elegant,

technologies and applications, which will truly make our lives simpler in sharp contrast to

what computer technology has delivered to us so far.

Lending even more credence to the statement is the so-called "big government"

phenomenon. Human societies have a natural tendency to create unwieldy bureaucracies, a

fitting example of which is the U.S. tax-law system. The Intemal Revenue Code and its

accompanying Treasury Regulations have grown so voluminous and complex that many

certified accountants and tax attorneys admit that they cannot begin to understand it all.

Admittedly, this system has grown only through considerable effort on the part of all three

branches of the federal government, not to mention the efforts of many special interest groups.

Yet, therein lies the statement's credibility. It requires great effort and courage on the part of a

legislator to risk alienating special interest groups, thereby risking reelection prospects, by

standing on principle for a simpler tax system that is less costly to administer and better serves

the interests of most taxpayers.

Adding further credibility to the statement is the tendency of most people to complicate their

personal lives--a tendency that seems especially strong in today's age of technology and

consumerism. The greater our mobility, the greater our number of destinations each day; the

more time-saving gadgets we use, the more activities we try to pack into our day; and with

readier access to information we try to assimilate more of it each day. I am hard-pressed to

think of one person who has ever exclaimed to me how much effort and courage it has taken to

complicate his or her life in these respects. In contrast, a certain self-restraint and courage of

conviction are both required to eschew modern conveniences, to simplify one's daily schedule,

and to establish and adhere to a simple plan for the use of one's time and money.

In sum, whether we are building computer networks, government agencies, or personal

lifestyles, great effort and courage are required to make things simple, or to keep them that

way. Moreover, because humans na~traUy tend to make things big and complex, it arguably

requires more effort and courage to move in the opposite direction. In the final analysis,

making things simple---or keeping them that way--takes a brand of effort born of reflection and

restraint rather than sheer exertion, and a courage character and conviction rather than

unbridled ambition.