

# The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Erik Fernholm:** The system that we have created, it has been hijacked and we're caught in this trap and we are worthy of so much better. And this is not what we're here to build. And I think everybody on the planet can come to that conclusion if they just have that scaffolding and that support, and then you'd want to empower them to, you know, drive the change.

[00:00:17] But I think that's actually the core of rediscovering what it means to be human and changing that story. And the rest, I think, would actually sort itself out.

[00:00:28] **Nate Hagens:** I often say. That it is an unusual time to be alive. And for many of us, the places we live and the problems we deal with were ones that the human brain evolutionarily was not meant to hold navigating the challenges ahead of us will require a change in consciousness for many humans, which of course is much easier said than done.

[00:00:54] Joining me to discuss this topic today is Eric Fernholm. Eric Fernholm has dedicated his career to unraveling how personal growth connects to building a sustainable society. He's a philosopher, social entrepreneur, and has an academic background in cognitive neuroscience and happiness research. Eric's been involved in launching a variety of initiatives to create forums for inner development, including the co founding of the 29K Foundation, which has a mission to democratize inner development by building the world's first scalable platform, making mental health and inner development tools available to millions free of charge for the users.

[00:01:39] Eric has since helped in founding the Inner Development Goals Initiative, which offers a framework to assist individuals in navigating and developing their inner lives to catalyze outer change. In today's conversation, he and I unpacked much of the nuance and complexity that goes into creating and working with such an ambitious project, alongside the importance of offering just one way that people can approach personal growth and self improvement.

# The Great Simplification

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[00:02:06] and mental health within the broader human predicament. I will also point out because it is often forgotten that every episode, including this one has a very long and thorough list of references and show notes, which can be found both in the description and on the site, a link at great, the great simplification.

[00:02:29] com. With that, please welcome Eric Fernholm. Eric, welcome to the show, my friend. Thank you so much. Great to be here. Great to meet you in your country last year. Was it last year? Yeah, I think so. I have to admit, I quite like Sweden. It feels like it's a merger of what's been, what is and what could be in, in ways that the United States is not.

[00:02:57] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, it was great having you here. Really appreciated it. and Sweden, the Scandinavian countries are, they're an interesting place to be in. Troublesome in some ways as well, but interesting.

[00:03:10] **Nate Hagens:** For sure. I only saw Stockholm and then I went up to visit Pelletil on her farm, so I can't say that I saw much of the country.

[00:03:20] So, finally, we have you on the show, and for those Who are unaware of your work it spans a lot of areas, which I described in the intro, but you've spent much of your career studying the psychology of happiness, eventually leading you to your current contributions in developing the EO inner development goals, the IDGs, what are the inner development goals and how can they inform and midwife the creation of, better, more sustainable societies?

[00:03:59] **Erik Fernholm:** So, so the inner development goals is a communicative framework, basically trying to map out that I mean, the context is basically that we know that, you know, more than half of the time has passed for reaching the SDGs, the Sustainable Development Goals from the UN. And we're getting more and more information that things aren't progressing in the right direction.

[00:04:20] And we aren't adapting to that information. So we're more or less kind of immune to that change that we are the ones causing the problem that we're trying to fix. So what we can oppose

[00:04:32] **Nate Hagens:** being the humans on the earth.

# The Great Simplification

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[00:04:34] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, exactly. Yes. And accepting that this is not just a information or technical challenge, but this is an adaptive challenge where we are, you know, the way that we are solving problems is the problem, then what we're exploring in the IDGs is what shifts, what inner shifts in culture and individuals are needed for us to actually achieve the SDGs, like to unlock the situation and to build the capacities, not only to process the information and to take that on, because that is an emotional, quite heavy thing to do.

[00:05:14] you have a lot of psychological immune systems as well within the individual that will kind of try day away from that or try to neglect it. but then not only to take it on, but then to you know, take in the complex view of that and to care for the entire system and act for that system in a more in a better way, basically.

[00:05:36] That is more generative.

[00:05:38] **Nate Hagens:** So, so what are they, what are the inner development goals? And I, I I have lots of questions.

[00:05:43] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah. so what we did was that together with this huge network of researchers, we kind of posed the question, what inner skills, capacities, and qualities are needed for us to reach.

[00:05:56] Sustainability and have a thriving future and planet and what we got back from that huge amount of data like 4, 000 experts on the topic was five categories and 23 skills indexing really kind of like these are the core things at least at a first iteration that can point us to kind of where we're lacking or the skills that we need to build and enhance so that we better can act on driving sustainability.

[00:06:27] And really, it opens up a different type of conversation, saying that there's this inner dimension of sustainability. It's not just this external systems change that we need to fix out there, but There's an inner aspect of psychology and culture that we need to change. and it's also saying that the inner and the outer interconnected, but it's also a story of, a more hopeful narrative of saying, you know what humans and cultures can develop.

# The Great Simplification

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[00:06:57] And that means that the system that we have created is not the only system that we can create. we have created this one, but it doesn't mean that humanity is. destined for unsustainability, but that we actually can develop past this and create better systems.

[00:07:15] **Nate Hagens:** So it's, natural that someone would eventually be working on this because we have a supply problem which is where our culture is based on fossil carbon and fossil.

[00:07:32] minerals. We have a waste problem that emanates from that. But then there's a demand problem. What is it that we want? What is it that we need? How do we relate with each other? And I've been saying for quite a while and a lot recently that the real energy transition isn't really about switching from dirty energy to clean energy.

[00:07:55] It's changing the relationship we have with energy, which gets to Some of these inner development goals, like what's it all for? How do we relate with each other and with the natural world? so you're looking on that on the demand side and presumably how we cope and presumably how humans can measure our success in things other than material throughput.

[00:08:23] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, I mean, so as soon as you open up the box of the inner dimension, you, really come down to kind of like the demand side, or what do we really value? What is truly important for humans? And how do we build a sustainable system around those needs? and here, I mean, research is quite clear that for one, I mean, human beings are hackable.

[00:08:47] so we are shaped by social norms but we're also hackable from the dopaminergic system of effective forecasting and stuff like that. But we, can be fooled into thinking that if I get what I want, then I'll be happy. If I get X, then I'll be happy. Then I'll feel this. and the, and within the inner development goals, it really kind of invokes and invites this conversation really of what is truly valuable, what is a life well lived really.

[00:09:17] And it may be surprising to some people, I don't think the audience of the podcast would be surprised by it. But from the, from at least in Scandinavia, I mean, there's this individualistic very kind of top down approach to happiness that,

# The Great Simplification

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If I just get more optionality, if I just get more freedom, and so money and power will give me freedom.

[00:09:43] And if I get freedom, then I can do whatever I want. And then I'll be happy because I won't be limited. And that presupposes that, you know what you want and that aligns with what you need. And it doesn't, unless you're very wise and have, you know, have had a great childhood where you really are aligning what you want and what you need.

[00:10:05] But for most people, Things don't really point in the same direction. So exploring that is, and the research on that topic I think is fundamental where, you know, nobody wakes up in the morning hoping to have a meaningless day. Even though we're all individuals, nobody wakes up in the morning wanting to be controlled by other people or wanting to feel less competent or wanting to be excluded of their social group.

[00:10:33] We all have these basic human needs. and, if we could focus more on experiencing a fulfillment of those needs instead of getting X I think that's a really it's a fundamental conversation to be had in the realm of sustainability at large, of course.

[00:10:54] **Nate Hagens:** So what are the five categories? And if, you want to list the 23, that's fine as well.

[00:11:01] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, I'll stay with the vibe. so it's, it's so what, what kind of from a Delphi process of the data, so just a statistical analysis of kind of grouping that what we found was that the first one was the, a being category basically of understanding who I am, what is important for me, the story of my identity.

[00:11:26] like for me, that kind of pulls into where do I think that I end and expanding that really shifts what I want, what I need, what I focus on. Second category is thinking. so I'm thinking in a make it a simple linear way or I'm thinking in systems and, I mean, there, there's a lot of different types of research from Peter Senge to Sharma that we pull in on.

# The Great Simplification

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[00:11:52] then also relating. So how do I relate? Third category is like, how do I relate to myself, others in the world? and then the second two categories is collaborating and acting. So that's much more you know, outward oriented getting things done, moving people are. more comfortable in those categories because we have, of course, a culture that's built on getting stuff done.

[00:12:17] And the first three being thinking and relating are a little bit more about, you know, slowing down and, reflecting and maybe changing these deeper narratives that we have of who we are, what is valuable What is really important?

[00:12:35] **Nate Hagens:** So you said you had 4, 000 experts contribute or you looked at their research.

[00:12:42] Is this like when we talk about climate change and oil depletion and, those things, there are check marks, like we each need 2, 000, 2, 500 calories a day. and. There's a CO2 footprint from flying a plane and things like that. The list of things that you just said are, are not so discreet and they might be applied in different contexts to different cultures.

[00:13:15] So is it a checklist or is it more a directional, aspiration? Some of, these categories.

[00:13:23] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah. So I wouldn't say it is a checklist at all. So, I mean, within each of the five categories, we have, you know, a couple of skills that came out of the data but like empathy and compassion and stuff like that or systems thinking or courage.

[00:13:39] but I would say it's much more a, a a way to start a conversation What is really needed for us to take in, care, and act on these really complex challenges, like the multipolar tramps or stuff like that. It really needs you to kind of move away from a simple way of looking at the problem. and it invites a lot of more perspectives where There are interventions then that the IDGs points towards like programs or tools, evidence based processes that we know will actually build these capacities and cooperations in a lot better way.

[00:14:27] **Nate Hagens:** So are these IDGs interdevelopment goals from the perspective of the dominant global culture, which is the economic superorganism

# The Great Simplification

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spurred by the global north right now, or are they also applying to cultures that aren't the dominant cultures that are pulled into what's happening right now and integrating those perspectives, or how, do you even manage such a thing?

[00:14:53] There's 8 billion people in wildly different contexts in the world.

[00:14:57] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah. And this is, this has actually been one of the big things that we've been working on and struggling with, because You know, we started the framework of saying, like, how could nobody have not invented the inner development goals, like the inner side, the inner shifts of motivation and care and systems thinking towards the SDGs like, like when we registered the domain, we're a little bit sad because we're like, how, like inner development goals and then, and then you found out

[00:15:23] **Nate Hagens:** why.

[00:15:27] **Erik Fernholm:** It's a really complex task, but, but I mean, doing it with the, some of the top thinkers in the world, but in this field, really, I think that enabled the project to, to take off. but what happened was once we released the framework. It, just exploded. we had people all over the world reaching out saying like, we are starting an IDG hub here or completely emergent organic.

[00:15:51] And now we have 700 plus hubs around the world, more in, I think, Brazil than we do in Sweden. so per capita and it just took off. And then As a kind of consequence of that, this, topic kind of came up, is like, is this just representative of the, like a small group of, of like Northern European thinkers, or is this representative of the global movement?

[00:16:19] And like, this conversation is not ours to dominate or to, to you know, have a veto on. So now what we're doing to kind integrate all these perspectives of, you know, native wisdom and all these different ways of thinking is expanding the survey again, not going for, you know, 4, 000 thinkers or expert, but actually inviting 2 million people to respond.

[00:16:47] of course that takes a lot more time. but it is really something that, that kind of has happened as a bottom up. process. what we're seeing also in the dominant culture is kind of a longing for this type of conversation. Because we've

# The Great Simplification

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been looking at, we've been fighting for the people who have intrinsic motivation and really care about these topics.

[00:17:11] They're not seeing the results that they want, and the years are passing and they're starting to feel it, like unsustainability is now touching us, right? And for those people to have a completely different level of conversation has really been inspirational. both on the corporate and governmental level.

[00:17:29] **Nate Hagens:** So what happens at these interdevelopment hubs? You said there's 700 of them. What are those about?

[00:17:34] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah. M, so the, the barrier to entry to start a hub is really low. And I think the limit is like, you need to be three, three people who join together and want to work on these topics in a systemic way, right?

[00:17:51] and spread those types of interventions. And we try to stay very close to, the science of what actually is what drives these types of skills and capacities. but then there's the possibility to start a center as well. And so some, hubs like the one in Barcelona, I think it has like hundreds of members.

[00:18:13] but then a lot of them are just a few people who really care about the topic. but we're also seeing is governments even coming on board and saying, we're starting we're not starting just a hub. We want to be the representative of, for the entire country and the nation. so in, in Costa Rica, the Costa Rican government for the second time in a row, like going.

[00:18:37] They changed the election shifted parties, but they're still implementing the IDGs centrally in the government into all of their institutions and agencies, educational system, because they said, you know, we're pioneering sustainability, but we know that we are the ones getting in our own way. So how do we even start exploring how we can get unstuck here?

[00:18:58] which is really

[00:19:01] **Nate Hagens:** So I know, you know, when I met you in Sweden, we talked about human behavior quite a bit. I'm not sure I knew your role in, in this org. Like



# The Great Simplification

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what are you doing now? Are you running this IDGs? who else is involved? Are you doing this from Sweden? what's the structure?

[00:19:18] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, so no, I'm, not running it.

[00:19:20] we're a big team. I mean, I was one of the co founders but we're really, we've been extending the co founding team because really now it's I mean, a lot of top researchers have joined. So I think the context of it was really the Oak Island Foundation with Thomas Bjorkman. and then I was working a lot with 29K Foundation, which is basically Wikipedia platform for scaling evidence based processes for inner development for free.

[00:19:48] So it's really a true Wikipedia open source project with Niklas Adalbert, founder of Norrskan. And in those conversations, I met a lot of philanthropists, and I had to spend, you know, maybe you get 45 minutes, maybe you get 20 minutes with them. And I had to spend the first, you know, 80 percent of the meeting trying to explain why building the capacity to even care for the system that you're part of, and to then build the capacity to act in that for the greater good.

[00:20:18] is something that's important. and, that's where, for me at least the inner development goals kind of at least frame came from.

[00:20:27] **Nate Hagens:** So I, imagine you have some examples of how inner development creates outer change in service of the larger good. do you, have any you could share?

[00:20:40] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, of course.

[00:20:40] So so the one closest to heart is actually my co founder, Niklas Alderbert, who founded Klona payment service. so he's, high net worth individual, who when he was younger, he took part of this training, leadership training, an experimental program. And he said that, I think like, by day two, he completely pivoted in his identity, and how he saw himself, and how he saw society, and he really made one of these developmental leaps and that changed his way of thinking about his own ownership, and where that comes from, and how he, is part of the society, and where he's not, you know, if he's successful, it's not because he's amazing, it's actually because he was really lucky, and has had all this support and

# The Great Simplification

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he says explicitly that's why he started Nordic Foundation, which is now, you know, shifting the entire norm in Stockholm and Sweden, where we are now at the point where we have 38 times the global average of VC capital going into impact.

[00:21:46] And if you ask people at the. Business school, the top business school in Stockholm. Most of the students now in contrast to a couple of years ago say that I don't want to go into just, you know, building a company, earning a lot of money and making an exit. But I actually, the majority say I want to go into creating a better world which is, Amazing.

[00:22:09] so one person shift trickles down, has these huge cascade effects. it's, I mean, maybe you can't say that he wouldn't have done it anyways. but his narrative at least is that, that be this support has enabled him to, see himself in a system instead of separate from it.

[00:22:31] **Nate Hagens:** Well, you said when he was younger, like in his thirties, or is this when he was like a teenager?

[00:22:36] **Erik Fernholm:** No, I think this was, probably when he was like 1920, something like that. Yeah. Beautiful, Yeah. And he always says that, like, he held this perspective even though he started Klana, which was the payment services, but he always knew kind of that he was going to do something else with it.

[00:22:52] Right. and this, you see again and again Thomas Bjorkman, co founder of the Oak Island Foundation, same story. He had a transformative experience when he was even younger at a youth camp that changed his entire perspective and he accredited that to him starting the Oak Island Foundation later on.

[00:23:09] And we have Rosa Park. She even went to the Highlander Folk School and there's a quote from her saying, you know, I wouldn't have had the courage to sit still on that seat on the bus if it weren't for the support and the insights I got from the Highlander Folk School.

[00:23:25] **Nate Hagens:** So interdevelopment for teenagers is really a high priority in our culture right now, I would say.

[00:23:30] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, I mean for everybody, but but yeah.

# The Great Simplification

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[00:23:33] **Nate Hagens:** I was in California last week at a staff retreat and I met with some friends and we sat and talked for 10 hours about related topics on a Friday. One of the projects that I have in my bend versus break list, I call the 1500, which is the 1500 elite humans on the world.

[00:23:59] Some of them need to have a consciousness shift. and it's almost like they traumatic childhoods, or whatever, and go through the world as if it were a video game amassing digital wealth and like hungry ghosts. And so my question to you is, do these inner development goals apply equally, if not more, to the philanthropists that you're seeking and the elite you know, billionaire class?

[00:24:32] do they need to take these courses and experience this as much as they need to donate their dollars.

[00:24:43] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, I mean, any movement of a powerful player that would, support them to move towards wisdom, that would, you know, help them thinking generationally and whole system. So including externalities instead of external, creating more externalities to increase speed would be a win, I think.

[00:25:04] and there, there's, you know, different theories of change. It's like what we've been talking about in the Oak Island Foundation for 15 years is basically, you know If you could create a tipping point of enough people who start seeing themselves as, you know, tethered to society, who care for that, who think about its longevity, they will automatically move towards creating sound systems that regenerate themselves.

[00:25:34] And that could be the bus driver, it could be the teacher, it could be the parent, it could be the farmer, doesn't really matter. But eventually that narrative would be self empowering, and could hopefully tilt the system.

[00:25:51] **Nate Hagens:** I wasn't being critical, I just, I really think we're out of time, our cultural runway is quite short, and I think we need everyone to play a role urgently in these issues, so I do think a shift in consciousness from those riding high on the superorganism is one of the things that's necessary.

[00:26:17] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, I mean, that's my take as well. like with my background in, in cognitive neuroscience and just the understanding of how these

# The Great Simplification

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types of changes happen, I mean, some people go the cognitive route to understand how systems work and how their actions impact that system. I mean, there's even psychopaths who start, who stopped manipulating people because they understood how that affected their relationships long term.

[00:26:47] Which is really cool. So there's, I've seen interviews with people who have actually concluded this for themselves like people who are diagnosed and working with tries ways to cope with their own illness, basically. and I think that unsustainability is now becoming real. A felt sense for a lot of people really creates the kind of conditions for a different conversation to be had.

[00:27:16] And if that conversation is only about technical means and technical solutions, we're not really solving the root problem, which is the type of deep disconnection that we have.

[00:27:28] **Nate Hagens:** I can already predict that we're going to run out of time because I have so many questions. I haven't even gotten to really the IDGs, but let me ask you this.

[00:27:37] So my, coach and I need I have several coaches because I'm, I'm carrying a lot here keeps telling me, Nate, you need to stop thinking and start feeling because I do, like you just said, I process all this by thinking. And I did a, frankly, a while ago that we think that there's the cognitive mind on top of the limbic system, on top of the reptilian system, on top of the enteric system, but in reality, it's not a straight thing.

[00:28:09] it's a pyramid and those underlying systems are much, much stronger than we give credit to. so I'm just wondering in, in all this work, is it educational that people think about these five categories or is there an experiential way that people feel the relational quality? can you tell us about that?

[00:28:31] **Erik Fernholm:** From neuroscience, what we know is that, you know, 0. 5 percent of your decisions are cognitive, rational. The thing, like, the words in your head that you associate with, the conscious choices that you're making, and even a lot of those are very biased. I

[00:28:46] **Nate Hagens:** didn't know that, but that makes sense.

# The Great Simplification

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[00:28:48] **Erik Fernholm:** It makes sense.

[00:28:49] I mean, we don't, know how we use language. We don't know that we're, you know, all the biological processes going on in our bodies right now. so. And usually when I work with leaders is like just getting people to acknowledge that they don't know why they trust people. They just got a feeling for it.

[00:29:09] They don't know why they feel, you know, trivial example is like, who do I feel attraction towards? Like a romantic partner that I met the first time we met, I felt something first, then I found maybe later cognitive reasons for that. And I put words on it, but who sent me the emotion? What process in me sent that to me?

[00:29:29] And as soon as you start looking in, you start realizing that, wow, something below the surface is actually directing me and telling me what in this conversation is interesting. what kind of has this emotional salience to it and not? And that invites a lot more humility to. Any human system of saying, you know, the agents, the, first principle agent in the system is not a rational mind running around controlling top down.

[00:29:59] So why would we build systems like that? And if we want to create change, it's not about understanding the IDGs. Like you reading up on the 23 skills will do nothing. If anything, it'll actually make you Maybe less humble because you'll be like, yeah, I'm good at these five skills and it also creates a story that, you know, that you are good at leadership.

[00:30:20] You're good at sustainability, which makes you, you know, it's a, it's an attractive hero story, but it won't make you curious and make you want to explore where you're lacking or where you need to learn. Right. So, so breaking the kind of rational myth. is a fundamental piece, and that also plays into any of the developmental processes.

[00:30:44] So this is where I see the IDGs is this neon sign telling people, you know what, the reason why you're seeing these outer symptoms that you're not being able to cope with, that we're not adequately responding to, is because we're lacking the conversation about the inner and tools for that. So, then direct them to these processes that are much more embodied, relational, experiential where people uncover these experiences about themselves.

# The Great Simplification

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[00:31:10] It's not that they read up on them.

[00:31:12] **Nate Hagens:** Does the 3, 000 or 4, 000 contributing experts to your IDG framework Is there a evolutionary psychologist or evolutionary biologist informing what these five categories and 23 subcategories are from an evolutionary perspective where we for, you 20 to 290, 000 years of our modern species.

[00:31:41] We've lived in small hunter gatherer bands on the Pleistocene and what was conserved in what drove us and made us satisfied and motivated us rhymes in a wildly different environment today with technology and supernormal stimuli and all that. Is that, does that map to your framework or is that tangential?

[00:32:07] **Erik Fernholm:** I mean, I would say that it maps, but not directly like the way that the process was done to distill the 23 skills was not through the evolutionary lens. That was just a statistical analysis of what the expert on aggregate thought was kind of needed, right? But when looking into how do you build it.

[00:32:25] Perspective taking. When you build these thinking capacities or relating capacities, the interventional programs that research has shown are effective. I mean, they're running on that substrate, right? So if they have an effect, they're really developing these capacities within the individual. So Just one example is we ran a program for leaders in six different countries with support from the Templeton Foundation, and what we found was that the majority of them afterwards had started new initiatives for sustainable growth, sustainable development, just because they had been in any process that really supported their them taking on the seriousness of the situation and then being able to have that kind of communal support to actually drive that change forward.

[00:33:18] **Nate Hagens:** So you mentioned communal support. I've recently intuited that healing and growing largely doesn't happen at the individual level that someone heals and grows in relation to someone else or to nature or a group of people or you and I have a relationship and we have a discourse. And from that I heal and grow.

# The Great Simplification

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[00:33:43] So how much of the it? Interdevelopment goals are at the individual level or how much happen in relation to other humans in a context.

[00:33:53] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah. So, I mean, at face value, people usually think that, the IDGs because it's skills is this individualistic framework, but it's actually not at all.

[00:34:04] most developmental processes are relational. and as you said, we develop in relationship to others, communities, our relationship to nature, to the world. and the, when looking at all the different types of programs that really have an effect, they usually have three components. One is great evidence based tools.

[00:34:27] Two is that you practice over time. It's not this kind of one off firework. I went to the jungle and I did the cool thing where I had the off site team leadership stuff, like a week or two weeks, but it's actually this continual practicing in your everyday environment because you need to be working down the stack from the rational into the embodied and the social way of relating to each other.

[00:34:48] So you're actually practicing You're working on changing within and with your context. and the third component is this safe and trusting relationship where you feel that you can be at home. And by me just putting words on and sharing with you the kind of messy inner workings of my emotions and thoughts and reflections.

[00:35:10] And I mean, it's not super clear why I feel the way I do, why I react the way I do. We are not transparent for ourselves, but by putting words on it we're actually making sense of the chaos that we're in and that creates agency. It creates sense making. So we want like a really powerful exercise that an intervention program is the Pennebaker paradigm, basically where you write down 20 minutes a day for four days in a row, the worst things that you've ever done, the worst things that you've, that has ever happened to you.

[00:35:45] So it's just free writing. You don't have to think about grammar, editing. You don't read, you don't show it to anybody. And just by putting your. Inner world into words. the positive effects on mental health were, they were insane. Like two years later, they were still having positive effects from this thing that basically took them, you know, an hour or two.

# The Great Simplification

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[00:36:09] **Nate Hagens:** Why would that be?

[00:36:12] **Erik Fernholm:** So one way of thinking about it is that so if we have this rational mind, the metaphor that I usually use is the rider and the elephant. It's from Jonathan Heights, his metaphor of the brain, right? And the rider is not cognizant of the elephant, but it's getting all these emotional signals.

[00:36:33] It'll tell it, like, stay away from that situation, or in this situation, you have to take control here. And it's basically all these past memories that the elephant is telling you what to do, how to react, and sending you these emotional signals, right? And by never working on the stuff that you've been through, the disconnections that you've experienced, your self worth is, how you work with shame, what is shameful and not.

[00:36:58] By never making sense of that, you're not relearning, you're just replaying that old memory or that old sequence, right? But by putting words on it, what they found also in the research was so cool that the amount of causal words Was highly correlated with the positive effect afterwards. So the more cause What do you mean?

[00:37:17] So, A happened because of B. So just causal links, right? So I'm trying to make sense of like sequencing what happened first, what came after, what was in effect. And the more they had those types of causal words, the higher the positive effect was. And you can see this in other research as well, like in soldiers coming home from PTSD or having post traumatic stress basically is people who share more about their experience, they have a lot less PTSD and even live longer.

[00:37:51] Of course, I mean, because they're, going through this process of making sense of the world and in some sense on a bigger level, I think that's really what we need to do right now is to make sense of where, how did we get to a place where we are not proud of the world that we've created and, how do we get out of that, right?

[00:38:15] **Nate Hagens:** Here's a thought, let me replay that back based on some recent experiences, so what you're saying is, by writing down the worst things that happened in the last couple years, what you're doing metaphorically is showing elephant footprints to your cognitive brain, there's an elephant here, And that



# The Great Simplification

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opens up a portal to dispel the ginormous cognitive dissonance that many in our culture are feeling.

[00:38:45] And I've recently been in some, groups, as I mentioned earlier, and it strikes me that a lot of people in the peak oil and early climate change and the systems collapse framework. A lot of them, and I think there is some evidence here and I'll, have to ask my friend Tom Murphy to find it, have a depressive realism personality and certain Myers Briggs categories.

[00:39:14] And some of the people I've talked to had recently like philanthropists that. totally shifted their worldview, had a tragedy in their family and such. So I wonder if you need to have some piercing of the consensus trance of our cozy fossil carbon pulse reality to be able to. Emotionally process.

[00:39:40] These things are actually biophysical reality that is staring us, you and I are, fluent in it, but a lot of people, it's too scary to touch. So the mnemonic, the tool that you just mentioned is one way of accessing that. What do you think about that?

[00:39:55] **Erik Fernholm:** I think that would be, I mean, that's mainly about mental health and processing of my own emotions, but it's also listening to them and giving them the right place.

[00:40:06] and, so the research and kind of adult development theory shows that We all go through a first phase of socializing, where we're actually downloading the culture. And that's why, you know, you have the Ash Conformity studies, where people really are shaped by their in group, and it's an evolutionary adaption.

[00:40:25] Like, if you did not do that, and you're a 15 year old, and you actually are completely self directed, but you don't know the language, you don't know the norms, you don't know how things work. It's too risky. So you download first as a young person, right? And you can see this either as an, as a life arc, or you can see it as a domain specific thing.

[00:40:44] So first you download, how does this game work? How does chess work? How does monopoly work, right? And once you understood it, and once you found your place in it, once you found your way to kind of master the game, you're not

# The Great Simplification

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that interested in becoming maybe just a little bit better. You have diminishing returns on that from an emotional perspective.

[00:41:03] And what starts. Being evoked, unless you're traumatized, really, because then you just want more, as you start listening inward, you become more so moving from the socialized mind to the self authoring mind of kind of, so the ladder that I was received, that somebody put up against the wall, if I'm just climbing up to the next rung, and I'm not feeling more, maybe it's pointed towards the wrong wall.

[00:41:29] And then I myself grab it, and I start thinking about what values do I want to lead my life by, taking back a lot of my direction, right, my ability to self direct. So first I can gain agency in the socialized mind. I can be an agent of this current system, but I'm not holding the system. I'm not seeing it.

[00:41:49] And that's the self authoring move. Instead of being inside the current pyramid, I'm actually moving outside and thinking, yeah, this is just one of many pyramids. So where do I want to live my authentic life? So that's the self authoring, right? And it doesn't really end there. Self authoring can also be quite self centered.

[00:42:06] It's about being authentic. It's about being true to your emotional systems. You kind of discover the elephant, right? But you're still part of a context and that's usually what dawns on people when they move away from the self authoring is seeing myself in a system where I actually have to honor other norms and other people being authentic for different reasons than I would and to act for that whole.

[00:42:31] So that's a self transcending perspective. And these individuals, they can really start moving systems because they're very few. They're like 5 percent of the population and they can start seeing not just the norm, not just my will to be authentic and to lead my you know, real life. But then I can also start seeing myself in this context and starting to act for that.

[00:42:54] **Nate Hagens:** What type of individuals are five percent of the population?

# The Great Simplification

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[00:42:59] **Erik Fernholm:** The self transcending ones. So people who I mean, and if we could increase that way of, so, I mean, saying that people are on one stage, I kind of want to avoid that way of thinking about it. I mean, you could, I have one, my oldest son, sometimes he's really acting for the whole of the system, the family system in a way that's extremely wise, maybe more wise than me a lot of the time.

[00:43:29] So, so it could be a state, but it can also be a stage way of thinking about it. But like, how am I acting for what other people have told me is good and true? Am I acting for what I feel is good and true? Or am I acting to, I mean, we could put it in the, monopoly frame, right? So am I trying to be the best player I can and win the game?

[00:43:51] Or am I trying to be myself? As a player, or am I trying to create a better game?

[00:43:56] **Nate Hagens:** So we at least in the U S on social media and just traveling around, there's so much advertisement and buzz around personal development. How does the inner development that you're discussing here differ from personal development?

[00:44:17] Is there an overlap? Are they quite different or what are your thoughts?

[00:44:21] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, I mean, I mean, I spent most of my professional life in this space, and I'm really disillusioned of the kind of market version of a lot of these self development programs, personal development courses. First of all, they're usually based on.

[00:44:40] the development I can sell you. and they're built off of this individualistic frame. So you take a course, you buy the book, you go to the keynote, you do the thing, and then they drop you back in the exact same context, the exact same situation. And your conclusion of why you're not integrating and changing is because you didn't try hard enough.

[00:45:02] And then you have a recurring customer come back. It's because you didn't take step two, right? so there's a lot of that with. People who are really struggling and who really need support who aren't getting it. So, a lot of it is good,

# The Great Simplification

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a lot of it is, are people deeply caring about supporting other people's growth and development.

[00:45:23] but there is this tricky part of it being captured into kind of market incentives that optimize for recurring customers instead of actually honestly helping people. and in some cases the people who design the programs or buy the programs in the corporate setting, for example If they are only saying, like, how can I, what can I get out of this?

[00:45:53] What is the corporate win out of this? it, it can, the program will be very directed towards the metric and it'll maybe increase people's capacity, right? and maybe that's a good thing. Maybe it's not, but the deeper programs will usually help people, you know, mature the entire system so that it maybe takes on more responsibility, longer time horizons.

[00:46:18] And those are I mean, I really have an, an amazing privileged position because I have the opportunity to work with some of those who are usually self owned, so they don't have external fiduciary responsibility on a quarterly basis, but they actually have. So one of the, one of the corporations that I'm really, like I was working with them in Austria last week, it's an 11th generation family business. And they have a seven generation perspective at least into the future. So in their boardroom where they have some of their boardrooms, they have a glass wall where they see the employees kindergarten. So they see the kids that they will take decisions that will shape their future. And just the amount of care that some of these organizations have.

[00:47:09] So I'll just give another example from them. Like the people who can train the trainees in this corporation, it's the top skill the, from the their factory floor. Like you get nominated. it's the biggest privilege you can have in the entire corporation is to train the next generation of, you know, 15, 16 year olds.

[00:47:30] And that's not, if you have a short term incentive to really, you know, win, you wouldn't do that. But they're really building generationally here.

[00:47:39] **Nate Hagens:** If they're really thinking seven generations ahead, I hope they have ecologists on staff. I mean, they would, should be hella worried about climate I, I would think.

# The Great Simplification

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[00:47:49] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, and this is where, you know, a lot of these individuals that I work with, they start seeing that they are part of the problem. And that's An emotionally heavy thing to hold, but if they can do it within a context that can support that and within other, with, other people who are in similar situations, they can really start being inspired by each other and starting to move a completely different narrative.

[00:48:15] **Nate Hagens:** So I, I totally agree with that, which is why I, okay. So here's my question is the inner development goals, like, are they actually goals or are they more like. Are they approximately goals, but ultimately just a bridge to allow this company in Austria and the people there to talk and process and get this conversation going to kick up the things that need to be kicked up?

[00:48:43] you know what I mean? Is it, one or the other or both?

[00:48:47] **Erik Fernholm:** I mean, like, the way that I think about it, at least, is not to say that they are goals as destinations, right? But it's rather this attractor to have this conversation, to find the process and tools and like minded people that can start moving from the narrative of this inner shift that has to happen for the outer change to take place.

[00:49:09] I mean, the meta crisis is really IDGs, I would say. But it is a different way of framing it that will attract more people to the narrative than, I mean, I, I mean, I've been trying to work with some philanthropists and it took me like three years to get them to kind of get the metacrisis narrative sending them, you know, podcast after podcast, and they're like, it's way too complex for me.

[00:49:39] Like, I, don't understand it. so this is a way of creating a, a. a different way of attracting people who sense that there is a, there is something more we can do here. We can really build the soil that can be more regenerative. yes, maybe we are part of the problem, but we could also become agents for the solution.

[00:50:03] That is an, inner journey that has to take place within us and the culture, and maybe also as system movers in the market. So, I mean, we work a lot with Ikea, for example I mean, there's a, they're a huge player and they. They honestly, care about these topics. They're like, Eric, don't sugarcoat anything.

# The Great Simplification

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[00:50:22] We want to hear all the, the how, how serious the situation really is, and we can take it because we really care about this. And we know that we're, you know, producing a lot of furniture, but we honestly want to do our best in this and we want to see reality and face it as it is. and that is for me yeah.

[00:50:44] Yeah, I mean, people are great. they can be, hijacked into really disastrous stories. But, for me, this brings a lot of hope

[00:50:53] **Nate Hagens:** if you're give me, give me three answers to this. if you and your team and this effort on Developing inter development hubs around the world and, scaling this work not as goals, but as a direction to get these conversations going.

[00:51:14] What is a, minimal base case and a wildly successful outcome and goal for you and, your colleagues with this framework?

[00:51:25] **Erik Fernholm:** okay, so minimum case and then wildly ambitious goal. So minimum case would be, you know, changing the narrative of sustainability to say, you know what, it is not a technical challenge, it is an adaptive challenge.

[00:51:36] So if we're going to navigate existential risk of sustainability, but also of AI, like, We need to change the narrative of how we think about systems, how we think about multipolar tramps, how we think about all of this, because reality is a lot more connected than our thinking has been. Therefore, we need this, inner shift.

[00:51:59] Okay, so that would be one. Just coupling unsustainability to the inner aspect of individuals, groups, countries. that would be one. the wildly ambitious case and I can't speak for the organization, but, if you're asking me that would be having these 700 hubs turn into 700, 000 hubs and not that being a hub, but actually a place where this conversation has, turned into developmental processes that are distributed for the many people and where it becomes norm.

[00:52:49] that you go through a process that will scaffold your development, where you end up in a place where you see yourself as part of this entire system, you know, words and all, with this long term perspective, and where you are in service Yeah, like your own conclusion, of course, once you see that is how can I be in service of life and not of myself?

# The Great Simplification

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[00:53:16] so communities of practice folk schools, basically all over the world building the wisdom that is needed to tame the technology that we now have. Shouldn't

[00:53:30] **Nate Hagens:** something like this, maybe not this exact thing, be in every freshman college curriculum in the world? you learn about science and chemistry and philosophy, but shouldn't there be some inner development part of a curriculum?

[00:53:49] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, I mean,

[00:53:50] **Nate Hagens:** I

[00:53:50] **Erik Fernholm:** mean, school wasn't designed for that. I think that's why, you know, in Scandinavia, I have the history of the folk schools. That was a parallel system because they were like, If we try to reinvent schools, we're going to get stuck. So let's build a parallel system that is about inner development and technology, like Bildung.

[00:54:08] And this is actually what is now popping up in a lot of places around the world. Like we have one center here in the center of Stockholm that we're now building at Oak Island Foundation, which would be a type of folk school, which is, you know, a combination of latest technology, but mainly these type of interdevelopmental shifts and scaffolding and support for that.

[00:54:31] so. I mean, there are some things that I think are also hopeful and maybe shifting at least the conversation at large. so, mean, we have so for example, like in two weeks, I think roughly we have a round table at the White House where you know, their chief sustainability officer is inviting IKEA, which is our partner at IDGs, the IDGs the World Business Council for Sustainable Development, Otto Scharmer, to talk about inner development goals and how we can actually have the conversation about The inner shifts that are needed in the capacities to actually drive sustainability because what we're doing now is not enough.

[00:55:14] It's not working. Time is running out. so doing like increasing our speed won't compensate for heading in the wrong direction. So what would a different,

# The Great Simplification

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how would changing direction actually look like? And of course it will be uncomfortable. Like But the feelings don't bite. So if you're, if you just don't want to be uncomfortable, and that's your reason for not, you know, taking on the meta story and listening to Daniel Schmachtenberger and Zack Stein and Nora Bateson and all these great thinkers, it is an inherently very uncomfortable process.

[00:55:48] I mean, I'm a student of these people informally, like I really have been through years taking on trying to learn from them. And a lot of the time it's this dizzying experience where I'm like, I'm losing my footing here. Like, am I even contributing to this movement? I just want to give up basically.

[00:56:07] And you can see it. Like when we do workshops, I worked in the Johar. And if you haven't had him, you should definitely have him because he's

[00:56:14] **Nate Hagens:** scheduled for two weeks from now.

[00:56:16] **Erik Fernholm:** Okay. Amazing. So, I mean, so we were doing this AI inner development session at the last year's summit and you could just see that like people can hold the narrative for just a while and then eventually they just glaze over and I recognize that so well that like, okay.

[00:56:33] And I even had to pause the room and say, okay guys, can you guys see what happened here? Like 98 percent of the people are not still in the room. Like they're physically here, but they're not here because they're so overwhelmed that they're not in the process. And usually my conclusion when I've been in those conversations is I'm not smart enough for this.

[00:56:51] This is over my head. This is over my pay grade. I should kind of get out of the conversation. And I think this is one of the key things from a developmental perspective is you being over your head, You feeling that you're losing your footing is not an indication that you're in the wrong place. It's the indication that you're in the right place.

[00:57:09] This is the feeling of being in transition, right? and if you can talk about that and share that experience with others, you'll actually stay in it and you'll grow throughout the years.



# The Great Simplification

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[00:57:21] **Nate Hagens:** I've found the only, well, the main coping mechanism I have for this is that I have friends like you and, Daniel and Nora and Zach and others that are experiencing the same thing.

[00:57:35] So I, I processed with them. So that's why I asked you, is the interdevelopment goals and the hubs is the sharing and the sitting in a circle in the community, is that a big part of it or is it more formulaic?

[00:57:52] **Erik Fernholm:** No, I would say that is the part that is the driving force of it. So I mean and it's so, it's so sad.

[00:57:59] Like I get a little bit emotional with talking about it because so we had this masterclass and this woman came up to me, this was Peter Senge's masterclass. A woman came up to me and she said like, this is the first time she was 45. I think this is the first time in my life that I feel at home that like, no matter who I turn to, I feel that we share so much.

[00:58:23] And that is, like, it's heartwarming, it's amazing, but it's also so sad when, when thinking about all the young kids who have never been heard, who never felt that they are really, truly seen, because, you know, the phones are there, or, that they think that they're actually, you know, consumers of the society, or that's their value, and it's just this soul crushing narrative that, that hasn't been fought off really.

[00:58:54] We haven't defended the values that are truly important. And I think that one part for me, at least, of why I care a lot about the inner development goals, is that it evokes this question of what is truly important and what do we want to hold sacred? Like, what is the thing that is the highest value that we want to sacrifice other things for?

[00:59:13] I mean, sacred, means sacrifice, right? So what is the thing that is the most important? Because if I was a young girl or guy today, I would say that's money and power. That's the thing that we sacrifice all the other things for. but it's not.

[00:59:31] **Nate Hagens:** I think if you were a young girl or guy, that would be the cultural context of that question, but I would actually think most people wouldn't

# The Great Simplification

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think that let me ask you a follow up to that and then we can circle back to this in one of your recent presentations, you cited if I recall correctly, that 56 percent of young people today think humanity is doomed in their lifetimes because of climate change.

[00:59:59] and climate change, as you know, is just one aspect of the meta crisis. What, what might a tool like inner development goals offer to these young people who are so worried about their futures and are losing hope of seeing positive change in their lifetime?

[01:00:16] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah. I mean, on one level. we don't know if they're right or not, right?

[01:00:23] **Nate Hagens:** It's a feeling. It's a feeling. Based on science, but yeah, it's, a feeling.

[01:00:28] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah. and I think that, like no matter, like one thing that I at least lean towards in kind of my darkest hours when actually I feel that, you know, maybe we are doomed, maybe things aren't moving fast enough is so I mean, one is like, how are we effective in driving these change, these changes that need to happen so that we can protect what is sacred?

[01:00:59] and another one is. Am I showing up in a way that is actually right now protecting what is sacred, or am I still reliving these old patterns from my, you know, limbic system or my conditioning? So there's two kind of destinations, right? One is the destination of the system and this kind of sustainable future, but there's also the destination in this present moment.

[01:01:23] and for me the kind of developmental move or the journey is about definitely both of these where, you know what how about we try to protect what is sacred right now and let's focus on what we have in front of us right now. and like the next step approach of doing the most, the next most important thing.

[01:01:52] And that for me brings a lot of hope and it also creates a sense of, you know, focusing on what we can manage instead of this entire overwhelming system shift.

# The Great Simplification

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[01:02:05] **Nate Hagens:** So I know what is sacred to me is the natural world that is here now and that will come a generation and a thousand generations after I'm gone.

[01:02:16] But I think in the 700 and hopefully 700, 000 hubs on interdevelopment, what's sacred to the people in Madagascar or Bolivia or Barcelona or Brazil or Stockholm might be different for those people than for me and for you. So how, so I assume there's not one answer to what is sacred. it's dependent on the context of the people that are having the conversation.

[01:02:45] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, I mean definitely, but to act from your values for the highest good would be the common denominator, right?

[01:02:57] **Nate Hagens:** And what does cognitive neuroscience say about that? Just that, that we are able to act for some greater good. I, think Maslow's hierarchy Scott Berry Kaufman wrote some read some letters that that he had written before his death that said that the transcendence wasn't the top of the Maslow's pyramid.

[01:03:22] It was there was another thing which was in service to something greater than yourself. So what evidence is there in the literature? And what have you seen when people are able to go from self to we to us and some greater aspiration? Yeah, I mean

[01:03:36] **Erik Fernholm:** so I wouldn't be pulling necessarily on neuroscience for that.

[01:03:41] Maybe there is great research on it. but for me I mean, just just the research on adult development of looking at, okay, so what does a wiser life look like? and it is moving beyond self. Actualization, which is, you know, self authoring, like it's focusing on me and living my authentic life and, you know, doing that fully.

[01:04:08] but eventually that, that usually if you have the right support that moves into how can I be in service of something bigger than myself? And that, I think, from an evolutionary lens is quite obvious that we are both individuals but we're also part of the whole. so, so it does make sense that would be something that we would you know, be hard coded to do.

# The Great Simplification

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[01:04:39] And if you backtrack and look at, like, what do people, you know regret on their deathbeds, or what are the happiest people on the planet have in common? It is not a life that is focused on their own happiness. It's not like, I mean, people who focus on their own happiness are more miserable and more depressed because it's about me and my happiness and how I'm feeling.

[01:05:02] **Nate Hagens:** Does it almost feel in a, this feels like a movie, like a Twilight Zone or a Groundhog Day. The things you're saying make so much sense to me and your colleague Thomas Bjorkman was on last year and it was the same thing. It's like at the 11th hour, just before the meta crisis is going to explode, we've had this awareness.

[01:05:22] Oh my God, how myopic and, deluded have we been as a culture? Do you get that sense?

[01:05:30] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, fully. I mean, I've had that my entire life. So, so that's, that's, my father was an Olympian. So he was a discus thrower. Yeah. He was a Swedish discus thrower who moved to the States to train in Provo and Utah, met my mom who was then Mormon.

[01:05:48] so I was born into a Mormon family but with an atheist Olympian father who had the religion of success was, that was killing him. Like he died when he was 37. I'm 38 now. And just like him, I have three boys. and he passed away due to a pale overdose. And I was there in between these two worlds, of like Mormonism, Which, on one sense, it really held our family together and it, held, it scaffolded the support that we needed both when we were in the States and when we came to Sweden.

[01:06:27] and then my father being this, you know, hotshot out in society, so everybody thought I was cool because I was his son. But at home, you know, he fell asleep in his food, like he almost drowned in his, you know, like oatmeal. It was insane to have the dissonance of like, how could that be success in most people's eyes?

[01:06:49] and even also like, how can Mormonism be so weird in other people's eyes? Cause I was getting that signal as well, but that was something that was in many cases healthy for us with family dinners and play nights and, you know,

# The Great Simplification

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Going to church but I also understood that like both of these stories can't be true at the same time.

[01:07:07] Like, he can't be right about how the universe is sorted, and my mom can't be right. I mean, she's not Mormon anymore, we've lived in Sweden most of my adult life. But to, see That we can be captured by these stories in a way that makes us blind and makes a sacrifice. So many values that we truly hold dear.

[01:07:34] that's been kind of my core assumption my entire life. I'm like, how can we be so captured by something that is so apparently bad for us?

[01:07:46] **Nate Hagens:** that's powerful. and I increasingly think that we have the mother of all cognitive dissonances as our culture. We feel that something is horribly wrong.

[01:07:57] I, refer to people as the walking worried that they, know that something isn't right, but they can't articulate it. But to do the work and to peer behind the curtain to do a Wizard of Oz analogy is, is potentially painful. And scary. And so it's my hope or it's my recognition in this conversation with you, that interdevelopment goals or something like that anything like that, even sitting in ceremony with, people or just Oprah book club town meeting about.

[01:08:33] climate change in Topeka, Kansas, or whatever, act as bridges to get that cognitive, to, see the footprints of the elephant and start these conversations. And I think they have to be conversations, not you clicking on the internet in your basement at 11 PM. Yeah, so I really, do you, are you hopeful that it's going to scale?

[01:08:55] I mean, are things exploding for your org in this effort?

[01:08:59] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, they are exploding completely. And like, honestly, I don't care if the IDGs become super successful or not. I just want this topic to be integrated into society and these conversations to be had. Like the RSA, they've also developed a framework for, the inner skills for sustainability and the thriving future.

# The Great Simplification

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[01:09:19] The U, the European Union, they kind of copy pasted the IDGs and now they have the green comp. I mean, all of those efforts are amazing. Like nobody, there's no winner of this field. Like any movement towards this direction is, I think, more apt in solving the complexity of this issue.

[01:09:36] **Nate Hagens:** Short of creating their own inner development hub, how can people listening or watching this show start working on inner development?

[01:09:47] Are there first steps for those that are recognizing that there's an elephant underneath their cognitive mahout? What do you have? Any advice?

[01:09:58] **Erik Fernholm:** First is like all of us have an immunity to change both on a cultural level and an individual level. So for you to try to decide that you are going to develop yourself and to force yourself into that I'd say I would invite to take a relational approach.

[01:10:18] you know, approach to that and say, you know, we have to become a community of practice who meet up and practice and talk about this over time. so that's first, like, input to the, process or scaffolding of it, right? Reading a book won't do it, understanding it Cognitively, most likely, it's a really good first step, but there are several kind of threads that need to be woven here.

[01:10:42] Behavioral, emotional, social, cognitive. so, so, do it as a part of a community, but find that tribe where people will be honest to you. about, you know, your shadows or what they see as your next step.

[01:10:57] **Nate Hagens:** Is there a container or a framework that if someone said, yeah, I have these four really close friends and we'd like to explore this, is there a video or some online resource that could get them started?

[01:11:09] **Erik Fernholm:** Because of the network asking us for this, we're actually in the process of developing stuff like this. This is also why we built 29K, so the Aware platform. If you download the Aware app, you'll find Hundreds of developmental evidence based tools, which you practice in group, either in a physical setting or online with live video where you see each other.

# The Great Simplification

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[01:11:35] And there's this kind of recurring format where you can come back and meet same or similar people working on that process. We've had a hundred thousand people go through processes that we know have an evidence based effect on their lives that is significant and it's free. so, so it's, actually funded by mainly Nordheim foundation.

[01:11:58] so, so there are scaffolding for that if not reach out to me and if there's a specific topic I can point you in the right direction. so, so getting into practice with others, I think is fundamental. So building that kind of community of brothers or sisters or sibling hood, right? so that's one.

[01:12:19] Another one is actually Think about the kind of aims that you have and the goals, what you're striving for, what you're putting your money into, what you're putting your time into. Is it this kind of like, if I reach X, everything will be different? or look for the, lived value of that instead.

[01:12:38] When do you feel, like, what do you think you're going to feel when you reach X? And instead of going for the X, go for the feeling. So try to uncover, like, when do you feel connection? Instead of posting on social media, when do you And trying to impress people which striving for there's a longing for connection, right?

[01:12:55] That's the need. That's a deep need, and everybody has the same need on a needs level. We're all the same, right? It's autonomy. It's relatedness or connection. it's competence, and it's feeling safe. That's basically the needs that we have right psychologically. So instead of going for the goal.

[01:13:15] When do you truly feel connection? Like, when do you feel held and seen and okay and feel when you feel love? Like, what is that? Because the research here is really cool and really, it kind of shocks people. But so, um Sonja Lubomirsky wrote a book on this called Love 2.0, where she found that the amount of milliseconds you're looking into other people's eyes, where you feel love and connection, and you're not talking necessarily, you're just holding each other, the amount of milliseconds was a predictor of mental health, happiness, connection, I think even longevity or sickness, it was just like the It was insane.

[01:13:53] I mean, so she basically coined the broaden and build theory of positive emotion. And then she double clicked on relationships because what she found was

# The Great Simplification

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these micro moments, micro seconds of connection were a driving force for a lot of health benefits. so instead of looking for the goal, look for the lived experience.

[01:14:15] **Nate Hagens:** Two thoughts there were number one is I used to live in New York city and you would travel, you would walk down the boulevard, six abreast and everyone was looking down. There was no looking even for one millisecond into someone's eyes. And that, that itself is a little bit of a microcosm for our current culture.

[01:14:34] and secondly How do how do people start on that? Like, what's the mechanism of visualizing the feeling? and then how does that change their behavior in the future if they, play that out in their minds?

[01:14:52] **Erik Fernholm:** I mean, so this would be moving towards becoming more self directed and trying to understand what, what, really makes me come alive?

[01:14:59] What really makes me feel purpose? You know connection, love, autonomy. Like when do I actually feel that instead of going for the symptoms? So,

[01:15:10] **Nate Hagens:** so, so if you experienced that a few times in your mind then little Eric in the future, when you're about to do something on social media, in order for you to feel held and respected and have status, you're like, ah, but that's not what I'm really after.

[01:15:25] So it informs your future actions of sorts.

[01:15:29] **Erik Fernholm:** Exactly. I mean, it's like any addiction, right? You don't go for like the go for the reason why you're addicted to alcohol. and you try to to rewire the approach to working with that anxiety or that longing for connection or that feeling of inadequacy.

[01:15:47] And the thing that you're fleeing from when you go for the alcohol, right? And it's usually some type of, deepening of these these needs, right? and I think this is on an individual level, you see this, but also on the aggregate level, where the more needs deprived you are, the more you're chasing for the goal.



# The Great Simplification

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[01:16:11] and I mean, I've been working with billionaires and philanthropists, and it's really always this huge difference in both how they relate to their needs, right? Where, you know, one of them is where I'm talking to them about, you know, sustainability and I'm like, so what are your goals?

[01:16:29] What are you kind of striving for? What is your motivation, right? Why do you do what you do? And they're like, more, I have to have more. I was like, this is a billion, like one of the richest people in Northern Europe. And he's like, I have to have more. And then you talk to Niklas and where he's like, I'm just so lucky that I was born in the right country with parents and I got so much free education, all of that.

[01:16:51] So this, these, billions of, you know, dollars are not mine. I just lucked out. So I kind of now have to give back, right?

[01:16:59] **Nate Hagens:** Nick, Nicholas is a pretty rare individual. I would love to have him on the podcast, but he's such an introvert that he doesn't like to speak. but I know this and I feel this, I don't know that you know this about me, but 30 years ago, I, I.

[01:17:14] Managed money for billionaires at Salomon Brothers on Wall Street. They were the same way. They, needed more because it was the dopamine and the feeling of status was the, proximate I mean, the dollars were the proximate, but it was the feelings were the ultimate and you can never get enough.

[01:17:33] **Erik Fernholm:** I mean, I can give you one example. That's really both scary and sad. so one very wealthy individual. that I was working with not super in depth, but a bit. He had, like, he couldn't sit, he couldn't sit on a chair. He was laying down on the floor. and eventually, like, we had a conversation about why he's not, you know, in the process, in the group, doing the sharings.

[01:18:00] And he's like, Oh, I, I, I've broke, I have a hernia in my disc, in my back, because all I've been practicing at the gym was my abs. Up until the point that I broke my disc, right? and this, it says something about the, it's not about this individual, it's about the human psyche, that we can get so into the flow channel, of getting the metric, that everything else, I mean, it's really this left hemispheric way of thinking, right?

# The Great Simplification

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[01:18:30] As long as I get the symbol, as long as I get the token, everything will be fine. And that is an evolutionally adaptive way of solving problems, in some Conditions. But if that is the thing that also sets all the goals and it sets the direction, then we lose the entire right hemisphere wisdom, right?

[01:18:50] **Nate Hagens:** Abs example again for like the third or fourth time in this conversation is a microcosm for our broader cultural, um context.

[01:19:00] Also renewable energy, like renewable energy is the answer for climate change is like lifting weights with your right palm. bicep and getting super buff, but you have diabetes and the rest of your body is flaccid or whatever. It's, that's why we need systems and we need inner development conversations.

[01:19:22] yeah, I

[01:19:23] **Erik Fernholm:** mean, I mean So honestly, like I, I had a massive burnout like a couple of years ago. So I don't see myself as like a peak sustainability guy. I understand happiness and psychology and all of that. so running 29K, like I'm not the CEO type, but I was, we were looking for an external CEO for this foundation and we couldn't find one.

[01:19:44] So I took the job because otherwise it wouldn't have happened. and it was super complex and I just, we, just had two kids and I was miserable and eventually I was, so burned out that I couldn't read, write, or count for 16 months. And my wife pulled the entire, like, ship of the house. I was only on the property, like, on, in our garden, 15 months.

[01:20:13] Couldn't do anything. Didn't meet one single person except my family. so, a couple of reflections on that is like, knowing a lot about this, is not gonna help, like, but having a supportive community that could've, you know, both, we pull each other through tough situations, but we also scaffold ourselves so that, you know what, hey Nate, you need to take a break right now, or, you know, supporting each other and seeing ways, seeing the things that I can't see myself, cause I'm so captured and like, this is so important, I need to, you know, deliver the thing.

[01:20:48] but one thing that I really like, I'm so grateful for that experience is, is two things. One is, The people who are really struggling in this society who are

# The Great Simplification

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emotionally, cognitively, just not where they need to be, this society is so violent for them. Cause when I went to the grocery store, when I was kind of trying to slowly get back, when I saw the offer, like buy two for the price, buy three for the price of two or get this, or like a salesman called me, I couldn't say no to anything.

[01:21:24] I was just like, I didn't have the emotional, you know, power to self direct at all. So I was completely following everybody with whatever they wanted with me. And it just became so apparent that this is a very violent society that we have built. and then secondly was that I I started like a permaculture garden.

[01:21:46] 'cause the only thing I could process, the informa only process information I could process was farmers talking slowly. I couldn't even recognize a healthy regenerative system that humans have built. If I saw it, I would probably just brush it off and say that's, you know, BS or I wouldn't even recognize it.

[01:22:05] And it became so apparent that of all the work I've done, I, didn't really have a clue of what health. looked like? I mean, I know it in nature, right? But I don't know it in a human system. So what does a really regenerative, healthy human system look like? And that just has kept me up since then. It's like, well, what would the kind of threads that need to be woven that would start first of all, building the soil for that to take place?

[01:22:32] And then what would the specifics of that look? Because the kind of the dream or the hope, like you asked me earlier, like if we're aiming really high, what would that look like? I mean, imagine coming to a place, it could be a municipality or a city or whatever, where all these principles, all these ways of thinking that we've learned from Daniel and Zak and all these great thinkers have been internalized, where they're a lived reality.

[01:23:01] You don't talk about it, they just live it differently, right? I mean, they could talk about it, but like, that would be such a heartening, hopeful experience to enter a space where, you know, It's like, wow, something's different here. What is that?

[01:23:16] **Nate Hagens:** So let me ask you this a thought just came to mind. Cause one of the things that I've been asked from our viewers is, can you make a two hour video series that gives an introduction to the human predicament and oil depletion

# The Great Simplification

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and climate and human behavior and debt and the economic system and why it's relevant to our community so that we can start having conversations locally?

[01:23:40] without you there because I can't be everywhere, but I almost wonder if this inner development or whatever it's called about human behavior and our needs our basic psychological requirements. If something like that were to be able to be seen and experienced with an unofficial city council that starts talking about it in a city, that would actually act as a gateway to the larger conversation, because the larger conversation is too politically fraught to start, unless you have close friends that are already well versed in these things.

[01:24:24] What do you think about that?

[01:24:26] **Erik Fernholm:** 100 percent is like if you bring people into, so, I mean, we've been talking about this for a couple of years, but like one metaphor is think about it as a temple experience, but it's not a religious place, but it is a sacred place where, you know, life is the thing that we, that is sacred.

[01:24:43] And we're actually, everything we do here is in service of that to enter a space like that. I think could be one of the most powerful interventions a person could go through. Um so I'll just, I'll give you one example and it's actually from this organization that I met the, other week where when they bring in like the president of Austria or, you know, the ministers or whatever, they don't bring them into through the, the big Entrance. They bring them in through the entrance where half of the wall is just like a glass wall where you can see into where are the, all these 15, 16 year olds are going through this trainee program and learning English and learning all the machines and all of it, right? because that's what they're most proud of.

[01:25:30] And the cool thing is not that they're proud of the kids and look at what we're doing. The signal towards the kids. is you are our reason for being like you guys are going to carry this into the future. and this is kind of what breaks my heart today because like in Sweden the average 13 year old is on their phone six and a half hours.

[01:25:51] Whoa. And it's, I think it's actually more in the States and that's outside of school. And not including TV. And the signal for that is like, we gave you to

# The Great Simplification

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Moloch. We gave you to the market dynamics, and these things are not good for you, and you know the content that you're looking at is not, like, if you ask kids they don't want to have TikTok and Instagram.

[01:26:15] A lot of them would say that I want Netflix, but I don't want these other platforms, but since everybody else is there, I have to be there. Exactly. Right. Exactly. Worst thing is that we as parents. We gave it to them and we did not protect them. So the signal is like, and this is where I think it's so, I guess, hard to talk about because the last thing we want to tell our kids is that they are not worthy of protection, right?

[01:26:41] And this is where I think that the market and protecting the people who are vulnerable, we need to make some big changes here quickly. and that is also moving beyond the postmodern perspective of saying, you know what, everybody can just self direct and go for their own happiness. But it's actually saying, no.

[01:27:01] There are things that are more sacred, and this is not a matter of opinion. this is a fact about life, that life wants more life, and we're here to protect that process. And that's actually moving beyond the postmodernist saying there should be a directionality in society that creates more generative life.

[01:27:20] And anything that is not that is actually bad for society. And, and we just went way too far into the postmodern perspective and let the market take over our children's lives. And it's so violent.

[01:27:37] **Nate Hagens:** So what can someone who is listening to this episode right now, and if they're listening, it means they're at least somewhat, if not very familiar with the meta crisis.

[01:27:49] What is something they can do today? this week, this month to help address these broader issues. You did mention how to get started on the inner development goals earlier. but what's your advice to people listening to this podcast to make some changes or is it all up to the leaders and politicians and, the post modern removal of the marketing and, some of the market leading our world?

[01:28:17] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah. Yeah. I mean, I would say Get into practice with others, but not, in relationship to just a random, like, inner development I want to

# The Great Simplification

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become more perspective taking, more blah blah blah, like, try to take on the most meaningful challenge you can, and when you notice that you need to check out, when you notice that your capacities are not there.

[01:28:36] Tch. up to the task. That's when you need development, right? So take on the most meaningful change you can drive in your system. And because it's a stretch, it's the most meaningful, right? Like 10 percent more than you think that you can handle. That will become a developmental process, especially if you have a supporting community where you can reflect and put words on it and find tools for, you know, whatever it is that stopped you, right?

[01:29:03] So, so find that edge through caring. as an agent in the world. And this is what I said to, to these corporations as well, it's like for IKEA, it's like, It's not about you guys integrating the IDGs only. It's not about you becoming the best in the world. Like, as soon as you have capacity and power, it's about becoming the best for the world.

[01:29:24] so it's you in the market. How can you shift the entire market and not just try to win and expand, right? So for, Any level of the system, how can I act for the highest value? So one intervention that I really love is the question that one of our professors taught me, and he teaches this to the astronauts that are potentially going to Mars, and he says, so just one question, it's basically this, it's In this situation, are you acting to avoid discomfort or are you acting for who you aim to be?

[01:29:56] So it's really pulling on the highest values that you have and the higher values are always about purpose and about me in the context and about relationship and about giving. High, like, who I aim to be would not be, like, self serving, short sighted, narcissistic. that's not the answer to that question for almost anybody.

[01:30:17] so it really pulls you away from hedonism and shortsightedness, and it really pulls you towards these values that are higher than you. and it has helped me through many times in my life like small things.

[01:30:32] **Nate Hagens:** And it's not only avoiding discomfort, I would include seeking comfort in there as well, for some people anyways.

# The Great Simplification

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[01:30:41] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, for sure. And and the people who I've seen do this, They move from kind of overwhelm to this kind of sense of, of hope not necessarily because there's more, you know, of a solution out there, but they're not alone and they're doing something for what they think is really important.

[01:31:06] **Nate Hagens:** I want to be respectful of your time, but you made me think of another question.

[01:31:10] And it, it so happens that a lot of our listeners are Autodidactic looking at how all the systems fit together, understanding that something is, not right and wanting to connect the dots, but they don't have a circle or a tribe or a group that they could process these things with. And I think it's really difficult to handle these as an individual.

[01:31:38] person, and you need such a group. But if people listening to this don't have such a group in your, you know, lifetime of looking at happiness research and social dynamics, do you have any recommendations for them?

[01:31:52] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah. I mean, of course it's find your peers, right? it's, really moving into these, these communities where we are, where we share these kind of basic axiomatic ideas about the world and the future.

[01:32:09] And then move into practicing together and then move into building structures together. I mean, this is what we've been doing in the, in Stockholm here for, years. And where we see that, so we've been running youth camps for 15 years almost. where people find each other, work through the processes, reflect on who they want to be, etc.

[01:32:28] And the re feedback from their parents is really like, what did you do to my son? What did you do to my daughter? Now they come home and they're completely contributing to the family system instead of receiving it as passive agents, right? So I think Finding people who are like minded, who share that story and online, offline, offline is of course better, but online is a lot better than nothing.

[01:32:54] IDG hubs could be one of those if not, I yeah. How does someone start an IDG hub?

# The Great Simplification

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[01:33:03] Just go into the website, Dan, and um, you'll find the instructions there. It's basically teaming up with a s with a small Group first and then you register and that becomes an attractor for more and more people who want to have a similar conversation and then it grows from there.

[01:33:19] a lot of people are meeting online and really gathering around this. so, so that's one way of doing it. but, honestly, it doesn't have to be the IDG hub. Like it could be, your neighborhood talking about how can we create the. Better, you know a better street where we, where we're living the values of how we would aim to be.

[01:33:44] Right.

[01:33:45] **Nate Hagens:** What do you care most about in the world, Eric?

[01:33:49] **Erik Fernholm:** I read this question in the, the notes that you sent before and I actually started crying. I didn't know why, and I still maybe don't. But I think,

[01:34:07] I mean, it's, of course, it's love, right? I mean, my kids pop up. I think about myself as a kid. and it just becomes very apparent that from that question, some things are, worthy of protecting. and I, can't see anybody regretting working for that on their deathbed that that would be probably what they would be, what I would be most proud of was, you acting from care and love and compassion and, also trying to figure out when do I shut off love, care, compassion and just working on that healing or forgiving

[01:34:57] **Nate Hagens:** So, from a place of love, care, and compassion, if you additionally had access to a magic wand, what is one thing you would do to change human and planetary futures for the better?

[01:35:10] It would be

[01:35:13] **Erik Fernholm:** enabling, like, all people, maybe especially young people, to discover when they feel the most alive, the most meaning, the most connection, and to really cement that experience that they decided on, that they found the patterns in. Because if they did, they would not accept the system that we have created.



# The Great Simplification

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[01:35:48] They would say, this is not human. What we've created has been hijacked, and we're caught in this trap, and we are worthy of so much better. this is not what we're here to build. And I think everybody on the planet can come to that conclusion if they just have that scaffolding and that support, and then you'd want to empower them to, you know, drive the change.

[01:36:10] But I think that's actually the core of rediscovering what it means to be human and changing that story. That would be it. And the rest, I think, would actually sort itself out.

[01:36:22] **Nate Hagens:** Well said. I did send you a list of uh, rough questions, and we only got to 20 percent of them because of all the tangents.

[01:36:35] If you were to come back and, For a round two and take a deep dive on some topic relevant to The Great Simplification, the meta crisis that you were just personally interested in. Is there such a topic and what would it be?

[01:36:53] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, I mean, I think it would be actually like, How can we start integrating the metacrisis into our lived experience, and how can that process go from, as it is right now, maybe a little bit of overwhelm, and people checking out, and like, this is way too heavy, way too complex, and I hope you guys are wrong, but you sound really on point, but I can't process it, to actually step by step integrating maybe in like a curriculum form that has this pedagogy of integration.

[01:37:26] So it becomes a lived experience. And how can I then move into an agentic experience? How can I agentic way of relating to the meta crisis individually, collectively? Because if we get that right it'll not be people just talking about the meta crisis while the house is burning. we'll, actually get started.

[01:37:49] stuff moving. And it doesn't have to be the right things. it'll just be the, the point of the projects, the point of acting in this world, I think where we are so much kind of interwoven into actually being the problem the point of any projects that we think is meaningful is I think equally parts outer system and equally parts inner system.

# The Great Simplification

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[01:38:14] The learnings of us trying to create meaning and trying to change the world for the better will actually uncover where we are, have where we are kind of off center, right? yeah, so that would be something

[01:38:28] **Nate Hagens:** and if we have 1 percent or 3 percent or 7 percent or 12 percent of people that have experienced that, then those are rocks in the river to change the flow of the water that's coming our way.

[01:38:39] I like that line of inquiry.

[01:38:42] **Erik Fernholm:** Yeah, and I mean, and I think that the water that is hitting us, the unsustainable direction of society is so powerful right now, and people are starting to feel it that when they uncover, discover something that's authentic and real. the feeling of community is probably beyond what most people have ever felt in their lives.

[01:39:09] so it's an equal attractor, like the, kind of chaos is actually calling for um, humans to, to step up. This is what Indy said as well. It's like the darkness is not here to scare us or to help us or to make us give up. It's actually a call for human greatness.

[01:39:31] **Nate Hagens:** My cognitive brain hears that and my limbic system and reptilian system feel it as well.

[01:39:38] so I'm, on board with, that direction. Thank you for all your work, Eric, and thank you for your time today and, to be continued for sure.

[01:39:48] **Erik Fernholm:** Thank you so much, Nate, for having me.

[01:39:50] **Nate Hagens:** If you enjoyed or learned from this episode of The Great Simplification, please follow us on your favorite podcast platform.

[01:39:58] You can also visit [thegreatsimplification.com](https://thegreatsimplification.com) for references and show notes from today's conversation. And to connect with fellow listeners of this podcast, check out our discord channel. This show is hosted by me, Nate Hagens. Edited by No Troublemakers Media and produced by Misty Stinnett, Leslie Batlutz, Brady Hyan, and Lizzie Sirianni.