



Stanford eCorner

Being Less Bad is Not Being Good

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Eco-efficiency often means being less toxic overall, but architect and designer William McDonough, McDonough + Partners, believes that true green design and the architecture of business needs to turn over a new leaf. Being effective, and not just efficient, is key to long-term success.



Transcript

So we wrote the book *Cradle to Cradle* to look at a lot of ideas. One of the ideas that we looked at was the one of being less bad is not being good. It's being less bad, so you're bad, you're just less so. And what we realized is that with eco-efficiency, a lot of people tried to be less bad. We tried to make our buildings more energy efficient which is a good thing to do, but we find that in the end, they're still fossil fuel powered and nuclear powered and so on. We tried to reduce our toxic releases but we're still releasing toxins. We tried to mitigate this problem or that problem but what we're doing is mitigating problems that we're perpetuating, perhaps more efficiently, but it's not necessarily good. It's just less bad. So it's like saying we could live here and go north to Canada or south to Mexico. If you find yourself going 100 hundred miles an hour towards Canada but we're supposed to be going to Mexico, it's only going to help us to slow down if we're turning around because we're going the wrong direction.

And so a new direction is needed. So the direction we looked at is the cherry tree for inspiration in this context. So we look at the cherry tree in the spring and we say, isn't it marvelous that there's this abundance of cherry blossoms. And we don't look at a cherry tree in the spring and say, oh no, how many blossoms does it take? It's not very efficient, but we love it. Thousands of blossoms so that two might sprout. It becomes seeds that sprout new cherry trees. So this idea that would have an abundance of things that we celebrate by design that return to cycles and stay within cycles is the fundamental premise of *Cradle to Cradle*. We're looking at not only natural products but also those things made by humans. We're looking for effectiveness, not just efficiency.