

---

# THE STORY OF SOLUTIONS

## Annotated Script



By Annie Leonard

---

Do you have one of these?

Of course not. This thing is five years old.

Now everyone's got one of these.<sup>1</sup>

Can you imagine how much genius and focus it took to turn a music player into a handheld computer/phone/GPS/remote control for everything in life in just five years? The thousands of people who made this thing had to solve thousands of problems that literally could NOT have been solved five years ago.

That's what people can do when they're motivated to find solutions to problems .

But the problems we've been busy solving are not the problems that most need solving. So much focus has gone into faster, cheaper, newer that we've actually lost ground on things like safer, healthier and more fair.<sup>2</sup>

It's as if we're getting better and better at playing the wrong game.

And in many ways, this system is a lot like a game — but with very high stakes.

---

1. Guess how many iPhones, iPods and iPads have been produced so far? Over 796 million! (<http://www.macworld.com/article/2026112/iphone-ipad-sales-up-macs-fall-as-apple-sees-record-sales.html>) (And these figures are prior to the release of the iPhone 5s for which some people slept on the sidewalk in front of Apple stores for days to get the day it was released!) According to Barbara Kyle, with the Electronics Take Back Coalition (<http://www.electronicstakeback.com>), "If all the ipods, ipads and iphones sold to date were stacked on top of each other into a very tall pile, it would reach 4,245 MILES (6,832 km) into the sky. If you took that stack and laid it on its side, then your iDevice snake would extend from Vancouver to Bogota. Or Oslo to Mumbai." With numbers like these, it's no wonder why electronic waste is the fastest growing – and most hazardous – part of today's municipal waste stream. (We do have a movie on that too; please watch [www.storyofelectronics.org](http://www.storyofelectronics.org))

2. The discrepancy between how we should be performing and how we are performing may be most extreme in my own country – the United States. On so many fronts, environmental, health and social problems are increasing in spite of the tremendous

resources available that could be applied to solutions. Gus Speth, in his inspiring 2012 book *America the Possible* summarizes how the U.S. has lost ground on many fronts compared to the other industrialized democracies in the OECD. As Speth explains: America now has the highest poverty rate, both generally and for children; the greatest inequality of incomes, the lowest government spending as a percentage of gross domestic product on social programs for the disadvantaged; the lowest score on the United Nations' index of "material well-being of children"; the worst score on the UN's gender inequality index; the lowest social mobility; the highest public and private expenditure on health care as a percentage of GDP and yet the highest infant mortality rate, prevalence of mental health problems, obesity rate, percentage of people going without health care due to cost concerns, and consumption of anti-depressants per capita, along with the shortest life expectancy at birth; the third lowest scores for student performance in math; the second highest high school dropout rate; the highest homicide rate; the largest prison population – both absolute and per capita; the highest water consumption per capita and the second-highest carbon dioxide emissions per capita; the lowest score

---

# THE STORY OF SOLUTIONS

Just like a game, our economy was designed by people to get everyone to play by certain rules. And like a game, it comes with instructions telling us what the goal is. Think about the last time you played a new game. Remember? The first thing you did was find out what it means to win and that guides every decision you make along the way.

So, naturally, the solutions most people are working on pursue this game's simple goal — and that goal is more. More money being spent, more roads being built, more malls being opened, more stuff!

That's what economists call growth.<sup>3</sup>

So we take all the money spent on stuff that makes life better and all the money spent on stuff that makes life worse and we add it together into one big number, called GDP. We're told that a bigger GDP means we're winning! So it's the number that thousands of rules and laws are designed to increase.

But there's a big difference between more kids in school and more kids in jail.<sup>4</sup> More windmills or more coal fired power plants. More super-efficient public trains or more gas wasted in traffic jams.<sup>5</sup> Duh. But in this game of more, they are counted the same.<sup>6</sup>

---

on the Yale-World Economic Forum's Environmental Performance Index, and the second largest Ecological Footprint per capita; the highest rate of failing to ratify international agreements; the third-lowest spending on international development and humanitarian assistance as a percentage of GDP; the highest military spending in total and as a percentage of GDP; and the largest international arms sales. Speth compiled this data set from many sources including the OECD Factbook 2010; UN Development Programme Human Development Report 2011; The Measure of America: American Human Development Report 2008-2009; The Measure of America, 2010-2011; The New York Times, The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger; Environmental Performance Index 2012 and others listed on pages 199 -200 of America the Possible (2012). Referring to this list, Speth writes "It is not for lack of knowledge, technology or thoughtful policy proposals that we face this overwhelming, colliding collection of problems. One can easily identify a set of intelligent policy proposals to almost all of these challenges. Groups advocating them pound constantly on Washington's doors. Extraordinary technological opportunities remain untapped. Nor did these deplorable consequences simply happen as the result of larger economic and geopolitical forces over which we have no control. When big problems emerge across the entire spectrum of national life, it cannot be for small reasons. We have encompassing problems because of fundamental flaws in our economic and political system." It is one of those fundamental flaws — an overriding focus on more rather than better — and an alternative solution, that this film addresses.

3. While most economists, governments and pundits continue to look to stoking growth as the primary

strategy for building a healthy economy, a growing number of the same are pointing out the shortcomings of this indiscriminate focus on economic growth above all else.

When economic growth serves human health, community wellbeing and environmental sustainability, that's great. But when it undermines those very things, we need to stop and reconsider our fundamental goals. That's what's happening in many countries in the world now; economic growth — as measured by GDP — is increasing while overall human and environmental wellbeing is decreasing. For example, a recent study by Kubiszewski, Costanza, Talbert and others found that "[w]hile global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has increased more than three-fold since 1950, economic welfare, as estimated by the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI), has actually decreased since 1978." ("Beyond GDP: Measuring and Achieving Global Genuine Progress" in *Ecological Economics*, 93(2013)57-68, available here: [http://www.academia.edu/3636103/Beyond\\_GDP\\_Measuring\\_and\\_Achieving\\_Global\\_Genuine\\_Progress](http://www.academia.edu/3636103/Beyond_GDP_Measuring_and_Achieving_Global_Genuine_Progress)). The Center for the Advancement of a Steady State Economy (CASSE) documents the downsides of our over-focus on growth. (See: <http://steadystate.org/discover/downsides-of-economic-growth/>).

According to CASSE: Continuing to grow the economy when the costs are higher than the benefits produces uneconomic growth. Casse explains that the United Nations has classified five types of uneconomic growth: jobless growth, where the economy grows, but does not expand opportunities for employment; ruthless growth, where the proceeds of economic growth mostly benefit the rich; voiceless growth, where economic growth is not accompanied by extension of democracy or empowerment; rootless growth, where

---

# THE STORY OF SOLUTIONS

So we take all the money spent on stuff that makes life better and all the money spent on stuff that makes life worse and add it together into one big number! That's what we call GDP. <sup>7</sup> We're told that a bigger GDP means we're winning! <sup>8</sup> So it's the number that thousands of rules and laws are designed to increase.

But there's a big difference between more kids in school or more kids in jail. More windmills, or more coal fired power plants. More super-efficient public trains, or more gas wasted in traffic jams. Duh. But in this game of more, they're counted the same.

Now we can't just change a game this dumb one rule, or one player, at a time. The problem is the goal itself! We need solutions that change that.

What if we built this game around the goal of better: <sup>9</sup> better education, better health, better stuff, a better chance to survive on this planet. <sup>10</sup>

That's what we all want, right? So shouldn't that be what winning means?

Changing the goal of the entire economy is a huge task. Of course we can't do that all at once. But when we focus on game-changing solutions, we gradually make it possible for a new game to be played.

---

economic growth squashes people's cultural identity; and futureless growth, where the present generation squanders resources needed by future generations. For more, check out these books: What's the Economy for, Anyway? (DeGraff and Batker, 2011); Supply Shock: Economic Growth at the Crossroads and the Steady State Solution (Czech, 2013), Deep Economy: The Wealth of Communities and the Durable Future (McKibben, 2007); Beyond Growth: The Economics of Sustainable Development (Daly, 1997) and more on CASSE's recommended reading list: <http://steadystate.org/discover/reading-list/>.

4. Clearly, investing in education is a far better investment for a healthy society than just locking people up. With more than 2 million people behind bars, the United States imprisons a greater percentage of its population than any other country, even as we see public school budgets slashed. (See International Center for Prison Studies: [http://www.prisonstudies.org/info/worldbrief/wpb\\_stats.php?area=all&category=wb\\_poprate](http://www.prisonstudies.org/info/worldbrief/wpb_stats.php?area=all&category=wb_poprate))

Many organizations in the U.S. – like Californians United for a Responsible Budget – work tirelessly to demand government divert funds from building ever more prisons to instead increase investment in schools and other programs that make society safer and healthier than rampant incarceration. (Join the campaign here: [http://salsa3.salsalabs.com/o/51040/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action\\_KEY=11826](http://salsa3.salsalabs.com/o/51040/p/dia/action3/common/public/?action_KEY=11826)). And we're talking about a lot of funds that could be growing solutions! In California, the notoriously abusive and ineffective Division of Juvenile Justice has a recidivism rate of 81% and spends more US\$200,000 per youth, per year! (<http://ellabakercenter.org/>)

[books-not-bars/books-not-bars-basics](http://books-not-bars/books-not-bars-basics)) Meanwhile, the same State government spends only \$8,482 per public school student each year – which is \$3,342 or 28% lower than the national average. (<http://www.edsource.org/today/2013/california-drops-to-49th-in-school-spending-in-annual-ed-week-report/25379#.UkCaD4asiSo>) We could provide a lot more of the things that make communities safer and help young people get their lives on track – education, job training, counseling – for less than we're spending keeping these kids locked up. The Books, Not Bars campaign, run by the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights in Oakland, CA, aims to cut the imprisoned population by 50% or more in 10 years. Get involved here: <http://ellabakercenter.org/our-work/books-not-bars>.

5. What are we even doing building more coal fired power plants?? From mining to combustion, coal is a dirty polluting energy source. Coal contributes to climate change and to 4 out of the 5 leading causes of death around the world! (<http://sierraclub.typepad.com/michaelbrune/2013/07/coal-future.html>). Just as we were launching this film the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC, <http://www.ipcc.ch/>) issued its latest and most urgent warning on climate change yet. This latest study confirmed with a 95% -99 % certainty that human activity is causing the world to heat. As 350.org pointed out, that's the same level of certainty scientists have that cigarettes cause cancer. That's what scientists call "unequivocal". The debate on the basics of climate science is over. The IPCC also warned that we've already released about half the CO2 the atmosphere can handle while keeping global warming under 2 degrees Celsius -- what many scientists have identified as a red line for our planet.

---

## THE STORY OF SOLUTIONS

To do that we have to be able to tell the difference between a game-changing solution or just a new way to play that old game of more.<sup>11</sup>

For example, let's look at two solutions to one of the many problems we face today — the scourge of plastic packaging that everyone knows is a disaster for the planet, especially the oceans.<sup>12</sup>

And here are two groups of people with very different ideas for solutions to the plastics problem

These guys decide enough is enough and they start by launching a citizen campaign to “ban the plastic bag” in their community.<sup>13</sup>

These guys have a different solution. They start a business that gives people gift cards to buy stuff if they recycle their plastic waste.<sup>14</sup>

Both of these are happening right now, but only one of them changes the game.

---

This means we need to stop burning coal, oil, natural gas and today's high plastic garbage – today. Read more at IPCC's website: <http://www.ipcc.ch/>. Even Bloomberg responded with an article “Fossil Fuels Need to Stay Unburned to meet Climate Target,” (available at <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2013-09-27/fossil-fuels-need-to-stay-unburned-to-meet-climate-target.html>) We need to divest from this dinosaur technology and start investing in a new energy economy. To get involved, contact the Sierra Club's Beyond Coal Campaign (<http://content.sierraclub.org/coal/>). Fortunately, investments in renewable energy are on the rise. According to the U.S. Energy Information Agency, electricity generation from wind is projected to increase 18% this year – 2013. For solar, utility scale capacity will more than double between 2012 – 2014. See more details at: [http://www.eia.gov/forecasts/steo/report/renew\\_co2.cfm](http://www.eia.gov/forecasts/steo/report/renew_co2.cfm). And let's not forget the enormous potential in reducing energy use through more efficient transportation, building designs and using less stuff. Yay for clean energy solutions!

6. We're certainly not the first to point out this problem. One of the most eloquent critiques of this approach for measuring wellbeing was from Senator Robert Kennedy while campaigning for President in 1968. Kennedy said “For too long, we seem to have surrendered personal excellence and community value in the mere accumulation of material things. Our Gross National Product now is over 800 billion dollars a year, but that Gross National Product counts air pollution, and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwoods and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm, and it counts nuclear warheads, and armored cars for the police to fight the riots in our cities. It counts Whitman's rifle and Speck's knives and the television

shows which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children. Yet, the Gross National Product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country. It measures everything except that which makes life worthwhile.” (Full speech available at: <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/RFK-Speeches/Remarks-of-Robert-F-Kennedy-at-the-University-of-Kansas-March-18-1968.aspx>) Note that Kennedy refers to Gross National Product, a similar concept as GDP but calculated slightly differently. In 1991, the U.S. officially switched from GNP to GDP as the most important economic measure. For a history of GDP and GNP, see DeGraaf and Batker's *What's the Economy For, Anyway?*

7. GDP, of course, stands for Gross Domestic Product and is a measure of the total market value of stuff and services produced in a country in a given year. GDP does not differentiate between stuff that makes life better and stuff that makes it worse; it's just more stuff produced = ka-ching, ka-ching. In the U.S., the Bureau of Economic Analysis ([www.bea.gov](http://www.bea.gov)) within the Department of Commerce collects and crunches the numbers that make up the GDP. A good brief history of both the GDP is contained in John DeGraaf and David Batker's 2011 book, *What's the Economy for, Anyway?* As DeGraaf and Batker explain, the GDP counts pollution (spilling hazardous waste and cleaning it up both count); crime (alarms, bars, security guards and jails all raise GDP); health damage (cigarettes sold and cancer treatment are both counted as positives by the GPD); Family breakdown (divorces can cost \$7,000 - \$100,000); debt, foreclosure and bankruptcy;

---

## THE STORY OF SOLUTIONS

The gift cards solution does keep some plastic out of landfills and incinerators.<sup>15</sup> But it creates more plastic by encouraging people to buy more stuff. Even worse, it teaches that MORE consumption is the right reward for being a good citizen, making it even harder to think outside that old game box.

The ban the bag solution is harder to achieve, but it's a game-changer.

Why? Well by volunteering their time, these citizens are declaring there's something more important to them than just earning and spending more. And they're insisting that the health of their community and the planet is more important than some chemical company's profits.

To win this campaign, these citizens are going to have to team up with forward thinking businesses offering alternatives to throw away plastic packaging.<sup>16</sup> They're going to have to build power to fight back against the American Chemistry Council which lobbies for the companies that make all that plastic junk.<sup>17</sup> And they're going to have to get out and talk to their neighbors and friends, inspiring yet more people to begin to question

- 
- paper transfers and bursting bubbles; natural disasters. The GDP does not count many things that make life healthier and more sustainable: natural resources and ecological services, exercise (unless we're paying to do it), social connection, volunteering, housework, quality and more. (DeGraaf and Batker, pp 12- 22.)
8. As John DeGraaf and David Batker write in *What's the Economy for, Anyway?* (Bloomsbury Press: 2011): "[T]he single-minded goal of GDP growth rules our national economic policies. The focus of President Barack Obama's \$787-billion stimulus package wasn't reducing unemployment, fixing the mortgage crisis, or building a twenty-first-century economy free from dependence on fossil fuels. It was to get King GDP through a financial hangover, and fattening as quickly as possible. Similarly, right after September 11, 2001, President George W. Bush went on television and told people to go shopping. He wanted them to buy more, so the economy, as measured by the GDP, would weather the storm."
  9. There are many efforts underway to measure "better", rather than just "more." Communities, states and even whole countries are experimenting with alternative measures that capture a country's human and environmental wellbeing more completely than economic indicators alone can. In other words, we need to measure what we treasure. Some of our favorites are: the Genuine Progress Indicator (GPI) ([www.genuineprogress.net](http://www.genuineprogress.net)), the Happy Planet Index (<http://www.happyplanetindex.org/>) and, of course, Bhutan's work promoting Gross National Happiness (<http://www.grossnationalhappiness.com/>). An excellent overview of the GPI is the 2013 article by Kubiszewski, et. al. "Beyond GDP" Measuring and Achieving Global Genuine Progress," in *Ecological Economics* 93(2013)57-68. ([http://www.academica.edu/3636103/Beyond\\_GDP\\_Measuring\\_and\\_Achieving\\_Global\\_Genuine\\_Progress](http://www.academica.edu/3636103/Beyond_GDP_Measuring_and_Achieving_Global_Genuine_Progress)).
  10. It may sound dramatic to question our continued survival on this planet, but it's not. For a sober experience, read the Millennium EcoSystem Assessment (MEA), a compilation of thousands of scientific studies about the state of the ecosystems around the world on which our survival depends. The MEA recognizes that "everyone in the world depends completely on the Earth's ecosystems and the services they provide, such as food, water, disease management, climate regulation, spiritual fulfillment and aesthetic enjoyment," yet, the studies compiled in the MEA paint a worrisome picture including water shortages, species extinction, and climate disruption. In sum, it says that approximately 60% of the ecosystem services evaluated in the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment are being degraded or used unsustainably." That's not a good trajectory. Our government and business leaders need to be addressing that, not just stoking indiscriminate economic growth as a goal in itself. Read more from the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment at: <http://www.unep.org/maweb/en/index.aspx>
  11. Another way to think of this is to consider the difference between transactional and transformative solutions. Transactional solutions work to advance a particular solution without challenging the fundamentally problematic context we're in – i.e. a growth-obsessed economy that is willing to undermine the environment, public health, equity and human rights to increase growth. Transactional solutions aren't all worthless; many have made the world a better place – like banning lead in gasoline or ending child labor. Transformational solutions, in contrast, seek to change the context in which we're working. They are harder, for sure, but they open the floodgates for so many more solutions. Say, for example, citizens unite to demand that government measure non-economic indicators, such as the levels of toxic chemicals in new born babies, the quality of our drinking water, the renewability of our energy sources along, the levels of inequity along with economic metrics when evaluating



---

## THE STORY OF SOLUTIONS

the old game.<sup>18</sup> This is exactly what's happening in towns and cities – all across the world — and they're winning!<sup>19</sup>

But can banning a few million bags transform the goal of the game? By itself, no, but in combination with millions of others working on game changing solutions they care about - Yes! Together, these solutions are beginning to turn the tide.

As people build power to change the game, their citizen muscles grow. They work to ensure the local solutions they create, get copied and scaled up. And when they see these solutions getting blocked by corporations with way too much influence, they start teaming up with other solutionaries to fight for a real democracy by the people, for the people.

Gift cards will never do that. But thousands of citizen campaigns can.

---

how we're doing. That would mean that much of the work we are all doing to fight pollution, promote clean energy and build a more fair society would no longer be going against the status quo – it would be reinforcing it! In this way, providing a new goal that focuses on better would open the floodgates for all kinds of solutions.

Writing in The Nation Magazine in 2008, then-New York State Senator Eric Schneiderman explored the difference between transactional work and transformational. He says: "Transactional politics is pretty straightforward. What's the best deal I can get on a gun control or immigration reform bill during this year's legislative session? What do I have to do to elect a good progressive ally in November? Transactional politics requires us to be pragmatic about current realities and the state of public opinion. It's all about getting the best result possible given the circumstances here and now.

"Transformational politics is the work we do today to ensure that the deal we can get on gun control or immigration reform in a year--or five years, or twenty years--will be better than the deal we can get today. Transformational politics requires us to challenge the way people think about issues, opening their minds to better possibilities. It requires us to root out the assumptions about politics or economics or human nature that prevent us from embracing policies that will make our lives better. Transformational politics has been a critical element of American political life since Lincoln was advocating his 'oft expressed belief that a leader should endeavor to transform, yet heed, public opinion.' " (See full article here: <http://www.thenation.com/article/transforming-liberal-checklist#axzz2ftj14dEU>)

12. For more information on plastics in the oceans, check out the great work of 5gyres ([www.5gyres.org](http://www.5gyres.org)) and Algalita Marine Research Institute ([www.algalita.org](http://www.algalita.org))

two organizations that are leading the research into plastics in the ocean. We also recommend watching photographer Chris Jordan's moving short film, Midway: a message from the gyre (available here: <http://vimeo.com/25563376>).

13. It is very exciting to see how many communities are joining forces to ban the particularly wasteful, noxious and unnecessary single use disposable plastic bag – a product particularly emblematic of all that is wrong with today's throw away society. My own community banned plastic bags and put a 10 cent fee on paper ones as of January 1, 2013. It was amazing to see the change; overnight, residents developed the habit of carrying a reusable cloth bag with them and found it's really not that hard. Our parents did it before the onslaught of cheap disposable plastic and we can do it again. And, in the process of restricting disposable ones, we can build our networks and our citizen muscles to go on to tackle other problems and advance more solutions. Chicobags, a mission-driven reusable bag manufacturer maintains a map with all the successful bag restrictions in the world. Check it out and if your campaign isn't on it, please add it! (<http://www.chicobag.com/track-movement>) Here's some advocacy resources ChicoBags has compiled to help folks get started ([http://www.chicobag.com/resources/track-movement/ADVOCACY\\_KIT.pdf](http://www.chicobag.com/resources/track-movement/ADVOCACY_KIT.pdf)) and here's a great resource on various approaches to reduce plastic bags (bans, fees, etc.) so you can find what is best for your community. (<http://plasticbaglaws.org/>)
14. It's true. You too can get rewards for using more single use disposable plastic, if you put it in recycling bins. See Recyclebank for info (<https://www.recyclebank.com/>). Of course, we at The Story of Stuff Project are all for recycling. We recycle and we hope you do too. But there's a reason that recycling comes last in the mantra: reduce, re-use, recycle. Recycling is a heavy industry, which involves transporting materials around the world, fossil fuel powered factories, and plenty of

---

## THE STORY OF SOLUTIONS

Whenever I'm asked to join in on a solution I wanna know if it's transformational — will it change the goal? To figure it out, I use the word goal. I wanna know that it:

G- Gives people more power — taking power back from corporations to build democracy.<sup>20</sup>

O- Opens people's eyes to the truth that, once basic needs are met, happiness and well-being don't come from buying more stuff but from our communities, our health and sense of purpose.<sup>21</sup>

A- Accounts for ALL the costs it creates including the toll it takes on people and the planet. In other words it internalizes costs instead of externalizing them as most businesses do today.<sup>22</sup>

L- Lessens the enormous wealth gap between those who can't even meet their basic needs and those who consume WAY more than their fair share.<sup>23</sup>

---

residual waste. The real potential for reducing overall resource use and pollution comes from reducing what we use (make stuff last longer, borrow stuff instead of buying it, turn to community rather than stuff for meaning and entertainment, etc.) and re-using (repair, upcycle, share, buy used, donate rather than dispose of stuff). It worries us when we see projects that overemphasize the final R – recycle –as some green panacea, diverting attention from the real waste reduction opportunities and sending a message that it is OK to keep buying wasteful products, as long as they are recycled.

15. I can't bear to miss an opportunity to provide more information on incinerators. These huge, expensive, garbage-burning machines waste resources, create pollution, threaten public health and drive continued wasting since, once built, they need a constant flow of stuff to burn. The 1980s was the heyday of incineration in the U.S., with over 400 proposals in communities across the country. Organized and angry citizen opposition prevented over 300 of these and those that were built have been plagued with technical and economic problems. To our horror, incinerator companies are back, pushing their technology with new fancy names like gasification and pyrolysis, promising to turn garbage into "renewable" energy. If your town is targeted with an incinerator, please contact the Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives for information and guidance on better solutions. ([www.no-burn.org](http://www.no-burn.org))
16. Not all business owners just want to grow profits at the expense of people and the planet. Some are working hard to find durable alternatives to disposable junk made from materials that are safe and fair. Check out Chicobags ([www.chicobag.com](http://www.chicobag.com)) for reusable bags and Klean Kanteen ([www.kleankanteen.com](http://www.kleankanteen.com)) for BPA-free reusable bottles.
17. For an overview on how the American Chemistry Council obstructs solutions for safer healthier chemicals, check out this article by Safer States: <http://www.saferstates.com/2012/08/stories-from-the-trenches-industry-opposition-at-every-turn.html#.UkCznIasiSo>. And here's an article about the ACC spending over \$85,000 to fight against a plastic bag ban in Oregon: <http://ouregon.org/sockeye/blog/american-chemistry-council-unfortunately-not-group-high-school-science-teachers>. Talk about dinosaurs! Get with the program ACC! Those companies that flourish in the 21st century are those that embrace caring for people and the planet. There's no business on a dead planet.
18. Social media and online campaigns are great, but when it comes to real power building, nothing beats good old fashioned face to face conversations and relationship building. Remember what Cesar Chavez said when asked how he organized the powerful United Farm Workers movement. He replied "Well, first you talk to one person, then you talk to another person, then you talk to another person..." "But, how do you organize", the questioners repeated. Cesar repeated "First you talk to one person, then you talk to another person." So yes, build your Facebook groups, online petitions and email lists, but sometimes the most powerful act is to step away from the computer and get out into the community. Here are some tips from the Center for Health, Environment and Justice on making those first contacts for your cause: [http://66.39.116.85/publications/groups/making\\_that\\_first\\_contact.htm](http://66.39.116.85/publications/groups/making_that_first_contact.htm).
19. Check out this map of campaigns and victories against plastic bags around the world. These campaigns are spreading faster than anyone can keep up with, so if you're campaign isn't on the map, please add it: <http://www.chicobag.com/track-movement>.
20. Wrestling back our corporate-money-marinated

---

## THE STORY OF SOLUTIONS

Like the Evergreen Cooperatives in Cleveland,<sup>24</sup> where worker-owners are running green businesses — a laundry, a solar company and a super productive urban farm — that are healthy and safe. They provide secure jobs to people the old game has left behind.<sup>25</sup> We all know we need to get businesses out of our democracy - but cooperatives go further and bring democracy into business. Sustainable, democratic and equitable — that's a game-changer.

Or in Capannori, a town in Italy, where local citizens<sup>26</sup> - working with businesses and government - are not just seeking to manage waste better but are questioning the inevitability of waste.<sup>27</sup> They are promoting solutions to waste not with expensive techno fixes but by working together as a community to reclaim compost for the soil, to find reusable substitutes for disposable products and put discarded material to good use. They've already reduced some waste streams by 82% while creating jobs and building social fabric.

And how about the new trend of "collaborative consumption"<sup>28</sup> — formerly known as sharing? Sharing may sound like the theme of a Barney song, but think about it - it's a huge challenge to the old game. It gets us off the treadmill of more, more, more; conserves resources, gives people access to stuff they otherwise couldn't afford, and builds community.

What's it look like?

Bike share programs in major cities.<sup>29</sup> Online platforms that let us share everything from our cars to homes

---

government so that it can serve the wellbeing of people and the planet is a top priority for just about any solution we want to advance. This is the battle of our generation and is key to removing countless obstacles in the way of making things better – healthier, safer and more fair. For more information on how corporations influence election outcomes in the U.S., and ways to get involved, please watch our film *The Story of Citizens United v FEC* ([www.storyofcitizensunited.org](http://www.storyofcitizensunited.org)) and sign up at [storyofstuff.org](http://storyofstuff.org) to join us in our efforts on this front.

21. Research into the field of happiness studies has churned out very consistent findings; after a certain point (once you have enough food, a roof, life's basics), the added contribution of new stuff contributes diminishing returns towards one's happiness and eventually reaches the point where it undermines happiness – partly because of the extra time needed to pay for and worry about all the stuff we own. Think about it; your second pair of shoes adds more to your happiness than your 22nd pair. By your 222nd pair, getting more shoes is starting to be a drag, yet our internal "enough stuff" metrics have been dulled by our consumeristic society so we just keep shopping, working, stressing, shopping, working and stressing. Turns out that – again, once our basic needs are met – spending time with friends and family, engaging in community activities, working together for a better future all contribute more to lasting happiness than new stuff. If you want to read more about this, we recommend: John DeGraaf and David Wann's classic *Affluenza* (latest edition due in late 2013); Tim Kasser's *The High Price of Materialism* (2002) and Richard Layard's *Happiness: Lessons from a New Science*. (2005)

22. We talked about externalized costs in the original *Story of Stuff* movie, which you can watch at [www.storyofstuff.org](http://www.storyofstuff.org), and in *The Story of Stuff* book (2010) excerpted here: "Bargains abound: rock-bottom prices at big-box stores, discount outlets, online auction sites, even 99-cent stores. Yet there's an unhealthy illusion at work there, a serious gap between the price you pay and the costs involved. The number on the price tag has very little to do with the costs involved in making Stuff. Sure, some of the direct costs like labor and materials are included in the price, but those are dwarfed by externalized, hidden costs like the pollution of drinking water, health impacts on workers and host communities, even changes in the global climate. Who pays for these things? Sometimes it is local communities, who now have to buy bottled water or filters or drink toxic water, since their local water is contaminated. Or the workers, who pay health care or disability themselves. Or future generations, who, for example, will pay by being unable to rely on forests to moderate the water cycles. Since these costs are paid by people or organizations outside the companies incurring them, they're called externalized costs. Economists define externalized costs as 'an unintended or uncompensated loss in the welfare of one party resulting from an activity of another party.' The good news is that a growing number of economists are attempting to capture these ecological and social costs in the price of consumer goods through approaches like full cost accounting or life cycle assessments so we can better understand the real cost of making our Stuff."

Allowing companies to externalize costs allows them



---

## THE STORY OF SOLUTIONS

to camping gear.<sup>30</sup> In my town, the public library system lends out tools! There's just no reason every house needs its own power drill, creme brulee torch, scanner, wheelbarrow, bike pump - when we can share.

As transformational solutions like these gain traction, we will reach a tipping point -- IF we keep focused on the new goal of better.

Without a new goal, all the work we're doing to build a better future will A) not be enough and B) be really hard.<sup>32</sup>

Too much genius and focus will continue to go to solving problems like iPhone battery life while the problems that threaten human life spin out of control.<sup>33</sup>

Five years ago, when we made the Story of Stuff, we started building a community of people who sensed something was really wrong with this old game.<sup>34</sup> We agreed there was a problem. Now it's time to build the solutions — solutions that won't just change a few of the rules, but will change the entire game.

Wanna help?

Come on, let's do it!

- 
- to get away with trashing people and the planet. We believe that requiring companies to compensate for those costs they now externalize would provide a great incentive to clean up their production processes. Of course, the ultimate goal is not just to hold companies financially responsible for the harm they create, but to limit that harm.
23. The gap between wealthy and poor is increasingly nationally and internationally. In the U.S., inequality levels are higher than they have been in a century (<http://www.latimes.com/nation/nationnow/la-na-nn-income-inequality-20130910,0,5392493.story>, <http://elsa.berkeley.edu/~saez/saez-UStopincomes-2012.pdf>). The U.S. has the worst income inequality among all industrialized countries ([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/15/income-inequality-wall-street\\_n\\_3762422.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/08/15/income-inequality-wall-street_n_3762422.html), <http://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/jep.27.3.3>) This is not just a moral or ethical issue; loads of evidence shows that societies that are more equal tend to be happier, healthier, safer and even more sustainable. For more information on this, please read the fabulous book *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*, by Kate Pickett and Richard Wilkinson, (2011). And remember, as Eric Liu says: Everyone is better off when everyone is better off.
  24. The Evergreen Cooperatives are inspiring on so many levels. Read more about them on their site (<http://evergreencooperatives.com>) or here (<http://www.whatworksforamerica.org/pdf/howard.pdf>) Hear about the project from the workers directly in our Good Stuff Podcast interview with some here: (<http://storyofstuff.org/blog/podcasts/workers-as-owners/>)
  25. One of the founding values of the Evergreen Cooperatives is that just as resources should not be seen as disposable, neither should people. So, in their hiring, Evergreen prioritizes formerly incarcerated people and others who are ready to work hard but are largely shut out of the old game. Evergreen builds stronger communities and social fabric, while also contributing to a better economy.
  26. The citizen-activists in Capannori are amazing! Like Rossano Erccolini, the elementary school teacher who has been at the forefront of fighting incinerators and promoting real solutions. You can read about his story and watch a short video on his work here: <http://www.goldmanprize.org/recipient/rossano-ercolini>. For more indepth information about the Zero Waste programs in Capannori, see: Zero Waste Europe's Case Study on Capannori at <http://www.zerowasteurope.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/ZWE-Best-practice-Capannori.pdf>.
  27. Zero Waste is spreading around the world as more and more cities break out of the old way of thinking about waste, limited to burning or burning it. Zero Waste includes, but goes beyond recycling; rather than just seeking to recycle or manage endless streams of waste, Zero Waste advocates take a whole systems approach, starting by asking if products are needed or could be redesigned to be longer lasting in the first place. Read more about this paradigm-shifting approach to waste in Dr. Paul Connett's new book, *The Zero Waste Solution: Untrashing the Planet One Community at a Time* (2013), or in GAIA's "On the Road to Zero Waste" collection of case studies around the world (<http://www.no-burn>

---

# THE STORY OF SOLUTIONS

- [org/on-the-road-to-zero-waste-successes-and-lessons-from-around-the-world](#)) and get involved with GAIA, The Global Alliance for Incinerator Alternatives, which has members in more than 90 countries working for real solutions: [www.no-burn.org](http://www.no-burn.org).
28. For more on the new sharing renaissance, check out What's Mine is Yours: The Rise of Collaborative Consumption by Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers (2010). And if you're more of a video person, watch the TED talks by Rachel Botsman and Lisa Gansky at [www.ted.com](http://www.ted.com).
  29. Here's a blog that tracks bikesharing programs: <http://bike-sharing.blogspot.com/>. Read up, and then go ride a bike -- or start a program in your community!
  30. There are so many online platforms now that promote sharing from homes ([couchsurfing.org](http://couchsurfing.org); [airbnb.com](http://airbnb.com)) to cars (<http://www.side.cr/>; <https://relayrides.com/>) to all kinds of stuff ([yerdle.com](http://yerdle.com)). Log on and start sharing!
  31. It's true. Check out how cool this is: [http://www.berkeleypubliclibrary.org/about\\_the\\_library/neighborhood\\_branches/tool\\_lending\\_library/](http://www.berkeleypubliclibrary.org/about_the_library/neighborhood_branches/tool_lending_library/). Maybe your library can start doing this. Next time you need a drill or ladder or jackhammer, wouldn't you rather go to the library than some big box mega-market?
  32. This is a really important point. We're not suggesting that we all have to stop working on what we're working on now and instead work on transforming the economy. We are saying that if we don't work on some transformative goals -- like changing the goal of the broader economy in which we're working -- we'll keep bumping up against obstacles in the work we're doing and it's going to be a) not enough and b) really, really hard. If you want to dig deeper into this, I recommend reading Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System, a really insightful article by the great systems thinker Donella Meadows available here: [http://www.sustainabilityinstitute.org/pubs/Leverage\\_Points.pdf](http://www.sustainabilityinstitute.org/pubs/Leverage_Points.pdf). Meadows explains that there are many places we can each intervene in a system in our efforts to change it and that some of these places of intervention have greater change-making potential than others. As the article explains, changing the goal of a system is one of the more effective ways to change that system. So we who care about sustainability and public health and economic justice and human rights can work ourselves to exhaustion within this growth-above-all economy and never win. Or we can ensure that as we work on whatever issue we're most passionate about, we target drivers of problems -- not just symptoms -- and we work to transform our economy's orientation from more to better, so it facilitates, rather than obstructs, real solutions. Otherwise, we're going to be opposing incinerators and saving forests and blocking unfair tax policies one at a time until the cows come home.
  33. See notes 2 and 10 for a recap on the problems spinning out of control.
  34. Join The Story of Stuff Community and let's build some real solutions: [www.storyofstuff.org](http://www.storyofstuff.org)

**Please note: All URLs referenced in this document were last accessed on October 10, 2013.**