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The Laws Of Simplicity: Design, Technology, Business, Life

BrillianceAudio

Unabridged

THE LAWS OF SIMPLICITY

DESIGN, TECHNOLOGY, BUSINESS, LIFE



John Maeda

"Maeda is the Master of Simplicity."

—Andrea Ragnotti, BOARD OF MANAGEMENT, RIVELA MULTIELETTRONICA



Synopsis

Finally, we are learning that simplicity equals sanity. We're rebelling against technology that's too complicated, DVD players with too many menus, and software accompanied by 75-megabyte "read me" manuals. The iPod's clean gadgetry has made simplicity hip. But sometimes we find ourselves caught up in the simplicity paradox: we want something that's simple and easy to use, but also does all the complex things we might ever want it to do. In *The Laws of Simplicity*, John Maeda offers ten laws for balancing simplicity and complexity in business, technology, and design - guidelines for needing less and actually getting more. Maeda - a professor in MIT's Media Lab and a world-renowned graphic designer - explores the question of how we can redefine the notion of "improved" so that it doesn't always mean something more, something added on. Maeda's first law of simplicity is reduce. It's not necessarily beneficial to add technology features just because we can. And the features that we do have must be organized (Law 2) in a sensible hierarchy so users aren't distracted by features and functions they don't need. But simplicity is not less just for the sake of less. Skip ahead to Law 9: "failure: Some things can never be made simple." Maeda's concise guide to simplicity in the digital age shows us how this idea can be a cornerstone of organizations and their products - how it can drive both business and technology. We can learn to simplify without sacrificing comfort and meaning, and we can achieve the balance described in Law 10. This law, which Maeda calls "the one," tells us: "Simplicity is about subtracting the obvious, and adding the meaningful."

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 2 hours and 44 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: Brilliance Audio

Audible.com Release Date: February 10, 2012

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B0077PC45K

Best Sellers Rank: #31 in Books > Audible Audiobooks > Arts & Entertainment > Design #70 in Books > Engineering & Transportation > Engineering > Industrial, Manufacturing & Operational Systems > Industrial Design > Products #195 in Books > Arts & Photography > Decorative Arts &

Customer Reviews

Almost immediately after I began to read this book, I was reminded of two quotations, the first from Oliver Wendell Holmes: "I do not care a fig for simplicity this side of complexity but I would give my life for the other side of complexity." Also from Albert Einstein: "Everything should be made as simple as possible, but not simpler." Further along into John Maeda's discussion of each of the ten "laws" and his explanation of why he thinks that "simplicity = sanity," I was reminded of this passage from William Butler Yeats' "The Second Coming": "Turning and turning in the widening gyre
The falcon cannot hear the falconer; Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world, The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere The ceremony of innocence is drowned; The best lack all conviction, while the worst Are full of passionate intensity." Holmes was right, acknowledging how difficult it is to proceed through complexity to simplicity. In fact, I view complexity in that context as a crucible. More specifically, as container into which alchemists once placed raw materials and subjected them to intense heat, hoping to produce a pure and precious metal, perhaps gold. Like the falcon in Yeats's poem, the human mind circles high above more than it can possibly absorb and process, then make sense of. This is what William Wordsworth suggests in "The World Is Too Much with Us": "The world is too much with us; late and soon, Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers; Little we see in Nature that is ours; We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!" And this is why Maeda believes that "simplicity = sanity." In a world that seems to become more complex each day, his on-going journey of discovery he realized how complex a topic simplicity really is, "and I don't pretend to have solved the puzzle...[and] am inspired to grapple with this puzzle many more years...Like all man-made 'laws' [mine] do not exist in the absolute sense - to break them is no sin. However you may find them useful in your own search for simplicity (and sanity) in design, technology, business, and life." It would be a disservice to Maeda as well as to those who read this review to list the ten "Laws." They are best revealed in context, within the frame-of-reference he creates for each. The same is true of the three "Keys to achieving simplicity in the technology domain" with which Maeda concludes his narrative. "Rarely do I have answers, but instead I have a lot of questions just like you." I am amazed by how much material he provides within only 100 pages. Additional resources can be obtained (at no cost) by visiting lawsofsimplicity.com. It is worth noting that when Maeda "set out with youthful zeal to attack the simplicity question, [he] felt that complexity was destroying our world and had to be stopped!" Presumably others have experienced the same frustrations I have encountered when struggling to

understand the directions provided in an operations manual or terms and conditions of a service warranty or when struggling to obtain assistance from a customer service representative who speaks slowly enough and clearly enough to be understood. Why does it have to be so (bleeping) complicated? After speaking at a conference, Maeda was approached by a 73-year old artist who took him aside and said, "The world's [begin italics] always [end italics] been falling apart. So relax." Maeda suggests that his reader take the same advice "and try to LEAN BACK while you read this book, if you can." John Maeda may not get you to the "other side of complexity" but he can help you to preserve your sanity meanwhile. If that isn't a value-added benefit, I don't know what one is.

Rather than listing products to organize your laundry room, this lovely book treats simplicity as a philosophical inquiry. And it does not fall into the voluntary simplicity movement (although those who adhere to that will be enchanted). It's more a meditation using his brilliant background as an artist, engineer, student, and professor. The book is short and thoroughly inspirational. I highly recommend this delightful read.

The book is disjointed and confusing. He rambles from one topic to the next. I learned little.

Wow what a dry book. The cover was the most interesting part..

I agree the core message : Make it simple! I remember Einstein as well : not more simpler, meaning do not sacrifice the core. I remind that it is required a smart effort to make sth simpler, but it is easy to make sth complex. It is a repetition with nice acronyms for me, not very productive experience of learning.

When I bought this book, I was really expecting a pleasure and a simple reading as its title claims, but the organization of the content, the excessive use of abbreviations created "to simplify" the understanding about some concepts and a not very skilled writing found on its pages make the reading becomes boring.

I had high hopes for this book, based on my enthusiasm for John and his other books. I guess I found the insights illuminating at times, and a bit thin or frustrating at others. It's also interesting to note that his examples in various cases might have been different had the iPhone been known of at the time (the interface, underlying complexity, cohesiveness of layers of data etc). I think it's a

worthwhile read, and I'll probably go back through again to distill it better (NOT an example of simplicity!), but it's brevity just doesn't allow for a full realization of the concepts.

I have given 5 stars for the incredible, simple and easy to read book. The Laws of simplicity must be read by designers, engineers and business people or any one who is looking for a fun yet rich and meaningful read

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