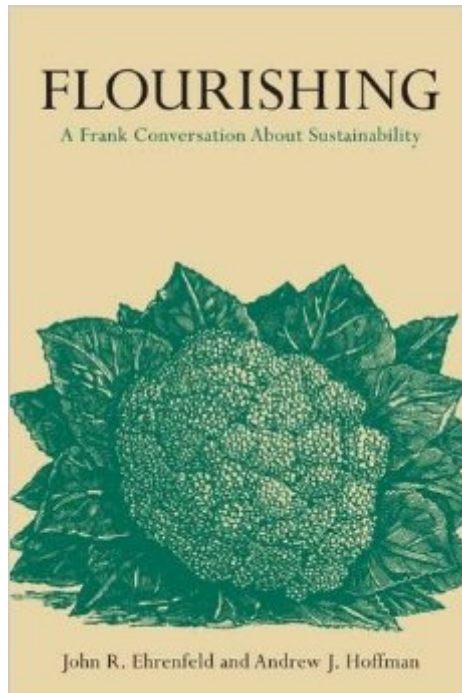


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Flourishing: A Frank Conversation About Sustainability



Synopsis

Flourishing: A Frank Conversation about Sustainability invites you into a conversation between a teacher, John R. Ehrenfeld, and his former student now professor, Andrew J. Hoffman, as they discuss how to create a sustainable world. Unlike virtually all other books about sustainability, this one goes beyond the typical stories that we tell ourselves about repairing the environmental damages of human progress. Through their dialogue and essays that open each section, the authors uncover two core facets of our culture that drive the unsustainable, unsatisfying, and unfair social and economic machines that dominate our lives. First, our collective model of the way the world works cannot cope with the inherent complexity of today's highly connected, high-speed reality. Second, our understanding of human behavior is rooted in this outdated model. Driven by the old guard, sustainability has become little more than a fashionable idea. As a result, both business and government are following the wrong path; at best applying temporary, less unsustainable solutions that will fail to leave future generations in better shape. To shift the pendulum, this book tells a new story, driven by being and caring, as opposed to having and needing, rooted in the beauty of complexity and arguing for the transformative cultural shift that we can make based on our collective wisdom and lived experiences. Then, the authors sketch out the road to a flourishing future, a change in our consumption and a new approach to understanding and acting. There is no middle ground; without a sea change at the most basic level, we will continue to head down a faulty path. Indeed, this book is a clarion call to action. Candid and insightful, it leaves readers with cautious hope.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

John Ehrenfeld (JE) doesn't see "sustainability" as increased energy efficiency or "green technology." Instead he sees it as "flourishing[:] ... a metaphor that captures happiness, health, and the many characteristics of what humans believe is a good life. And it captures a sense of the health of the natural world" (@22). He believes that the usual corporate tactics to promote sustainability, through sustainability scores for products, corporate social responsibility programs, etc., miss some essential points: (A) sustainability is a property of a whole interconnected system, not of a specific enterprise within it, and (B) it can't be reduced to a few quantitative dimensions. (Not all corporations have the wrong idea: he says some interesting things about a Patagonia ad campaign to encourage people not to buy the company's products if they don't really need them, and to buy them used rather than new, when possible (@122-123).) JE very elegantly and accurately characterizes the usual meaning of sustainability, deriving from the 1987 UN report, "Our Common Future" (a/k/a the Brundtland Report), as "try[ing] to hold onto the world we have now by doing things better." This means, among other things, continued economic growth. But, warns JE, such "business as almost usual" can't lead us forward to sustainability as flourishing. What we need is a "shift" in the "dominant culture" (@120), "a shift in our view of ourselves first from one of Having to one of Being, and second from one of Needing to one of Caring" (@83). This involves, among other things, changing our patterns of consumption, and abandoning economic growth as a goal.

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