Sample

take less. do more.

SURPRISING LIFE LESSONS

IN GENEROSITY, GRATITUDE, AND CURIOSITY

FROM AN ULTRALIGHT BACKPACKER

Glen Van Peski

Founder, Gossamer Gear

"For the last twenty years, I've studied people who live longer and more fulfilling lives than the rest of the world. Having hiked with Glen, it's no surprise to me that *take less. do more.* contains many tips on the practices evidenced by people in the Blue Zones for a longer and more satisfying life."

—**DAN BUETTNER**, National Geographic Explorer and #1 *New York Times* Bestselling author/Founder of the Blue Zones

"I met Glen deep in Buckskin Gulch, and loved his unique concept of The List for getting people out into the Wilderness. As we connected outside of the canyon, I grew to appreciate his passion for applying his wilderness learnings to all of life. *take less. do more.* shares the stories of how the wilderness taught him lessons in generosity, balance, curiosity and the importance of relationships."

—**MELISSA WRIGHT**, co-owner Women Who Explore

"Glen epitomizes what it means to 'leave it better than you found it'. In *take less. do more.* you see how he incorporates this in every aspect of his life. In a world where we often don't see nor hear enough about kindness and decency, Glen personifies this and is someone who people of all ages and backgrounds can learn from."

—**MATT ABRAMS**, The Abrams Group, Advisor, Investor, Co-Founder, Board Member

"If Glen Van Peski is talking about hiking … or business … or life, I'm a listener. *take less. do more.* gives everyone the chance to walk alongside one of the most insightful people I've ever known. His combination of knowledge and experience make him an expert guide on the most challenging trail of all: Life."

—**ALEXANDER GREEN**, *New York Times* Bestselling Author, Chief Investment Strategist of The Oxford Group

"As a backpacker, I mark my years as 'BG' and 'AG.' Before Glen, I thought a boyhood in the woods and a career filming hikes on every continent had given me decent skills, but then came one epic trip with this thru-hiking legend and After Glen, I have a whole new philosophy around wants and needs. His book, *take less. do more.* will change the way you think about backpacking, and life."

—**BILL WEIR**, CNN Correspondent, host of *The Wonder List* and author of *Life As We Know It (Can Be)*

"By mastering the art of minimalism, Glen Van Peski wound up with all the things money can't buy: a loving spouse, happiness, deep friendships, an open mind, contentment, calmness, generosity, kindness, legacy, health, and true freedom. This book helps you stop to consider what constitutes a well lived life, and how you can actually have one. It's simpler than you think."

—**DAVID MCLAIN**, *National Geographic* Photographer

"With humility and humor, Glen distills wisdom earned from hard nights on the trail and from his extraordinary life. Keeping with his ultralight ethos, his writing is concise, yet chock full of lessons applicable for everyday life, even for folks who never intend to backpack. For thru-hikers, Glen is one of the fathers of ultralight backpacking and a legend. This book and his life story are a testament to the fact that legends are not born, but built through deliberate thought and persistent practice. Through his storytelling and well-chosen anecdotes, I hope for the world that his life philosophy will become as widespread as his ultralight message has become in backpacking today."

—**LIZ 'SNORKEL' THOMAS**, award-winning author, writer and speaker, long distance hiker

"I've known Glen since the dawn of the modern-day ultralight backpacking movement. *take less. do more.* details his journey and inspires us to move forward in our own journeys. Glen's generosity and thoughtfulness has had a profound impact on my personal and professional life."

—**RYAN JORDAN**, Founder, Backpacking Light

"Glen has walked a different path than I have, but *take less. do more.* reveals a similar passion to mine for getting everyone outdoors, especially underrepresented groups (and with lighter loads). I have been the personal recipient of Glen's generosity, curiosity and creative problem-solving, and recommend this book as a way to walk alongside Glen and learn some of the lessons he's absorbed."

—**CRYSTAL GAIL WELCOME**, writer and backpacker

"I've hiked with Glen deep into Buckskin Gulch, and can attest that he knows more about taking less and doing more than anyone I know. He shares my passion for getting people into the wilderness and removing barriers to make the experiences more accessible. His book *take less. do more.* can certainly help you get out into the wilderness with a lighter load, but also contains many life lessons applicable beyond backpacking."

—**KATHLEEN SCHNEEMAN**, CEO, Explore Austin

"Some authors use research and theories to write books. The principles in this book have been tested and consistently lived by my friend Glen Van Peski."

—**DAN ROCKWELL**, Leadership Freak, Executive Coach, Keynote Speaker

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Forefront
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Take Less, Give More

The final scene from the riveting Spielberg movie *Schindler's List* plays in my mind over and over again. The film was released over thirty years ago, and when I first saw it, I was reduced to tears. I still can't watch it without being deeply moved.

The movie focuses on Oskar Schindler, a German industrialist, humanitarian, and member of the Nazi Party who was credited with saving the lives of twelve hundred Jews during the Holocaust by employing them in his enamelware and munitions factories in occupied Poland as well as in Bohemia and Moravia.

But in life, as in the film, Schindler didn't start off as a do-gooder.

Initially, he was interested only in the money-making potential of his business, and he hired Jews simply because they were cheaper than Poles, with wages set by the occupying Nazi regime. Later, though, as he came to see that his efforts to help might actually matter, he began shielding his workers without regard to cost. The actions he took had a positive influence on the world, and that feeling that he could make a difference came to mean more to him than money.

As the film progresses, Schindler, in order to keep up appearances as a manufacturing magnate, socialized with Nazi officers, pretending that his motivations for protecting his workers

were purely financial. He banned guards from the factory floor in Czechoslovakia, arguing that harsh treatment and executions were detrimental to productivity.

He also rescued children from Auschwitz, claiming that the children's small fingers were necessary for polishing the insides of shell casings.

In reality, Schindler's humanitarian undertaking eventually cost him everything he had. By the war's end, Schindler had spent most of his personal wealth on constructing his camp, providing food for his Jewish workers, and bribing Nazi officials.

Once Germany surrendered to the Allied forces, Schindler, who was still a member of the Nazi Party, was forced to flee his factory. Before he left, his workers presented him with a letter explaining what he had done, signed by every worker at his factory. They also gave him a golden ring with a Talmudic inscription: "Whoever saves one life saves the world entire."

Moved by the workers' gratitude, Schindler broke down crying, lamenting to his assistant, Itzhak Stern, that he might have saved more people if he had been willing to let go of more of his most valuable possessions.

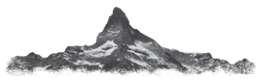
"I could have got more out. I could have got more. I don't know. If I'd just … I could have got more." He looked at his car. "Why did I keep the car? Ten people right there. Ten more people." He removed his Nazi pin from his lapel. "This pin. Two people. This is gold. Two more people. He would have given me two for it, or at least one. One more person. A person, Stern. For this." He sobbed.

That is the part that haunts me.

Few of us, we think, will ever be in a position to help people the way Schindler did. Our lives are so much smaller, we possess so little power, we have too few opportunities to shape the world for the better. But is that actually true? If the saying on the golden ring presented to Schindler is accurate—"Whoever saves one life saves the world entire"—then perhaps our efforts to ease the sufferings

of those around us, even one person, are much more profound and valuable than we realize.

I understand it's ridiculous to put suffering on the level of the Holocaust on par with anything any of us might do, but what I want you to realize is that *every* effort you make to help someone else has a weighty impact. Perhaps shoveling your neighbor's driveway, or anonymously paying for a child's flute lesson, or bringing soup to someone who is sick is not going to change the course of history. But you never know. It might alter in some tiny yet important way the course of that person's individual trajectory. As others have said, "I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." Sometimes, helping someone to feel safe, protected, seen, or heard has a profound effect.



Early on I adopted a concept elucidated by the author Antoine de Saint-Exupéry: "[It seems that] perfection is attained not when there is nothing more to add, but when there is nothing more to remove."[1] Over the years, as I worked on civil engineering puzzles and tinkered in my free time with developing lightweight backpacking gear, this concept guided me. It also touched on so much in life by asking me to focus on finding what is essential.

And yet, while Saint-Exupéry speaks of "perfection," I have come to realize that maybe not everything *can* be perfected. Maybe making progress as a human, developing a spiritual framework, and engaging with others and my own work in a way that creates goodwill is actually more important than achieving perfection.

Still, his words guide me, getting me to that place where nothing else can be taken away. This is the kernel of ultralight backpacking, but it's also a crucial way to look at life.

But how do we position ourselves to give to others from our time, our resources, our talents if we need everything we have just to make it through the day? This is where the idea of taking less comes into play. Minimalism. Learning to get by with only what we truly require.

I think of it in terms of backpacking. When I carry only what I need, I have a greater capacity than I'm using at that moment; I have not maxed myself out. Yes, that means I can log more miles and see more of this spectacular world if that's what's on the docket, but it also means I have the ability to help someone else who is struggling.

I was recently hiking in Buckskin Gulch in southern Utah with a group of people including my lovely wife, Francie. It became apparent that, due to her hip problems, the weight of her backpack was taking a toll on her body. I could see it in her stride, the way she was slowing down, the hidden grimaces that maybe only a spouse would notice. She was doing this trip to please me and to be with some of our mutual friends, but backpacking isn't really her thing, and it was now costing her plenty.

The fact that I was carrying a pack of not much more than ten pounds in weight, including food and water, meant that I was in a position to help. I could sling my pack on my front and carry her pack on my back, allowing her hips the break they desperately needed.

How many ways in life are we able to help carry someone else's burden, figuratively and literally? They are countless if we look for them. And I would venture that, like Oskar Schindler, when we put ourselves out in this way, we find that the emotional riches we receive are much more valuable than whatever it is we think we may have given up.

Minimalism is about a lifestyle of intentionally owning less. It's not about carrying or owning the *fewest* number of things possible but rather owning just the right amount of things so we can focus on the priorities we've set for our lives. How much is just right? With minimalism, I embrace those things I most value, and I consciously remove anything that distracts me from my rich and abundant life. This principle applies to many areas of life besides possessions. I've heard it said that the richest person is not the one who owns the most but the one who needs the least. I appreciate that sentiment, and minimalism has taught me to embrace that form of richness.

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What this means in practice impacts many parts of my life. For example, I don't look for the cheapest item when shopping; I try to purchase what is high quality and will last, and I tend to spend money on experiences rather than things. To that end, I eschew activities that pull me away from fully living my life, like social media or overscheduling my days. When I'm too distracted or busy, I miss out on opportunities to really appreciate my life and to be of service.

I *do* try to schedule my life in a way that makes me as healthy as possible, like exercising regularly and eating a wholesome diet. Habits shape our lives, both daily and over a lifetime. By removing habits that obstruct my fullness of life, I feel better and more focused on what matters to me. For instance, because I care about both the health of my body and the health of this planet, I tend to choose a plant-based diet. That said, if invited to dinner at someone's house or if circumstances are such that following that diet is not easy or possible, I remain flexible and eat whatever is offered.

The principles of minimalism also come into play in my speech. I think about the words of Bernard Meltzer, a radio host who ran an advice call-in show from 1967 to the 1990s. If I remember, it goes something like this:"Before you speak, ask yourself if what you are going to say is true, is kind, is necessary, is helpful. If the answer is no, maybe what you are about to say should be left unsaid."

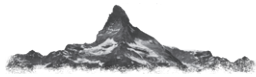
As part of this effort, I strive to avoid negative self-talk as much as possible. We are often our toughest critic, allowing emotions like blame, regret, and fear to shape how we see things. Just changing how we speak to ourselves about what's happening and choosing our thoughts intentionally—taking custody of our thoughts—can free up our mental capacity to see things more objectively.

And though many self-help gurus will tell you to set and go for your biggest, wildest goals, my thoughts on that subject are a little different. I regularly try to reduce the number of goals I'm striving to achieve so that I can focus as clearly as possible on each and am not splitting my attention and efforts. What matters to you? Put that first. Write it down and put it on your bathroom mirror, on your fridge, on your steering wheel. Are the choices you are making today supporting the life you truly desire?

All of this boils down to my own definition of success. The world tells us what success looks like: the big house, the fancy clothes, the sports car, the heaped-on adulation. But I have found the opposite to be true. When I know what matters most to me and I orient my life around those priorities, I experience a kind of peace and calmness that all the money in the world, all the vacation houses, and all the admiration of others cannot buy. No matter how I look at it, my goals remain consistent: to embrace those elements of my life that

feed my greatest wishes and passions and to reduce anything that is a distraction from them.

These lessons, as first experienced in the backcountry and then slowly adopted into my personal life, have changed so much, including how Francie and I view money and the resources available to us.



We have both worked hard our entire professional lives and have tried to be good stewards of what we've received. We also made a conscious choice to live below our means in order to be sure we had a margin for error. This came in handy when my own engineering firm was on the rocks after the economy tanked in 1992. Because we'd kept our overhead low, Francie went back to work, and we had the cushion needed to ensure that I could keep the business going without taking a salary for a year while I helped my employees find new jobs. I had asked them to come work with me, and I felt a responsibility to make sure they landed as well as possible in that recessionary climate. When the day finally came for me to shutter that business, I could do so without a sense of failure; I had done all I could to promote it and to care for the people who'd come to work with me, and though eventually the business became untenable, my relationships with those people and with my clients were strong and enriching. That's success in my book.

Francie and I also took this philosophy into our charitable giving. That term, *charitable giving*, sounds so pompous and self-important, and I want to be clear that I don't mean it in that way. What I want to say is that, as fellow humans on this planet, we have a moral responsibility for each other and that, to meet that responsibility, Francie and I developed a way of living up to that obligation that works well for us.

Way back, early in our respective careers, Francie and I decided to set up a separate checking account with its own debit card specifically for the purpose of helping others in need. Every payday, a set percentage of our income went into that account. Initially, we deposited 5 percent. I thought of it (and still do) as our gratitude account, though you could also call it your peace fund, or giving account, whatever works for you.

This money is distinct from a rainy day fund, savings for retirement, or college savings. It is money that we become essentially trustees for, but it is not in our budget. This way, when needs present themselves, we can address those needs independent of whether we happen to be feeling rich or poor in the moment. Because we have this margin, we have been able to bless many people in need over the years. We have supported ministries and organizations monthly that are important to us, but we also maintain a healthy balance with more nontraditional charity. We've been able to write checks on the spot when a need occurs, like to help a person afford a funeral for their son who died in prison. A longtime friend was dying of cancer with no family, and we were there. Another person, also dying of cancer, had a bucket list of travel he wanted to tick off and no financial resources to do so. That's where this kind of account comes into play. We can write a $100 check or one for $10,000 on the spur of the moment if needed. It makes no difference to our monthly budget, because it's already been set aside. It's no longer our money; we're just stewards of it. We've been able to help replace salaries lost due to the coronavirus for people who didn't have other options. By living on less, we've been able to give more.

I PREFER TO LOOK AT THE ONE PERSON I CAN CONTROL—ME—AND ASK IF I AM DOING ENOUGH. AM I COMFORTABLE WITH WHAT I AM DOING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Even before we decided to set up our separate checking account, I had figured out that when I felt poor, giving to others made me feel rich. When my fledgling engineering company, Pacific Rim Engineering, was based in San Marcos, California, there was a flower shop standing by itself where Mission Avenue crossed the railroad tracks, not far from our office on Rancho Santa Fe Road. It was called the Little Yellow House. One day I came up with a plan and explained it to the owner: I would leave her my credit card info, and when someone came into her shop that looked like they needed a little help, she could use that card and let me know the amount afterward. The stories I got from the shop owner were well worth the sums involved. One day she told me that a young woman had come in to get flowers for a friend who had just found out they had cancer and did not have long to live. The woman appeared to be of very modest means, understandably distraught by the news of her friend. The shop owner showed her small arrangements but noticed the woman couldn't help glancing back continually at a much larger arrangement. Finally, the shop owner told the woman she could have the larger arrangement for the price of the much smaller one, explaining that an anonymous donor was making up the difference. The shop owner didn't even charge the entire difference to my card because she wanted to participate by discounting the arrangement. Generosity often begets more generosity.

Oddly enough, the ability to give away has boomeranged with its own abundance. Though we started with a small percentage, that amount has grown gradually as our income has increased. Some people seem to think that charitable giving should be handled by the ultra-rich, and they always demand to know what the rich are doing with their millions. I prefer to look at the one person I can control—me—and ask if I am doing enough. Am I comfortable with what I am doing to make a difference, without worrying about whether other people are doing what they should?

This may not be true for everyone, but our rule is that if we begin to feel too comfortable with the amount we are giving, we increase the percentage. This has taken us, over the years, from 5 percent of our after-tax income to, now, a significant portion of our pretax income. Everyone is different, but for us, if we don't notice any discomfort caused by our sacrifice, we could probably be giving more. Don't get me wrong; we have plenty. But it's a mindset, a deliberate choice we are making, that creates more margin to help others.

The reality is, though, that when we give to others, we are enriching everyone. We never know when we might be the ones in need, and we have to remain open to accepting help if we find ourselves in difficult straits.

It's interesting to note that after all Oskar Schindler did to save people, he ended up living in Argentina, where he tried raising chickens and then nutria, a small animal valued for its fur. When that business went bankrupt in 1958, he left his wife and returned to Germany, where he had a series of unsuccessful business ventures before declaring bankruptcy in 1963. He suffered a heart attack the next year, which led to a monthlong stay in the hospital. Throughout his misfortunes, though, he remained in contact with many of the Jews he had met during the war, including Itzhak Stern. Schindler, the man who had saved so many, eventually survived on donations sent by *Schindlerjuden* (literally translated from German as "Schindler Jews") from all over the world, reminding me again that giving and receiving are two sides of the same coin.

About the Author

Glen Van Peski is known by the trail name "Legend" for his legendary contributions to the backpacking community. A native Californian, Van Peski grew up in the western outdoors, and when his oldest son joined Scouts, he led the Troop's backpacking program. Through those experiences, he became intrigued by lightweight backpacking. He started sewing his own gear and eventually started his own company, manufacturing ultralight backpacking equipment. Glen and his company Gossamer Gear have been featured in *Backpacker*, *Outside*, and *National Geographic Adventure* magazines, and the *New York Times*.

Van Peski is an internationally sought-after speaker known for his inspiring, humorous, information-packed presentations. He has hiked most of the Pacific Crest Trail, has wandered the backcountry in Japan and Europe, and bikepacked on the Great Divide Mountain Bike Route. He lives in Bend, Oregon with Francie, his wife of over forty years, and is the father to two grown sons.

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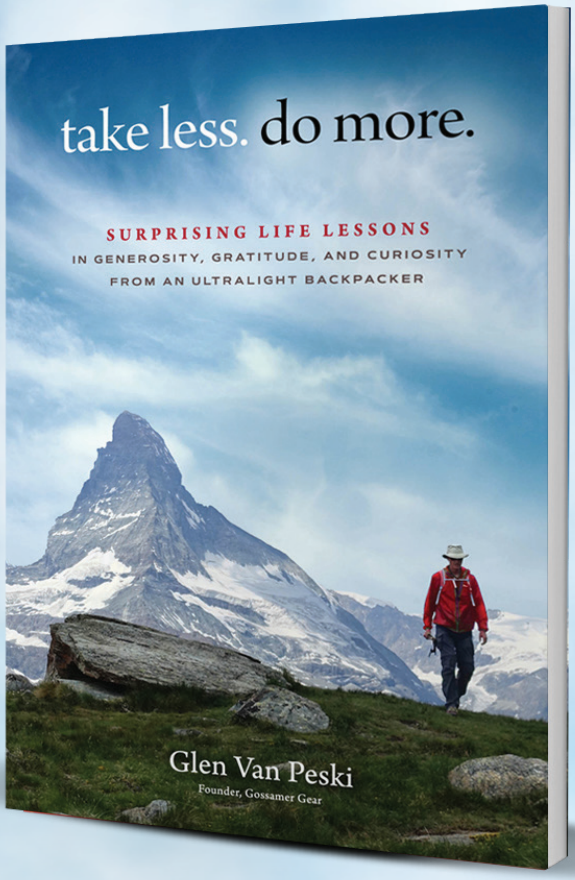

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