

Need for a Crash Diet

Energy – it has the same function and meaning for fuelling our lives as well as fuelling our bodies. That is neither a coincidence nor wordplay. While all species are dependent on consuming food for fuelling themselves, we are the most dependent of all on other forms of energy for warmth, transportation, constructing abodes and preparing food. In addition, we fuel what we fondly call the economy. Local economies, national economies and the regional economies.

And, how our thirst for the black gold has grown. We can't seem to get enough, and we seem to have an ever-growing appetite. The rigs and hoes can't seem to work hard enough. How the world had changed when in 1901, an Englishman rich from gold-mining in Australia, won a 60-year concession to prospect in most of Persia.

My two key questions are: How would we change our consumption patterns if different forms of energy are priced appropriately? And, How much more efficient could we be in our consumption?

Pricing is key to this resource. And, we are yet to get it right, although many would argue that it is increasingly becoming more realistic. Imagine if we had quantified the amount of fossil fuels at some point, built a model around its sustainable consumption (ie. around 500 years before fully transitioning to other technology) and incorporated environmental costs of its use. Perhaps the price of a barrel of oil would have been \$10 in 1915 instead of \$3.50, and over \$200 now. This would have produced more efficient cars, built cities around public transport corridors and renewable energy would have been well and truly embraced by now. The word 'rev-head' would not have entered colloquial vocabulary. Instead, we have squandered this resource and are now in damage-control mode.

The second issue is efficiency. The International Energy Agency recently said that at the global level, lighting currently consumes more electricity than is produced by either hydro or nuclear power and results in CO2 emissions equivalent to about 70% of the world's cars. If all the world's lighting globes were switched to energy efficient globes - that equates to taking every single car in the world off the road for six years. Why aren't we making this simple transition? This is just one example – imagine if we also switched to energy efficient appliances, low emission cars and renewable energy supplements such as solar hot water systems. We could cut our use by over 50%.

Just like a crash diet, we need to cut what we consume – less of the bad stuff. It would help if the good fuels are cheaper than the bad, but then in a situation where a banana costs more than a cheeseburger and fries, this may be wishful thinking.

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