

How can life be simple when there are so many choices?



by

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Organizing  *Resources*

Simple Steps for a Simpler Life

Life has become incredibly complicated. We have more choices regarding work, family, friends, education, self-development, homes, furniture, clothing, eating, hobbies, travel, and on and on...

There are opportunities each and every day that involve commitments and with each new commitment, we lose space – environmental legroom, breathing space, emotional freedom and mental capacity. There is nothing simple about these crowded positions that have trapped us!

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Simple...

The word **simple**, simply put, means uncomplicated, less complex. That's easy enough, right? Well, maybe not easy because there is nothing simple about simplification. In fact, it can be rather complex!

In reality, when we are searching for simplification, and simple living, we are looking for the greatest possible return on our investment. Whether that investment is money, time, friendship, love, clothes, possessions or energy we simply need to choose wisely to reap the highest interest rate. We need to make choices that enhance our surroundings, maintain our well being, soothe emotions and stimulate mental capacity. We need to make choices that are right for our own life, not what others tell us is right. We need to know what is most important, what is embedded deep within our hearts and follow the pathway of our own choosing.

The search is on...

Now that you have begun thinking about the possibility of choosing a simpler life, let me pose a simple question. Is it your *life* that has become too complex or is it your *lifestyle*? In other words, do your possessions possess you? The more we have, the more time it takes to care for our possessions, the more it costs to get them repaired, the more storage we need when we acquire even more. It is a vicious cycle. As we accumulate more stuff we end up expending more energy, more money and more time. Actually, the more we have the less valuable it all becomes.

I read that Sony's shelf life is 90 days. When a new product hits the store's shelf, within 90 days on average, Sony will update the product with better features and faster functions. Sony estimates that its shelf life will soon be 18 days. (Source – *The Joy of Simple Living* by Jeff Davidson)

Years ago, we were afraid that machines would take over our jobs and livelihood. We also thought we would have the paperless office, as computers became more common. However, the amount of paper we now use has tripled. Look at the quantity of mail we get in a single day, the number of emails passed around at the speed of light, the printers, fax machines and copiers whirling out sheets and sheets of paper. Look in the wastebaskets that need to be emptied on a daily basis. We are drowning in paper and throw aways.

With all the choices available and the easy process of acquisitions, everything is getting cluttered. Look around your home and office. What do you see? More piles, more papers, more clutter and less time in your hectic life. There is very little space left in our day planners, in our closets, in our garage, in the cities, on the highways, at the marinas and even in the landfills.

Our lifestyle should enhance our life. So, what has happened over the years? Many of us spend our time and money enhancing our lifestyle. We get caught up in having the entrapments of success – success as defined by Madison Avenue. It is quite evident as we witness TV commercials, walk around the malls, surf the web or read a magazine. There are more choices and it is difficult to ignore.

Health vs. Wealth...

Many individuals are willing to exchange health for wealth. You have the excuse, and maybe even used it yourself: “I don’t have **time** to exercise, eat better, sleep more, and take care of myself.” Paradoxically, in the pursuit of wealth we end up depleting our health and ultimately depleting our wealth in pursuit of health. It seems to me if we maintained our health, we just might sustain our wealth.

Healthy living is a choice. Choices are abundant, but complex. The habit of choosing healthy means educating yourself beyond the supermarket magazine racks. Start a quest on learning about natural whole-food choices and the benefits of olive oil. Find a local grocer that purchases fresh produce free from pesticides. Avoid anything wrapped in cellophane. That’s simple enough!

As the technological world expanded, so did our sitting time. Most of us spend our working hours sitting at a desk, not lifting hay bales, gathering the harvest or mucking stalls. Even for those that do the physical labor, when they come home at night they plop in front of the TV or computer screens. We are a sedentary society, even though we have spent large sums on treadmills, bicycles and gym memberships. Next time you are in an airport, look around. Vast numbers of people are traveling – sitting around in the waiting area, sitting on the plane, sitting on the tour buses, sitting around seminars, sitting around just sitting around. Doesn’t sound like *travel* to me.

Exercising is important but keep it simple. If you have to go out and purchase special equipment, think twice. Walking is one of the best exercises, yet it requires only a good pair of shoes. Nature is uplifting and energizing. Go and experience the simplicity of it.

The choice to stay health requires you to carve out personal time. I tell all my clients to take a purple pen and record personal time in their day planners or if they use electronics, highlight time in a specific color. The “me first” attitude here is acceptable. Then use a different color pen or highlight to block off time for family and friends. Finally, with a pencil they can record their work obligations. Using a pencil for our professional life makes it so much easier to erase and reschedule, while the colored pens are difficult to obliterate. Think about priorities. You come first! If you don’t take care of yourself, you won’t be around to care for others. If you don’t put your oxygen mask on first, you will be unable to continually help those around you.

How much does simple living really cost...

When we think of the cost of something, we think in terms of money or time. However, the emotional costs are significantly higher. When we take on the commitment to work long hours to maintain an abundant lifestyle, we are on the losing end. A vast number of people are paying way too much for what they are getting out of life when they choose opulence. Take on the quest to understand the difference between living a life and having a lifestyle.

Are your choices guided by what others think someone in your position should be choosing or by the desires of your heart? Who are your life models? Watch and learn from people with simpler lives to see how they are living. You might find that you are no longer willing to pay the emotional costs often associated with success.

It really is a simple equation: Less of the lifestyle trappings result in more life. It really becomes quite simple when you align yourself around your core values.

Yakety-Yak...

We are all familiar with the concept of space. It is the distance between here and there; the extra room in the closet, file cabinet and computer hard drive. The reference of space works well with those things that are measurable. But, how about the space in our mind?

Even our minds have become cluttered as more and more information bombards us. Listen! Can you hear the silence? If the mind were not overcrowded, not constantly occupied with things to do, then we would be able to listen, appreciate and fully comprehend the tones of silence.

Appearance deceives. We think we appear *attentive* when listening to someone, but we are really supercharged and mentally formatting our response. We are thinking while we are listening as well as observing our surroundings. We have cluttered the spaces of our mind and increased our stress.

What can you do to create space in your mind? Take a walk, exercise, play solitaire, meditate or make lists? It doesn't really matter what you do, just do something to relax the brain cells, de-stress the body and create a sense of harmony throughout. Look at it in computer terms. It is as if we were *defragging* our hard drive to keep all our programs running efficiently. We are creating valuable space.

Are you ready...

Thomas Leonard, wrote in his book, *The Portable Coach*, that simplifying your life can be as easy as saying, "Wow, I'm ready for a very, very simple life at this point in time. What major change would I need to make to get on that track?" Let's examine that track.

1. Spending less money is a great first step. Choose your possessions carefully and you will have more space and less to manage with more free time as an added value.
2. Prune out the yakety-yakkers. Relationships and acquaintances can consume a great deal of our time if we allow it. Learn to set boundaries and communicate those limits to others in your life. To simplify relationships, identify the 10 most important people in your personal and professional life and focus on them.
3. Before you jump at new opportunities, stop for a moment and take a breath. Give yourself time to scan this new juncture to see if it would add value to your life or needlessly complicate it.
4. Eliminate promises. Do things because you want to, not because you feel obligated to promise. If you have the time to give a request attention, then you can surprise people when you knowledgably say yes!

Summary...

Time is a resource and we all place heavy demands on it. Change your perspective a little and look at time as an opportunity, as a chance to make choices about how to spend that resource. Remember it is your choice. Keep it simple!

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