

25 Ways to Cut the Chaos & Simplify Life!

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In this very busy and fast-paced world, it seems almost impossible to simplify our lives. It doesn't seem right to ask ourselves not to do something. How can I choose to say 'no' to that? I'll be missing out if I don't...But consider this: how much time and energy do you waste on tasks, projects or initiatives that we don't find value in? How much time do you waste because you can't find things? How much energy do you waste telling yourself all the things you *should* do?

We often make life much more complicated than it needs to be and somehow we convince ourselves that our lives must be consumed with endless to-do's. We over-schedule our lives, and then wonder why we feel dissatisfied. As a result, we end up spending the majority of our time on the things that are not aligned with our values and quite honestly, don't really matter to us.

Here are some strategies to help you move past the 'unnecessary' and simplify, simplify, simplify:

- 1. Define and Examine Your Values.** Determine what your values are and live by those values. We often feel conflicted because how we are living is out of sync with our values. For example, if your number one value is family and your job requires you to work 65 hours a week, is it any wonder that you feel unsettled and unhappy? When you're clear about what is important to you, it will be easier to let go of things that don't fit or to consider making changes to better align your life with your values.
- 2. Define Annual Written Goals, then Monthly, then Weekly.** Create a list of goals you want to accomplish this year both professionally and personally. You may want to also separate these goals in categories, such as: physical, mental, social, spiritual, etc. Work only to those priorities. If your goal is to develop a new income-generating product line, then that is where you should spend significant time focusing your attention.
- 3. Prioritize Needs and Wants.** Make a prioritized list of what tasks 'need to be done' and a separate list of those things that you 'want done.' From those things you really need done, prioritize them in chronological order, also noting the amount of time you believe it will take to complete each one. Seeing this list visually helps you to truly understand where you are at. Drop the to-do's that have been on your list for a couple of months. Get rid of those tasks that you keep telling yourself that you will get done but you always find something more interesting/important to do. If you have not done them by now, they likely are really not that important and are merely draining your energy.

It's very easy to get distracted from our priorities, because there is so much information out there that attracts our interests. How often do you get diverted to other projects and never finish what you were originally working on? What happens? The year goes by and you did not accomplish any of your objectives. When new ideas do excite us, get an idea notebook and write all of your new ideas down for future projects. One note, if you find yourself working on everything but your stated priorities, it may be time to reexamine what you think you want.

4. **Single task, not multi-task.** More and more research is showing how we really cannot multitask very well. In fact, we end up doing multiple things less than adequately, and instead could focus on one task at a time and complete it far more effectively and efficiently. Give your brain a break!
5. **Conquer the Clutter!** There are few things more discouraging than having more stuff than we have places to put it. Cynthia Townley Ewer, a home organization expert, recommends the "Four Box Method." She suggests that when you decide to de-clutter an area, you take four boxes with you. The boxes represent actions to take with each item you find. Label one box "Put Away." In this box goes everything you feel a need to keep. The second box is labeled "Give Away/Sell." In this box, you are to put things that you no longer need or want but might be of use to someone else. The third box is called "Storage," and represents things that you feel you may need, but not soon. The final box is labeled "Trash" and is filled with things that will end up at your local landfill or recycling center. Then take 15 minutes at the end of each de-clutter session to appropriately dispose of the items in each box.
6. **Organize.** How much time do you waste looking for things? Take the time necessary to organize your work space so that you can easily find what you are looking for. Do you have stuff that you need to get rid of? The more cluttered your space is, the more stressed and unfocused you are likely going to feel. Be sure that the items you use daily are most easily accessible. If you don't need a hard copy of something, toss it. If you think you may need it, but aren't sure, have a temporary-hold file that you empty once per month. This can be either a physical file or an electronic file. Likewise, utilize computer files and place your information in an organized fashion. You will be able to easily retrieve information without staring at an inbox with 100 emails, just because you think you may need that piece of information.
7. **Disconnect the Devices.** We managed to live quite effectively before the invention of mobile phones, emails, and social media sites. Avoid being constantly bombarded by their demands. Use your favorite communication tools, but limit how many and as with many other things...use them in moderation.
8. **Turn Off the Television.** Television often consumes more of our time and attention than we realize. Eliminating unnecessary distractions is an important part of simplifying. Consciously choose what programs you want to watch and be self-disciplined to watch only those. Don't turn on the television just for background noise. Who needs that?
9. **Combine Errands.** We tease in our family sometimes about the number of hours we spend in a car each week running to one thing or another. We have found that trying to group our errands cuts significantly into that travel time.
10. **Simplify Our Expectations of Ourselves.** Part of feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of our lives may have to do with the expectations that we have of ourselves. Sometimes, our expectations of what we can accomplish in our personal time can be unrealistic. Do you find yourself constantly thinking about the things that you have to do? Are you hard on yourself when you can't get everything done? A common companion to trying to do too much, is trying to do things perfectly. Perfectionism can set us up for disappointment as it is next to impossible to do most things "perfectly" and trying to do so takes an abundance of time and effort.

- 11. Don't Worry About Pleasing Everyone.** If you try to please everyone, you will undoubtedly fail, plus you will likely not be very happy yourself. Consider what is the right thing to do, rather than what other people expect you to do. Try to not feel guilty if people are disappointed with how you act and what you choose. It is not your responsibility to please unreasonable expectations of others.
- 12. Don't be quick to saying 'yes'.** It is okay to say no. If you are not comfortable committing to a task, or something doesn't feel right to you, then consider not doing it. We often get in trouble because we ignore our gut feelings, and most of the time it leads us down the wrong path. If you have a difficult time saying 'no' on the spot to someone, you could consider saying that you will think it over and let that person know in the next day or so. Then when you follow-up, you could employ a couple of different techniques that I have found to be very successful:
- Describe what you could do instead (modification of what was asked)
 - Explain that it can be done, but to do a quality job you will need "X" more time
 - Explain how you have these other two commitments that you need to follow through on first in order to maintain your integrity, which then doesn't fit their timeline (be certain you are honest in your response)
 - You could recommend another individual that would enjoy this challenge as a growth opportunity (be careful not to recommend someone who also has a full plate – it may be helpful to check with that person before recommending him/her)
- 13. Avoid Unnecessary Conflict.** If we value harmony in relationships, life will be immeasurably simpler. By nature of engaging in relationships, there is always the potential for getting involved in minor conflicts. Instead of arguing with others, we should try to be more tolerant and truly try to look for the good qualities. If we can avoid conflict and arguments, life will be more peaceful.
- 14. Let go of F.E.A.R.** F.E.A.R. is an acronym for 'False Evidence Appearing Real.' There's no true threat of immediate physical danger, no threat of a loss of someone or something dear to us, actually nothing is there at all. F.E.A.R. is an illusion. Something we fabricate in our own minds and pretend is real. So let go of those things that are truly false and choose to live in the present moment.
- 15. Stop Spending Time to Save Money.** Spend Money to Save Time! Don't drive across town to save a few cents on a grocery item. Have dry-cleaning delivered...you will be amazed how inexpensive this service is (sometimes it's free). Consider paying someone to do some chores that you really dislike.
- 16. Automate Repetitive Tasks.** One easy example is to pay as many of your bills on-line as you can. With a few clicks of a button, they are paid on-time, with no hassle. Stop spending time with people who drain your energy. Hang around with people who are a positive influence, with similar values and beliefs. Don't let those negative people suck you dry!
- 17. Carry a Smaller Wallet or Purse.** Do you really need to drag around that huge handbag, so that you have every possible item you just may need, with you at every moment? Do you really need every discount card available in your wallet...even if you only go to that particular store once a year?

- 18. Cancel Subscriptions You Don't Enjoy or Read.** This includes "unsubscribing" to unwanted marketing emails.
- 19. Cut Back on Planned Activities for Both You and the Kids.** Whatever happened to 'free time' or 'play time'? Believe it or not, I used to have most of the summer weekends planned so that we were able to "maximize" our summer fun. Boy, being stressed out and not having any down-time is sure a lot of fun!?!
- 20. Create a Simple Weekly Dinner Menu.** If figuring out what's for dinner is a nightly stressor for you or your family, consider creating a weekly menu. Decide on a week's worth of simple dinners, set a specific dinner for each night of the week, go grocery shopping for the ingredients. Now you know what's for dinner each night, and you have all the ingredients necessary. No need for difficult recipes — find ones that can be done in 10-15 minutes (or less).
- 21. Create an Easy-to-Maintain Yard.** If you spend too much time on your yard work, you may need to re-examine how it is designed. I used to have flowers that would require water daily. I quickly realized that ensuring my plants receive the necessary water every single day was simply unrealistic and it wasn't going to happen. So I replaced those plants with others that didn't need as much attention and what a difference it made! Sometimes foregoing one thing for another, doesn't leave it less beautiful, just different and far easier to maintain.
- 22. Live Closer to Work.** This might mean getting a job closer to your home, or moving to a home closer to your work. I realize this is a huge decision and it shouldn't be made quickly. But our commute time before and after work chews up time we could be spending doing other, more important things with are super valuable time. This may be a choice to apply the 5-step decision making model to, as it likely will impact more individuals that just you.
- 23. Leave Space Around Things in Your Day.** Whether they're appointments, or things you need to do, don't stack them back-to-back. Leave a little space between commitments and activities that require your attention, so you will have room for unforeseen things, and you'll go through your day much more relaxed and able to handle them.
- 24. Learn to pack light.** Who wants to drag a bunch of luggage around on vacation? Yes, you may have a lot of fun clothes to choose from, but having a kink in your neck or a knot in your back because of the heavy totes you have burdened yourself, does tend to take away some of the fun. Pack tighter and lighter and reap the rewards.
- 25. Always Ask Yourself, "Will This Simplify My Life?"** If the answer is no, reconsider.