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Simplifying Your Existence ... In Search of the Good Life

By Edward B. Toupin

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I hear many people distress about their need to simplify their lives and "move to the mountains." Their desire is to eliminate all of the things that cause them stress and move into a less hectic, and more gentle, lifestyle. They want the dream of solitude and calm with easy living. However, simplifying your life does not necessarily mean selling everything and moving to a mountain cabin. I've done it, and it's not that easy. It's expensive, alienating, and difficult. Human beings are not meant to live alone; however, sometimes it seems as if that is the only way to survive.

When I speak with such individuals, I first ask them what it is that they find hectic and stressful. In most cases, it is not their way of life that is causing the problem, but it is how they manage the many facets of their life. "Moving to the mountains" is merely running away from the problems that are making life difficult. The most haunting aspect of running is that the problems will follow you regardless of how far "back in the woods" you decide to move. The many facets or our lives can been seen as either stressful or as a learning experience and it is important, and beneficial, to resolve and manage them instead of running from them.

−−− Why is it so hard? −−−

On one extreme, there are people that say that life is beautiful, but they are bitter and unfulfilled. On the other, there are those that despise life as horrid and painful, yet they are content to remain in their situation.

If indeed life were an absolute, everyone would see it the same way. However, life is a series of events that occur on a given timeline. We all mask and filter these events, or realities, because of our experiences. Sometimes we're blinded by these filters and cannot move; however, it is how you are able to adjust your view and manage your life that makes the difference.

You can either let life run you, or you can run it. It's just that simple. You have the power to determine the events and the opportunity to decide when these events occur. But, to do this, you have to not only figure out what is in your life, but also where you want your life to go. This is the first step in simplifying

your life.

−−− But, if I just dump it all, it all goes away. −−−

Yes, if you simplify by eliminating everything in your life then, indeed, all of "those" problems will disappear. However, you will end up with ... nothing ... and an entirely new set of problems to handle. But, in the process, what is it that you are getting rid of? Your furniture? A car? Some tools? Your family? No, you are getting rid of "stuff." Stuff consists of things in your life that, at one time or another, meant something to you or represented something. For some reason, now they don't.

Look around at your stuff and determine what it meant to you and why. Then, figure out what changed over your life such that the stuff no longer means anything to you. As you consider the changes, think

about whether these changes were for the good or the bad. Did you outgrow these things for the better or for the worse?

As you ponder, realize that the stuff is not causing the problems, but it is your view of your "life" and what "it" means to you. These things are merely representations of something that once was, but no longer is, and now you feel the tug of what these items represent. This "tug" usually happens when you have no current direction in your life and are searching for something more, or better, within yourself.

−−− But, there's just so much coming at me. −−−

Overwhelming sensations are expected in today's world; however, you have the ability to control everything that comes at you. The only thing that prevents your control is your ability to comprehend the various levels of control you can exert on any given facet of your life.

You have to examine every facet of your life, not just the ones that appear to be causing problems. You might find that the ones that appear to be causing the greatest problems are not problems at all, but are instead irritated by other gnawing aspects of your life.

Write down the single, overwhelming, feeling that you have −−− confused, lost, angry, misdirected, intimidated, etc. Then, write down every element of your life that affects you directly and indirectly −−− work, marriage, neighbor, expectations, disappointments, successes, past, future, desires, hobbies, kids, friends, etc. For each of those items, write down how you feel about each one listed −−− angry, alienated, confused, overwhelmed, etc.

Go through your list several times then sleep on it for a few days. You are slowly defining the things that are creating the overall feeling you originally noted. Let it all settle in so that you can think clearer the next time that you examine the list. Then, as you go through the feelings you defined for each item in your life, determine if there is a common thread that is causing that feeling.

In most situations I've seen, there is one underlying issue that provokes a problem in everything you do. It is not necessarily the various issues, but it is something that you have within yourself that is blocking you or causing several external problems.

Perhaps, your problems at work are causing you to distance yourself from your wife. Then, this appears as a problem at home, which then affects you at work. Then, you let them all go for so long that it seems nearly impossible to resolve. The problems, however, can be resolved by defining the issues and determining the underlying problem, or desire.

−−− Resolving the Unresolvable −−−

Once you figure out the various issues in your life and find that there is one common theme, or thread, to all of the issues, you now have to do two things: make a plan to resolve the core problem, and make a plan for your life.

Understand that many times, common threaded problems occur because you have no place else to go in your life. With that, you amplify small problems, create new problems simply because you have nothing better to do, or get caught up in small problems that expand into other areas of your life. Without a direction and a path to travel, you have no choice but to stay and deal with the problem instead of resolving and moving on to other things.

Everyone needs a direction and everyone must have some type of destination ... you need a place to go and be. This sounds like I'm heading back to the idea of running away to the mountains. Actually, you are running to the mountains, but not physically. You are creating a destination that you want to run toward −−− satisfying a desire. As you head toward that vision, you are accomplishing goals, learning, becoming stronger, and resolving issues as you "move" through life.

−−− Mission, Vision, and Goals −−−

In previous e−books and articles, I mentioned the need to create an action plan based on your Vision, Mission, and Goals. I called it a "Business Plan for Life." Your action plan contains the researched and planned steps that you take to clarify your life, resolve your current issues to clear your path, and move toward a specific Vision that you see as "Your Life."

It is important to understand your Vision. But, you have to be clear when defining your Vision. Clarity comes from understanding your current situations and being able to clear these situations such that your life is more balanced. By clearing, I don't mean eliminating everything from your life. I mean eliminating the kinks that certain situations cause in the fabric of your life. This means coming to terms with certain issues and getting rid of other things that are no longer of any use to you (e.g., past fears, current petty problems that seem insurmountable, etc.)

Once your Vision is set, you have to define your Mission. Your Mission defines the mechanism that you will use to reach your Vision. It is your overall idea, the theme, of your action plan. When defining your Mission, picture your Vision as a bright light with a clear path right up to the center. This path is your Mission.

With your Mission defined, you must define the Goals to be accomplished to successfully traverse your Mission. These Goals are the steps involved to incrementally approach and reach your Vision based on the mechanism defined in your Mission. Each step is a "baby step" or a "bite sized" piece of the

entire journey. By defining your Goals, you are able to take an overwhelming journey and break it into manageable and measurable pieces that slowly build to help you reach your ultimate Vision.

Finally, your action plan contains the actual pieces of the puzzle that identify the physical actions you must take for each Goal. This action plan is your prioritized map that defines what you will do every day to accomplish a Goal. This map allows you to measure your progress and better understand where you are in your journey. Additionally, by examining the Goals as you go, you can make adjustments to your plan to make sure that your Mission is on track and your Vision is clear.

−−− What's next? −−−

Simplifying your life does not have to involve a complete elimination of your worldly existence. Nor does it have to be the escape to some remote region of the planet. When you feel that desire to "run to the mountains" or get rid of everything in your life, that's a sign that you need to change something in your life and get moving. It is your inner self that is telling you to wake up and go.

Simplifying your life means that you want to make things easier in all aspects. It can be as simple as eliminating things that are complicated and replacing them with things that have meaning to your direction. I call it "Managing your Life" instead of simplifying because you are not minimizing your life to its bare essentials, but you are taking an already full life and removing the kinks to make the path smoother.

A simple life does not have to contain nothing. A simple life can be full and contain numerous tangents and paths, but it is void of issues that unnecessarily complicate the things that mean the most to you.

Edward B. Toupin is a writer and Life Coach living in the Entertainment Capital of the World. He works with individuals to help them realize their potential and establish the directions that will bring them the most fulfillment. Contact Edward at etoupin@toupin.com for more information on defining a plan for a more fulfilling life.

4 Super Reasons You Will Love "Easifying" Your Life

By Kathy Gates

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Are you someone who wants a simpler life, but who associates simplifying with giving away everything you own, and going back to baking your own bread? Unfortunately, that attitude can scare you away from making the simple (pardon the pun) kind of changes that can make your life so much easier, better, and happier.

Instead, let's agree that simplifying means whatever you want it to mean in your own particular life. For me, it means eliminating the stuff around me that I find neither useful nor beautiful, and trust me, other people would not always agree with my definition of useful or beautiful. However, it also means setting up systems to make sure that I have easier ways to handle some age−old problems in the future.

To me, simplifying means "ease−i−fying" (ok, so there's no such word, but maybe there should be!). Easifying defined would be, "minimum effort for maximum pleasure:" Easifying simply looks at the problems of everyday life, then poses creative − easifying − solutions.

Here are 4 super reasons that you will love easifying your life.

1. Less Stuff, Fewer Problems: With less stuff cluttering up your life the benefits are easy to see. You'll have less stuff to clean, (yippee!), less stuff to have repaired (more cash flow!), less stuff to dispose of (environmentally good!), and less stuff to find (halleluiah!) Just pick one room in your house and look around it. How much of that stuff are you really enjoying and getting use from? How much of it is an aggravation for cleaning, repairing, losing, fixing, disposing of, etc.? I'll bet you a paycheck (not really!) that it's at least 75/25.

2. Less Effort, More Energy You'll have less fear and worry associated with carrying around a lot of

stuff. It will simply require less effort. By simply combining things into one (aerobics and weightlifting at the same time), by setting up a system to do the work for you (a bill paying system), by eliminating a task altogether (delegate it to someone else), you'll be calmer, not stressed with the day to day logistics of stuff. An example I love to use is the freedom that comes from not smoking. It's not the freedom from the habit that most people notice first. It's the no more worrying about having enough cigarettes, no more fears of not being able to find a lighter. You'll

feel more in control of your time, your space, your energy.

3. Less Baggage, Better Relationships: "Stuff" refers to not only material things, but mental and emotional clutter as well. By cleaning out the needto, haveto, and oughtos, of your own life, you'll have better relationships because there's not as much "stuff" in your life to fight about. Put the past in the past by returning anything you borrowed, by apologizing to whoever you need to, by getting your bills up to date, by sending the card or gift you forgot to send, by making the phone call you need to make. You get the idea. Anything that you "should" have done, but neglected to, has you Tied To The Past.

4. More FUN! Having an easified/simplified life means having more time for the things you dream of like reading, or traveling, or entertaining, or exercising, or playing with the kids, or visiting with friends. You'll feel more in control because the clutter −− physical, emotional, and mental −− will no longer dictate how your space is arranged, or how your time is spent (looking for things), or how your energy is used (frustration, aggravation). Need I say more?

Kathy Gates, Professional Life Coach, believes that "Life Rewards Action". She can help you create goals, overcome procrastination, organize your time and money, find your true passion, and learn to love the real you. Visit www.reallifecoach.com, email Kathy@reallifecoach.com, or call 480.998.5843

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