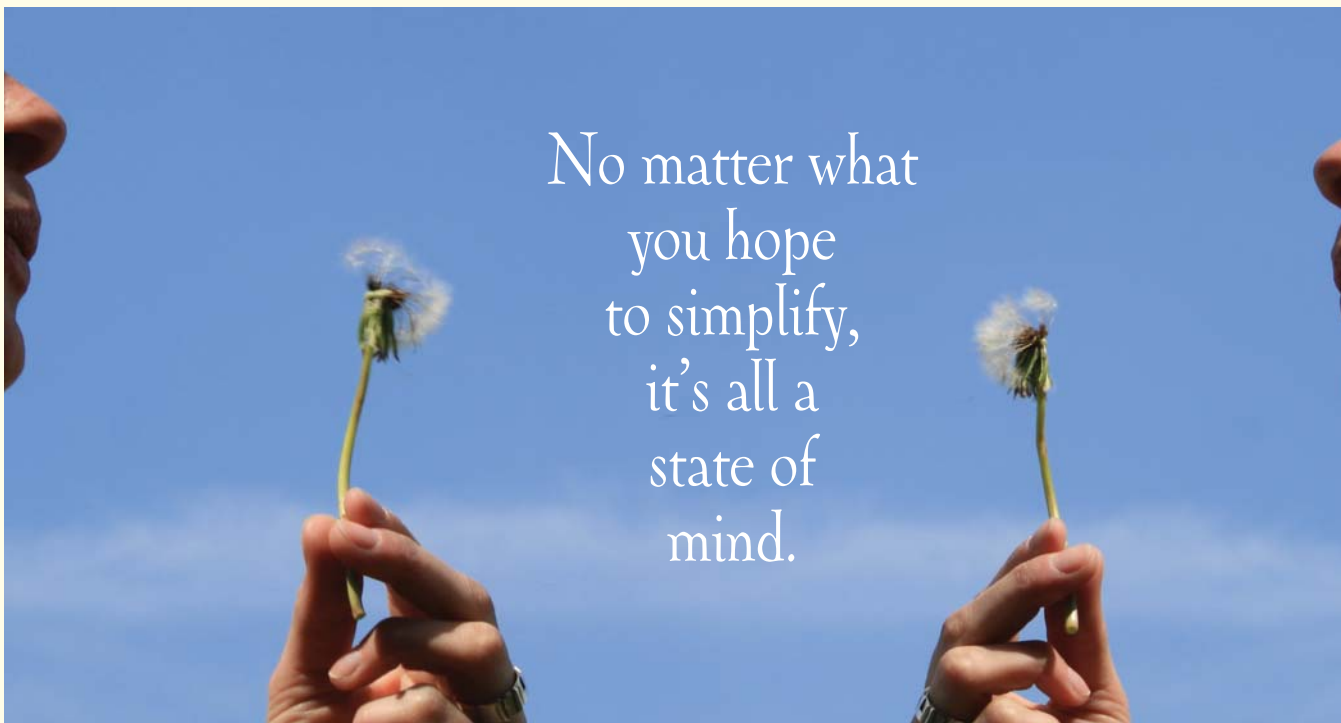


# intentional simplicity

WHEN SUBTLE CHANGES MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE



No matter what  
you hope  
to simplify,  
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BY KAREN CHILDRESS

We all know someone who is constantly overwhelmed; and yet, even though the person is in this perpetual hole, she just keeps on digging. You know the type ... your friend who has a full-time job, a family, meddling in-laws, a house in constant need of repairs, and money problems to boot. She says things like, "I need to slow down and get organized." In the next breath, she tells you she's thinking of getting her real estate license, the kids just got a puppy, and her husband is out shopping for a new SUV. How do you support someone like this? Instead of offering advice, judging, or criticizing, simply nod and then set a good example by adopting some of these simple living principles.

## DIFFERENT THINGS TO DIFFERENT PEOPLE

Dave Wampler is founder of The Simple

Living Network ([www.simpleliving.net](http://www.simpleliving.net)), an online service that offers resources for individuals who want to simplify their lives in almost any way you can imagine—money management, green living, natural cooking, organic gardening, recycling, de-cluttering, time management—it's all there, and more. The simple living movement, says Wampler, isn't an organized movement, and even he isn't sure where or when it actually began. But one thing is clear— it's catching on.

"People are coming at it in a lot of different ways," says Wampler. "The one thing they all have in common is a goal to live lighter on the earth, have less of a carbon footprint, get rid of the clutter and noise in their lives, and focus on what's most important."

When you find yourself craving a slower, simpler life, think about what is most important to you. Is it a lighter schedule? Clearing

away clutter? Consuming less? Eating healthy, whole foods? Saving money by choosing free activities such as hiking in nature over expensive entertainment options? Once you have a clear picture of what "simple" looks like, you're on your way to making it your new reality.

## SIMPLICITY = PRODUCTIVITY

At some level, simplicity is a state of mind. When you're at work and notice that your thoughts are racing about all you have to do today or this week, a shift in attitude can be a real blessing. Take a breath and remind yourself (a) that you almost always eventually accomplish everything you have to do and (b) that being 100 percent "caught up" is a fantasy. Then choose a task and get on with the business at hand. Eventually, this can become a habitual attitude toward your endless to-do list.

At home and at work, be conscious enough to ask yourself questions like these before adding anything new to your schedule: Is this something I'm genuinely interested in doing? Is this the best use of my time? Will this add to the quality of my life or work? If you can't answer "yes," then don't add whatever you're considering to your already full plate.

Simplicity coach Bruce Elkin of Vancouver, British Columbia, ([www.bruceelkin.com](http://www.bruceelkin.com)) encourages his clients to think primarily about what they want to create instead of spending precious energy focused on what they don't want or what isn't working. "Think about the kind and quality of workflow, office ambiance, and communication you want," says Elkin. Adopting this kind of positive attitude can make it easier to simplify and work effectively. "Separate out what's working, and focus on that. It will make you feel better and give you energy," says Elkin. "What's

not working dissolves as you create what you want."

If you find yourself on overload, Elkin says the solution is to simply focus on one thing at a time. One of Elkin's coaching clients came up with the word "unclumping" to describe how she breaks large tasks into smaller, simpler steps. After assessing a large project (or just your average busy workday) and slicing it into manageable pieces, Elkin says the next step is to prioritize.

Wampler's current favorite book on using simple ideas to be more productive is *Eat That Frog: 21 Great Ways To Stop Procrastinating & Get More Done In Less Time*, by Brian Tracy. "It's a short read with great tips on how to get organized and prioritize," says Wampler. The book's title, Wampler notes, means to "take the biggest, ugliest [task] and eat it first thing in the morning and get it out of the way." If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed with too

many things to do and not enough time, perhaps developing a taste for scrambled eggs and frog would be worth pursuing.

## SIMPLIFY YOUR FINANCES BY "NEEDING" LESS

The chaos in most people's lives is the result of taking on too much (remember, it's okay to "just say no") and a constant barrage of advertising designed to make us feel we "need" more and more stuff in order to be happy. "I once heard a quote: 'There's a black box in your living room that wants all your money,'" says Wampler. "It's okay to be away from the TV or computer or phone. Turn it off. Take a break," he adds emphatically.

Wampler contends that simplicity is a lifestyle choice. Since we tend to equate lifestyle with money—how much we earn and, even more so, how we spend—simplifying will most likely require an honest look at where all that money you make actually goes. A classic book on smart (and simple) money management is *Your Money or Your Life: Transforming Your Relationship with Money and Achieving Financial Independence*, by Joe Dominguez and Vicki Robin. This book was originally published in 1992, but as Wampler says, "the steps of the program still work." The main message of this book is that when we spend money we're, in essence, exchanging our time for the goods and services we buy. Once you've calculated (the book teaches you how) exactly how much your time is really worth, you may think twice about spending \$5 on a latte or \$95 on a cute pair of shoes.

In our fast-paced, consumer-driven society, less is often more. Need less and spend less, and you'll ultimately have more free time for what matters. This occurs not only because you won't constantly be chasing after more and more money, but because having less "stuff" means less to

## Eight Tips for Simplifying Your Life

You may not be able to simplify every area of your life overnight, but here are eight ideas to help jump-start your thought process.

**OFFICE:** Brainstorm at your next staff meeting about ways to "reduce, reuse, and recycle."

**HOME:** For 30 consecutive days walk through your house and find one item to put into a donation bag. At the end of the month, take the bag to the local charity thrift store.

**FINANCE:** Organize your bills so that you only have to pay them once a month.

**NUTRITION:** For one full week eat only whole foods—nothing processed.

**WARDROBE:** Don't buy anything new that can't be tossed in the washer and dryer.

**ENVIRONMENT:** Set a goal to reduce your electric bill by 10 percent, and put 20 percent fewer miles on your car over the next 12 months.

**TIME:** Go through your calendar and schedule a 30-minute appointment each day for yourself to do something that is strictly for pleasure.

**CONSUMPTION:** Unplug the television for a month and see what happens.

maintain—and maintenance takes time and energy. Consider, too, all of the things in our lives that seem to have migrated from the “want” to the “need” category and which ones you might be just as happy without. For example, it’s actually possible to live without a cell phone.

### THE GREEN CONNECTION

You can’t open a newspaper or turn on the radio these days without hearing about a new way to “go green.” There are still a few people who say the planet is fine, that we can keep doing exactly what we’re doing with no long-term negative consequence, but those voices are in the minority.


“People who truly embrace simple living were environmentally conscious long before *green* became the new buzzword,” says Wampler. “Technology may solve some of our problems, but ultimately, we’re all going to have to consume less. We’ve

tapped the planet out. There aren’t enough resources to go around.”

Easy ways to reduce your energy consumption include relying less on artificial heat and cooling (instead, add or take off a layer of clothing) and replacing light bulbs with the new compact fluorescent ones (which are becoming more affordable all the time). Use less gas in your vehicle by combining errands and sharing a ride. Consider becoming a one-car family.

One of the green movement’s mottos is “reduce, reuse, recycle.” Look for ways to *reduce* your overall consumption and purchase brands that use minimal packaging (less to carry home, less to throw away). Find ways around your office and home to *reuse* things that you currently consider disposable. Make it easy to *recycle* by creating simple systems that are convenient for everyone to use.

### LIVE SIMPLY, LIVE RICHLY

Living simply isn’t about depriving yourself. It’s about living an abundant life based on what you value the most. It’s about using your time and money wisely. And it’s about living gently on the earth so that your children and their children will have clean water, fresh air, and the resources they need to live full and healthy lives. Duane Elgin is the author of several seminal books and articles on simple living, and perhaps, he sums it up best when he says simplicity is “living in a way that is outwardly simple and inwardly rich.” 

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