

## Baby Boomer Lecture Series

### Making Life Simpler Not Simple

<http://zenhabits.net/2007/09/simple-living-manifesto-72-ideas-to-simplify-your-life/>

Simplifying can sometimes be overwhelming. The amount of stuff you have in your life and the amount of things you have to do can be too big a mountain to tackle.

But you don't have to simplify it all at once. Do one thing at a time, and take small steps. You'll get there, and have fun doing it.

In fact, you can do little but important things *today* to start living the simpler life. Here are 10 of the most important things to get started. As you will see these are not 10 difficult things, but 10 simple things that you can do today. Not tomorrow, not next week, not next month but today. Choose one and do it today. Tomorrow, choose another.

If you do these 10 things, you'll have made great strides with little effort.

**1. Make a short list.** Take out a sheet of paper and fold it into a small square, perhaps 3×5 inches. Or take out an index card. Now make a short list of the 4-5 most important things in your life. What's most important to you? What do you value most? What 4-5 things do you most want to do in your life? Simplifying starts with these priorities, as you are trying to make room in your life so you have more time for these things.

**2. Drop 1 commitment.** Think about all the things in your life that you're committed to doing, and try to find one that you dread doing. Something that takes up time but doesn't give you much value. Perhaps you're on a team, or coaching something, or on a board or committee, or whatever. Something that you do each day or week or month that you don't really want to do. Now take action today to drop that commitment. Call someone, send an email, telling the appropriate person or people that you just don't have the time. You will feel relief. I'd recommend dropping all commitments that don't contribute to your short list (from Item #1), but for today, just drop 1 commitment.

**3. Purge a drawer.** Or a shelf, or a countertop, or a corner of a room. Not an entire room or even an entire closet. Just one small area. You can use that small area as your base of simplicity, and then expand from there. Here's how to purge: 1) empty everything from the drawer or shelf or corner into a pile. 2) From this pile, pick out only the most important things, the stuff you use and love. 3) Get rid of the rest. Right now. Trash it, or put it in your car to give away or donate. 4) Put the stuff you love and use back, in a neat and orderly manner.

**4. Set limits.** Basically, you set limits for things you do regularly: email, RSS posts, tasks, feeds, items in your life, etc. And try to stick with the limits. Today, all you have to do is set limits for a few things in your life. Tomorrow, try to stick with them.

**5. Simplify your to-do list.** Take a look at your to-do list. If it's more than 10 items long, you can probably simplify it a bit. Try to find at least a few items that can be eliminated, delegated, automated, outsourced, or ignored. Shorten the list. This is a good habit to do once a week.

**6. Free up time.** Simplifying your life in general is a way to free up time to do the stuff you want to do. Unfortunately, it can be hard to find time to even think about how to simplify your life. If that's the case, free up at least 30 minutes a day for thinking about simplifying. Or alternatively, free up a weekend and think about it then. How can you free up 30 minutes a day? Just a few ideas: wake earlier, watch less TV, eat lunch at your desk, take a walk for lunch, disconnect from the Internet, do email only once today, shut off your phones, do 1 less thing each day.

**7. Clear your desk.** I can personally attest to the amazing feeling that a clean desk can give you. It's such a simple thing to do, and yet it does so much for you. If your desk is covered with papers and notes and gadgets and office supplies, you might not be able to get this done today. But here are the basic steps: 1) Clear everything off your desk and put it in a pile (either in your inbox or on the floor). 2) Process the pile from top to bottom, one item at a time. Do not defer decisions on any item — deal with them immediately and quickly. 3) For each item, either file it immediately, route it to someone else, trash it, or note it on your to-do list (and put it in an "action" folder). If it's a gadget or office supply, find a place for it in your desk drawers (or get rid of it). 4) Repeat until your pile is empty and your desk is clear. Be sure to get rid of any knick knacks. Your desk should have your computer, your inbox, perhaps a notepad, and maybe a family photo (but not many). Ahh, a clear desk! 5) From now on, put everything in your inbox, and at least once a day, process it in the same way as above.

**8. Clear out your email inbox.** This has the same psychological effect as a clear desk. Is your email inbox always full of read and unread messages? That's because you're delaying decisions on your emails. If you have 50, let's say, or fewer emails in your inbox, you can process them all today. If you have hundreds, you should put them in a temporary folder and get to them one chunk at a time (do 20 per day or something). Here's how you process your inbox to empty — including emails already in your inbox, and all future incoming emails: 1) process them top to bottom, one at a time, deciding and disposing of each one immediately. 2) Your choices are to delete, archive, respond immediately (and archive or delete), forward (and archive or delete), or mark it with a star (or something like that) and note it on your to-do list to respond to later (and archive). 3) Process each email like that until the inbox is empty. 4) Each time you check your email, process to empty. Ahh, an empty inbox!

**9. Move slower.** We rush through the day, from one task to another, from one appointment to another, until we collapse on the couch, exhausted, at the end of the day. Instead, simplify your life by doing less (see Items 1, 4 and 5) and doing them more slowly. Eat slower, drive slower, walk slower, shower slower, work slower. Be more deliberate. Be present. This isn't something you're going to master today, but you can start practicing today.

**10. Single-task.** Instead of multi-tasking, do one thing at a time. Remove all distractions, resist any urge to check email or do some other habitual task like that while you're doing the task at hand. Stick to that one task, until you're done. It'll make a huge difference in both your stress level and your productivity.

