

Happiness@TheSpeedofLife Newsletter
January 2003: Simplify

1,327 words of content -- approximate reading time required: 5.32 minutes. And isn't your happiness worth it?

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Welcome! This is my e-newsletter, which focuses on defining and applying the 13 Principles of Happiness in your life and work. It is a (more or less) monthly communication. I invite your comments, reactions, and ideas. Jim

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I. HAPPINESS PRINCIPLE #12 - SIMPLIFY

“The sculptor produces the beautiful statue by chipping away such parts of the marble block as are not needed – it is a process of elimination.” ~Elbert Hubbard

“Too much, too much, too much!” Do you ever find yourself thinking that? How we are is a result of choices we make and the way we surround ourselves with stuff and challenges. Sometimes our choices can leave us busy and full yet unhappy. That’s when we need to start dropping what does not serve us.

Woven through many of the Principles of Happiness is a common thread that can best be described as “eliminate friction.” From a purely physical perspective, friction is a resistance to motion. What friction does is slow things down by removing energy. A rocket flying thru space will move freely. But if it is caught in the gravitational pull of a planet the rocket encounters the resisting force of atmosphere. The larger the rocket, the more friction it encounters. Eventually, friction will cause it to burn away until all motion ceases. That’s your lesson in physics.

While the example is physical, it describes what friction can do you and your happiness. Think about the things that complicate your life – tasks, goals, relationships, commitments, and expectations. How many of those feel like appendages on the rocket, splaying out in all directions to catch the atmospheric resistance and slow you down?

To Simplify is not necessarily about giving up goals or material possessions or busy schedules, but rather a reminder to keep what we have and what we do in perspective. Simplify is about striving to remove the clutter in our lives in order to concentrate our energies toward those things that really matter.

On another level, Simplify is a suggestion to avoid overindulgence as a lifestyle. When we surround ourselves with all the best and the newest, or indulge in richer and more exotic pleasures, we actually narrow our options for experiencing happiness. When we live a simple life, we increase our opportunity for awe.

Here are some steps you might take to Simplify:

~~ Schedule "Nothing" Time. Establish time in your calendar to do nothing. Learn how to be at ease in solitude, silence, and stillness. Realize you don't need all that "noise" around you to feel content.

~~ Let Go of Goals. We typically get 80% of the impact from 20% of our goals. Line up your personal goals and identify the handful that will provide you the most return on your investment of time. Cross off the rest. A simplified focus will increase your output and creativity while reducing your stress.

~~ Create Space. In her book, "Clear Your Clutter with Feng Shui," author Karen Kingston walks through a non-judgmental review of all the places in life where 'stuff' accumulates and then provides a template to help clear it out. Even if you are not into analyzing energy flow or baguas, you will find a wealth of practical tips to help simplify your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual environments, thus creating space for Happiness.

~~ Outsource What Doesn't Serve You. What business is Me, Inc (that's you) in? While you might know HOW to pay bills, clean house, and mow the lawn, consider if these tasks bring you joy. If no, why not automate or delegate them? Have your monthly bills automatically debited through the bank, delegate vacuuming to someone else or hire a cleaning service to come in once a month, and pay the neighbor's kid (or a lawn service) to cut your grass. Spend one hour and ninety bucks to have a professional tax service handle your returns this year, and then spend the 20 hours you just freed up to do something that DOES bring you joy!

QUOTES

"Life is really simple, but we insist on making it complicated." --Confucius

"Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is the noble art of leaving things undone. The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of non-essentials." --Lin Yutang

"To find the universal elements enough; to find the air and the water exhilarating; to be refreshed by a morning walk or an evening saunter... to be thrilled by the stars at night; to be elated over a bird's nest or a wildflower in the spring – these are some of the rewards of the simple life." --John Burroughs

If you'd like to download a 1-page summary of the 13 Principles as a reference, you can do so right now: <http://www.1leadercoach.com/>

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II. PERSONAL REFLECTIONS – NATURE ABHORS A VACUUM

Simplify is a principle I've employed for many years to help me pull out of creative funks or open up opportunity. Whenever I clear something out – reduce, move, delegate, eliminate, or finish – the most interesting things happen.

Feeling overwhelmed at work? I look around the office for signals, and usually notice all the junk that's built up over several months, like piles of filing, projects not stored away, reading piles, and an army of post-it notes stuck to everything. All that stuff, subconsciously, distracts me. If I take a few hours on the weekend to clear it all out (usually several trashcans full) I find that my workspace transforms, and everything flows better.

No new business coming in? Several months ago I was in a dry spell, so I dug into my prospective client files, as marketing manuals instruct. I was on my third or fourth unproductive call when I thought, "I'm hating this. These people did not connect with me then, they aren't going to now". As I went to refill the folders, I noticed that my client files were crammed in like

sardines. So I took a deep breath, and before I could evaluate my own action, I purged out all the inactive leads and “maybe someday” items, and dropped them into a storage box. Gone, off my list, let them go. As I reveled in the new-found space, I noticed something odd: my phone was suddenly ringing. Within a week I’d filled my calendar, and ended up having my busiest quarter ever. In conversation with a colleague, I wondered about the connection between clearing out my files and the sudden surge in business. She told me it was because “Nature abhors a vacuum.” As long as I hung on to those old leads, my (mental and physical) space was full. But once I created an empty spot, the universe noticed, and natural forces conspired to fill that space.

I’ve also applied Simplicity to clothes. I had items in my closet that pre-dated my eldest child, who’s a junior in college. You know, favorite old sweaters, that comfortable pair of shoes that look like hell but fit like... well, anyway, I purged out everything I haven’t worn in two years or that I’ve been “saving for when...” My closets and drawers are now lean and mean, and the time it takes me to put away or pick out my clothes has dropped to half. I simplified, yet gained in the process.

I wish the same for you!

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III. IN THE WORKPLACE

Ah, you expect so much – of self and others – on the job. How much of the stress you experience comes from trying to juggle too many roles, goals, and projects simultaneously?

Take a hard look at your current goals. Remind yourself that your maximum capacity is four to six priorities at a time. Identify the top four and renegotiate the rest with your manager or affected clients. Then focus all your energy on those four. When one is completed, pull another off the list, but never hold more than four at a time. You will find that you get more done (and at a higher quality) by working on ONLY four priorities at a time than you did when you tried to juggle ten or twelve.

Why is this true? Back to physics: when you eliminate the friction – i.e. resistance, discontinuity, resource and schedule conflicts – between those multiple simultaneous priorities, the energy that used to go into unproductive juggling now goes into DOING.

AN EXERCISE IN THE WORKPLACE

**Choose an associate who appears overwhelmed. Put yourself in the place of a coach, and ask: “What would you be able to accomplish tomorrow if you only had to worry about ONE THING?” Draw out an answer, then help them structure the next day around that single focus and protect them from distractions.

This may not be a drill you can do often; yet you will be amazed at the payback from your efforts.

Remember, leadership is not about a title. Anyone can be a leader if they model effective habits and share their great ideas with others!

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IV. CONTACT AND SUBSCRIPTION INFORMATION

Jim Smith is a personal and leadership coach, trainer, and Speaker. Jim is a recovered corporate executive who has over a decade of experience helping leaders at all levels to be happier and more successful in their lives and careers. He'd love to help you succeed in a bigger game! Why not bring Jim into your organization for a 1-hour, half-day or full-day workshop on the 13 Principles?

=> P.S. Don't keep this a secret. We grow by referral, so please pass it on! To join our complimentary newsletter, please visit my website: <http://www.1leadercoach.com/> .
AOL Users: If links are not active, you will have to cut and paste.

Drop me a line anytime with your feedback and questions! Jim <mailto:Jim@1LeaderCoach.com>

Happiness is a decision, not an event.
How will YOU decide today?

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