



A Healthy Outlook!

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Simplify Your Life

Most people say they want to simplify their lives because they feel like they have lost control of their time. They want to have more time to do the things they want to do, both at work and at home. Every few weeks there is another newspaper or magazine story about people who feel that they are not spending their time on things they enjoy. A recent poll, for example, found that 65% of people are spending their free time doing things they would rather not do. Isn't that amazing? It's great if you have created a full and interesting life for yourself; it is frustrating if you don't have the time to enjoy it!

The 80/20 Principle

The 80/20 Principle, first stated by Vilfredo Pareto in 1897, says that 20% of our effort produces 80% of the results. This means that a small number of resources is highly productive—and a large number (80%) is not very productive at all. Here are a few examples:

- 20% of the things in your house are used 80% of the time.
- 80% of the things in your house are used 20% of the time.
- 20% of your activities give you 80% of your satisfaction.
- 20% of the stocks in an investor's portfolio produce 80% of the results.
- 20% of the books in a bookstore account for 80% of the sales.

The challenge is to identify those few vital items that produce the greatest value for you. Focus on the activities that result in satisfaction, such as money, better health, or more free time. At the same time, identify those many trivial items that do not lead to things like satisfaction, money, better health, or more free time. These unprofitable activities are taking up 80% of your time. Doesn't it make sense to deemphasize them in favor of the vital 20%?

Making Time Takes Time

The first challenge to simplifying your life is recognizing that it takes an investment of time. If you want to discover how to make time for the things you enjoy, you have to examine how you are spending your time now. If you keep living your life the same way you always have, it will stay complicated.

For some, the excuse, "I can't slow down because everything is important," is a way to avoid seeing what they don't want to see: a relationship that is no longer fulfilling, a job that no longer satisfies, or an emotional distance that has emerged between them and their family members. Some people keep their lives going at a furious pace to avoid seeing what they do not want to see.

If you really do want to simplify your life, you will make the time. You do not have to do anything radical; in fact, it is best to start small. Set aside just 30 minutes each day for a month. During that time, think about a simple question: What elements contribute to making my life feel so complicated? Make a list of the factors in your private journal and write about them.

Begin to think about what can be changed or eliminated.

Finding this time is not as impossible as it may seem at first. Perhaps you can take the train instead of driving, or turn off the television during the evening news and write in your journal instead. Set aside 30 minutes a day for one month, ask yourself some important questions, and be prepared to learn some remarkable things about yourself.

Fewer Responsibilities

You may think that this sounds too simple. Most people who seek to simplify their lives think that the answer is to get more help. But this probably will not help. In fact, if you hire someone to help you get more done, you will actually have added another complication to your life rather than making it simpler. You probably do not need more help; you probably need fewer responsibilities.

continued on page 2

In This Issue

- 1 *Simplify Your Life*
- 2 *Top Health Concerns*
- 3 *A Stress Reminder*
- 3 *Ten Warning Signs of Alzheimer's*
- 4 *Upcoming Events*
- 4 *Ask EAP*

continued from page 1

Learn to Say No

If you want a simpler life, you must learn to say no. In *Simplify Your Life: 100 Ways to Slow Down and Enjoy the Things That Really Matter*, author Elaine St. James says that people get into trouble because they agree to do things they really do not have time to do. This leads to a constant state of being overcommitted and frustrated. Our culture makes it difficult for us to say no to requests to attend extra meetings, dinner engagements, or to taking on new responsibilities. Many of us feel obligated to always be participating at a high level. We are proud of our high productivity and involvement, but it comes with a high price: a complicated life that leaves no time for you. St. James suggests that you actually schedule time *for yourself* on your calendar at the beginning of every month. When you are invited to participate in something, you can turn down the request because you already have a commitment.

Clear Away Clutter

Get rid of things you do not use. Think of all the stuff you have acquired in the past 5 or 10 years. Most of it is designed to make life simpler but, in fact, most of it brings along its own set of complications. Think of what typically happens when you buy a new electronic gadget. Consider all of the time required to earn the money to pay for it, shop for it, buy it, set it up, learn how to use it, fix the unexpected problems it causes with another gadget, and then the time you spend actually using it. Most of us have rooms in our houses filled with stuff that seemed like a good idea at the time, but ends up sitting on a shelf or in a drawer, unused. St. James suggests that you go through your house once each year and get rid of everything you have not used during the previous year. She also has an idea for not acquiring new stuff in the first place. She suggests a technique called the 30-Day List. When you start thinking that you must have a certain product, add it to your 30-Day List and wait. At the end of 30 days, ask yourself if you really still need

it. Chances are, you will have lost your enthusiasm for the product and will cross it off the list.

Simplifying your life might seem to be anything but simple, but the rewards of doing so will be well worth the effort. ■

Suggested Reading

Richard Koch. (1998). *The 80/20 Principle: The Secret of Achieving More With Less*. New York, NY: Doubleday.

Elaine St. James. (1994). *Simplify Your Life: 100 Ways to Slow Down and Enjoy the Things That Really Matter*. New York, NY: Hyperion.

Covey, Stephen, Merrill Roger A. and Merrill, Rebecca R. (1995). *First Things First*. New York: Simon and Schuster

Morgenstern, Julie. (1998). *Organizing From the Inside Out*. New York: Owl Books.

Adapted from an article by Elizabeth Handley, a licensed social worker, in the *Therapists Newsletter*. Used with permission.

Top Health Concerns

Men's Health

Men die at higher rates than women from the top 10 causes of death: heart disease, cancer, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, accidents, pneumonia/influenza, diabetes, suicide, kidney disease, and chronic liver disease.

☀ An estimated one-third of men with type 2 diabetes do not know they have it until they develop problems such as impotence, vision loss, or kidney disease. Heart disease, the leading cause of death, begins to manifest about 10 years earlier in men than in women.

☀ More than 6 million men have depression each year, but the number could be greater because men show signs in a different manner than women. Instead of sadness, depression may display itself as anger, aggression, work burnout, risk-taking behavior, midlife crisis, alcoholism, and substance abuse. Men commit suicide four times as often as women because they are more likely to use deadlier means such as firearms.

Women's Health

The gap between life expectancy for men and women has shrunk to 5.2 years, the narrowest since 1946. In 1920, women outlived men by one year. Women are 33% more likely than men to visit a doctor.

☀ Lung cancer is the leading cancer killer of both women and men, claiming more lives than prostate, colon, and breast cancers combined.

Children's Health

According to a 2008 national poll, the top 10 children's health concerns are obesity, drug abuse, smoking, child abuse/neglect, teen pregnancy, alcohol abuse, ADHD, sexually transmitted infection, and chemicals in the environment.

☀ Other health concerns include motor vehicle accidents, Internet safety, and school violence. Health issues for children that are not ranked in the top 10 include psychological stress, depression, eating disorders, autism, suicide, and cancer.

Seniors' Health

Maintaining mental sharpness is a bigger concern among seniors than relationship issues, mood disorders, and emotional problems that can accompany aging. Nearly 6 out of 10 seniors are concerned about staying mentally sharp.

☀ Seniors' concerns about their health and well-being include maintaining mobility, availability of affordable prescription drugs, and paying for mental health expenses. The mental health condition that concerns them the most is Alzheimer's disease. ■

Sources: *Medical News Today*, U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, NIH, U.S. National Library of Medicine, WebMD, Knowledge Networks, *About.com*, Trust for America's Health, Today's Seniors Network, and Washington and Shady Grove Adventist Hospitals. The *Fact Sheet of the Month* is for educational purposes only. For additional information, consult your physician. Printed with permission.

A Stress Reminder

Ways that stress can take a toll on your body:

- Increased blood pressure and heart rate
- Muscle aches
- Digestive disturbance
- Skin problems
- Respiratory difficulties (asthma, allergies)
- Compromised immune system

Some simple strategies to keep stress in check:

- Exercising
- Healthy eating habits
- Avoiding coping strategies that are more harmful than helpful (e.g., overeating, excessive drinking, buying things you cannot afford)
- Having social connections
- Good sleep
- Relaxation activities, including meditation and yoga
- Not allowing anger or conflict to fester

Quotes:

We immediately become more effective when we decide to change ourselves rather than asking things to change for us.

—Stephen Covey

Leadership is communicating to people their worth and potential so clearly that they come to see it in themselves.

—Stephen Covey, the 8th habit

Ten Warning Signs of Alzheimer's:

While change in memory is normal as we grow older, the symptoms of Alzheimer's disease are more than simple lapses in memory. People with Alzheimer's experience difficulties communicating, learning, thinking, and reasoning — problems severe enough to have an impact on an individual's work, social activities, and family life. Listed below are 10 warning signs to keep in mind for yourself or perhaps a family member.

1. Memory loss

Forgetting recently learned information is one of the most common early signs of dementia. What is normal? Forgetting names or appointments occasionally.

2. Difficulty performing familiar tasks

Finding it hard to plan or complete everyday tasks. What is normal? Occasionally forgetting why you came into a room or what you planned to say.

3. Problems with language

Forgetting simple words or substituting unusual words, making speech or writing hard to understand. They may be unable to find the toothbrush, for example, and instead ask for "that thing for my mouth." What is normal? Sometimes having trouble finding the right word.

4. Disorientation to time and place

Becoming lost in their own neighborhood. What is normal? Forgetting the day of the week or where you were going.

5. Poor or decreased judgment

Dressing inappropriately or showing poor judgment, like giving away large sums of money to telemarketers. What is normal? Making a questionable or debatable decision from time to time.

6. Problems with abstract thinking

Unusual difficulty performing complex mental tasks, like forgetting what numbers are for and how they should be used.

What is normal? Finding it challenging to balance a checkbook.

7. Misplacing things

Putting things in unusual places: an iron in the freezer or a wristwatch in the sugar bowl. What is normal? Misplacing keys or a wallet temporarily.

8. Changes in mood or behavior

Showing rapid mood swings — from calm to tears to anger — for no apparent reason. What is normal? Occasionally feeling sad or moody.

9. Changes in personality

Becoming extremely confused, suspicious, fearful, or dependent on a family member. What is normal? People's personalities do change somewhat with age.

10. Loss of initiative

Becoming very passive, sitting in front of the TV for hours, sleeping more than usual or not wanting to do usual activities. What is normal? Sometimes feeling weary of work or social obligations.

There is no clear-cut line between normal changes and warning signs. It is always a good idea to check with a doctor if a person's level of functioning seems to be changing.

alzheimer's 
association®

The Alzheimer's Association believes that it is critical for people diagnosed with dementia and their families to receive information, care, and support as early as possible.

For more information, call the Alzheimer's Association, National Capital Area Chapter toll-free at 1-800-272-3900 or visit www.alz.org/nca.



Upcoming Events

April 12 and May 10

MCPS Cancer Support Group —

We will be meeting on the second Monday of the month

12:30 – 1:30 p.m. at CESC, room #240

For more information, please contact

Debra Tipton on Outlook or by phone at 240-314-1040

April is National Autism Awareness Month —

The Autism Society, 7910 Woodmont Avenue, Suite 300

Bethesda, MD 20814-3067

800-3-AUTISM (328-8476), 301-657-0881

info@autism-society.org, www.autism-society.org/naam

May is National Physical Fitness and Sports Month —

President’s Council on Physical Fitness and Sports

200 Independence Avenue SW, Room 738-H

Washington, DC 20201-0004

202-690-9000

fitness@hhs.gov, www.fitness.gov

June 20–25 is Brain Health Week —

At RIO & Washingtonian Center —the Alzheimer’s Association, National Capital Area Chapter will offer

a week of activities (a 2K / 5K run, a lakeside walk, a paddleboat regatta, zumba classes, a day of Scrabble, Bridge, and Texas Hold-em tournaments) with an emphasis on learning how to live a brain-healthy lifestyle.

For more information, visit www.alz.org/nca

or call 800-272-3900.

Ask EAP

Q. If I use EAP, is there a way for me to give feedback or evaluate the services I received?

A. Yes, there is. Everyone who uses EAP is sent a Satisfaction Survey, giving them the chance to respond, confidentially, to a number of questions regarding the quality of the services and the program, in general. This information allows EAP to monitor the quality of services being provided and also provides useful feedback about the services.

Do you have a question for EAP? Send us your questions via Outlook or through the Pony to Jeff Becker.



A Healthy Outlook!

To help employees with troubling issues before they become overwhelming.



EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE

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You may contact us or send your questions and comments to
Debra_Tipton@mcpsmd.org

Please note that e-mail is not necessarily confidential.

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