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Simply your life



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Introduction

“Go confidently in the direction of your dreams! Live the life you’ve imagined. As you simplify your life, the laws of the universe will be simpler.”

- **Henry David Thoreau**

CLUTTERED, CONFUSED AND complicated, is that your life we just described?

Running from place to place, over-scheduled, over committed, and with your priorities lost in trivia... is that you?

If so, read on. Here is a book that just might help you see light at the end of the tunnel.

Does a ‘rich and full life’ mean a life of wealth and material possessions? A life that is crowded with activity and a brain that is fevered by thoughts galore? Or is it possible to own only a few possessions and live a rich and meaningful life?

Possible? It is preferable.

There is a benefit to having fewer things. You place less stress on the environment. You can focus more clearly on what matters. Freeing your personal space can free your mind.

‘Stuff’ – both the tangible clutter and the intangible kind – can surround and ensnare you. ‘Stuff’ can drag you down.

Get Organised... simply your life.



What is clutter?

“Out of clutter, find simplicity.”
Albert Einstein

CLUTTER IS ANYTHING you own, possess, or do that does not enhance your life on a regular basis.

Clutter goes far beyond the physical environment. Clutter can result from activities, or even people, in your present life.

Clutter costs us time, which is priceless.
Clutter costs us energy. It makes our jobs harder.
Clutter costs us financially.
Clutter costs us peace of mind.

Categorise your clutter

- IT'S JUST PLAIN clutter... anything that serves little purpose but takes up space is clutter even when it is brand new. Or very expensive. Souvenirs are a classic example of this.
- Anything that has served its purpose and no longer works for you... such as locks without keys, keys without locks, lids without containers and containers without lids, clothes that don't fit and shoes way past their prime... This is clutter of another kind. It imposes on you.
- Clutter, posing as a bargain deal, is clutter of a fraudulent kind. You think you have a good deal. But instead, you have a cheap piece of clutter that, you were happy enough without.
- Some clutter is inherited. Yes, heirlooms are precious, but look at them in context. Have you got room for your grandmother's queen-sized bed in your tiny apartment? Even if it is your grandmother's and is made of teak with ivory work on it?
- Some clutter comes to us as gifts. Five clocks, four irons and three pressure cookers may be wedding gifts all right. But have you any need or space for them?.



- We have clutter that is supposedly utilitarian. Unused kitchen appliances, musical instruments that you never play and things in good condition, but never used.
- Then we have clutter that is seen as decoration, but is overdone or requires too much work to maintain. The valances that hardly suit your curtains but are similar to your sister-in law's...
- Anything you aren't currently using, but you intend to fix, furnish, or get to someday. The broken rice cooker, hair dyer and hand-mixer that became dysfunctional way back and now need new replacements.. This is clutter that you will get to 'someday'.
- And the ever-popular 'mushy' clutter. Clutter that we are emotionally tied to..love letters from the man you didn't marry along with ones from the man you did; your obstetrician's first prescription...
- The 'cream of clutter' is the stuff we accumulate to impress our peers. Snob value clutter such as crystal dishes, silver platters... Now, there is nothing really wrong with wanting to possess the good things in life. Get crystal...if you use it and have space for it. Else it is as much clutter as your old newspapers. So judge carefully.

One woman's treasure is another one's clutter.

Having identified your clutter, GET RID OF IT!

Learning to eliminate clutter at its source helps in dealing with the problem at the root level, before it gets out of hand.

Go through your mail when you receive it and throw away whatever you can before it piles up on your desk.

Teaching yourself to eliminate clutter is an important life skill. So free yourself from clutter.

Creating space makes you feel better physically and emotionally.

Clutter Personalities

What's your name, clutter bug?

WHO'S YOUR ENEMY? The clutter bug within you, that's who. There are as many reasons for household clutter as there are clutter bugs.

Take stock of your clutter problem by going to the source. Your own thought patterns.
Do any of these voices strike a chord?

1. "This might come in useful someday!"

Hey! You must be The Hoarder!

Hoarding stems from insecurity. Financial or emotional. Hoarders fear that they'll never have the resources they need if they let go of any possession. This deep-rooted fear results in the retention of objects, no matter how worn or useless.

Hoarders need to remind themselves that resources will always be available.

Reassure yourself! What you have not used for long may never be used. If you do need it later on, find an inexpensive second-hand piece, borrow or hire. For now, just dare to dump it!

2. "Tomorrow, tomorrow, not today..."

Are you The Procrastinator?

There are those that defer....everything.

Their mindset makes them set aside everything 'for the time being'.

Bills, mail, old newspapers, things that need cleaning or repair, and household projects. Everything is set aside to be dealt with another day.

This Bug will leave dinner dishes in the sink, wet laundry in the washer, dried washing on the clothes line and food in the fridge, long forgotten.

“I can’t. I won’t. I shan’t.”

This is the Li'l Child bug. The rebellious little child.

These are adults who are still expressing the mute and stubborn determination of a small child who throws tantrums and who refuses to pick up his toys.

Rebel clutter can be anything, but often centres on household activities. No, that's li'l child rebel won't put his or her clothes in the hamper, plate in the sink or even park the car in the garage.

No matter what the consequence.

Rebels need to tell themselves that childhood is over. They are adults and need to behave as such! Not like sulky children.

Bid the child rebel goodbye.

4. “Just wait. I’m making plans and it will be done perfectly as soon as I am ready.”

Of course you will, Ms. Perfection. But when?

Perfectionists do wonderful things. If and when they do them! Until they have the time, energy and inclination to do their best, they prefer to let matters slide.

Ms. Perfection needs to understand the 20-80 rule: 20 percent of every job takes care of 80 percent of the problem. The remaining work should be easy to sort out.

It's perfectly okay to get started right away and finish later. The job will still get done. Perfectly.

5. “Oh! do you remember?...”

So you are the sentimental Ms. Marshmallow. There is nothing that you don't like, or keep. For memory's sake. Old time's sake. Baby clothes, old report cards, greeting cards, souvenirs and keepsakes...Problem is, there's so much to remember that the best gets lost with the rest!

Shoo! You compulsive shopper!

PREVENTING CLUTTER IS the best way to battle it.

Check yourself at source. Don't accumulate and then give away.

Ever been bitten by the shopping bug? Of course, you have. It bites us all from time to time – that irresistible urge to purchase on impulse.

If you are a compulsive spender owing to psychological problems, you may need professional help. But chances are, most of us shop to elevate our moods. We are power shoppers.

The only problem with shopping sprees of this kind is this...most of what we buy on impulse, we don't really need. We have packages piled up in our lofts and garages that we couldn't identify if our life depended on it.

But the good news is, impulse buying is easy to curb, provided we choose to.

It's check...not cheque!

Here's a 'check list'...to keep you in check!

When you want to buy something you don't need immediately, take a moment to think about it. Take a deep breath.

Ask yourself this...will you use it right away? This week? This month?

Do you really have the place for it?

If the answer is no, just walk away and give yourself time to think about it. If you still think you need it after you reach home, fine. Go back and buy it. But chances are, you'll forget about it completely.

Champion, lady! You have saved yourself space, money and yes...stress too.

Don't slip up at 'sales'

Just because something has a 40 or 50 percent discount, is not reason enough to buy it. If you save 50 percent by buying something you don't really need, you save 100 percent by not buying it at all. Think about it.

Can you argue with that logic?

Don't buy because today is 'the last day' of a bargain sale. Sales people use the fear of loss as a tactic to tempt you. Phrases like 'just for today' and 'One day sale' should warn you...to think again. Be on guard.

There's no safety in numbers...

HEED A RULE of thumb. If you have more than one blender, stapler, toaster or laughing Buddha, chances are you are buying on impulse. Keep one and give or give away the extras. You'll be one step closer to nirvana.

Prevention is better than clearing up all the clutter later. By avoiding impulse buying, you keep the clutter at bay.

When in doubt, throw it out

This is sometimes easier said than done. Most of us would really like to, but we are too scared. The 'I-might-need-it-someday' and 'Just in case' feeling is pretty hard to fight and overcome.

If a possession is causing you any amount of stress, it's not worth keeping around. Such as the modern painting you inherited but detest the sight of...the collection of dusty textbooks from college, decades ago...Set yourself free of the possession, and chances are you won't even miss it once it's gone.

Another feeling people struggle with is the reluctance to let go of things they've spent money on, whether it was an expensive purchase or a great bargain. "What a waste of good money!" they say.

Sure. But, here's the deal: if that loud outfit that came free when you bought two unwanted saris cheap is cluttering up your closet, it's not doing you any good.

Have you ever used it? No? There you are...Keeping it will not bring your money back.

Accept that fact, and give it away. To a younger person or someone who does not have quite as many clothes. It might help to imagine that, if you donate an unused item, someone might make better use of it.

Books and magazines are often collected mindlessly. While a collection of favourite books or an organized library is not clutter, a pile of old auto magazines or weeklies may serve little purpose.

They require your time and effort to keep in order. For what?

Let clutter go. You'll be amazed at how good you feel. Simply because, clutter bogs us down.

So, 'When in doubt, throw it out.'

It's now for never

Paper piles up so quickly, it's amazing. Learn to deal with paperwork immediately. This is step one to sanity and order.

With these piles of correspondence, unsolicited offers, and just plain junk mail, you could easily miss unpaid bills and important correspondence. Mail that you don't deal with causes inexplicable disturbances in the back of the mind. The more mail that is added to the stack, the more the anxiety generated. You are constantly worried by what you have not seen and sorted out!

A daily system is therefore needed. First, get into the habit of filing. Keep only that which is important. Records need to be kept for legal, financial or tax purposes, for instance.

Just organize things in a simple and efficient way. Then you can find things when you need them. Your file headings should be simple...

Medical, Tax, Auto, Home Repairs, School, Travel, Insurance, Investments, Credit Cards and a file for each family member to keep personal documents.

For large household purchases, staple the receipt to the warranty booklet or instruction manual and keep a separate folder for Warranties and Instructions.

Keep a separate box with envelopes for bills to be paid and write the due date and amount on the outside of the envelope. Keep these in chronological order.

Rid yourself of junk right away. Put all junk mail, unsolicited catalogues and unwanted applications into the waste bin as soon as you get them.

Record information. Have a daily planner or calendar handy and enter important dates, time and relevant information. This goes for doctors' appointments, wedding and party invitations, school activities and all the numerous happenings of your household or work-place.

Refer to your calendar daily.

Every day, spend five minutes putting paperwork in its proper place. Most of the clutter invading our lives is paper. Confronting it daily may just be the most liberating thing you can do for yourself. In the long run, it will save you time, frustration and mountains of unruly paper.

File. Discard, Record. Keep track every day.

These are the four easy steps to relief from clutter, stress-relief and ultimate freedom.

Give away gladly

Keep a Donation Box. Keep dropping in things which are no longer of any use to you. Encourage your family to do the same. When the box is full, sort out the things and give them away to the deserving.

It is difficult to let go of things that we've spent our hard-earned money on or that mean something to us on an emotional level. But if objects are of no use to us, they simply take up valuable space and cause us stress.

Keep a donation box going at all times. It's crucial to being organized. Make a rule in your house: when something new comes in, a similar item goes out. If you buy a new T-shirt, an old one goes into the donation box .

2.Lift your spirits

Clear the blues

- THERE IS A powerful link between depression and clutter.
- Possessions, like fat, insulate us from the outside world.
- They become a wall behind which we can hide from the harshness of reality.
- The sheer act of acquiring stuff too, can be a means of self-medication.
- So many of us shop when we feel low or miserable.
- Buying stuff that elevates our mood is merely a temporary fix.
- In the end, this only adds to our depression.

It's the old chicken-and-egg story...

HOW DOES CLUTTER connect to depression?

- Clutter on its own does not cause depression. It is merely a symptom.
- You collect to ease depression. Your collection soon becomes clutter.
- A cluttered space is gloomy and breeds dark moods.
- Clearing out clutter can dispel melancholy and lead to healing.
- Our environment is a reflection of our inner selves.
- When we start to change the outside, the inside changes too, and vice versa.

Whither peace

WHERE WOULD YOU rather sit and relax? In a garden or in a foundry or a favory?

- A peaceful environment fills us with peace. Effortlessly.
 - When our environment is chaotic, our hearts, minds and relationships fall into chaos as well.
 - It only follows that an orderly work environment is more productive.
- And you would be a lot happier in a house that has no clutter.

And so...

- YOU DON'T HAVE to keep everything that you have accumulated over the years.
- You can et rid of clutter the minute you choose to.
- You – and only you – can create a peaceful space for yourself.
- The important thing is to start. Start small.
- Getting organised is just like going on a diet. It takes time for the fat to disappear. It also take time to shed clutter.

- Make one clutter-free, peaceful space for yourself.
- Within that space, clear out every item that is redundant or has negative associations and bad memories.
- Toss it out or pass it on to someone who needs it.
- Once you've cleared this one little space, keep it that way.
- Slowly clear the rest of the space around you.
- This works well both at home and at work.

Ridding ourselves of the material things that clutter out lives us gives us room, time and energy to truly enjoy the things that are more important in life.

Just as important as this physical exercise of getting rid of material clutter, is the process of clearing mental debris and emotional toxic waste.

And that brings us to another story.

Oh! Woe!

THIS IS SERIOUS.

This is emotional and material clutter that accumulates in our lives as a result of traumatic events or loss.

The loss of a spouse, parent or child; a traumatic divorce, first-hand experience of a violent crime, even a child leaving home for any reason.

Just about anything can cause the clock of enthusiasm to stop ticking.

Clinging to Clutter?

WHEN TRAUMATIC EVENTS happen, we lose the energy and the will to go on. Even routing tasks seem daunting. Ordinary tasks such as cooking, cleaning, or even bathing can take considerable effort.

In the event of death, we hang on to things that remind us of our deceased loved ones. It's natural.

Grieving persons may often refuse to let go of certain possessions or deal with the details of life. A time comes however, when freeing themselves of the clutter is one of the ways to healing.

Closure....

INVITE OVER A group of people close to you. Together think of a deserving family where your ‘clutter’ would be welcome necessities. Then methodically clean out personal closets, neatly packing away belongings. Give away without a trace of grief. The effect is cathartic.

This is called closure.

Letting go of the loved one’s possessions can help the bereaved person to shed the burden of grief.

Divorcees may go through similar crises.

Being constantly in the company of familiar objects, that trigger memories can be painful. The trick is to tackle this objectively. Consider every object one by one. If it conjures up painful feelings, then it’s meant to go out of the door. Adult children may want some keepsakes. The rest can go to the needy.

Therapists say that a feeling of lightness always follows the clearing process. The painful memories seem to disappear or at least diminish along with their material symbols.

Sometimes we need to cling on to memorabilia to facilitate the grieving process. These are subjective emotions. But when you’re ready to take life on again, cleaning out your environment can help you clean out your heart an mind as well.



3.Love your life

YOU CAN DO the things you love and really love your life! Simply, by simplifying your life. Now, how does one do that? What does this mean? There never seems to be time to sort out even these important issues. Our involved and complex lifestyles are the reason. Questions surface all the time, though.

Make a commitment to assess your life and change what needs to be changed. Decide, after some thought, on what is truly important to you. Identify the extra baggage you are carrying around in the name of commitments. Simplify your life by getting organised and start living the way you really want to.

First, we have to give ourselves the time to 'listen for the answers'. Quiet time set aside each day is essential. Some things may need to go in order to make way for new things. Our daily activities can be simplified. But most important is our ability to see the bigger picture. Make a mental shift.

Learning and applying new skills, thinking, beliefs and philosophies should be a constant effort in our lives. This isn't a one-time activity. It is a continuous process. The answers are different for everyone. There isn't a wrong or right answer.

Start with a vision

DON'T WORRY ABOUT how you are going to change something. Begin with a clear picture of how things will look when they are exactly the way you want them to be. Find your authentic self. Listen to that wise little inner voice of yours for answers.

Enjoy caring for yourself and be assured that you are not being selfish. Be comfortable with progressing at your own pace. This isn't a race with anybody else. Have fun. Laugh at yourself. Look at yourself more clearly and see how silly it is to get all worked up.

Visualise yourself on a path that is filled with order, harmony, joy. Bring about understanding, calm, peace, fun and beauty in all that you do and see. Enjoy your journey.

Give yourself time

Can you spare 30 minutes a week for yourself?

THESE ARE ONLY the tools and techniques to begin a new. You need a time and place to put them to use. Knowledge is power only if it is put to good use.

A great way to make use of your tools is to set up a weekly meeting with yourself. Yes, a meeting with just yourself!

Each week, set aside 30 minutes for your meeting. Make sure you are not disturbed or distracted. Choose a quiet, comfortable spot.

Once you have chosen your time and place, a pen and notebook are of help. During these 30 minutes, you can write out your new goals, jot down notes about goals in progress, and take time to put everything in perspective.

Just 30 minutes a week will propel you faster towards success and happiness.

It's simply a matter of confidence

Many of us want to try new things, but hold back for fear of failure. We choose to complicate our lives when the solution lies in the simpler alternatives. We keep shying away from what is unfamiliar and new.

Try, don't shy away

When we don't understand how something works, it is easier to shy away from trying it. This may be a gadget appliance, car or just a different idea, system or way of life. The solution is to learn how it works. Once you master the system, you will find it less overwhelming.

Ignore the wet blankets

People love to tell others that things are harder than they think. The solution is to ignore the know-alls and just do it! May be they are right, and it is hard. That is still no reason not to try. May be they are wrong, and it's not so bad. You'll never know until you do it.

Oh! For shame!

One of the biggest obstacles to learning new things is the fear of doing it wrong and being criticized. We worry so much about what others think that we forego many opportunities and challenges. The solution is simple.

Don't fret about what might never happen. People do not pay as much attention to you as you think. They are preoccupied with their own feelings and fears too. Take the risk, and go for it! When you succeed, you may inspire others to do the same.

When you are interested in trying something new, just focus on learning about it, don't worry about negative comments, and don't worry about doing it wrong. Have fun and just do it!

Paper peace

One of the reasons we become stressed is because of the thousand thoughts that race through our minds...continuously. Did I finish that project? Are the kids okay? How am I going to pay all these bills? Will I ever get that promotion?

With all these thoughts in our minds, it's easy to see why even the best of us can get stressed out fast. The solution is to get your thoughts organised. Get them out of your head and onto paper. Yes. Paper and pencil can give you peace of mind.

Clearing your thoughts completely and starting from scratch would surely help. But you just can't let go of everything that is bothering you and forget all about it. That's why you need the pencil and paper.

Once you write down your thoughts and concerns, your mind can be free to think of solutions. To do this sit in a quiet, well-lit room. Make a list of every thought that has been constantly coming up in your mind. Write until you can't write anymore. When you are finished, you should have a nice list of the things that are in need of some attention. After your list is created, set out a plan to deal with each item.

Getting your thoughts out of your head and onto paper is one way of simplifying thought-related chaos. A free mind solutions. Problems don't faze it. free mind solutions. Problems don't faze it.

Problems are petty

WE ALL ENCOUNTER problems each day, and depending on our attitude towards problems, we fix them or add fuel to the fire.

There's no excuse

When problems arise, avoid making excuses for yourself or others, or the problem will continue indefinitely. Excuses only cover up the source of the problem and so, any solution is bound to be short term and ineffective.

We must take responsibility for our attitudes and our actions. If we are in a bad mood, or if someone else is always negative, it is because of the person, not outside influences. Once we decide to be accountable, change is possible.

Source it

Lasting change can only come from fixing the source of the problem. Giving out Band-Aids isn't the solution if the floor is covered with nails.

It's a daunting task though, and it is small wonder that many shy away from going to the basics.

When you find the source, you can fix it forever, and save yourself from troubles in the future. It is worth your time and effort.

Fix, don't fuss

When the problems that you face each day are slowly being fixed, your mood and attitude will also improve. A good attitude spreads, and will infect those around you.

Once you know the source, fix it. If you are always in a lousy mood because you don't like your job, then it's time to find a new line of work. If you are unhappy at home, may be you need to look for a different activity outside for a few hours at least.

The trouble is, even when people discover the solution to their problems, they prefer not to deal with it. It is hard to admit a fault, but without that step a change for the better cannot happen.

So, no more excuses...find and fix your problems. It's simple.

Stay focused

How many targets do you see?

In front of you is a target with a large bull's eye in the centre. Next to you is a bow and arrow. Your goal is to hit the target, directly in the middle of the bull's eye. You believe you can do it. You pick up the bow and arrow, take aim, and stop short.

You wonder if you might miss the bull's eye. You lose your focus and see many targets hovering over the true target..

Having doubted your ability, you keep telling yourself to focus. But now the focus of succeeding is replaced with that of ‘not failing’. The main target gets lost in a sea of worries and concerns.

Now, hundreds of targets stand in front of you! Only one of them is real. You have only one arrow.

Do not concentrate on what might go wrong, but on your goal. Your focus has been led astray by self-doubt.

Bring your focus back to accomplishing your goal. Forget about failing, or missing, or anything else. Slowly, the other targets will start to fade and ultimately disappear.

Perhaps your goal is to get a new job. If you go for the interview focusing on the possibility of not getting the position, you will be aiming at the wrong target. This could become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Focus on what you want to do, not on what you don’t want to do. Only one target remains. Bull’s eye!

Demystify mental myths

“I don’t deserve it”

MANY PEOPLE THINK that happiness and success are things that only other people can enjoy. This simply isn’t true.

Each person, whether happy or unhappy, has the same amount of time during the day. People can only do one thing at a time. It is what they do with that time that makes the difference. You can do anything you want, if you use your time wisely. With persistence and desire, you can accomplish anything.

“Impossible”

This statement has been used many times throughout history. Going to the moon isn’t possible. Breaking the 4 minute mile isn’t possible. It doesn’t matter what the subject is, someone has said that it can’t be done.

But it certainly has been done. People have won against the odds before and they’ll do it again.

If someone else can, so can you.



“It’s too tough”

When you first think of getting to work on a goal or project, it can be a little overwhelming. It can seem too large for one person to handle.

After you learn more about it, your goal becomes more manageable. You may see the huge shadow of a scary monster, but you will soon find that it is only a small kitten casting that large shadow.

“It will take too long”

When you think of the end, the main goal, it can seem like it will take a very long time to get there. There is a secret to making this easier. Break the goal down. Break it down into smaller targets. This way, you will accomplish two things: you will be motivated to keep going and you will taste success along the way.

“I am not capable enough”

This is one of the deadliest myths. A lack of confidence can put a quick and untimely end to thousands of dreams, wishes, and goals.

It will take time, patience and hard work, but you will learn. If you are dedicated to succeeding, you’ll put in the time, and you’ll have the knowledge and confidence to carry through until the end.

Differentiate between myths and truths.

Set your goals, get moving.

4. It's about balance

WOMEN HAVE A phenomenal ability to take on numerous roles. Lined up in that closet of life are dozens of shoes, some a little more worn than others.

Though we spend a great deal of time trying to achieve perfection...the perfect body, the perfect home, the perfect parent, what the happiest, and most efficient people learn, is that it isn't about perfection. It's about balance. It's about keeping the scales off the ground, never allowing any one aspect of life to become too big and take over. It's a wonderful, healthy way to live.

Does anyone ever truly achieve this?

We would all like to be a little more focused and happy. So, where do we start?

Get organised!

GETTING ORGANISED IS a fantastic way to clear both the mind and the home. When items have a specific place to go to, clean-up is simply a matter of returning them to their rightful areas. Building shelves, putting up hooks and organizing your life filing cabinet could save you hours of frustration in the long run. Knowing where things are when you need them could free up valuable time in your day. This time can be better spent on a good book or a long relaxing walk.

Most people are affected by visual stimulation. When we walk into a room that is filled with clutter we are less inclined to spend our time there. So if our office, home or personal space is uncomfortable, we are much less likely to be efficient, content or relaxed in it. The less organised our homes and schedules are, the less focused we feel.

The mistake we make...

IT'S NOT UNCOMMON to look outside our lives for solutions to our feeling of imbalance. This could be the root of many of our problems.

We cannot find balance by enrolling our children in multiple after-school activities, volunteering for dozens of projects and attending every workshop that comes our way.

Learning to say "No", refusing to be accessible every moment of every day, and slowing down to focus on what matters, are the first steps in the right direction.

- Choose to clean or tidy up as you go along rather than leaving it for later.
 - Slow down and focus on what you are doing, rather than taking on too many tasks to the point of doing nothing well.
 - Learn to say “No!” We don’t need to be available for others all the time.
- Do what you do best and delegate the rest.

Don’t lose out on relationships

WHEN TIME IS short and the to-do list is growing, often the first things to fall out of priority are our relationships with other people. When we put our family and friends on the back burner, we end up harboring feelings of guilt and frustration, powerful emotions that cut into our ability to be effective in our many roles.

Strong relationships play a key role in our sense of balance. It’s difficult to make good use of our time when our minds are preoccupied with tension or ill-feeling. Having or being a supportive spouse or parent will affect work ethic, happiness in the home, our desire to pursue goals and the energy with which we will face life.

Move!

OH SURE, YOU’RE thinking, I already need more hours in my day and you want me to fit in a fitness routine. The truth is that exercise could be a defining factor in our sense of balance. If we are dissatisfied with our body image this can impact our confidence, our perception and our general well-being.

Exercise releases endorphins, improving our state of mind and perhaps even enhancing creativity and productivity. Exercise can also help us to sleep better, stave off feelings of depression and, of course, improve our overall health.

WE can painlessly integrate exercise into our everyday activities just by parking a little further away from the door or walking to the store round the corner, instead of driving. An even better option would be to get up half-an-hour earlier than usual in the morning, or stay up a little later at night to fit in a workout. Taking care of the body will go a long way in clearing up the mind.

Discover your true interests ... know yourself

IF YOU MUST write, write. If you must sing, sing. We all have our outlets and sometimes by not making time for them we stifle an integral part of our psyches. We live inside our bodies every moment of every day, and yet, many of us are surprisingly disconnected from ourselves.

We each have unique forms of expression, that when tapped into, make us feel alive and energetic. If we allow ourselves the time to do those things that are enjoyable to us, we are much more likely to feel focussed on other aspects of our lives. Just a few minutes of doing that one activity that inspires us could give us the energy to complete the numerous mundane tasks that we have been avoiding.

This is also true of relaxation techniques. Yoga and aromatherapy are not everyone's cup of tea. Some prefer to relax with a cup of coffee and a books or just watch a good movie.

Whatever activity it is that helps you to feel relaxed, alone and comfortable, make time for it. Giving yourself an opportunity to recharge will help you to regain the balance you need.

Change your style

A NEW START involves new challenges. To achieve this we have to break out of our routine and expand. We need to step out from the familiar and comfortable and move into the realm of the unknown. Change can be completely overwhelming when we take drastic steps all of a sudden. Sounds scary? Sure, but the rewards are worthwhile.

Simple changes that will make a big difference

When we are around children we teach them new skills. But when do we think about stretching our own boundaries? Often we don't. Try something new and exciting. There is a world of adventure out there. Take a risk. Define your own limits.

A change, they say, is as good as a rest. Try doing something you normally do, in a different way. Experiment with a new image and be whatever you want. Life is what you want it to be or, more accurately, what you make it.

Live and learn

Increase your knowledge and new choices will become available to you. There are always things that we are interested in but don't know much about. Learning is 'free for all'. Join a course. There you may meet interesting people and find new opportunities that may change the way live and think.

Get away

Retreat from routine.

A spiritual retreat gives us time to connect to an important part of ourselves. We sometimes get so caught up in the business of life that we lose sight of the bigger picture.

A retreat offers inner peace and valuable time to slow down. Find your direction.

Return to the essence of your being.

Precious gifts that cost nothing

THINK AGAIN. DO all gifts come off the supermarket shelf? Everyone loves to receive a beautiful big box, wrapped in glitter paper, finished with a brightly-coloured bow. True. But there is more.

The more precious gifts are those that spring from the heart.

They bless the other person in a way that a 'gift in a box' never can.

Consider these...

A smile – How many of us think of smiling as a gift? And yet it is one of the most powerful unspoken gifts we can give. Try it out and see for yourself.

Eye contact – In general, people don't really look at one another. They don't connect at the level of spirit. It is said that the eyes are the windows to the soul. Give the gift of eye contact and you'll notice a closer and more compassionate connection between you and your friend or family member.

Silence – Most of us have plenty to say, usually too much. Try speaking less and listening some more. Your silence may find meaning..."I love you." "I appreciate you." "I'm here for you."

An apology – Most of us are so busy being 'right', pressing our point, demanding performance, and abusing our authority as parents or heads of our homes or companies, we rarely stop to realise that we could be wrong, could be insensitive, could be ungrateful – at least part of the time. How wonderful it would be to let go and simply say. I am sorry. Please forgive me."

It would be a gift to both the giver and receiver.

The joy of giving can include picking out the right card and buying an expensive gift. But real joy comes from within – with the invisible gifts of the heart.

Dealing with the dumps

WE LIVE SUCH hectic lifestyles and face so many pressures, it's not surprising that bad moods are something many of us experience. However, too many down days can begin to seriously interfere with work, relationships and home life.

Studies have shown that women are almost twice as likely to suffer from bad moods and depression than men – and it's not all due to hormones. Women spend a lot of time thinking about what is making them unhappy and this can lead to bad moods.

Next time you are feeling low, rather than wallowing in self-pity, simply shake off that bad feeling. By behaving and thinking differently you can lift your spirits immediately.

Change the way you think

We are what we think. If your thinking is black, your mood will be black too. You, and only you, have command over your thoughts.

By gaining control of your mind, you can become aware of the bleak thinking patterns that leave you troubled.

Become aware of negative thoughts and replace them with positive ones.

In time you can, and will, break the negativity cycle. When your thoughts are optimistic, your mood will soar too.

Get gregarious

If you are in a bad mood, the last thing you will feel like doing is being around happy people. But, if you do isolate yourself you will stay focused on what is causing you to feel down. Force yourself to call a friend, to meet for coffee and a chat. Go to a party.

A change of atmosphere and company will have a positive effect on your mood.

Don't put off

If an unpleasant task is hanging over your head, it will only put you in a bad mood. By delaying action, you prolong your agony. Save yourself depression by tackling problems as they arise. Take a deep breath and go for it! You'll feel much better afterwards.

Get upbeat

Being around positive people is a great way to get your mind off your problems. Let your friends know you feel down, and tell them why. Talking to an upbeat person about things other than your own issues will help lift your spirits.

Bite off only what you can chew

If you are in a bad mood because you feel overwhelmed with work or responsibilities at home, then priorities and delegate. Rate your tasks from zero to five, in order of importance. Delegate the less important tasks to someone else and schedule time for the very important ones. You'll find that you will cheer up as your work gets done. It really is okay to ask for help.

Be there for others

A great way to feel better is to help someone less fortunate than yourself. It will make you realise that your own problems are often insignificant when compared to the misfortunes of some other people. Visit sick relative, support a friend or do some volunteer work with a local charity – they will all make you appreciate your life.

No excuses

If you blame others for making you feel low, you'll remain powerless to change the way you feel. Accept responsibility and take control of the situation. Your mood will lift the moment you are in charge.

Shun negativity

Your mood will be the first to suffer if you continually tell yourself you are hopeless and a failure. The second you turn the critical self-talk off, your mood will lift. Silence your inner critic. When it says, "You're not good enough," say you disagree...

Be present

A blue mood is kept alive by wallowing in the past or worrying about the future. By doing this, you run the risk of avoiding the present where you may find a solution for your problems. Daydreaming is passive. You won't find the answer by staring at the wall or brooding at home alone.

Renew

Bad moods are often the result of feeling as though you are stuck in a rut. Feeling good is a great side-effect of embarking on a new hobby or doing something out of the ordinary. Take up something new. You'll be on a natural high afterwards.

Journey with a journal

A journal can help you along on life's journey.

When thoughts are spinning in your head like a whirlpool, they are best drained by writing about them. Once you put down your thoughts, they begin to make sense.

Keeping a journal is very subjective. There are no rules. Except, to write consistently. Try various tools. Pen and paper feel more intimate...treat yourself to an attractive book.

Start off with any pattern that suits you. You do have the option to change it. Experiment, too, with writing rituals. Some write best in the silence of dawn, when the mind is free of clutter. Some people write well at night, to work out the problems of the day. Find out what works best for you.

Some like to write with music or television on, some with candles and incense. Some prefer the outdoors, solitude or even company.

Again, there are no rules – just what works for you.

Writing letters can be cathartic. When we don't want to 'talk' to ourselves, a letter to someone else could be the solution. We tend to be more open in a letter, divulging things we may not want to admit to ourselves. These letters need not be sent. They are very personal journal entries. You may keep them or destroy them. The privacy of a journal allows us to organize our thoughts without inhibition. We can also re-read, examine and analyse what we have written. And the more we write, the more we can understand ourselves.

Take control of your life

Instead of worrying, turn to your journal. Several hours before bedtime, pick up your journal and draw a line down the centre of the page. On the left side list what is distressing you and on the right side list the steps you can take to resolve the issue.



Stay focussed and motivated

Whether you are trying to reach a fitness goal, a weight loss goal, or are trying to save money, you can use your journal to log your progress. Simply record the relevant information on a daily basis.

Not only will you be motivated to keep going, but you will also have a record of your personal habits and patterns. This is also useful information if you pursue a similar goal in the future.

Practise positive thinking

Taking the time to remember a few things you are grateful for every day, helps you to keep your life in perspective. Being grateful for all the good things in your life helps you to ride out major life crises and to cope with stress.

5. Busy Body

ARE YOU BUSY every minute? Are you in the habit of doing two or three things at once? Is your busy lifestyle keeping you from enjoying your life? It's like the chicken and-egg question. Are you busy because of your lifestyle or is being busy your lifestyle? Are you trying to be efficient and get as much done as possible so that you will have enough time to relax?

Stop kidding yourself. When you are doing too much, you rarely, if ever, actually take the time to do what you mean to do. Which is, to slow down and relax.

However, when we feel overwhelmed, we often think the solution is to speed up and do even more. We cut out exercise, sleep, eating well, and spending time with family and friends. We go into 'survival' mode, thinking that we will only keep up this hectic pace for a little while until things settle down.

Unfortunately, a lot of us are doing this full-time and it's leaving us feeling extremely stressed out and unhappy.

We need to rethink our attitude and organize our lives.

Mental clarity, the order of the day

REVIEWING YOUR TO-DO list in your head while worrying about the future or thinking about the past is the sign of an overly busy mind. Not only are you unable to physically are caught in a cycle of constantly thinking about the past, present and future, which creates stress.

When your mind is running a mile a minute, racing from one thing to the next, there is a lack of real focus. The solution? It's obvious: focus.

Focus on one thing at a time, one moment at a time, a day at a time. When the mind is quiet and calm, we get our best insights and solutions.

Slowing down provides us with greater clarity in our lives.

How do you slow down?

MAKING TIME FOR what's important to you requires that you first figure out what is important to your. Make a list of your top five priorities and compare this to your day-today life.

Most importantly, are you willing to make these necessary changes in order to allow some fresh air into your hectic life?

The bottom line is that you can't have everything, at least not all at once. You have to decide what's more important to you. How you do this? The key is to plan more.

To plan your free time as well as you plan your work; to plan your weekends as well as your weekdays. And, it's okay to plan to do nothing.

Simple Solutions

Take a 60-second vacation

STOP WHAT YOU are doing, take a few deep breaths, release any tension you are feeling in your shoulders, hands, back and elsewhere, and become fully conscious of yourself and your surroundings. Ask yourself: What I am I focusing on? How does my body feel? Am I hungry, thirsty, tired? Am I fully present and mindful of what's happening in this moment?

Schedule time for you

Set aside at least 15 minutes, at the same time every day, during which you focus only on yourself – read, moderate, go for a walk. Do whatever it is that relaxes you.

Only worry about one thing at a time

Reduce your stress by keeping your attention focussed on the real, important issues, and don't lose your head over those which you have no control.

Express yourself

Talk about what is bothering you with a trusted friend or write it all in that journal.

Engage in regular physical exercise

Even if this means that you have to get up from your desk at work and walk around the office a bit, do it. Incorporate this very effective stress-reliever into your daily routine.

Don't skip meals

Eat a well-balanced diet and drink plenty of water. This may seem like common sense, but providing your body with a slow, steady supply of energy instead of relying on sugar and caffeine for a lift is much more efficient and healthy in the long run.



Stop berating yourself when things don't work out

In a stressful life event such as divorce, death in the family, or job loss, accept that there's nothing you can do to change reality and focus on what you can do to make the situation more bearable. Recognise that sometimes situations are tough and that we can only do the best we are capable of at any given moment.

Stop taking everything so seriously

Give yourself permission to laugh. Rent a funny movie, share jokes with friends, read the comic strips. Fit laughter into your daily routine, especially on the bad days.

Focus on the good that happens to you every day

We get so caught up in all that is wrong with our lives that we forget to take time to appreciate the small things. Count your blessings, name them one by one. Sounds familiar? It's an old hymn that gives timeless advice.

6. Take control

“Destiny is not a matter of chance; it is a matter of choice. It is not something to be waited for; but rather something to be achieved.”

William Jennings Bryan

TAKE CHARGE OF your life. You and you alone are responsible for how you live your life. You have to manage your life, implement your plans and take control of your future.

Just remember...

Your actions are yours alone. You are the one who chooses to do things, the way you want to. Therefore, even the consequences of what you do are your responsibility. So, the next time you propose to do something, wait for a minute and think rationally. Don't take any action that is hasty and impulsive and which you will regret later on. Do away with clutter, mental, emotional, physical.

Take responsibility for your job and the work you do. Many people like to overlook this, because it's convenient to pass the buck. Remember that it is your job and you have chosen to do it. So don't blame your colleagues or boss or your destiny for it. Organise your life in such a way that you enjoy what you do.

You may not be able to choose your colleagues but you certainly can choose your friends. “It's hard to soar like an eagle when you're surrounded by turkeys.” Remember that your friends can either lift you up or bring you down.

The state of your health is in your own hands. Though health is a combination of your genes and the environment, you need to keep in mind that much of it depends simply on what you choose: your diet, exercise, drugs, sleep, medical monitoring and so on.

You have control over how you spend your time and in what activities. You can choose not to waste your time. Once you wake up to the fact that these things are indeed in your control, you will be able to live a more meaningful and effective life. Just go ahead and do it. Get Organised and simplify your life. It's in your hands.

Thou shalt pamper thy body

Health and vitality depend on your body's ability to use oxygen and food effectively. One of the ways to help that happen is through exercise. Exercise also releases endorphins, which have been shown to improve your mood, making it a great way to deal with stress! Move your body every day!

Thou Shalt relax

What do you do really relax? Do you even take the time, or k now how to? Meditation, listening to soothing music, spending time with friends and people you love, conscious breathing... these are all ways to really relax. If your mind is pulled to be things that stress you, you aren't really relaxed! Take time to be absolutely quiet every day.

Thou Shalt rest

It's important to take breaks. If you work for yourself, it's critical to your success that you take time to rest – away from your office or desk. Take a nap if you feel like one! It's also important to get sufficient sleep. Most people need at least seven hours each night. Good sleep habits include having a set bedtime and a set waking-time. Following a pattern and establishing a rhythm for yourself and your body help you to be more relaxed and less stressed during the day. Go to bed! Don't apologise for wanting to 'turn in' early!

Thou shalt be aware of thyself

Pay attention to your body. It gives you clues as to what it needs and when something is wrong with it. Also know what makes you feel great and what makes you feel lousy. Being able to recognize these will help you in making great decisions for yourself. Listen to your intuition.

Thou shalt eat right

Our minds have really been confused with ideas of what a 'healthy' diet should be and what 'proper' nutrition is. Learn more about things like 'low fat' foods, sugar, caffeine and impure water and find out how they are affecting your body. Improper nutrition causes stress in the body. Eat good stuff! Your body will thank you!

Thou shalt enjoy thyself

There's only so much time in this life. Every moment of it is precious. Make it all count. When you do, you'll find you have less stress, fewer physical problems, and that you are more productive. You deserve the very best life has to offer and life deserves the very best you have to give!

11. Balance your life

Finally it's all in your head

HAVING A POSITIVE attitude towards life in general ,may be one of the most important characteristics of successful, happy people.

A positive attitude is not accidental .Successful people know how to create a positive attitude and positive motivation for themselves.They don't just wait for it to happen.

Having a positive attitude is not the same as blind optimism.We need not ignore the challenges in life .We simply need not well in a futile situation.

At the end of each day, instead of recounting all the difficulties and all that remains undone, write down your accomplishments.

End each day on a positive note by jotting down a few of the good things that happened during the day.

When things get busy or when the going gets tough, Its easy to let your attitude slip .Yet, this is when you need your positive attitude the most .Your attitude influences your actions.

Remember, it's when" the going gets tough, the tough get going."

When you feel low are stressed out-When you really need positive action, but cannot rid yourself of negativity-remember ,Ultimately, "It's all in your head". Think positively. You will leave the valley of doom... and stress far behind you.

Enjoy the journey!