

Simplify Your Life...

First, let me say... and not because I invested in an education to become a Psychologist, but from basic experience growing up in a small, nicely nestled community; moving to a much larger, not so nestled city, and then leaving the province all together to only return and replant my roots... "Life is not simple."

Now, don't get me wrong! There are many things about life that may seem simplistic and, well.....in some cases they are. However, no matter the circumstance, we as people in society come face to face with "speed bumps", "road blocks", "detours", "life's little challenges" ...

Sound familiar?

Through the years I have formed my own vision of life and to be completely honest with you, it's still a work in progress. It's a vision that includes happiness, sadness, work, fun, enjoyment, new experiences, development... and the list can go on and on and of course change as I go on through life. It's altered by my relationships (both personal and work related), my community (how I'm involved, or not involved), world events (both good and bad) and much more. For the sake of this little article and for those who casually will read it, I believe that most of us can agree that life's path is not just a straight line. It has different characteristics and/or meanings for different people (values, cultural influences and the like). It is certainly influenced by our decisions and by those of others, and it can be challenging and rewarding at the same time.

What about when life gets out of hand just a bit? Those times when you get the feeling that there is not enough time in the day, you're just so busy with work and what a colleague of mine often says "putting out fires", or just dealing with "life's little challenges". Below is a list of tips that I have decided to put together that might be of some use to you. Some of these I have generated based on my own experiences, some came from others around me who felt I could use some "words of wisdom", while others came from educational material or from perusing book stores, internet, and the like. These tips are not meant to be a substitute for seeking appropriate services or consultation regarding mental or physical health issues.

Tip # 1

Create Boundaries. Creating boundaries may seem difficult when we have been engaging in particular behaviors for a long period of time. When I read "Create Boundaries" or hear someone mention "Boundaries", I often think about work. In some way, shape, or form, whether you get up in the morning and leave at 8am for work, or university classes, or to raise children and embrace the responsibility of a household, it is often a good idea to have some sort of boundary in place that allows you to balance the "work" and other aspects of life. For instance, getting some "me time" (watching a favorite show, reading a book in a quiet room, planning a quality time activity with family) can help recharge the batteries, and feel like work or other responsibilities are not only what your life is about.

Tip # 2

Stop Putting Things Off. Let me be the first to admit I procrastinate from time to time. Personally, I haven't met anybody yet who hasn't procrastinated in some way. A friend told me not long ago, "the longer I put things off the harder it is to motivate myself to get things done". I have to agree...Not only do I feel that procrastination takes a fair bit of energy, but it can waste a lot of time as well. If you make the decision to do something, start it and get it done. The achievement will feel good in the end, and you may have opened up some free time for yourself.

Tip # 3

Step Out of the Virtual World. The everyday world will be forever changing and of course, we as humans (organisms) are expected to adapt accordingly. Change can be a wonderful thing, but there is much opportunity to get caught up in it sometimes, losing focus. The world of Facebook, Twitter, texting, emailing, and other forms of social media, not only in personal life but business as well are a high-pace, time consuming, and engulfing phenomena. Disconnect yourself for a little bit, get back to the basics of interpersonal relationships (meet someone for a coffee, a walk, plan a movie night). For some of us, technology is challenging, it can feel like work sometimes but getting to the basics of interpersonal relationships and living in the moment could simplify things a little.

Tip # 4

A To Do List. Here is something that has been preached to me time and time again over the years by my parents, teachers, life-partner, and, well...friends. I'm sure that many people generate To-Do-Lists for household chores, work related activities, and so on. And, if they are used correctly (which for me would mean not having too many items listed that could not be completed in the allotted time, or listing the most important items to be completed first) they can be a wonderful thing for those "need to be done tasks". However, I think it would also be a good idea to have a To-Do-List for fun activities or things that you would normally not get a chance to do because you feel there is just not enough time for it. Having such a list may be helpful in reducing stress, allowing you to relax and have fun, stay connected with your interests and more.

Tip # 5

Lowering Your Level of Personal Consumption. What does that mean? I think it could mean very different things for different people. For this article I will relate this statement to money and expenditures. At some point in life, we are likely to be affected by stress related to income and expenses. Learning some basic, effective money management skills early can be an effective way to simplify the "money in, money out" process. You can certainly talk to your accountant or banker about options, but for the average person, we may engage in impulsive purchasing, spend money unwisely or not be aware of the possessions we already have. There

are pros and cons to virtually everything we do, we may not be aware of them all the time, but they are there. Creating more awareness could be a very effective tool in life.

Buying less or spending more wisely, with an awareness of qualities such as durability, energy efficiency, functionality, as well as being aware of our “needs vs. wants” may have some benefits.

Tip # 6

Talk to Someone. This is my favorite tip on this list. When we keep things to ourselves, especially some of “life’s little challenges”, we are virtually adding ingredients to a recipe for more difficulties to come; not just mentally, but physically as well. Having a particular someone to talk to, who can offer a different opinion or point of view, can make a world of difference. As surprising as this next sentence may be, I feel it is true. There is someone in your family or among your friends who would prefer you talk to them about those “life challenges” than to let them grow and create more significant issues in the future.

I hope these six, short and basic, simplifying tips in some way becomes useful for you. If you wanted to immerse yourself at the book stores and on the internet you will find information upon information and pages after pages of tips, strategies, and activities to simplify life in some way. If you’re not careful, it can be quite stressful gathering all the available material and getting through it, much less put it to use. I purposely kept the tips to a minimum of six. Let’s face it, if we are looking for ways to simplify our lives we do not want a hefty list of changes to make at the onset. I like “baby steps”. For example, I have heard time and time again that losing small amounts of weight over a longer period of time is not only a healthier approach to losing weight but contributes more efficiently to actually maintaining your weight loss. That is how I view the process of “active change” and making a difference...taking baby steps, putting supports in place to allow a healthier, more effective transition of change.

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