

MINIMALISM

for a More Focused Life



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Steven C. Keller

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Food, shelter and clothing – these are the basic necessities of life. So, where does the need for the latest iPhone or owning an automobile that can give you directions, tell you the location of the nearest restaurant, or make a phone call factor into things?

The answer is quite simple. The need for more fuels people to buy and do a wide range of things and is basic to human nature. Some individuals understand that the continuing quest for more only brings more stuff rather than happiness or whatever you may be searching for. Other people haven't grasped that understanding yet. For those who do, that's where minimalism comes into the picture. It's a way to attain happiness by being content with less. What a concept.

The idea that less is more is not just a fashion statement. It's a way of life for people who want to get back to the basics and focus on what is most important.

What is Minimalism?

Let's start with the basics. Society suggests that we need to own more and do more to "be happy and fulfilled". However, when you take a close look at the bare minimum of what you actually need, you see that it is a far cry from what you have been lead to believe.

While minimalism involves ridding yourself of some extra baggage and doing more with less, it is so much more. Minimalism is not only a way of life. It's a way of being. It's about adopting a philosophy that promotes rich life experiences and memories rather than living for the next hot gadget or trying to keep up with the neighbor's thing-oriented lifestyle. Minimalism is truly about making happiness a top priority by getting rid of the excesses including things, behaviors, and thoughts so you can focus on whatever enriches your life.

What Minimalism is Not

When you hear the word minimalism, do you think of living in a log cabin without electricity and living off the land? If so, you are not alone. Minimalism is not necessarily about giving up everything you own, sitting crossed-legged in a field of daisies, and eating berries off the bush. Many minimalists have fine homes, cars, careers, and families that they adore.

Minimalism isn't an irresponsible lifestyle. People who have a minimalistic outlook just choose to keep things simple to cut out the excessive, unfulfilling responsibilities. This allows the focus to be placed on the things that matter most. That applies to attitudes, actions, and materials.

Minimalism is not about being a martyr or complacent. It's not about giving up things for attention or just saying you're happy when you aren't. Neither is it about depriving yourself of important things.

Does Your Stuff Own You?

Do you own your house or does our house own you? Stop and think for a moment. Do you find yourself constantly trying to find a place to store things in the garage, the attic, and the basement? If so, you are not alone. When you own too much stuff, the stuff begins to take over your life. While it's nice to get a few "hot" items occasionally, it's important to be able to distinguish between wants and needs. It is also essential to identify and prioritize what is most important in your life.

The less you own, the less you have to take care of and the less you are responsible for doing. If you want to get fresh fruits and vegetables in your body, you can do that without buying a juicer. Simply buy fresh fruits and vegetables. Better yet, grow them yourself. Rather than buying an elliptical, go for a walk, even during the winter months. The cold air can do wonders for you after being cooped up indoors. You don't necessarily need a bulky piece of exercise equipment to get healthy.

Do you find yourself buying new seasonal items before reducing the previous season's clutter? This may apply to you if you don't give away or figure out where to put the unsuitable Christmas gifts you received before you're out buying gardening supplies.

It happens to all of us. The rituals of the current season take control and you feel you are "supposed to be" doing certain things. The result is that you feel overwhelmed and out of control. There are too many things to organize, clean, or maintain and not enough time for rest, relaxation, and time with family. It's a never-ending to-do list.

Is Minimalism Right for You?

When you are searching for answers or looking for a way to make your life more meaningful and fulfilling, you have many options. Taking a minimalistic approach is one of them. However, is this option right one for you? Here are a few questions common to people who choose to simplify their lives in order to ultimately have more, do more, and be more, without sacrificing the things that are most important to their happiness and wellbeing. Do these questions sound familiar?

- Is there more to life than this?
- How can I spend more quality time with my family?
- Will I ever complete everything on my to-do list?
- How can I conquer my debt?
- What's my purpose in life?
- Why is my job so stressful?
- How can I find more freedom?
- What can I do to be of more service to others?
- How can I teach my children about character and values?

If you've asked yourself one or more of these questions, there is a good chance that this approach will help you solve some of your problems and enable you to focus on finding happiness, fulfillment, freedom, and much more.

Benefits of the Minimalistic Approach

Minimalism is one of the few approaches that can literally be incorporated at any stage of life and in any situation or existing lifestyle. Because of its versatility and adaptability, many people find it to be beneficial. Minimalism can open up a whole new world of possibilities for you and grows with you as your life changes for the better.

There are many benefits to simplifying your life. However, the specific benefits will be different for each person. For example, the benefits for a twenty-something, single woman will be different from those of a forty-something, married man with children. Having said that, there are many common benefits minimalists experience as they go through each stage of life. Let's look at a few benefits of living a more simplistic, minimalistic life.

Gain More by Simplifying and Reducing

Imagine having a simple cell phone. Having less data hungry features and using fewer gigabytes equates to more money in your pocket. What does having more money mean to you? It may mean many things, such as fewer financial worries, needing to work overtime less often, and having the money you need to do things that bring you joy.

Technology and its advances are good and have their place. However, you can get along and even thrive without the latest and greatest model, the extra bells and whistles, as well as the perceived convenience.

That convenience is costing you. It's costing you family time and your health may be suffering from the stress of all the extra work. How much do you have to work to pay that cellphone bill each month? Chances are, your cell phone bill is in the \$100.00 to \$300.00 range every month, especially if you have a family.

Minimize that bill to simplify your life and make room for more enriching experiences. And, this is only one example of how being a minimalist can change your life. It's easy to do when you focus on your goals. What do you want – more stuff or more time, money, and joy?

Develop Meaningful Connections

Minimalistic practices allow you to strengthen the connections to the people in your life. Think about your use of technology as an example. Do you really need the latest game console and programs? You could get just as much or more satisfaction and happiness by playing a simple board game with your family and connecting with them.

What would happen if you only used your cell phone for emergencies? You could pick up the home phone to contact other friends and neighbors rather than using the cell or sending an email. When you hear someone's voice, it's easier to understand them and the meaning behind

their words. Reducing and simplifying your technology use gives you the opportunity to connect in a more personal way with the people in your life.

Finding Peace

You might think that living with less would be stressful and complicated. All those things that you buy and use daily seem to make your life run faster and easier, right? While modern conveniences do provide some of that, there is one thing to keep in mind – with things comes responsibility. However, if you keep your life simple and uncluttered, freedom will surely follow.

The more you have, the more there is to take care of. For example, you need to follow up on that cell phone plan when the contract expires. You need to winterize and store the boat each year. You need to take another class to stay competitive at work. You need to get that knocking in the car engine diagnosed before you are left on the side of the road, again. The potential list of responsibilities, whether necessary or not, related to things just keeps growing while it steals your peace and joy with each thing that is added.

All these responsibilities keep you away from simply "being" and enjoying your life to the fullest. When was the last time you had an opportunity to just be? How about just sitting quietly and being still? Do you always need to take a vacation to escape the stress of daily living? How would it feel to take a vacation to explore and enjoy yourself rather than taking one to get away from problems?

Taking a simple approach to life gives you the opportunity to slow down, have less, and be more. The less you have to take care of, the more freedom and peace you have.

More Time for What Matters

The more stuff you accumulate, the more you have to take care of. In turn, that means more stress and strife. A simple life means little maintenance and more time for yourself, your passions, your hobbies, and your family.

More Money for More Value

The more you buy into using "the latest and greatest thing" to fill or fix the empty spot in your life, the more money you need and spend. Stop throwing money into things that don't add value to your life. When you reduce and limit your spending, you will have enough money to go towards the things that you value and that bring you happiness.

Being in the Moment

Minimalism teaches you how to be in the moment. What exactly does "being in the moment" mean? Well, being in the moment means that you are mindful of what is happening to and around you. Your focus is on the here and now.

If you are on vacation with your family, your head is not filled with thoughts about what you need to take care of when you return home. All of your responsibilities are already taken care of, there are no more things to buy, and you have the peace of mind and focus to be present with your family.

Happy at Last

When you have a minimalist mindset, more of your focus is on things that add value to your life and make you happy. How many people do you know of that are happy with what they have. You probably know someone who is afraid to do something new or who is afraid to part with a few precious dollars. That fear paralyzes them and keeps them from taking action, which could add value and happiness to their lives. That's not what minimalism is. Minimalism is truly being content with what you have in the moment you have it.

By taking on a minimalist mindset, you train your brain to be content where you are with what you have.

Finding Your Purpose

Once you have opened yourself up to the idea of minimalism, you will need to train your brain and take on the practices necessary to continue to have the self-discipline to follow through with it. Nothing worth having comes without doing a little bit of work. However, the rewards can be great.

Once you take on the practice of minimalism and make it a habit, you may discover more time to find your true life's purpose. With good habits put into place, with more time and even more money, the possibilities to tap into your life purpose are endless.

How to Become a Minimalist

While everyone is different, as are their needs and priorities, when you embrace a minimalistic lifestyle, you may want to consider incorporating the following strategies. As you progress and master each item that applies to you, keep adding another to make your life even better and more meaningful.

Eliminate Clutter

Everyone can reduce and clear away clutter several times a year. However, you must make a commitment to stop allowing clutter to accumulate. It's easier to keep excess items out of your life than it is to clean up the mess after they take over. This is true of everything from ideas to unneeded materials.

Begin by clearing out the clutter in your home. Gather the family around and make an executive decision as to whether you are going to have a garage sale or donate. Next have everyone take responsibility for their own stuff. Set up some rules. For example, if you have not used it in more than three months, then out it goes. Don't hold onto anything that falls under the category of, "someday we might need this." Sometimes you might hold onto wrapping paper or gift bags. If you need a gift bag, you can always purchase it, put the gift in and no more clutter. Stop holding onto stuff. The more stuff you hold onto, the more clutter you will have and the more you will have to clean.

Next, separate everything into categories such as holiday materials, school supplies, and seasonal supplies. Once you have the bare minimum of necessities with no extras, move on the next step.

Get it organized. Devise a system of organization that works for you and your family. Make sure that everyone is on board and that this is not just a one-time project. It is a new way of life for your family. Be consistent with this mantra, be a role model and have integrity. Mean what you say and say what you mean.

Whether your organization system consists of plastic tubs or labeled cardboard boxes, getting organized is important. Once your system is in place, keep clutter to a minimum with the following tips for keeping yourself and family on track.

- Be a role model and be consistent.
- Set firm rules about buying things.
- Commit to being proactive.
- Use clutter to teach children about family values and character.

Goodbye Multi-Tasking Hello Focus

While you may think that multi-tasking is a way to get more things done, it's actually not the case. When you multi-task, you overload your brain. You cause your mind to think about too many things at the same time. This causes stress, which eventually may lead to health issues, dissatisfaction, a lack of motivation, and much more.

Another disadvantage is that none of the things you do is representative of your best work. While it may seem that you are accomplishing twice as much, you are actually only doing half the job. When you become a minimalist, one of the goals you want to achieve is to do one thing at a time.

How many times have you tried to make a call or check an email while doing something else? You may drop the phone. People may get annoyed because you are not giving them the respect or attention they deserve. You may be late for a meeting because you are responding to a text. In other words, you make mistakes or open the door to potential problems. Slow down, do one thing at a time. Focus on doing one task at a time and doing it well.

The Art of Saying No

One of the hardest, yet most rewarding, things you will learn to do is to say no. If you are like most people, saying no can be difficult in the beginning. Don't worry. It gets easier with practice.

Take baby steps. In the past, you probably followed up saying no with a lengthy explanation in order to soften your decision. Avoid doing that. Start by simply saying no without an explanation. You will find that the more you practice, the quicker it will become a habit. And, guess what? When you say no to things you don't have time for or don't need, you are actually making time for things that are more important. When those opportunities come along, you won't feel regret because didn't say no to something else.

Avoid Wasting Time

We all do things that waste time. We do it to avoid thinking about things, especially things we don't agree with or want to do. While daydreaming may fuel our creativity, if it becomes a habit,

then it is unhealthy and is an excessive behavior that must go in order to make room for productivity, efficiency, satisfaction, and extra available time to be used when you need it.

Have you ever noticed how you go on social media, “just for a minute” and you wind up there for more than an hour? If you just must get on a social media site, set a time limit and stick to it. Sometimes social media can drag you down. Limit your time on anything that could become addictive or where you find it difficult to keep track of your time.

When you need a break, do some light stretching, meditate, take a walk, or just close your eyes for ten minutes to recharge your battery. You get to pick and choose where your time goes. Remember to ask yourself if the activity will add value to your life. Choose wisely.

Examine Your Relationships

Don't be afraid to walk away from relationships that don't enhance your life. However, if this applies to a family member or a co-worker, it may not be possible to let go of the relationship completely. That doesn't mean that you have no options. To keep it civil, minimize your time with these people and set firm boundaries with them.

Setting clear boundaries takes plenty of practice, but once they are established, everyone will know that you say what you mean and mean what you say. So, if you can't eliminate negative relationships, you can certainly put healthy boundaries in place and set limits. This will free you up for more joy and more time for things that are important to you. You and you alone are responsible for how you allow people to interact with you.

Take Time to Give Back

Many people find that leading a minimalistic lifestyle opens opportunities to help and give to others. As your life becomes simplified, you have more experiences, material things, time, money, happiness, and a host of other things to share.

One of your goals may be to focus on your family and friends. However, you don't want to limit your giving to your immediate family and current circle of friends only. When you limit your giving to a small group, your life experiences and opportunities also become more limited. It's in the sharing and giving that you grow the most as a person.

Your money and time are only as valuable as how you choose to use them. If you really want to make a difference, find your purpose, or grow and become more, broaden your concept of giving. Look for opportunities to share your knowledge, experiences, time, etc.

Resist Impulse Buying

Get into the habit of asking yourself one question before you buy – “Does this thing add value to my life?” You don't need more merchandise to store in the closet. Just because it was on sale, does not mean that buying it is a good choice. Think about walking out of the store without that extra piece of clothing. If you can last the week without purchasing it, you didn't really need it to begin with.

Start with small purchases. For example, a snack that is on sale or even laundry detergent. Don't stock your freezer full of food that will last you into next century. Allow your food supply to dwindle down a bit. Use what you have first and then buy it.

Save for Now

We have all heard of saving for retirement. What about saving for right now? Take all that extra money that you would have used to purchase merchandise and put it into a savings account. You'll have more money for your future and more money for today. Take a trip and enjoy time with your family. It doesn't have to be an extensive trip. It can be a simple camping adventure, activity, or any event that makes your lives more meaningful and memorable.

At the beginning of this report, there was a list of questions to help you decide if simplifying your life and adopting a minimalistic lifestyle was right for you. Now, you have a better idea of what minimalism is, how you can incorporate a "back to basics" philosophy into your life, and what you can gain from keeping things simple. There is one more question for you to answer – "Can I really meet my goals and be happy without simplifying my life?" If you answer "yes" to this question, congratulations and more power to you! If your answer to the question is "no", you have a unique opportunity to make meaningful changes that will enable you to have, do, and be more than you ever anticipated. Congratulations!

Minimalism Checklist

Adopting a minimalistic lifestyle can be exciting and rewarding. However, with so many options available, it may be difficult to tell where and how to begin incorporating it into your daily life. Here is a checklist that will help you get on the right path to lead a successful minimalist lifestyle in two major areas – your home and office spaces and in your personal life.

When you get stuck, keep this checklist handy and it will act as your quick and easy guide to living a minimalistic life you love.

For Your Home-Office

- Take Inventory – this is perhaps the most important step to get started. Begin your inventory by walking through your home and office and making a mental note of what is there, what should be there, and what needs to go.
- Grab a notebook and pen. Label a page with "Unnecessary." Walk through again and list the unnecessary items on the page. Once you have a clear list of the unnecessary items, write down the reason why you keep those items around. For example, they have sentimental value or it's something you have on your to-do list but never get around to doing.
- Think about your list of unnecessary items and the reasons/excuses you still have them. Now, write down how having this item will enhance your life and the last time you actually used it. If there is no real value in keeping it, it has no sentimental value, or it has not been used in the past three months, throw it away or give it away.
- Get an accountability partner – In order to part with material possessions, you will need an accountability partner. Have your list handy and share it with your accountability partner. You can make it a fun day where dinner is the reward for a day of tossing and donating stuff. Have your accountability partner remind you just how useless that third stapler on your desk is. Donate it or give it away and have your accountability partner pry it out of your hands if necessary. Once you have taken these steps, go out, and celebrate.
- Create a storage system – Whether it's sophisticated or simple, buy or make a storage system that works for you. Have your accountability partner help you set up an organizational system. Label everything. When working in your office, do not keep more than two or three of anything including pens, pencils, and other supplies. Purchase more when you are down to the last item.
- Ask for help – Get your accountability partner to walk through this process with you. Ask them to allow you to phone them when you have difficulty resisting a "good deal" because you buy in bulk. You don't need it. Less is more.

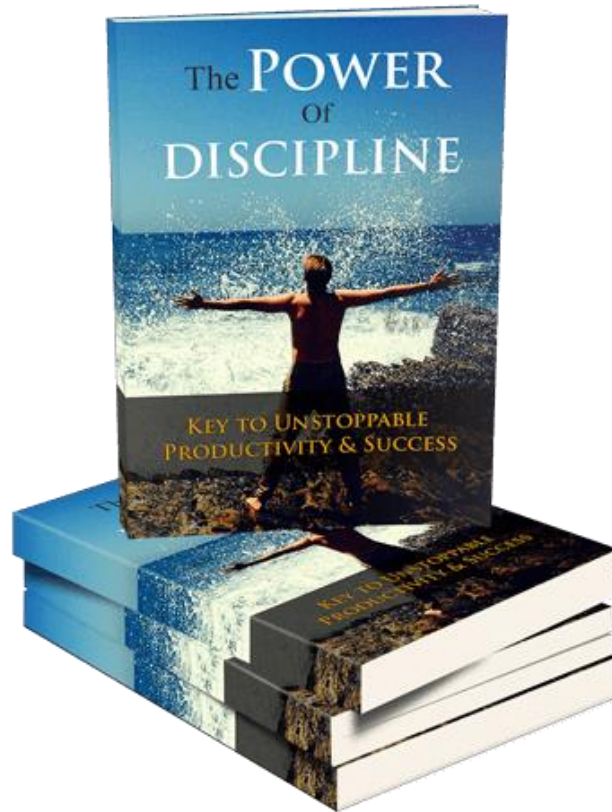
As you practice eliminating, reducing, and organizing items, your mindset begins to change to that of a minimalist. However, this is just the beginning. You need to keep this focus and momentum going. In everything you do, think twice. If you need help to resist buying something or in making a decision, don't hesitate to call in reinforcements. That is why you have an accountability partner.

In Your Personal Life

- Take responsibility for everything that you do. Nobody can make you buy something if you are self-disciplined and take responsibility for your actions.
- Make a declaration. Declare out loud to anyone who will listen that you are going to adopt a minimalistic lifestyle. Do not say that you are going to “try” minimalism. Say it emphatically and with confidence – “I am living a minimalistic lifestyle,” or “I am a minimalist.”
- Ask for support. Gather your friends, family members, and co-workers. Tell them of your decision to adopt a minimalistic lifestyle. Explain how important it is for you to open your life to more time, money, and happiness.
- Find a support group. Join a minimalistic Meetup group in your area. If you cannot find one, create one. Get the word out about the group and your lifestyle change by sharing your experiences and taking action. Lead by example to enrich your own life as well as inspiring others.
- Be a role model. If you expect your children to follow suit and your peers to respect you, then be a role model for living with less. While everyone else is out buying the latest and greatest version of something new, enjoy the knowledge that things don't really make you happy.
- Focus on one thing at a time. Do one chore or task at a time and do it well. In time, you will receive recognition for a job well done rather than for half listening while multi-tasking. People appreciate and expect your undivided attention.
- Learn to be a delegator. Start with one small task per week as to not overwhelm those you are seeking help from, as this will only cause rebellion. Ease into delegating on a weekly basis.
- Learn how to say no. Saying no, in the beginning, may be difficult. Take your time and practice it weekly. Keep it simple by saying, “No.” Don't elaborate or make excuses. Get used to awkward silence, repeated requests, and pleading. Continue to say, “I wish I could, but I simply can't.” While it sounds simple, it does take quite a bit of practice.
- Avoid time-wasters. Take inventory and eliminate unhealthy behaviors and attitudes such as spending too much time on social media sites, constantly texting, and watching too much television. Replace those with things that bring you and others more joy. Keep a record of how much time is wasted. Start to take that time back and declare it as your own. Spend time with family and friends; take up a hobby; pursue your passions; begin to tap into your life purpose.
- Be a conscious shopper. Ask yourself pertinent questions: Do I really need this? Is this an impulse buy? Can I survive one week without it? If the answer is yes, then take the money you didn't spend on the item and begin saving for special vacations, charitable causes and your retirement.

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