Beat: Lifestyle

Realizing We Don’t Need It All

How To Be Happy With Less

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USPA NEWS - Living with less is more than just decluttering, it’s about getting rid of all clutter, permanently. It’s about removing all the things that distract us from what’s important in our lives. That is how I try to live my life. I don’t have a lot, but what I do have is important to me.

For extreme minimalists, such as Andrew Hyde, who lives in Colorado in the US, it means owning only about 15 items. For others, it means getting rid of the excess until you are left with essentials, and your definition of essential might change. “A minimalist lifestyle entails being mindful about the things we own, the things we buy, and how we spend our time,” said Francine Jay, author of The Joy of Less. “It is a lifestyle that values experiences more than possessions.” Minimalism tends to thrive in countries that have accepted consumer culture, such as the US, UK and parts of Europe. It’s difficult to rebel against the get-more-stuff attitude if that isn’t your country’s way of life, but you can live a minimalist life anywhere and gain more money for savings and great experiences, and also have less stuff to take care of and clean.

How do you get back to the basics?

What will it take? Mental strength. Getting rid of your things requires commitment. You have to make a decision about every item you own, and that can be mentally taxing and it won’t happen overnight. “It almost certainly took you longer than one afternoon to collect all the possessions in your life, and it is going to take you longer than one afternoon to sort them out,” said Joshua Becker, a minimalist writer and blogger in Arizona.

How long you need to prepare? You can start the process today by putting a box in every room. “When you come across something you haven’t used in a long time, or ever, throw it in,” said Rachel Jonat, the Minimalist Mom who lives in the Isle of Man in the UK. “If you are scared about wanting those items again, hold onto the box for six months and then donate everything.” You may have to do some preparation to get into the right mindset, because a lot of us like our things. Things have a catch though. That big house and everything in it take time to clean and organize, and it takes money to maintain it as well. “Look at an item and think about how many hours you had to work, or will have to work, to pay for it,” Jonat said. Every piece you own is a chance to regain time or money if you sell it or give it away.

Do it now. Think about the places in your life where you feel anxiety or frustration, said Cristin Frank, US author of Living Simple, Free & Happy. “Too many decisions? Is your closet so crowded that things get lost or easily wrinkled?” Focus on those areas and deal with them first. Name brand clothes and household goods in good condition are perfect for eBay or Facebook Marketplace. Check recent sales of similar items to help you set a price.

Start small. You aren’t going to be able to declutter your life in a day, or even a week. And the process may seem really daunting. If you are feeling anxious about change, “try one thing for 30 days, starting with the easiest things to get rid of,” said Joshua Fields Millburn, a minimalist who lives in Montana and writes at TheMinimalists.com blog. Another strategy: Spend 15 minutes a day de-cluttering. Set a timer. You can make great progress when you race the clock.

Ditch the obvious things. Get some momentum by starting your giveaway pile with the items you clearly do not need, the mugs you never use, that ugly thing you received as a gift. Start a pile for a rummage or yard sale. You can also make it easier to part with things by passing them along to someone else who can use them via local charities. “Throwing it all in the garbage can make you feel guilty or wasteful,” Frank said.

Repurpose the money you’re saving. “My husband and I paid off our home in less than seven years with our minimalist lifestyle,” Frank said. “I was then able to quit my job and be a blogger and author full time.” For Francine Jay, living minimally allowed her and her husband to travel. “We lived in London for two years, and traveled throughout much of Europe and Asia during that time,” Jay said. Rachel Jonat and her husband paid off $80,000 in non-mortgage debt in less than three years. When you don’t squander money away on junk, you have more to put toward the essentials like your house payment, debt, retirement, and experiences.

Reassess after a few weeks and see how you feel. “Decluttering isn’t something you just do once,” Jay said. “It’s an ongoing process.” You may find it difficult to let go of certain items in the first or second round of purging, but on the third round it could end up on the giveaway pile. “It took me eight months to slowly pare down my possessions while constantly asking myself, ‘Does this thing add value to my life?’” Millburn said.

Be smart about future purchases. Shop only when you need something, not for fun or entertainment, Jay said. Before you buy, “make an inventory of what you already have,” Jay said. “Counting just how many shirts or kitchen gadgets you own will likely discourage you from purchasing anything new.” When you do add to your home, seek out versatile, multipurpose items.

Consider a big change. Moving into a smaller space isn’t for everyone. But if you are a renter and your lease is coming up, or you’re really struggling to manage your home payment each month, downsizing accomplishes a few things: It encourages less stuff, less time cleaning, and of course, smaller bills.

Do it smarter: Avoid comparing what you have with others. Your life is your own and you know what works for you. While you may not keep up with your neighbors who have every techno gadget known to man, you can have a small, comfortable house that has exactly what you need. My house is paid for and so is everything in it. Life is less stressful when you do not have that high, reoccurring debt. You can sit back and relax, enjoying what you do have.

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