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KEEPING IT SIMPLE.

By Dr. Michelle Robin



Yup, that's it. This article is about just one thing: keeping it simple. As I've reflected on my own life during the course of the past year, I realized that somewhere along the way, I forgot about how good simple is.

I start out every week by looking at my calendar on Sunday evening, and I inevitably find myself shaking my head, wondering how it happened to get so full, so quickly. Patient appointments, inter-office meetings, meetings outside the office, dinner appointments. I am overwhelmed before I even begin the week by virtue of all the commitments I've already made.

And, all too often, the things that are missing from that schedule are the things I really like the most. Spending quiet evenings at home. Getting a massage. Going to yoga class. Not only do I like those things the most, they are probably also the things that are the most beneficial for my overall health and wellbeing. These are the things that feed the body and the soul. And yet, they are so often forgotten.

Next, I visit my e-mail inbox. I am blessed with having many friends, and I can't imagine my life without them. But with friendship also comes the opportunity for clutter ... in a well-intentioned way, but clutter nonetheless.

"Will you have dinner with me on Tuesday?"

"Do you want to go to this conference?"

"Will you have time to stop by this event?"

"Can we have a meeting about this?"

"Will you help me teach this class?"

"Will you come to my birthday party?"

Will you, can you, won't you, when can you ... you know the drill. I'm sure your e-mail inbox looks much the same as mine. But the thing is, I can never do all the things I'm invited to do, asked to do, feel like I should do or just flat out want to do. There are just not enough hours in a day. But yet, before I know it, I've said "yes," "yes," and "yes" again – so many times that, in the veritable blink of an eye, there's not a free moment in my days or in my evenings. Not even a moment where I can just sit still and breathe. And, I don't know about you, but when I overbook myself, I start to feel a little panicky. When I commit to weeks filled with busy, action-packed workdays and even more full evenings, I find my battery quickly running low and am always wishing I had found a way to filter things a little more efficiently.

Then, I look around my house and realize that, somehow, when I wasn't looking, perhaps when I was having all those busy days and busier evenings, clutter crept in. Too much junk on the kitchen island, a pile of unfolded laundry on the top of the bureau in the bedroom and a pile of papers on my desk (and I have no idea whatsoever what that pile contains) and other things I meant to get to and/or put away – then just ran out of time to make that happen.

Is any of this sounding familiar? I have a feeling that your answer is a resounding, "Yes!" Well, I have a solution. Let's start by remembering just one word: simple.

Simple means remembering to breathe. It means leaving room in a busy week to actually get some work done, instead of running from meeting to meeting. Simple means being realistic about what you can and can't do. Simple means learning that it's okay to not do everything, but to do the things you can do really, really well. Simple means consciously finding time for yourself each and every day and making sure you've got—what I call—"white space" in your life. Simple means learning to say no, because when you say no to others, what it really means is that you're saying yes to yourself.

Start working on the clutter that surrounds you. Get rid of the things you don't really need and put the things that are cluttering spaces away, where they belong. Then, take a hard look at your calendar – the way that I will be doing this coming Sunday night. Get rid of the things that aren't essential and reschedule where necessary so that you leave time for breathing. Leave time for you to be you. My suggestion is that you go through the year, in advance, and schedule that white space that I mentioned. Book it and try to respect it. You won't always be able to do it, but if you can set the expectation that you'll have that white space to yourself, each and every week, you'll be halfway there.

And if you need a reminder, use the below as your mantra to challenge yourself to remember – and practice:

- **Say no and mean it.**
- **De-clutter your house – Less is more.**
- **Book your white space – and try to respect it.**

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