

Simplicity



The Six Principles

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"Our life is frittered away by detail... Simplify, simplify."

Henry Thoreau

Introduction

It is 2004. And my life feels pretty complicated.

- **I find life and the world confusing and overwhelming.** My mind is so overwhelmed by my confused thoughts and all the input from the hectic outside world that I mostly just feel paralyzed.
- **My mind is cluttered with unhelpful habits.** It often dips into negative thought habits like pessimism, overcomplicating and overthinking things and worrying.
- **My effectiveness in school just plain sucks.** I get up a few hours before lunch, miss a few classes, do some unimportant busy work and then procrastinate until I cram just before a big exam.
- **My fitness levels has gone down the dumps.** I put on probably 35 pounds of fat produced by a steady diet of too much food, too much potato chips and Pepsi and running the 200 meters to the bus stop as my alibi for exercise.
- **My social skills aren't too good either.** I haven't had a date with a woman in years. I am too shy, timid and lack the confidence and self-esteem to express myself most of the time with anyone.
- **My home is disorganized and cluttered** with stuff I don't really need.

Things aren't going too well. Something has to change. Luckily for me, I'm curious and love to learn. So I start moving slowly and wobbly forward and upward to improve my life.

As I write this it's April of 2011 and things are simpler and better:

- **I live a simple life** in my calming and uncluttered home with only the most important things.
- **My focus is simple and sharp.** I do more of critical importance between breakfast and lunch than I used to do in a couple of days in 2004.
- **My thought habits are light and positive.** I am not weighed down by worries and overthinking like I use to be. Pessimism and overthinking aren't the default modes, a light mindfulness and flow are. Instead of feeling confused I feel an inner stillness.
- **I am doing regular and intense workouts every week.** I eat healthy and not too much anymore. I have lost my excess weight, all those pounds. I have a few fundamental health habits that, at the age of 31, keep me in the best shape I have been since I was a kid.
- **I am no longer shy or socially unconfident as a default mode.** My social skills and relationships skills have improved greatly. I find it pretty easy to talk to anyone and feel no inner obstacles standing in my way for that anymore. A couple of months ago I celebrated my one year anniversary with my awesome girlfriend. It feels like a natural thing to be social and open these days.

How did I make this huge shift?

That is what I will share in this course. I will share the most essential techniques, strategies and advice I have found over these last few years. I will teach you how to make the shifts you want to make in your life.

The shifts that make life simpler, lighter and focused in a way that help you to find time and energy to fully enjoy what is most important in your life. And in the simplest way I can I will share how you can simplify and improve much faster than I did and make those changes stick.

Now, let's get started. Let's start moving towards simplicity.

About the author



My name is Henrik Edberg and I'm the author of three books: [The Art of Relaxed Productivity](#), [The Power of Positivity](#) and [The 7 Timeless Habits of Happiness](#). I'm also the creator of the popular personal development website [the Positivity Blog](#) and the Positivity Newsletter where I write articles and newsletters about improving your happiness, social life, health, effectiveness and general awesomeness.

Feel free to follow me on [Twitter](#), become a fan on [Facebook](#) or send me an email by using [this contact form](#).

How to use this course

This course is pretty in-depth.

It contains all kinds of helpful things such as PDF guides, printable workbooks and audio guides spread over six modules.

The six modules are:

- 1 – The Six Principles
- 2 – Simple Productivity
- 3 – Simple Thinking and Mindfulness
- 4 – Simple Social Skills and Relationships
- 5 – Simple Health and Fitness
- 6 – Simple Living

Now, it's pretty simple to use the course. You can move directly to the PDF document of the module. Or you can start by listening to one or more of the audio guides in each module.

I recommend that you start with reading this guide containing the foundational principles. After that you can go through the modules in order (that would be my suggestion). Or move on to the module that you feel most interested and in need of now.

But do consider going through the module on Simple Productivity next even if you want to skip forward to some other module. I recommend that because that module contains advice and a workbook on things like goal setting, motivation and creating habits. Those are topics that will be useful for you to know something about even if your main priority may be getting shape or improving your social skills.

Whatever path you may decide on be sure to then add habits one – or a few smaller ones simultaneously – at a time and attach them to rituals in, for instance, the morning or evening. You can for example add the 3 habits of simple productivity explained in the next module to the end of your morning ritual – after breakfast and brushing your teeth – to get the most important thing of the day done in a focused manner.

Or you can add a habit of listening fully to your family or friends to improve and deepen your relationships at the end of an evening ritual.

It will be more work for you but I also highly recommend printing out the workbook for the module you are currently studying as you move forward through this course. Yes, you can just read and listen and get a lot out of it.

But the ones that get the most out of a course like this are the ones that put in that extra work and start to apply what they have learned to their own situations by using the workbooks. By using the workbooks you are taking action instead of just being a passive consumer of the information. This will motivate you and help you to find specific solutions and plans for you own situation. And that will be the start, the first push that put you into forward motion that will result in sustainable change.

So for your own sake, make the extra effort to use the workbooks as best you can to help yourself to make your hopes and dreams into reality.

There is some space to evaluate your progress after two months and space to plan the next month of simplifying in the last workbook (The Simple Living Workbook). So print that one out – or use your journal if you got one – so you can evaluate how things are really going no matter what module you are working on.

"The ability to simplify means to eliminate the unnecessary so that the necessary may speak."

Hans Hofmann

1. Focus on What Really Matters

In this first module we will take a look at six principles that will help you to simplify your life in the various areas in the upcoming modules.

You'll find these principles spread throughout the rest of course too as a foundation for the simplified life.

The first principle is to focus on what really matters in your life. What do I mean by that?

I mean that you have to drill down in various areas of your life and find the things that matter the most to you and will give you the best results.

This is about setting priorities and sticking to them as best you can. Some of the most important things in my life overall is for example:

- The people closest to me.
- My health.
- Doing what I love (writing, creating and helping people).

Now, those are the things that are most important to me in life and that I want to improve even more and spend lots of time and energy on.

I can do that in a more effective way by finding what is most important – what gives me the best results so to speak – and doing more of that and discarding or reducing doing the things that give me very little or no positive results.

Finding the things that are the most important can take some time and effort and are not always what you may think. You may for example discover that it more important to be fully there and not doing very much at all with someone close to you to deepen the relationship rather than trying to cram in a much activities as the two of you can in one weekend.

In many cases the most important thing is often pretty obvious though. So why do we not do it? Well, one big reason is simply that it is also most difficult and hard thing you have to do that day. Creating something or doing an intense work out is harder than checking your email one more time or taking a short walk.

But there are other reasons too such as not knowing where to start or not doing your new actions long enough for them to stick and become habits you feel drawn to do each day.

In this course we will be highly focused on those most important things in each area of life. By doing them and reducing and discarding less important things life becomes so much easier. Your daily schedule becomes less packed. Your mind becomes more focused and less stressed.

You still have to work hard and you have to do the things that you may feel a bit reluctant or resistant towards doing, at least in the beginning. But you will also work smarter and spend more time and energy on the things you know pay off – this increases your motivation to take action – and on the things that mean most to you in life.

"Besides the noble art of getting things done, there is the noble art of leaving things undone. The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of non-essentials."

Lin Yutang

2. Set Limits & Do Less

To have more time and energy for what is most important in life we can for example increase our energy levels via exercise and healthier food. I will go more into that later on but an even simpler solution is to set limits.

By setting strict limits you can open up your daily and weekly life and find more freedom. This is a simple thing that is easy to miss in today's stressed society that is overloaded with choices and information.

Yes, having as many choices as many of us have today is wonderful. But it can also become a burden and lead to stress as we feel overwhelmed and confused a lot of the time.

By becoming stricter with what you spend time and energy on and how much you spend on those things each day life become lighter and simpler.

A few examples:

- Setting a limit on how many minutes you will spend on Facebook or in your inbox each day.
- Setting a limit on how much time you will spend with social commitments this week to also have time for solitude and other things that are essential to you.
- Setting short time limits for small decisions in your daily life to overcome the negative habits of overthinking and indecisiveness.

“Success in any endeavor requires single-minded attention to detail and total concentration.”

Willie Sutton

3. Do One Thing at a Time

An important part of keeping things and life simple is doing just one thing at a time.

Why is this so important?

Because it helps you to keep your focus single-mindedly on what you are doing right now. This will allow you to perform better and achieve results of higher quality. It will often also let you do something quicker because when you peel away the distractions and focus on just one thing you move faster.

By doing just one thing at a time your mind becomes effective but at the same time stays as relaxed as it can. No extra confusion or stress is added.

This is one of those things you have to try for yourself though to understand how much of a difference it makes. You may think that you aren't that stressed and are doing things quite well while multi-tasking. But if you single-task everything for a while you realize that you are most likely carrying around underlying stress and confusion that you didn't know was there and can result in negative thoughts and emotions.

The difference between how you feel when doing the same task or when being with someone in single-tasking versus multi-tasking mode can be eye-opening.

“The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, nor to worry about the future, but to live the present moment wisely and earnestly.”
Buddha

4. Be Here Now and Enjoy the Journey

An essential key to a simpler life is to dream, to learn from the past and to plan for the future but then to shift your attention back to the present moment.

Living in the now is of vital importance because here your attention is not split. It is just focused on the task at hand or the person in front of you. You are fully here and as mentioned in the previous principle on doing one thing at a time, there are many advantages to going about things this way.

Not just because it improves your performance and results at work or in school.
Not just because many of your worries and negative feelings come from thinking too much about the past or making up disaster scenarios in your mind about the future.
Not just because it will enable you to improve your relationships and social skills by being fully there, flexible and light on your mental feet.

But also because the journey is the big part of life and it's important to enjoy it along the way. It is important to not get caught up in always thinking about your goals and reaching them.

Yes, reaching a goal can feel great for a while but after while you are back on the winding path of your life again. So you better make sure that you enjoy what is here now too because that is where you will be spending most of your life.

"It had long since come to my attention that people of accomplishment rarely sat back and let things happen to them. They went out and happened to things."

Leonardo Da Vinci

5. Be a Responsible Person of Action

Now, the principles described so far may sound good. But there is always the problem that they will just stay on the page as perhaps some inspiration and sources of good feelings from time to time.

That would be a waste. Because just reading about how to change and improve your life will change very little. Looking to me or any other personal development writer or any other person at all to change your life will not change much.

Your life is your responsibility you know.

Yes, I can help you with a course like this. Your friends and family and random strangers can help you with advice and support. But in the end it's up to you. It's you who have to accept the responsibility for your life and realize that if you want something to be different in it then you have to take action to change that.

Along the way you will find help but you have to take that action each day or week yourself.

You don't have to start big. You don't have to face your biggest fear right now. But you have to get started and you have to take action. Any small start and action is better than none at all.

"First we make our habits, then our habits make us."
Charles C. Noble

6. Sustainable Change Through Habits & Rituals

Taking action and preferably a lot of it over time can change your life. But how can you actually make sure that you take the right actions consistently and integrate what you learn in this course into your life?

By creating new habits and replacing old and less helpful ones. And by stringing small and big habits together into rituals that you do during your day or week.

Changing your life isn't that easy. Humans are most often more or less resistant to change. So you have to go about this the right way to get the results you want.

By cultivating the right habits and rituals in your life you form a new sort of stability for yourself. A stability that will support both a simplified life but also a life of success and improvement. I will show you how to go about changing your habits in the most effective way and also what to avoid so you don't do the same mistakes that I and others have done in the past.

By building this foundation of habits and rituals much of your improvements will over time to a large degree happen on autopilot. And by having this structure there - perhaps counter-intuitively - will be more time and energy over for you to be spontaneous and creative too. Structure does not equal a boring life without spontaneity and fun. In my experience the opposite happens.