



Is your life harder than it has to be?

Leading a simple life is not always as simple as it's cracked up to be. People inadvertently make choices that create stress, chaos and frenzy in their lives. Here are eight ways that people overcomplicate their lives and a few strategies to simplify:

Problem #1: Over-scheduling. We all do this from time to time. There are two times of year that are particularly crazy; the month of May and the holidays. Many of us suffer symptoms at those times due to all of the additional parties, programs and social functions. Problems arise when being overscheduled becomes a constant state of being.

- Establishing boundaries is important. It's wise to know your own limits, and the limits of your family members. Some people thrive on an active social life and being on the go. Others are home bodies and need time alone. Keep this in mind, before you schedule activities for every evening and multiple events throughout the weekend.
- Learn to say no. Just because you're asked to do something doesn't mean you're obligated to say yes. If something is inconvenient or will make you feel too stretched, say no.
- Build relaxation time into your schedule. Plan a bike trip, an afternoon spent planting in your garden or a movie night with the family. Or just take a nap.

Problem #2: Over-commitment. Yes, these are two different things. Over-scheduling is a transitory state. When a person is overcommitted they have ongoing responsibilities with committees, board positions or volunteer work, with no end in sight. It's amazing how much time is required for meetings.

And I haven't even mentioned all of the events we sign our kids up for: sports, drama, music, art. Part of the problem is that there are so many options available and we all want the best for our children. So we offer them all of these amazing opportunities. It's important to watch and listen to make sure that kids aren't feeling too stretched or exhausted. The tip off is when they beg for time off.

The answer to over commitment is to prioritize. Put your energies into the things you value most.

Problem #3: Too much stuff. This one shouldn't surprise you. We own too much. Everything we own requires some kind of maintenance, which costs us time, money and storage. Every item costs more than the amount listed on the price tag. There is time spent in the purchasing process. Add extra time for exchanges or returns. There is the extra effort required for things like dry cleaning or oil changes. More possessions means more chores to complete. Think of the extra dusting and laundry. Excess stuff takes up space and adds to the clutter. Don't worry, there's hope. Try these three tips:

- Go on a spending diet. Buy only what you need for awhile.
- Eliminate the things you no longer use and put them in the hands of someone who will.
- Make your home your haven-- a sanctuary away from the frenzy of life. Once all of the excess is gone you'll feel much more relaxed.

Problem# 4: Long commutes. Commuting is a triple threat. It adds stress, hassle and cost to your life. With the rising cost of gas, it's preferable to be as close to work as possible. The stress of

driving in rush hour, or trying to time your commute to miss the rush, complicates life. The more time you spend on the road, the less time you have to do the things that are important to you.

- Take public transportation so that you can be free to read, make a call or complete your work during the commute.
- Car-pool to work to save gas and reduce the stress of driving in rush hour traffic.
- Carpooling children to school is a timesaver, because you no longer have to do it every day.

Problem #5: Errands on impulse. If you stop every night to pick up something for dinner or purchase items piecemeal it takes more time. It becomes irritating when you find yourself in line at the same store three times in one week! Driving all over is especially frustrating if you can't find what you need and end up coming home empty-handed.

- Schedule your errands. Assign one day or evening each week to complete the task.
- Keep a list of what you are running low on, or what you've run out of.
- Call first. Before you drive to the store in search of something unusual, make a call. The retailer may set the item aside for you. Instead of walking into a salon that advertises, "walk-ins welcome," call to see if they're busy and then make an appointment. Calling ahead could save you from sitting in a long line.
- Plan the route to avoid back tracking.
- Think of the internet as your new best friend. It's a great resource and time saver. Do a Google search and save a trip to the library. Do a price check from your laptop instead of driving to three stores to find the best deal. If you're having a busy week, order your groceries online.

Problem #6: Embracing their mess. There's a rumor circulating that "messy is the new neat." Don't fall for it. Once you let the mess get away from you it's much harder to bring it back under control.

- Fifteen minutes a day does the trick. Continuous, persistent action is unbelievably effective.
- Stay on top of clutter. Put things away right away.

Problem #7: Failure to plan. Thinking ahead helps you focus and direct your energies which in turn makes you more productive.

- Plan what you will wear the next day.
- Plan what you will serve for dinner.
- Plan what you will do and how you will do it.

Problem #8: Underestimating the importance of timing. Timing is everything. There are good times to run errands and there are bad times.

- If you live in an apartment building with shared laundry facilities, don't wait until Saturday morning to do laundry.
- Avoid the grocery store after work or mid-day on the weekends.
- Use auto deposit on your payroll check, so you don't have to stand in line at the bank on Friday afternoons.

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