

organize today!

Ideas and tips to help you live
an organized, simpler life at work and home

Winter 2007

Abundance Overload: Live a Full Life With Less Stuff

Every day, we are bombarded with messages to BUY MORE STUFF. Turn on the television, and we see 16 minutes of commercials during a 60-minute show. Open a magazine, and we'll discover more ads than articles. Peek inside our mailbox and we'll find junk mail overload. (Did you know that 40% of the mail you receive is junk mail?) That's a whole lot of pressure to buy more, have more, and be more.

This issue of *Organize Today* is devoted to helping you slow down and recognize that more isn't necessarily better. Keep reading to understand over-consumption, discover life-simplifying tips, and learn the benefits of living within your means and your space. Here's to knowing when enough is enough!

Affluenza: how much is too much?

Is shopping your favorite recreational activity? If so, you're not alone. Seventy percent of Americans visit a mall each week.¹ But often, instead of coming home with what we *truly need*, we're left with just more stuff to pay off months (or years) later. There's even a new word to describe the modern-day pursuit of more stuff: **affluenza** — and it leads to debt, overwork, stress, anxiety, waste, and an empty, unfulfilled feeling.

Overconsumption affects people on different levels. On the extreme end, some people suffer from compulsive buying, leading to credit card debt, relationship troubles, and poor self-esteem. But more commonly, the need for abundance pulls in more subtle ways. The Sunday paper comes with more ads than news (two-thirds of the space in newspapers is filled with advertising) and it's pretty hard to resist the great sales. So we pop over to the mall or discount store. Suddenly, our shopping baskets are full, the credit cards come out, and we think, "Wow, I just came in for *one* thing!"

The antidote to affluenza? Pause before each purchase. Take a moment to ask yourself: Do you *really* need it, and can you afford it? Do you have space to store and time to maintain it? Do you already own something similar or just as good? Recognize that the pursuit of material goods may feel good at the time, but is only a momentary fix. Put away your wallet and find other worthwhile activities to fulfill your needs — you'll be much happier in the long run.



Shopping addictions and hoarding

Extreme spending and saving

Shopping is embedded in our culture. But sometimes it turns into addiction. It becomes a compulsive disorder which brings a temporary high. This excessive, chronic, and impulsive behavior can destroy a person's finances and relationships. (It goes way beyond a weak-moment shopping spree.) Help may come to overspenders in the form of Debtors Anonymous meetings, credit or debt counseling, and professional assistance from a therapist.

Then there are those who save. Some people save things, and some people save *everything*. When it gets to the point that a home is nearly uninhabitable, compulsive hoarding may be the culprit. People who suffer from this psychological condition see the value in *every* object, leading to the inability to get rid of things (even items of no value, such as old newspapers and food containers).

Hoarding is more extreme than simply accumulating clutter. Hoarders may not be able to move around the home. Floor space may shrink to a single pathway. Hoarding restricts everyday activities like cooking, cleaning, or sleeping and severely reduces the quality of life. Hoarders may not even recognize the extremity of their surroundings. Or, if they do, they may refuse to let family and friends visit their homes for fear of being criticized.

If you or someone you know has symptoms of hoarding or shopping addiction, consider contacting a therapist. Good resources for basic information about hoarding are the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization (www.nsgcd.org) and the Obsessive Compulsive Foundation (www.ocfoundation.org).

Deliberately simple lives

You'd think with all the great technology and gadgetry available today, we'd have more time to enjoy life. After all, aren't cell phones, leaf blowers, cappuccino makers, and computers supposed to make our lives more convenient? In theory, they sound like time savers. But somehow, they just seem to create the need to "do" more, and they often make our lives *more* complex.

To know when you have enough is to be rich.

— Lao Tzu

What would happen if you put away these time savers for a weekend? Imagine two days without the blaring ring of your cell phone. Imagine raking leaves by hand, enjoying the sounds of crispy leaves and nature *sans* the roar of the leaf blower. Imagine warming water for a cup of simple herbal tea, rather than dragging out that huge coffee-making contraption. Imagine reading your favorite book cuddled on the couch rather than hunched over your computer. Living simply sounds inviting and compelling!

By paring life down to its essentials — the things, activities, and relationships you either truly need or genuinely cherish, you unburden your life and live with fewer distractions. When you live simply, you determine what is important, or enough, for you, and discard the rest. (Visit www.gallagherpress.com/pierce and www.SimpleLiving.net for information.) Millions of Americans are consciously practicing this "new" way of living.¹ Reasons to move away from complexity and over-abundance and toward simplicity vary. Some people want to **save money**, eliminating their debt and living within their means. Others want to **help the environment** by reducing and reusing things rather than purchasing more stuff. Others simplify to **find more time** — less stuff to maintain means more time for family, friends, and hobbies. Some **see it as a spiritual journey**. Others view it as a way to **reject consumerism** or **embrace social justice**. No matter what the reasons, simplifying your life makes simple sense. Research shows that the more people fill their lives with things, the more empty they feel. Give simple living a try instead and discover its life-changing benefits.

Newsletter sources /additional information:

1 Affluenza by John de Graaf, David Wann, and Thomas H. Naylor

2 The Green Lifestyle Handbook by Jeremy Rifkin

3 The Hunger for More: Searching for Values in an Age of Greed by Laurence Shames

Twelve quick steps to make less into MORE

1. **Reduce junk mail.** Call 212-768-7277, visit www.dmaconsumers.org, or write to Mail Preference Service, PO Box 643, Carmel NY 10512-0643, and ask to be taken off promotional mailing lists. Call 1-888-5-OPT-OUT to stop mailings of credit card offers.

2. **Banish clutter.** Ask yourself three questions about each item in your home: Is it beautiful? Is it useful? Is it loved? If you can't answer yes to *at least* one question, it's probably clutter that you can toss, recycle, or donate.



3. **Stop future clutter.** Before you buy, consider whether it will make your life simpler or more complex. (Will you have to put it together, dry clean it, dust it, fix it, or organize it?)

4. **Get clothes cleaning under control.** Designate a laundry day (or two) each week rather than running small loads each day. Color code laundry baskets for each household member. Deposit clean, folded garments into each and have each person put away his/her own clothing. If you hate running to the dry cleaners, stop buying dry clean-only clothes!

5. **Downsize your home.** Less square footage can mean less to clean and maintain, not to mention less financial stress. (A great resource is *The Not So Big House* by Sarah Susanka.)



6. **Give gifts from the heart, not the wallet.** For gift-giving occasions, set guidelines with family, friends, and coworkers. Instead of exchanging gifts, agree to put the money toward a dinner or fun outing. Or draw names so each person is responsible for only one person's gift. Or forgo gifts altogether and donate money or time to a local charity.

7. **Consider public transportation.** Although hard for many Americans to fathom, only eight percent of the world's people own a car. But in the U.S., 89 percent of all households own one or more.² Could you get along with one less car in your family, or none? You'd save money, stress, maintenance, and time. Imagine the luxury of reading a book or taking a catnap while riding the bus!

8. **Delegate and ask for help.** Whether at home or the office, pass off (or trade) tasks that you're not good at or don't enjoy and spend your time and talents in productive ways.

9. **Manage your time.** Take control of your schedule by deciding what you'll do and when you'll do it. Group errands to save drive time. Check e-mail and voicemail only at set times each day rather than as they appear. Use an agenda and keep meetings short and to the point. Limit choices and know that one of them will be just fine.

10. **Keep track of tasks and lists in one place.** A small notebook is still the simplest and cheapest way to keep track of life's to-dos. Maintain running lists of errands and tasks, and take the notebook everywhere you go. No more jotting down on scraps of paper!



11. **Let go of perfectionism.** It will stall you out! It's okay to be "good enough." Stop trying to "keep up with the Joneses" because they aren't really happy anyway. Live for you and what makes you truly happy!

12. **Start small.** For large or dreaded tasks, break them down into chunks. Set a timer for ten minutes and work like crazy until it beeps. Now, that wasn't so bad, was it? Keep going if you feel inspired by the work you accomplished.



Kids and consumerism

Consumerism strikes at a young age. Advertising targeted at children is hard-hitting and hard to resist. It's no wonder that 93 percent of American teenage girls reported that store-shopping is their favorite activity.³ Here are some tips to teach savvy shopping and money habits to the kids in your life.

- Teach money management skills with allowances starting at an early age. Show how money should be responsibly spent, saved, and shared.
- Establish a “new thing in, old thing out” system where some purging takes place before buying new clothes, toys, and gadgets. Limit exposure to media so there's less temptation.
- Help high schoolers understand credit cards and how they work. Calculate interest rates so they understand what they're really paying in the end.
- Teach kids to shop with a list and stick to it to avoid impulse purchasing. Know that kids are looking to adults for spending guidelines. If you have good habits, they will, too.
- Set up a children's savings account. Encourage kids to set aside a percentage of their money to save for college, a car, or other long-term purchases.
- Help them find a charity that touches their hearts and encourage frequent generosity.
- Encourage community involvement, providing a healthy outlet for time and a better understanding of others and their lifestyles.