

MINIMALISM

THE STEPS TO GETTING STARTED

INTRODUCTION

This booklet was an idea based on one of the Two Less Things blog entries, and the comments I get via the web site and through e-mail, social media, and interviews. I thought new readers might like something to take away and read at their leisure in an offline format.

I'm fortunate to have many readers comment and e-mail me on some of the articles I write. We discuss many aspects of adopting minimalism, simplifying their life, concentrating on what's important, and removing the clutter from their lives.

Whilst many people completely understand the concept of minimalism, appreciate the lack of clutter in their lives, and understand that life is about experiences not things, there are themes in some of the questions and comments I get. There's a common thread that often appears:

They really struggle with how to start.

For many people the challenge is physically getting started, while for others it's about momentum, but I can appreciate that much of this is about how to tackle what can be a really large task. Not only is it about de-cluttering their home, their office, their mind, it's about convincing themselves that it is possible. That the end result, being able to focus on what's important, really can become a reality.

MINIMALISM - STARTING

Whilst minimalism seems to be a concept that's spreading, it's still something new. With companies bombarding you with advertising about how inadequate you'll feel without more stuff, it's tough to be different, however positive it will make you feel in the long run.

In order to help those on the journey of minimalism, those some way through, and those who just need another tip that perhaps they've missed, I've drawn up the following list of some of the most popular steps to minimalism. These are the things I've written about on the blog in more detail, but here are some of the key things often asked about by those new to minimalism.

Its worth noting that there is no set order for these steps, just try any or all of them, however you wish. Let me know how you get on in the comments on the blog perhaps.

START SMALL

De-cluttering your life and working towards minimalism is not a small task. You are changing your life by doing so, allowing you the clutter-free space to concentrate on the important things.

As with any large task, it can seem overwhelming. A mountain to climb. You look around you, and everything you feel you need to do seems to require such a gargantuan effort.

Rome wasn't built in a day and neither will your life become clutter free overnight.

Take small steps, removing one item, tackling one space, one room. Pick up one more thing, clear just one surface. Whatever that small thing is, its enough to start. Rest easy that night, knowing there's one less thing to worry about, one less thing in your cluttered life and one more step toward minimalism.

Small steps applied consistently will reach the goal, and applying minimalism to your life is no different.

THERE IS NO 'MAGIC NUMBER' OF THINGS

I read about some of the more extreme minimalists, who have 1000 things, 100 things, only a backpack of things. Thankfully there are no rules, it's not about the number, it's about removing clutter and distraction from your life so you have time and space to concentrate on what's important to you. Keeping things simple, not necessarily bare and stark. We all know in our heart of hearts if that thing we hold dear really is important to us. That's why there is no magic number of things to own. It's an individual choice, a number unique to you.

ONE IN - ONE OUT

A simple way to stay on top of the stuff and clutter in your home is to gate-keep the items coming into your home. If you are taking the small steps to remove just a few items per week, then you don't want things coming into your life that will just take their place. So a solution to this problem is the One In - One Out concept. Simply, for every item that comes in, another item must go out. This is particularly useful for clothes, books, and things you may end up accumulating.

So if you bring a new thing into your home, which item is going out ?

THE 15 MINUTE DAILY DECLUTTER

To keep on top of things, I try to spend at least 15 minutes every day on the ritual de-clutter. This generally means wandering around the house, just picking up items, clearing surfaces, washing odd dishes and giving things a quick tidy. Putting things away and so on. I find that when settling down to a specific activity, my concentration is so much sharper when that cup and saucer are washed, that I can't see that pile of clothes that need putting away. Throwing out or tidying away items that have appeared during the day makes me feel more prepared to tackle the bigger tasks. There should be a place for everything, and everything should be in that place.

DO I WANT THIS, OR NEED THIS?

This is often a difficult area to cover. Our minds play tricks on us. Combine that with those troublesome marketing people, and we believe we'll simply be unable to function without the latest this, that, or the other. OK, so even a minimalist needs stuff now and again. Things break or wear out. In my year of not buying anything, I realised that walking the dog in the winter wearing holey wellies means that there's a *need* for new wellies. Its not just a want. To get around this I found that filing my needs and wants for a month, and not doing anything about them for a period, really did crystallise which was which. For some reason the needs remain but the wants seem to have a fleeting nature about them. They seem like needs one minute, and then with time, they lose all sense of urgency. Perhaps its the same as sometimes buying things only to then regret it a few days later. Write the needs and wants down, file them out of sight for a month, then review them.

HOW LONG DO YOU KEEP YOUR STUFF?

I was reminded of this one, even today. How long has it been since you last used that thing ? When it was last worn, read, viewed, played with ? If it was more than a year, then admit it: you no longer have use for it. I say a year because some things are seasonal, such as clothes, sports equipment and so on. Sometimes you could skip a season's skiing for example, so maybe, at a push you could say two years. But anything beyond that, if that box hasn't been opened, those drawers hunted through, then whatever is in them you just don't need.

UNSUBSCRIBE TO ADS AND NEWSLETTERS

We can't buy what we don't know about. Temptation is out of reach.

Cancel your subscriptions, unsubscribe from retailers mailing lists, and don't read that weekly newsletter.

These marketers are good at their roles; the advertisements serve just one purpose. They want you to buy. No other reason. They talk about building brand value, but that's just another way to get you to buy. They can make buying more stuff just so tempting. Yes, that's exactly the feeling they want you to experience. The only solution is to turn the other way, don't look. Click the button at the end of their very tempting newsletter. The one marked 'Unsubscribe'

BARGAINS AND FREEBIES

We all love a bargain, they say, the something for nothing. That 'special' offer, the one time only offer that's here today and gone tomorrow.

There's no such thing as free. Free stuff, buy one get one free, free trial, free with your next purchase.

They all come at a price, generally the price you just paid to get the free thing. Its those clever marketers again. But there's another price, the price to store, to maintain, the price of not using that thing. Worse still the price to dispose, to recycle. The price of time, the cost of ownership. There's always a cost. Even the cost of wanting something you didn't need before you saw that 'Free' sticker. Even if it really was free, why on earth would you suddenly need it, someone else is trying to get rid of it by giving it away. Beware of the bargain, don't be fooled by the free.

YOU ARE NOT THE SUM OF YOUR STUFF

Every single person on the planet is different from all the other people, by nature, experience, genes, culture and a whole host of other things. Yet we seem to invest so much time comparing ourselves to others, and whats worse, buying stuff other people have, just because they have it. Personally I blame the media and marketing. Their messages are designed to make you feel insecure. Buy product X and you'll be cool, be thin, be awesome, be the envy of your friends. They don't really care about you, they just want a sale, and when thats sold they'll move onto selling the next shiny thing. If your friends fall into this trap, the only way to make them feel better is to tell you that you don't have what they do. Shallow isn't it.

Life is not about stuff, its about experiences. Its about passion, and love and excitement, and joy and tears and all of those wonderful emotions that make us feel alive. You don't need a room full of stuff to tell you how to feel.

IDENTIFY WHAT'S IMPORTANT IN YOUR LIFE, THEN CONSIDER REMOVING ALL THAT IS NOT

This is more a reminder of why you considered adopting minimalism. Why do you feel you need to get rid of this stuff, what is it you need the mental or physical space for? What was it that made you start? What really is important to you? As I started removing the stuff from my life, I gained space to think, to write, to pursue what I was passionate about. There was a weight lifted from my shoulders every time I got rid of something. When we understand what's important in life, without all this clutter and distraction, we give ourselves the time, space and perhaps permission to pursue this important activity.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Chris Wray was born in 1964 in Halifax, Yorkshire, in England. He's a photographer, writer and entrepreneur. He runs the Two Less Things blog as one of the UK's few writers on minimalism. He's appeared in various magazines, websites and on the BBC.

Chris lives just outside the centre of Cambridge, in the company of his Mac and retro Hi-Fi. He shares these few possessions with his grown up children. He owns very little, not even the house he lives in, and maintains the minimalist ethos of believing life is about experience, not about things. He also lives in London with his partner, and he's trying really hard to convert her to minimalism too.

When he's not working, he can be found out on his bike, trekking across the fields of Cambridgeshire, or camera in hand, trying not to look like a tourist.

You can read more about his minimalist views on his blog at www.twolessthings.co.uk

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