

The Happy Minimalist

PETER LAWRENCE

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Trans4mind

The Happy Minimalist

by Peter Lawrence

“We are happy in proportion to the things we can do without.” -Henry David Thoreau

According to Greek philosopher Epicurus, the troubles entailed by maintaining an extravagant lifestyle tend to outweigh the pleasure of enjoying that lifestyle. He recommended that what was necessary for life and happiness be maintained at minimal cost, believing that anything beyond what is necessary should either be tempered by moderation or completely avoided.

Most people do not realize this simple truth. Over time, we have been brainwashed to think that “More is Better”. We also harbor the misconception that a minimalist leads a deprived life. He has to sacrifice many pleasures in life etc. The truth is, a minimalist aims for the optimum point. A minimalist knows that too little can be inefficient and too much can be detrimental. Take your car for example. If you drive too slowly, you are not maximizing fuel efficiency. If you drive too fast, you are not maximizing fuel efficiency either. In general, for most vehicles, the fuel efficiency is maximized at 55 mph. At this speed – you get the most miles for every gallon of gas. This same notion, applies to every

resource we have. A minimalist is aware of this and hence maximizes whatever resources he has. A minimalist is a maximizer. Because he is fully aware of the disadvantages of too little and too much, he lives in moderation.

This then begs the question: What is too little and what is too much? Here is where more personal introspection is needed. We need to reflect on this with a full understanding of how our ancestors actually lived and how other cultures live today. If they all can live happily while utilizing less resources, aren't they by definition more efficient? Being efficient and hence utilizing less resource not only hastens one's financial independence; it is also good for your own health and the planet. Here are some facts for you to mull over:

- 1) You reach financial independence when your passive income is greater than your expenses. Most people focus only on increasing their income while not paying attention to the expenses part. As your income rises, your expense does not have to rise in tandem. Consider what Henry David Thoreau said: With respect to luxuries and comforts, the wisest have even lived a more simple and meager life than the poor.
- 2) Studies find that a millionaire is no more likely to be happy than someone earning one-twentieth as much. Once you reach the median level of income, roughly \$50,000 a year, there is no longer any co-relation between higher income and happiness.
- 3) Anhedonia refers to the reduced ability to experience pleasure. In the book, *Thrilled to Death*, Dr. Hart laments the fact that

our continuous pursuit of high stimulation is snuffing out our ability to experience genuine pleasure in simple things.

4) In the book *The Longevity Diet*, the author shows that calorie restriction is the only proven way to slow the aging process and maintain peak vitality.

5) If everyone in the world consumed like the average American, we'd need about six Earths to sustain ourselves.

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As part of his book, *The Happy Minimalist*, Peter Lawrence has included a section called *Ethical Will* (appendix G). *Ethical Will* is a way of leaving behind something more meaningful than material goods.

We are not going to live forever. And even during our lifetime, we may not have the opportunity to share our knowledge and experience. Including this section provides a means to share our “values” not only with people we know, but also those we have yet to know.

On Treating Yourself

1. My first goal in life is not to be a burden to myself and/or to society. My second goal is to help others not to be a burden to themselves and/or to society.

2. The less you depend on people and things for your happiness, the more you become your source of happiness.

3. Focus on things that really matter and those that you can add value to. Don't get distracted. Focus on your strengths and not on your weaknesses. An elephant is best in the forest and a camel best in the desert. No point for the elephant to spend time and energy trying to be like a camel. If it does, it will eventually end up being bad at both.

4. Avoid prescription drugs or over-the-counter drugs as much as possible. As the Father of Medicine said, "Let food be your medicine and medicine be your food." Be aware of what you ingest. Make every effort to eat real foods that are locally and organically grown and in season. Avoid GM (genetically modified) foods at all cost.

5. Mother Nature is self-healing. Give nature a chance to heal itself. Think about it: When you have a wound and the doctor dresses it, who or what actually heals the wound?

6. No one culture, race, or religion has the answer to everything. You are usually better off in combining the best of what each has to offer and developing a style that fits the

situation best. Example: Bruce Lee became formidable by studying styles from more than one form of martial arts.

7. Two wrongs don't make a right. It is very tempting to justify a wrong action by claiming that you did it for the greater good. A wrong is a wrong. A lie is a lie, white or otherwise. Your yes should mean yes and your no should mean no.

8. Don't make any decision out of fear, greed, pride, or anger.

9. Get out while you are still ahead. Don't be greedy. Cut your losses as soon as you realize your decision is wrong. No point hanging on to bad investments hoping they would turn around, or worse still, injecting more resources into a lost cause. There is an opportunity cost to hanging on to bad decisions. Pumping more resources into a bad investment is tantamount to letting good resources chase after bad investments.

10. Don't compare your life with others. You have no idea what they may have gone through in life. You don't know what is in store for you or for them. Each of us has our own unique role to play and there is no backup. When we fail to recognize our true vocation and live it, we are doing a disservice to ourselves and to others. As Abraham Maslow said, "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself."

11. Always take some time to be alone to reflect things through. If possible, take a hike to the mountains or to a water source. If that is not possible, spend time quietly with nature.

12. Recognize all the good things you have and be thankful.

13. Nothing lasts forever. If you are going through bad times, just remember that no storm lasts forever.

On Treating Others

1. Mother Nature is forgiving. So follow nature: Try to forgive others as soon as possible. It is not always easy, but holding a grudge only does you more harm than good.

2. When you have the opportunity to help someone, help. Don't keep tabs on who you helped. Just help. Don't help expecting something back. Just help. Amazingly, you will get the help when you need it most (not necessarily from the same people you helped).

3. When you are not sure if you should go the extra mile to help someone, ask yourself what you would want if the roles were reversed.

4. We are only asked to love our neighbor as much we love ourselves. No more. No less. Usually, we end up either overextending ourselves or loving ourselves too much—meaning we become too obsessed with our own happiness, impervious of the consequence that has on others.

There is a common cliché “***Money doesn't buy happiness.***” Many people just repeat this like a parrot. As long as we are not living in a barter-based economy, money can buy happiness. But the following points are also true:

* Money can also buy sorrow.

Money can lead to sorrow if used in the wrong way. A truly happy person judiciously uses his money to procure only what he needs to secure happiness. A fool spends his money on frivolous wants and suffers later.

* The way one goes about getting money can result in sorrow.

The happier people are those who do what they enjoy to earn money and use the money wisely to procure only the things they need. Others compromise their principles and health in their pursuit of money and consequently negate the happiness they were after.

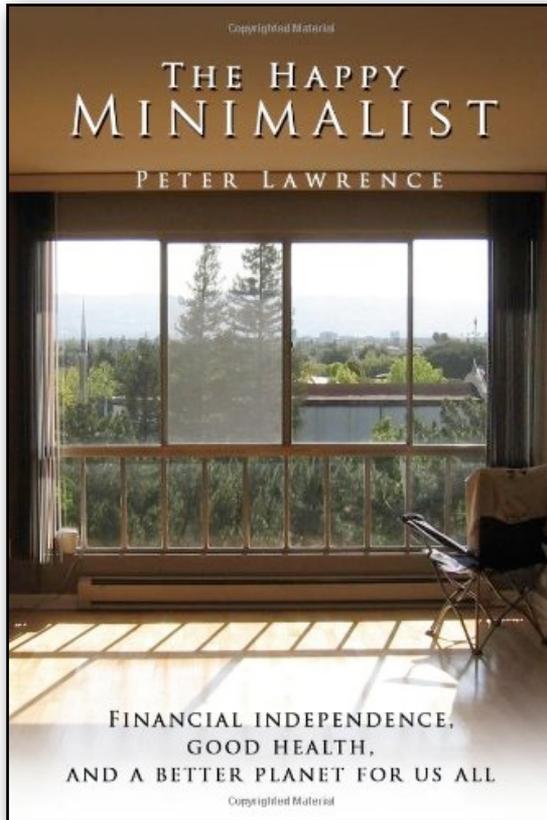
* Money is not the only thing that can bring us happiness.

There are other things that contribute to our happiness besides money, such as a clear conscience, mental and physical health, and endearing relationships.

* The best things in life are free—no money is needed.

A happy person is the one who realizes all the above points and is able to achieve them. ###

Peter Lawrence was born and raised in Singapore and lives in Santa Clara, California. He has been able to retire well before the normal retirement age not because he won a lottery, inherited wealth, or joined a start-up. In fact, he has humble beginnings. Peter attributes his early retirement to his minimalist lifestyle. The life of a minimalist does not have to be deprived. Rather, it is simple living focused on what is truly needed to make a person happy and can be filled with enriching experiences—as demonstrated by Peter’s life. Peter spent time in the army and in the monastery. He has bungee-jumped in New Zealand and sky dived in Australia. He has floated on the lowest point of Earth and ridden a camel to the Great Pyramids. He also spent time in Europe, South America, and Central America. Peter holds a Bachelor in Information Technology from an Australian University and an Executive MBA from an American University.



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