

ESSENTIAL

Essays by The Minimalists



CONTENTS

[Copyright](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Title Page](#)

[PART One - INTRODUCTION](#)

[About The Minimalists](#)

[Foreword](#)

[What Is Minimalism?](#)

[PART Two - LIVING IN THE MOMENT](#)

[Be On the Mountain](#)

[Clear Your Damn Plate](#)

[PART Three - EMOTIONAL HEALTH](#)

[On Happiness](#)

[Letting Go of Sentimental Items](#)

[Jealousy Is a Wasted Emotion](#)

[Dealing with Overwhelm](#)

[Motion Creates Emotion](#)

[PART Four - GROWTH](#)

[Growth Through Minimalism](#)

[Minimalism Scares the Shit Out of Me](#)

[Minimalism Is Healthy: How I Lost 70 Pounds](#)

[30 Is Not the New 20](#)

[30 Life Lessons from 30 Years](#)

[PART Five - CONTRIBUTION](#)

[Giving Is Living](#)

[Establishing Deeper Connections with People](#)

[Adding Value](#)

[Minimalist Family: Start with Yourself](#)

[PART Six - PASSION & MISSION](#)

[I Quit My Six-Figure Job to Pursue My Passions](#)

[Stop Living the Lie; Start Living the Life](#)

[Screw You, I Quit!](#)

[Minimalist Finances and Budgeting](#)

[PART Seven - TAKING ACTION](#)

[How to Make a Damn Decision](#)
[Never Leave the Scene of a Good Idea Without Taking Action](#)
[Packing Party](#)
[PART Eight - CHANGE & EXPERIMENTATION](#)
[Stop Trying](#)
[Minimalist New Years Resolution](#)
[You Are Not Your Khakis](#)
[Why I Don't Own a TV](#)
[Killing the Internet Is the Most Productive Thing I've Ever Done](#)
[Killing Time](#)
[Focus on What's Important](#)
[About the Authors](#)
[Books by The Minimalists](#)
[Acknowledgements](#)

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For — — — and — — —

minimalism: essential essays

PART ONE

INTRODUCTION

ABOUT THE MINIMALISTS

We are Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus—*The Minimalists* . We're a pair of thirty-year-old guys who write essays about living a meaningful life with less stuff at TheMinimalists.com, a website with over 100,000 monthly readers. We've been featured in the *Wall Street Journal* , NPR, CBC, NBC, FOX, and various other media outlets. Our essays have been featured on dozens of popular websites throughout the Internet, including *Zen Habits* , *Time* Magazine's #1 blog in the world. Both of us have extensive experience leading large groups of people in corporate America, coaching and developing hundreds of employees to grow as individuals and live more meaningful lives.

Once upon a time, we were two happy young professionals living in Dayton, Ohio. But we weren't *truly* happy. We were best friends in our late twenties, and we both had great six-figure jobs, nice cars, big houses, plenty of toys, and an abundance of stuff. And yet with all this stuff, we knew we were not satisfied with our lives. We knew we were not happy or fulfilled. We discovered that working 70–80 hours a week and buying more stuff didn't fill the void. So we took back control of our lives using the principles of minimalism to focus on what's important. Our website documents our journey into minimalism and our continued growth through experimentation.

Thank you for reading this essay collection. We hope you enjoy it.

FOREWORD

We started *The Minimalists* in December 2010 with two objectives in mind: to document our journey into minimalism and inspire others to take a similar journey, resulting in a more meaningful life for us and for others.

This book is a collection of twenty-nine of our most important essays—some short, some long—during the first nine months of our journey. These essays are purposefully organized into seven interconnected themes: *living in the moment* , *emotional health* , *growth* , *contribution* , *passion & mission* , *taking action*, and *change & experimentation* . The order is deliberate—this collection is meant to be read from beginning to end. We believe doing so will result in a better overall experience—a different experience from reading the essays on our site—connecting various concepts that might not otherwise seem connected. The order herein is designed to start with the purpose—the *why* —of minimalism and then lead you down a path that forces you to think critically and, ultimately, take action towards a more meaningful life.

As a special thank you to our readers, we also included two never-before published essays in this collection: *Dealing with Overwhelm* and *Focus On What's Important* , found in the *emotional health* and *taking action* sections, respectively.

If you enjoy this essay collection, we'd appreciate a helpful review on Amazon.

WHAT IS MINIMALISM?

To be a minimalist you must live with less than 100 things, and you can't own a car or a home or a TV, and you can't have a career, and you have to be able to live in exotic places all over the world, and you have to write a blog, and you can't have any children, and you have to be a young white male from a privileged background.

OK, we're joking. Obviously.

But people who often dismiss minimalism as some sort of fad or trend usually mention some of the above "restrictions" as to why they could "never be a minimalist."

The truth is that minimalism isn't about any of those things, but it can help you accomplish all of that stuff if you'd like to. If you desire to live with less than 100 things or not own a car or to travel all over the world without fear, minimalism can help. But that's not the point.

The point is that minimalism is a tool to help you achieve freedom. Freedom from fear, freedom from worry, freedom from overwhelm, freedom from guilt, freedom from depression, freedom from enslavement. Freedom.

It is, however, OK to own a car or own a house or have children or have a career. If these things are necessary to you, then that's OK. There are tons of successful minimalists who do some or all of these things. Leo Babauta has a family and six children and writes one of the most popular websites in the world, and Joshua Becker has a career he enjoys and a family he loves and a house and a car in Vermont. Conversely, Colin Wright owns 51 things and travels all over the world, and Tammy Strobel is completely car-free. All of these people are minimalists even though they are vastly different. So how can they all be so different and yet still be

minimalists? That brings us back to our original question: what is minimalism?

Minimalism is a tool to achieve fulfillment in life. It is a tool to achieve happiness, which is (let's face it) what we are all looking for. We all want to be happy. Minimalism can help. There are no rules in minimalism. Rather, minimalism is simply about stripping away the unnecessary things in your life so you can focus on what's important. We believe that there are four important areas in everyone's lives: your health, your relationships, your mission, and your passions. Typically these things overlap, and we realize what's important to us may not be important to you.

Minimalism has helped us in several ways, including:

- Reclaiming our time
- Ridding ourselves of excess stuff
- Enjoying our lives
- Discovering meaning in our lives
- Living in the moment
- Focusing on what's important
- Pursuing our passions
- Finding happiness
- Doing anything we want to do
- Finding our missions
- Experiencing freedom
- Creating more, consuming less

How has minimalism helped us with these things? Well, minimalism is a lifestyle choice. Minimalists choose to get rid of the unnecessary in favor of what's important. But the level of specificity is up to you. Minimalists search for happiness not through things, but through life itself. Thus, it's up to you to determine what is necessary and what is superfluous in your life. Through these essays we intend to give you some ideas of how to determine these things and how to achieve a minimalist lifestyle without having to succumb to some sort of strict code or set of rules.

A word of warning though: it isn't easy to take the first few steps, but the journey gets much easier and more rewarding the further you go; the first steps into minimalism often take some radical changes in mindset, actions, and habits.

So, if we had to sum it up in one sentence, we would say, *Minimalism is a tool to get rid of superfluous excess in favor of focusing on what's important in life so you can find happiness, fulfillment, and freedom.*

PART TWO

LIVING IN THE MOMENT

BE ON THE MOUNTAIN

By Joshua Fields Millburn

Last February I had an epiphany (albeit a small epiphany as far as epiphanies are concerned). I was sitting in a coffeehouse writing a piece of fiction. Somehow it turned into 47 pages about my life and ended up being a pseudo journal entry instead of a piece of fiction.

One theme recurred throughout those 47 pages: living in the moment. Or, said another way, enjoying the moment. It's what Rob Bell refers to as "being on the mountain." If you don't know who Rob Bell is, he's a hip, cool, Gen-X, new-age Christian guy with whom you'd like to have a coffee and a conversation (irrespective of your religious leanings). I am not particularly religious, but I enjoy his perspective.

Rob tells a story about Moses' journey to the top of a mountain. I'll omit most of the religious and historical details for the sake of attenuation (and those details aren't relevant to the moral of this story anyway). In the story, God tells Moses to travel to the top of the mountain. Then, in what is an ostensibly redundant (and odd) request, God commands Moses to "be on the mountain."

To which, I imagine, Moses was like, "Um, yeah, I heard you the first time. You already said to go to the top of the mountain." But Moses didn't get the point right away. God didn't want Moses to go to the top of the mountain and then start thinking about what he needed to do next. God didn't want Moses to start worrying about how he was going to get down, or worry about whether or not he turned off the lights before he left the house, or worry about what bills needed to be paid this week. God just wanted Moses to be on the mountain, to enjoy the moment.

The moral? Enjoy the moment.

How? Don't spend your time in perpetual planning.

Or perpetual worry.

Or perpetual whatever.

Instead, just enjoy the moment.

Notice what all of your efforts have done for you.

They got you to the top of the mountain, after all.

Just take a moment and be on the mountain.

Be on the mountain.

Be.

That's what I want. I am committed to being on the mountain, to enjoying my life.

That doesn't mean I don't plan. I just enjoy the planning process more. It doesn't mean I don't work hard. I just enjoy working hard, whether it's writing or leading people.

When you enjoy it, it's not work anyway. In fact, I avoid calling it work altogether. I call it my mission.

How about when you're doing something you dislike? Or worse, something you hate? Ask yourself, how can I do this and enjoy it too? The only way to get a better answer is to ask a better quality question. So ask yourself, how can I enjoy this? You will get better results if you do this.

I get better results when I enjoy the process. Better health. Better relationships. More growth. Greater contribution. A better life.

Don't dwell on the past. Don't worry about the future. Just be on the mountain.

CLEAR YOUR DAMN PLATE

By Joshua Fields Millburn

I don't own much, but I have a lot to live for. And so do you. But you know this already. Paring down my possessions over the last two years has afforded me more free time and more freedom and a less stressful life. That's why I'm trying a new experiment this month. I'm going to clear my damn plate—a phrase my mother used to use with vigor—and focus on one thing at a time (viz. place one thing on my empty plate at a time).

There is little-to-no physical clutter in my life, but I still get stressed out sometimes; I get stressed out by self-imposed deadlines, by other people's expectations, by my own standards of supposed accomplishment, by constant interruptions that I can control.

I am in control, just as you are in control. We must remember that.

This is my life, I am in charge, and I have the freedom to do what I want.

So next month I'm going to clear my plate, and I'm going to do only one thing at a time. All the time. I'm not going to take my computer with me when I want to read a book or exercise or visit a friend. I'm not going to check my phone when I'm eating a meal with someone. I'm not going to brush my teeth while I browse through email.

I'm going to be in the moment. If I'm on the Internet, then I'll give my full attention to that, not the other way around. If I'm reading a book, I'll read a book. If I'm writing, I will write. If I'm interacting with you, I'll interact with you, uninterrupted.

I will live my life, one moment at a time. The moments of our lives deserve our full attention. So let's give our lives the attention they deserve

and start living a more meaningful life, one that we don't hate, one that we love.

Care to join me? Want to clear your damn plate for a month? Let's do it together.

PART THREE

EMOTIONAL HEALTH

ON HAPPINESS

By Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus

Happiness is an expansive concept, it goes without saying. At its fundament, the term “happiness” is abstract and abstruse and can be a mind-numbing, migraine-inducing thing to try to explain with words. But it was this complex idea—the thought of being truly happy—that led us to live simpler lives. Happiness was at the precipice of our journey. It was happiness that led us to minimalism. Eventually.

But let’s rewind.

Before we discovered the concepts of minimalism, and before we understood the importance of simplifying our lives, we were successful young professionals from Dayton, Ohio. But we were only ostensibly successful.

You see, back then people saw two best friends with their large homes with more bedrooms than inhabitants. They were envious. They saw our six-figure jobs, our luxury cars, our new gadgets, and our life of opulence, and they thought, *These guys have it figured out. I want to be just like them.* They saw all of those things—all of that superfluous stuff—and they just knew that we were successful. After all, we were living the American Dream, weren’t we ?

But the truth is that we weren’t successful at all. Maybe we looked successful—displaying our status symbols as if they were trophies—but we weren’t truly successful. Because even with all of our stuff, we knew that we were not satisfied with our lives. We knew that we were not happy. And we discovered that working 70 to 80 hours per week and buying even more stuff didn’t fill the void. In fact, it only brought us more debt and more anxiety and more fear and more loneliness and more guilt and more

overwhelm and more paranoia and more depression. It was a very solipsistic existence.

What's worse, we found out that we didn't have control of our own time and thus didn't control our own lives.

And then, as our lives were spiraling downward in ever-diminishing circles towards empty oblivion, we inadvertently discovered minimalism. Or perhaps it discovered us, as it were. It was a beacon in the night. We lingered curiously on the limbic portions of minimalism's perimeter, scouring feverishly through Internet page after Internet page looking for more information and guidance and enlightenment, watching and learning and trying to understand what this whole minimalism thing was all about. Through months of research we traveled farther and farther down the rabbit hole, and over time we had discovered a group of people without a lot of things but with myriad happiness and passion and freedom, things for which we desperately yearned.

Eventually we embraced these concepts—the concepts of minimalism and simplicity—as a way of life and discovered that we too could be happy, but it wasn't through owning more stuff, it wasn't through accumulation. We took back control of our lives so we could focus on what's important, so we could focus on life's deeper meaning.

Happiness, as far as we are concerned, is achieved through living a meaningful life, a life that is filled with passion and freedom, a life in which we can grow as individuals and contribute to other people in meaningful ways. Growth and contribution: those are the bedrocks of happiness. Not stuff.

This may not sound sexy or marketable or sellable, but it's the cold truth. Humans are happy if we are growing as individuals and if we are contributing beyond ourselves. Without growth, and without a deliberate effort to help others, we are just slaves to cultural expectations, ensnared by the trappings of money and power and status and perceived success.

Minimalism, in its many forms, is a tool that allowed us to simplify our lives so that we could focus on what's important. We were able to strip away the excess stuff and focus on living meaningful, happy, passionate, free lives.

We invite you to join us. Membership is free. You deserve to be happy. You deserve to live a meaningful life.

LETTING GO OF SENTIMENTAL ITEMS

By Joshua Fields Millburn

My mother died in 2009. It was an incredibly difficult time in my life, it goes without saying.

She lived a thousand miles away and after she passed it was my responsibility to vacate her apartment in Florida. It was a small, one-bedroom place, but it was packed wall-to-wall with her belongings. My mother had great taste—she could have been an interior designer—and none of her stuff was junk. Nevertheless, there was a lot of stuff in her home.

Mom was always shopping, always accumulating more stuff. She had antique furniture throughout her apartment, a stunning oak canopy-bed that consumed almost her entire bedroom, two closets jam packed with clothes, picture frames standing on every flat surface, original artwork hanging on the walls, and tasteful creative decorations in every nook and cranny and crevasse. There was 64 years of accumulation in that apartment.

So I did what any son would do: I rented a large truck from U-Haul. Then I called a storage place back in Ohio to make sure they had a big enough storage unit. The cost of the truck was \$1600. The storage facility was \$120 per month for the size I needed. Financially, I could afford this, but I quickly found out that the emotional cost was much higher.

Memories

At first I didn't want to let go of anything. If you've ever lost a parent or a loved one or been through a similarly emotional time, then you understand exactly how hard it was for me to let go of any of those possessions. So instead of letting go, I was going to cram every trinket and

figurine and piece of oversized furniture into that Lilliputian storage locker in Ohio. Floor to ceiling. That way I knew that Mom's stuff was there if I ever wanted it, if I ever needed access to it for some incomprehensible reason. I even planned to put a few pieces of Mom's furniture in my home as subtle reminders of her.

I started boxing up her belongings. Every picture frame and every little porcelain doll and every white doily on every shelf. I packed every bit of her that remained.

Or so I thought.

And then I looked under her bed...

Among the organized chaos that comprised the crawlspace beneath her bed, there were five boxes, each labeled with a number. Each numbered box was sealed with packing tape. I cut through the tape and found old papers from my elementary school days from nearly a quarter of a century ago. Spelling tests, cursive writing lessons, artwork, it was all there, every shred of paper from my first five years of school. It was evident that she hadn't accessed the sealed boxes in years. And yet Mom had held on to these things because she was trying to hold on to pieces of me, to pieces of the past, much like I was attempting to hold on to pieces of her and her past.

That's when I realized my retention efforts were futile. I could hold on to her memories without her stuff, just as she had always remembered me and my childhood and all of our memories without ever accessing those sealed boxes under her bed. She didn't need papers from twenty-five years ago to remember me, just as I didn't need a storage locker filled with her stuff to remember her.

I called U-Haul and canceled the truck. And then, over the next week, I started donating all of her stuff to places and people who could actually use it.

Lessons Learned

Yes, it was difficult to let go, but I realized quite a few things about our relationship between memories and possessions during the entire experience:

- I am not my stuff. We are more than our possessions.
- Our memories are not under our beds. Memories are within us, not within our things.
- An item that is sentimental for us can be an item that is useful for someone else.
- Holding on to stuff weighs on us mentally and emotionally. Letting go is freeing.
- You can take pictures of items you want to remember.
- Old photographs can be scanned .

It is important to note that I don't think that sentimental items are bad or evil or that holding on to them is wrong. I don't. Rather, I think the perniciousness of sentimental items—and sentimentality in general—is far more subtle. If you want to get rid of an item but the only reason you are holding on to it is for sentimental reasons—if it is weighing on you—then perhaps it's time to get rid of it, perhaps it is time to free yourself of the weight. That doesn't mean that you need to get rid of everything though.

Giant Leap or Baby Steps

When I returned to Ohio, I had four boxes of Mom's photographs in my trunk, which I would later scan and backup online. I found a scanner that made scanning the photos easy. Those photos are digital now; they can be used in digital picture frames instead of collecting dust in a basement somewhere. I no longer have the clutter of their boxes laying around and weighing me down, and they can never be destroyed in a fire.

I donated everything else. All of it. Literally. I donated every piece of furniture and all of her clothes and every decorative item she had strewn throughout her home.

That was a giant leap for me, but I felt as if it needed to be done to remove the weight—the emotional gravitas—of the situation from my shoulders.

You see, I don't need Mom's stuff to remind me of her. There are traces of her everywhere. In the way I act, in the way I treat others, even in my smile. She's still there, and she was never part of her stuff.

Whenever I give advice, I tend to give two options. The first option is usually the giant leap option, the dive-in-head-first option (get rid of

everything, smash your TV, throw out all your stuff, quickly rip off the band-aid, etc.). This option isn't for everyone, and it's often not for me, but in this case, that's what I did. I donated everything.

The second option is to take baby steps, and it works because it helps you build momentum by taking action. Look at it this way: what sentimental item can you get rid of today that you've wanted to get rid of for a while? Start there. Then pick one or two things per week and gradually increase your efforts as you feel more comfortable.

Whichever option you choose, the important part is that you take action. That is to say, never leave the scene of a good idea without taking action. What will you do today to part ways with sentimental items that are weighing you down?

JEALOUSY IS A WASTED EMOTION

By Joshua Fields Millburn

We all get jealous, don't we? Actually, no, not everyone experiences jealousy as an emotion.

I don't get jealous. That's a weird thing to read, isn't? Well, it's a weird thing to say, too. But it's true. I don't experience jealousy as an emotion. I experience sadness, happiness, anger, euphoria, and a plethora of other emotions, but not jealousy.

Why? Because, unlike many emotions, I can choose to not experience jealousy.

After years of observing people getting jealous in myriad ways, I understand that our culture is riddled with jealousy and envy and greed, all of which are by-products of our competitive, consumer driven culture.

What's worse is that it's far more pernicious than we think. Competition breeds jealousy, though we often give to prettier labels like "competitive spirit" or "stick-to-itiveness" or "ambition."

But the truth is that jealousy leads to certain cultural imperatives—e.g., keeping up with the Joneses, as it were. Thus, we envy Mr. and Mrs. Jones for their money and their large house and their luxury cars and their big boat and their weekend retreat and their fancy vacations and all of their stuff—all of the trappings of our heavily-mediated society.

But we don't get jealous solely over material possessions. We also get jealous over our relationships. We think our friends don't spend enough time with us, our lovers don't care about us as much as they should, our customers aren't loyal enough. It all revolves around us. He doesn't spend enough time with *me*. She doesn't care enough about *me*. We think this

way because it's hard to back away from ourselves, it's hard to realize I am not the center of the universe.

There is good news though. Like our televisions, we can choose to turn it off. We can choose to remove jealousy from our emotional arsenal. And like TV, it's not always easy to turn off (it sure seems interesting sometimes, doesn't it?) But turning off jealousy can significantly improve one's emotional health. Because, at the end of the day, jealousy is never useful. Many negative emotions can be useful—pain tells us something is wrong, fear tells us to look before we leap, etc.—but jealousy, no matter how jealous we get, will never help.

But How?

The easiest way to turn jealousy off is to stop questioning other people's intentions. We often get jealous because we think a person meant one thing by their actions, when they meant something totally different. And the truth is that you'll never know someone's real intent, so it's a waste of time to question it.

If you're struggling with questioning someone's intent, you can do one of two things:

1. Ask them what they meant by their actions/words.
2. Accept that you will never know their true intent, no matter how much you question it.

The bottom line with jealousy: You can turn it off. You can stop questioning other people's intent. A better life is waiting on the other side of jealousy.

DEALING WITH OVERWHELM

By Joshua Fields Millburn

An Unpublished Essay

Throughout my thirty years on this earth, I have struggled with one emotion more than any other: the feeling of overwhelm. That changed this year though.

Until this year, I was overwhelmed by my job. I was overwhelmed by the amount of email in my inbox. I was overwhelmed just thinking about hitting the gym in the evening. I was overwhelmed by the Internet. I was overwhelmed by my smartphone. I was overwhelmed by the phone calls and emails and text messages and instant messages and BlackBerry Messenger messages and Twitter updates and Facebook statuses and all the millions of discrete bits of info hurled in my direction every day.

I became neurotic—I was overwhelmed, so I worried about everything. What if I don't respond to that email today? What if I don't return that voicemail in time? What if I fail? What if he doesn't like me? What if she stops loving me? What if, what if, what if...

Overwhelm is a heartless bitch who makes us doubt ourselves into oblivion. And it's easy to let her into our lives. Overwhelm seems like the natural reaction to the barrage of information with which we're faced every day of our lives. Everybody else is doing her, why shouldn't I give it a whirl too? But there is a way to have an amicable separation from overwhelm, a way to deny her access to your life.

Minimalism allowed me to deal with overwhelm in ways I never thought possible. Minimalism taught me we don't get overwhelmed by the million bits of information whizzing at us at all hours of the day; rather, we get overwhelmed because of those million bits. In other words, the reason

we get overwhelmed is because there is too much going on in our lives. The overwhelm is a warning sign.

I finally realized that this year. I realized that overwhelm was there to help me, not hurt me. She was standing over my shoulder saying, “hey, dummy, you’re trying to do too many things,” and “hey, stupid, you have too much crap in you life,” and “hey, you idiot, yeah, you, don’t you realize that what you’re doing isn’t that important?”

Overwhelm was actually there to help me, to get me on the right track, to make me feel the pain of accepting too many unnecessary responsibilities, the pain of accepting too much superfluous stuff in my life, the pain of the status quo. Once I realized this I was able to get rid of my old routine, to develop habits I loved instead of meaningless, tedious tasks that filled up my day, to focus on doing important things and live a more meaningful life.

This year, I quickly whittled away anything that wasn’t important in my life. No more “to do” list. No more daily emails. No more TV. No more Internet at home. No more unneeded bills. No more unnecessary phone calls. No more clocks (no more time). Now I focus on what’s important to me: my relationships, my health, my passion, growing as individual, and contributing to others in a meaningful way.

At first, I thought people wouldn’t understand me, I thought that my friends and family would reject my change, I thought they would be offended when I didn’t respond to their emails within 24 hours, when I didn’t call them back within an hour, when I didn’t conform to the status quo of my yesteryear, but I discovered that the important people in my life respected my newfound lifestyle, my newfound underwhelm, my calmer, more focused life. Once I set the expectation with them, they respected my decision—the people who really matter did. Some of these people even began implementing aspects of my lifestyle into their daily rituals, experiencing a new life, a more fulfilling life, a life of underwhelm.

MOTION CREATES EMOTION

By Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus

It's incredibly difficult to roll out of bed some days (especially at 4:30am to exercise). Sometimes you just don't feel motivated to do anything. You don't want to create. You don't want to contribute to others. You don't want to do anything. Sometimes you'd rather sit passively in front of the television and watch the world progress without you.

We know, it happens to us too. Sometimes we procrastinate or we just don't feel like doing something. But we do three things that allow us to break our pattern and take action. Good news, they're all pretty easy too.

1. Accountability Partners . We often exercise with each other. It helps to have someone else there to make sure we show up when we need to show up and to make sure we give it a little extra effort each time. Who is your accountability partner? It can be via phone, in person, or even via email or text. Get one.

2. Taking The First Step . We tend to put things off, especially boring or mundane tasks (e.g., doing the dishes, laundry, writing, etc.), but if we take the first step, we get momentum and we are much more likely to complete the task. Sometimes we just need to take that first step—as difficult as that might seem at times—and the rest falls in line. Go on, take that first step.

3. Change Your State . If we don't feel like getting up or moving, we will drastically change our physiology (e.g., go for a walk, jump up and down like a crazy person [seriously], do push-ups, change our breathing [deeper,

more conscious breaths], run as fast as we can for 30 seconds, etc.). Do something to radically change your physical state. Motion creates emotion.

Give these three things a shot. They will get you moving in the right direction.

PART FOUR

GROWTH

GROWTH THROUGH MINIMALISM

By Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus

The above quote might seem, by itself, like a banal platitude, one that doesn't warrant much discussion or contemplation or cerebration. But we'll ask you to bracket your skepticism for a moment and think about the following.

Think about a plant.

More specifically, think about a fruit.

A fruit you enjoy.

Let's say it's an apple.

When an apple is still on the tree, it's still growing.

But once it's picked, it starts to die.

This isn't always apparent though.

When you see an apple at your local market, you don't think of it as a dying thing.

In fact, ostensibly it's "ripe," which makes you think it's in some sort of ideal state.

This isn't true though.

And as a person you are no different.

Things might look great on your surface.

They did for us: nice cars, big houses, high salaries.

But we were dying on the inside .

Rotting when we appeared ripe.

Unhappy. Unfulfilled. Unsatisfied with life.

A life without meaning.

But guys, what the hell does this have to do with minimalism?

Nothing.

And yet, in a broader sense, everything.

Why did we get rid of our excess stuff? Well, there are a lot of answers, right?

To reclaim our time, to live a more meaningful life, to contribute to others, and...

To grow as individuals.

You see, like the apple, if we are not growing, we are dying.

And not just in the physical sense, but in every sense of the word.

Dying.

Physically, mentally, emotionally, financially, spiritually.

We hope this doesn't sound like some abstract, esoteric pontificating.

Because it's not.

It's the truth. You are getting rid of the excess things in your life because they are not important.

And if you want to feel alive, really alive, then you must grow.

What have you wanted to do for the longest time, but haven't be able to because you don't have the time or the resources or the drive to do it?

Eat healthier ?

Quit smoking?

Run a marathon?

Write a novel?

Quit your soul-crushing day job?

Travel around the world?

Start a blog?

You can. And all of these things will help you be more fulfilled.

Why? Because they help you grow as a person.

And growth isn't always easy.

Sometimes the most growth comes from the most difficult tasks.

Think about working out.

More specifically, think about a basic exercise: bicep curls.

When you're doing ten bicep curls, which one is the most difficult?

Of course, the tenth one is most difficult.

But which curl helps you grow the most?

MINIMALISM SCARES THE SHIT OUT OF ME

By Ryan Nicodemus

Let's be honest: minimalism scares the shit out of you, doesn't it? You're worried you'll get rid of stuff you might need later. You're worried what your friends/family/co-workers/neighbors will think about you? You're worried you'll lose your identity, your status, and everything you've giving meaning to in your life. Right?

Me too.

I started my journey into minimalism last year, and guess what: I still have my job, still own a condo 3x bigger than what I need (and can't find a buyer for), still have over 100 things, still find it hard to throw away magazines, still find it difficult to turn down free chachkies, etc., etc.

To be blunt: minimalism still scares the shit out of me.

I know there are many people just like me who are just as scared and I wanted to speak to you, to tell you its OK. That's why I write, and I hope that sharing my experiences and my point of view helps you.

I have always been the type of person who puts his whole heart into his beliefs. When I take on a particular ideal or way of life I make the most of it. I do this to a fault. I have such high expectations of myself that I often expect perfection. This is probably why I stress out easier than most, why I have more anxiety than most, and why my chest sometimes feels tighter than a small glove on O.J. Simpson's hand.

On top of the expectations, a lot of people around me love to point out every "non-minimal" thing I have in my life. They love to talk about how I still own a condo (one that I'm having trouble selling), wear Allen Edmonds shoes (which I've owned for 5 years), have a nice haircut (yes someone actually brought up my haircut), and the list goes on and on. But

these people are just jealous of my new way of life, of my new lifestyle. They feel like I'm judging them because I don't live the way they do anymore.

You might be thinking, "Ryan, why do you care what people think?" Well, it's not about caring, as much as them affirming things I already think about to myself (with the exception of my haircut, which I'm quite fond of, thank you very much). I'm aware there are many things in my life I still need to minimize. I constantly have to remind myself that I don't need to explain myself.

The beautiful thing about minimalism is there is no right or wrong, there is no pace at which you have to live your life, and there is nothing that says "this is how you have to live your life." Minimalism is a journey, and it is different for everyone.

Yes, it scares me to think about throwing away different things I didn't get rid of during my packing party last year—things I know I can live without but kept because I spent hundreds of dollars on them. It scares me to think I might fail. But I will keep experimenting. It scares me to continue this radical change in my life, but I've made it this far. I've made so much progress. My life is so different. And I'm not going to stop now.

MINIMALISM IS HEALTHY: HOW I LOST 70 POUNDS

By Joshua Fields Millburn

The Time Of Our Lives

“I don’t have time to exercise. I’m just too busy!”

We’ve all told ourselves this lie before, that if we had more time then we could get into shape, that if we weren’t so darn busy then we could lose those extra 15, 20, 90 pounds, that if there were just more hours in the day then we’d make the trek to the gym.

I used to tell myself that same lie. I was 70 pounds overweight in my early- and mid-twenties. I avoided mirrors because I was embarrassed when I saw myself. I was fat and out of shape and I hated it.

And there’s another lie we tell ourselves. We say, “I’ll start exercising next month or next week or tomorrow.” But tomorrow never comes, does it? That’s because we’re just as busy—or even busier—tomorrow or next week or whenever, and so we put it off again and again and again until it’s no longer on our radar at all. Tony Robbins calls this the *Ultimate Mañana Syndrome*, because tomorrow never comes. There is only today.

Did you know that both of these lies are essentially the same exact lie? You see, we tend to do some funny things with time. We think that we don’t have enough of it today, but somehow we’ll magically have more time tomorrow, that somehow—even though we don’t change anything that we’re doing—we’ll be able to exercise and eat healthier and get into better shape tomorrow.

It’s funny, we don’t do the same thing with food though, do we? If you didn’t have enough food in the house to eat this week, do you think you’d say, “Oh, it’s OK, I’ll just start eating again next week.” Of course not.

The first stop on the road to better health is to stop lying to ourselves.

Two Solutions

There are two things that will help you get on track quickly:

1. Make change a must. Not a *should*, but a must.
2. Minimalism. Get rid of life's excess so you can focus on what's important.

It took me nearly two years to lose those 70 pounds of disgusting fat, but that was seven years ago and I've kept the weight off and I'm not turning back. I'm 30 years old, but I'm in the best shape of my life. And it's only going to get better from here.

How Did I Do It?

First, I made exercise and eating healthy foods a must. It became a must for me to exercise at least three times per week, and it was a must for me to eat less than 2,000 calories per day, with no fried foods and no sugars.

It was hard for me though because I was still extremely busy and I still felt like I didn't have time to exercise more than three days per week. I had too much stuff in my life that I was focused on and that's why it took me so long to get into shape.

Minimalism would have drastically accelerated my healthy lifestyle...

Minimalism's Role

If you follow me on Twitter, you've probably noticed that Ryan and I often hit the gym early in the morning 5 or 6 A.M. We don't post these Twitter updates to impress you, but rather to impress upon you that it's possible to make time for exercise, even for a guy like Ryan who still works over 60 hours per week and who has other obligations like his family and his longtime girlfriend. Heck, Leo Babauta has six kids and he still exercises daily. You can too.

It isn't always easy, but when you've made it a must, you have no other choice. When you must do something you don't have the option to say no. Ryan would have a much more difficult time if he didn't embrace minimalism as a lifestyle. But after getting rid of life's excess, we are able to better prioritize our lives. Your health should be towards the top of that priority list.

Joshua's Personal Exercise Musts

Health is certainly at the top of my priority list. I'm continuing to grow and get into better shape because I'm always experimenting and challenging myself. It's important to challenge yourself, because even when we fail, we end up in a better place than where we started.

Going to the gym at least three times per week used to be a *must* for me. Can you guess how many times I was going per week? Three! Occasionally four if it was convenient (*should* happens when it's convenient). And I only did cardio when it was convenient for me too.

My must changed to five times per week recently. Can you guess how many times per week I go to the gym now? Five! And during those five days, I must do cardio each day, and I must do weight training each day. No exceptions. Exceptions don't exist in the world of must.

It's funny how that works, isn't it? When three days per week was a must, that's what I did. Now I don't have the option to go less than five days per week, even when I'm tired and I don't want to get out of bed at 4:30 A.M. to go exercise with Ryan, I don't have an option. It is a must. Holding each other accountable has helped as well.

"But I made it a must and I still didn't have time to exercise this week." I've heard that plenty of times before. Hell, I used to say it. The truth is that you didn't really make it a must if you're saying this. It was still a *should* for you.

After about six months of consistent exercise, I started to look forward to it, I started to enjoy it, I even started to crave it. Many people who exercise consistently will tell you the same thing.

Joshua's Personal Diet Musts

It's also a must for me to eat even healthier this year. I still eat less than 2,000 calories, and I also I cut out breads and sugars, and it's going extremely well.

While writing this, a reader asked about "cheat days." My answer: I don't believe in them. Food is not entertainment, it is nourishment. That said, if you're going to cheat—which, think about it, you're just cheating yourself—then I would limit it to one meal per week.

Personally, I don't eat meat (other than fish), but I believe you can eat meat and still have a healthy diet. You should, however, eliminate (or

drastically reduce) your intake of three things: sugar, fried foods (or anything with a lot of fat), and complex carbs (bread, pasta, etc.). That's really it; it's not that hard.

I tend to eat two to three meals per day. I don't snack anymore (snacking is evil). I eat a lot of salad and fruits and vegetables, and I drink at least 100 ounces of water per day. I'm addicted to burrito places like Chipotle, but I eat burrito bowls (no tortilla) with light rice, lots of beans, vegetables, and a little cheese. I also respect the Paleo diets of people like Julien Smith and Jeff Sarris, which is somewhat close to my diet, although my diet doesn't have a name, I just call it eating healthy foods.

Eating healthy foods is no more expensive than any other diet. In fact it can be cheaper because you buy less stuff. I intentionally keep very little food at home for two reasons (yes, this works for families too):

1. I'm not wasting money buying a bunch of food
2. I don't even have the opportunity to snack at home

What about cravings? This might sound a bit flippant, but it doesn't take discipline to not eat something. Just don't eat it. Again, food is not entertainment. I tend to associate pain with any junk foods I crave, because I've personally seen the results in my body when I eat them. If you do this (i.e., associate pain with junk foods) then you'll have enough leverage not to eat it.

How do you associate pain with junk food? How about this: before you eat the piece of crap you're about to eat, take off your clothes, stick out your gut, and look at yourself in the mirror completely naked. That used to work for me. Still want that piece of cake?

The best part about my diet and exercise is that I feel great. Do you know how good it feels to say I'm in the best shape of my life? I want you to be able to say that too. I'm certain you can do it. Let me know if I can help.

More Time

Ironically, exercise actually gives you more time, it doesn't take it away. Not only does it add years to your lifespan, but in my case it allows me to build a stronger relationship with my best friend. And when I exercise alone, it gives me time in solitude, time for myself, which we all know is important. Exercise is a surprising way to reclaim your time.

Today

I encourage you to take some sort of action today (with respect to both diet and exercise). You don't need to join a gym to exercise; you just need to do something that gets you moving. So shut off your computer now, go for a walk or a jog or a run or bike ride or something. And start eating healthy foods today too. Make it a must.

30 IS NOT THE NEW 20

By Joshua Fields Millburn

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.

I officially turned 30 recently (cue the music and the candlelit cake).

They say that 30 is the new 20, but to be honest I'm glad that's not true. I'm moving forward, not backwards. I'm growing and I'm happy to be 30.

I struggled immensely throughout the last two years, as a decade faded for me. And through the struggle, I grew tremendously. I am a different man. We change over time—we really do—often for the better.

I am a better man today than I was yesterday. But I am far from perfect. I make mistakes and bad decisions, and I fail at times. I stumble, fall. I am human—a mixed bag, nuanced, the darkness and the light—as are you. And you are beautiful.

My story is unique, and yet it is no different than yours, minus the details.

I have loved. I have laughed, grown, and contributed. And for that I am grateful.

I have hated. I have hurt, damaged, and lied. And for that I am sorry.

I have lived. And for that I bear no regrets.

But today marks a new decade for me, a decade of opportunity. My twenties were filled with the greatest joys of my life, as well as my most excruciating pains. I can see it lingering behind me in the foreground of my rearview mirror. Perhaps my thirties will bring forth a certain kind of levity, a certain kind of serenity, a certain kind of calm.

Or perhaps life isn't meant to contain these kinds of absolutes. Perhaps one must sit in the valley to see the beauty of the mountaintop, to appreciate

his ascent, to live a meaningful life. And perhaps the key is to not live in the valley, but, rather, to be aware of why you are there and prepare for the journey ahead.

My friend, Mark Robertson, recently wrote a line that stuck with me. He said, “Sometimes rock bottom is the finest place to be.” For me, his sentiment speaks of opportunity, of growth, of a bright and compelling future, irrespective of your current situation, be it good, bad, or somewhere in between.

Whatever the case may be, I will embrace this life, even though it scares the shit out of me at times. It is the only life I have. And I will love my life—a beautiful and terrifying and wondrous life—through the good times and the bad.

Here’s to another 30 years, and then another.

30 LIFE LESSONS FROM 30 YEARS

By Joshua Fields Millburn

Last month I turned 30. And during the journey to 30, I learned much. Below are 30 of the most important life lessons from those 30 years.

30 Lessons I've Learned In 30 Years

1. We must love . You know the saying, “tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all,” right? I know, such statements sound so banal and vapid on the surface that we often dismiss them with a wave of the hand. But it’s the cold truth, a truth so profound that perhaps we can only discuss it with little clichéd statements. But we must love, even if it breaks our hearts. Because unless we love, our lives will flash by.
2. Love isn’t enough . Although we must love, love is not enough to survive. We must take action to show others that we care, to show them that we love them.
3. Happiness is not for sale in any store . We can’t buy happiness. Hell, it sounds cliché to even say that, and yet we search the aisles and shelves and pages on eBay in search of something more, something to fill the void. But we can’t fill the void with stuff. It doesn’t work that way, no matter how hard we try or how much stuff we buy, because that stuff won’t make us happy. At best it will pacify us momentarily. At worst it will ruin our lives, leaving us empty and depressed and even more alone, alone among a sea of material items—sometimes a crowded room can feel the most alone. The

truth is that we are all going to die, and heaping our tombs with treasure will not save us from this fate.

4. Success is perspectival . I used to think I was successful because I had a six-figure job that my friends and family could be proud of. I thought the house with too many bedrooms would make me look even more successful, and so would the luxury car and the tailored suits and the nice watch and the big screen TV and all of the trappings of the material world. But I got all of that and I sure as hell didn't feel successful. Instead, I felt depressed. So what did I do? I bought more stuff. And when that didn't work I figured out that I had to do something else with my life, that I had to stop living a lie and start living my dreams.

5. You must make change a must . I knew that I wanted to change my life for the longest time. I knew I was unhappy, unsatisfied, and unfulfilled. I knew I didn't have freedom. Not real freedom. The problem was that I knew these things intellectually but not emotionally. I didn't have the feeling in my gut that things must change. I knew they should change, but the change wasn't a must for me, and thus it didn't happen. But once you understand these things on an emotional level you are able to turn your shoulds into musts. I believe that that is the pivotal point, that is when you get leverage, that is when you are compelled to take action. Thus, a decision is not a real decision until it is a must for you, until you feel it on your nerve-endings, until you are compelled to take action. Once your shoulds have turned into musts, then you have made a real decision.

6. Growth & contribution is the meaning of life . Giving is living, I've said that before. I believe the best way to live a meaningful life is simple: continuously grow as an individual and contribute to other people in a meaningful way. Growth and contribution. That's all. That's the meaning of my life.

7. Health is more important than most of us treat it . Without health, nothing else matters. It took me over a year and a half to lose 70 pounds—70 pounds of disgusting fat—but that was seven years ago and I've kept the

weight off. I'm not turning back. I'm 30 years old now, but I'm in the best shape of my life, by far. And it's only going to get better from here.

8. Sentimental items are not as important as we think . My mother died in 2009. It was an incredibly difficult time in my life, but it also helped me realize a lot about the unnecessary meaning we give to stuff. I realized that I could hold on to her memories without her stuff, that I don't need Mom's stuff to remind me of her. There are traces of her everywhere: In the way I act, in the way I treat others, even in my smile. She's still there, and she was never part of her stuff.

9. Your job is not your mission . At least it wasn't for me, though I thought it was for the longest time, I gave it so much meaning and worked so much that the rest of my life suffered. Then I discovered it wasn't my mission. So I made a drastic change in my life.

10. Finding your passion is important . My passion is writing. Maybe you already know what your passion is, maybe you don't have a clue. Do yourself a favor and figure it out, it will change everything for you.

11. Relationships matter . Not every relationship matters all that much, but there are a few that really, really matter. There are a few relationships we should focus on (for most of us there are a handful of relationships that truly matter, probably no more than twenty total relationships). I've found that minimalism has helped me focus on these relationships and establish deeper connections with people.

12. You don't need everyone to like you . We all want to be loved, it's a mammalian instinct, but you can't value every relationship the same, and thus you can't expect everyone to love you the same. Life doesn't work that way. Julien Smith articulates this sentiment very well in his essay *The Complete Guide to Not Giving a Fuck* : "When people don't like you, nothing actually happens. The world does not end. You don't feel them breathing down your neck. In fact, the more you ignore them and just go about your business, the better off you are."

13. Status is a misnomer . Similar to “success,” our culture seems to place a lot of emphasis on material wealth as a sign of true wealth, and yet I know too many people of “status,” too many “rich” people—hell, I’ve been to some of their dinner parties—who are miserable, who are not wealthy at all. They are only ostensibly “rich,” but they are bankrupt inside, emotionally drained and broke almost everywhere except in their wallets. But perhaps Chuck Palahniuk said it best: “You’re not your job. You’re not how much money you have in the bank. You’re not the car you drive. You’re not the contents of your wallet. You’re not your fucking khakis.”

14. Jealousy and envy are wasted emotions . This one might be easier for me than it is for you. I’ve never been the jealous type. In fact, it has hurt some relationships for me in the past, because I didn’t articulate this fact—that I’m not the jealous type—to the other person. It’s strange but some people expect us to be jealous to show that we care. Instead, I choose to show I care about someone by showing that I trust them. Just be up front with people, tell them you don’t get jealous because you love them and you trust them. It makes everything easier .

15. Everybody worships something . My favorite fiction writer, David Foster Wallace, said it best: “In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there is actually no such thing as atheism. There is no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.” Many of us choose to worship our stuff. That’s what led me to minimalism.

16. I am not the center of the universe . It’s incredibly difficult to think about the world from a perspective other than our own. We are always worried about what’s going on in our lives. What does my schedule look like today? What if I lose my job during the next round of layoffs? Why can’t I stop smoking? Why am I overweight? Why am I not happy with my life? Suffice it to say that we are acutely aware of everything connected to our own lives. But I am not the center of it all. It’s important to be cognizant of this.

17. Awareness is the most precious kind of freedom . This is yet another reason why minimalism is so appealing to so many people. It removes many of the obstructions and allows us to focus on what's important. Minimalism is a tool to rid ourselves of superfluous excess in favor of a meaningful life, it is a tool to take a seemingly intricate and convoluted world, cluttered with its endless embellishments, and make it simpler, easier, realer. It is unimaginably hard to remain conscious and attentive and aware. It is difficult not to fall back into a trance-like state, surrounded by the trappings and obstructions of the tiring world around us. But it is important to do so, for this is real freedom.

18. Be On The Mountain . This is the term I use for “living in the moment.”

19. We are often scared for no reason . Just ask yourself, “What am I afraid of?” We are usually scared of things that don't have a real impact on our lives (or that we can't control, so we're worrying for no reason).

20. It's OK to change; change is growth . We all want a different outcome, and yet most of us don't want any change in our lives. Change equals uncertainty, and uncertainty equals discomfort, and discomfort isn't much fun. But when we learn to enjoy the process of change—when we choose to look at the uncertain as variety instead of uncertainty—then we get to reap all of the rewards of change. And that's how we grow as people.

21. Pretending to be perfect doesn't make us perfect . As I've said before, I am not perfect, and I never will be. I make mistakes and bad decisions, and I fail at times. I stumble, fall. I am human—a mixed bag, nuanced, the darkness and the light—as are you. And you are beautiful.

22. The past does not equal the future . My words are my words and I can't take them back. You can't change the past, so it's important to focus on the present. If the past equaled the future, then your windshield would be of no use to you; you would simply drive your car with your eyes glued to the rearview mirror. But driving this way—only looking behind you—is a surefire way to crash.

23. Pain can be useful; but suffering—there is absolutely nothing useful about suffering . Pain lets us know that something is wrong. It is an indicator that we need to change what we're doing. But suffering is a choice—one that we all choose from time to time—and we can choose to stop suffering, to learn a lesson from the pain and move on with our lives.

24. Doubt kills . The person who stops you from doing everything you want to do, who stops you from being completely free, who stops you from being healthy or happy or passionate or living a meaningful life is you. We can doubt ourselves to death.

25. It's OK to wait . Blogger Leo Babauta always reminds his readers to slow down, that we don't need to hurry. Sometimes it's OK to wait a little longer for something. Why rush if you don't have to? Why not enjoy the journey? Example: These days, when I'm walking the streets of Dayton or Portland or Oakland or wherever, I don't rush across the crosswalk when I see the flashing red hand warning me that I need to hurry up and cross the damn street! Instead, I wait. I let red hand turn solid, warning me to *halt!* and I let the traffic light change color from green to yellow and then red, and I wait. I look around, I breathe, I think, and I wait. It's OK to wait.

26. Honesty is profoundly important . Honesty, at the most simple level, is telling the truth, not lying. It's incredibly important to be honest, and it's hurtful when you're not, but...

27. Openness is just as important as honesty . Openness is more complicated than honesty. Openness involves being honest, while painting an accurate picture, shooting straight, not misleading other people, and being real. Openness is far more subjective, and you have to be honest with yourself before you can be open with others. This doesn't mean that you must put your entire life on display. Some things are private, and that's OK too.

28. Adding value to other people is the only way to get their buy-in . We recently wrote an essay about adding value to other people. It's something I've lived by for a long time. When I managed a large team of people I

constantly asked them questions like, “how did you add value this week?” I also asked that same question of myself, and I would share with my team how I added value that week. That’s how I got their buy-in.

29. Hype is cancerous . While eating lunch with Leo Babauta in San Francisco he said something that stuck with me: “I’m allergic to hype.” That sentence touched my nerve-endings and resonated in a special way. So often we fall for the hype (e.g., “Buy More, Save More” and “Three-Day Sale!”), and we are suckered into rash buying decisions because of scarcity and a false sense of urgency. But we can train ourselves to not only resist such hype, but to have a vitriolic reaction to the hype, to elicit a response so off-putting that we avoid anything that’s hyped. This goes back to being aware, which is, as I mentioned above, the most precious kind of freedom.

30. I’m still trying to figure it all out . I don’t intend to promulgate my views and opinions as some sort of life maxims or absolute lessons by which you should live your life. What works for me might not work for you (hell, sometimes it doesn’t even work for me). Hopefully some of it does work for you though.

PART FIVE
CONTRIBUTION

GIVING IS LIVING

By Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus

Contributing In a Meaningful Way

It's funny how contributing to others makes us feel. It's a feeling that's hard to explain. There is a sense of fulfillment that you can't get from buying things. It makes you happy. It puts a smile on your face—a real smile.

Here are four examples of ways that we can contribute to others in a meaningful way.

Scenario One: Seeking Out and Giving

Give this a shot: give \$10 to the next guy you see standing on the street corner (yep, we're talking about the panhandler holding an "out of work" sign).

But what if I don't have an extra \$10? You do. Even if you're broke you have \$10 you can give up.

But what if he just uses my money to buy alcohol? He might. But what if you're wrong? What if he uses it to buy food to keep from starving?

Better yet, don't give him the \$10. Instead, use that \$10 to take that guy out to eat. Have a conversation with him. It might change his life. Or the feeling you get from it might change yours. Sometimes giving changes everything.

Something is built into us—hardwired at birth—that makes us feel great when we are kind, when we are giving, when we contribute to others.

Scenario Two: Donate What You Don't Need

How many coats do you need? How many pairs of jeans do you need? What else do you have excess of in your life?

Why not donate that stuff to someone who needs it more than you?

You might recall that Joshua just donated the majority of his remaining clothes to the Goodwill recently. And Ryan donated a ton of stuff to the Salvation Army and Goodwill during our journey into minimalism. You can find the charity that is right for you at DonationTown.com (many will even come to you to pick up your donation). Plus you can write this stuff off at tax time.

Scenario Three: Donate Your Time

Last Saturday, we spent our day donating our time. We helped rehab a house for a family in Dayton, Ohio. We did this with a great organization called Habitat for Humanity. Not only do you get to help a family who needs your help, but you get to pick up some practical skills as a bonus.

We also participate in other community events like soup kitchens, park clean-ups, volunteering at schools (tutoring, painting schools, school maintenance), and any other way we can give back to the people in our community.

The most valuable thing you can give someone is your time. How are you going to give your time to others ?

Here's a recommendation: schedule one day next month with some friends and/or family in which you give back to your community in some way. The easiest places to start are Habitat for Humanity or a local soup kitchen. And make sure you have fun with it—we're certain you will.

Scenario Four: Listen To Your Inner Voice & Help People In The Moment

While Ryan was in the checkout line at the grocery store recently there was a young, early twenty-something couple with a newborn baby standing in front of him. He saw that they were putting some things back they brought to the checkout line because they didn't have enough money. The urge to contribute—that same hardwired desire to help that we all have—kicked in and Ryan knew that he had to contribute to this couple. So he purchased the items they couldn't afford and gave those items to the young couple.

We're not writing about these things because we want everyone to see how nice we are (although we are super nice guys, not to mention incredibly handsome and friendly and supercool guys to hang out with). We're writing about how we contribute because we want you to contribute too.

We want you to hear that voice inside you that tells you to do something kind or generous for someone else. We want you to take action. Sometimes that voice can be quiet and easy to ignore, so we're just reminding you that it's there.

When Ryan got that "you need to do something" feeling in the checkout line, he didn't think, he just acted. You can do the same thing; you can condition yourself to just act.

Take Action and Contribute

If there is something in your life right now that you've been wavering on, a decision of should I or shouldn't I, just act on what you know is right. Act on that built-in voice. We guarantee you'll feel great.

The other great thing about doing what's right isn't just the feeling you get, it's also the payback you'll get when you least expect it, when you need it. Our friend, blogger Colin Wright, calls this paying it way forward. And it works.

More people must contribute.

Start today, start now. We're certain you can make a difference.

ESTABLISHING DEEPER CONNECTIONS WITH PEOPLE

By Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus

Through the mist and through the haze we found clarity.

We just returned from a twelve-day whirlwind journey along America's West Coast, a journey that provided clarity to our lives, and it was the connection with other people that created that clarity.

We both agree that it was the best trip we've ever taken. We flew from Dayton to Portland for an amazing three days of *World Domination Summit*, followed by a few days of roaming the streets of Portland and meeting with some amazing online people. We immersed ourselves in the entire event, including much of the pre- and post-event activities.

Then we drove south down the beautiful Oregon coast towards San Francisco. Along the way, Ryan broke his ankle (it's a long story that involves sharks with laser guns), but he didn't let that spoil the trip. He crutched around San Francisco and the show went on.

We met Leo Babauta for tea under a sun-kissed sky in downtown San Fran. That meeting turned out to be an outstanding experience. Our lives are filled with great moments and exciting times, but occasionally we are blessed with a rare peak experience that we never forget, one in which we notice a fundamental shift in our state; and this meeting was one of those peak experiences.

We were supposed to meet for one hour, but the three of us quickly lost track of time. Four hours later we were sunburned and happy to have created a deeper, more personal connection with each other.

Leo taught us a new way to connect with people, a way that creates a lasting connection, and we want to share that strategy with you.

While we discussed various topics under the California sun, Leo said he wanted to try something he hadn't tried before. He had recently discovered a technique that creates a bond between two or more people, a technique that gets past the surface-level conversation and builds a lasting bond.

First, he recollected a story of a man who stood up in front of a crowd and told two different stories to his audience. The first story was about a successful, accomplished, award winning, well-respected man. The second story was about a man who grew up poor, had problems and struggles throughout his life, made bad decisions, and was far from perfect.

And then Leo asked us which story we connected with most.

Obviously, we connected with the latter story. As humans, we are flawed, we are imperfect, we make bad decisions, and we struggle with life. We are unique, yet we are one in the same, and we connect with that sameness.

So Leo shared a very personal story of his own struggle with us, one that we obviously won't share here. We reciprocated, telling our own personal stories of struggle and imperfection and weakness and utter humanity. It is not a coincidence that all three stories were eerily similar, sharing many common themes, themes that describe what it means to be a human being.

We left that meeting knowing more about Leo but also more about ourselves.

We encourage you to attempt this strategy when creating a connection with others. It might seem frightening to you at first—it was for us—but it opens you up and allows you to create a different kind of connection with someone.

And thus there was one reason why this was the best trip of our lives: connection. Sure the weather was spectacular and the food was amazing and the places we went were very cool, but it was our connection with other people that stood out among everything else. It was that connection that gave meaning to our journey.

ADDING VALUE

By Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus

Adding value to someone else's life is one of the most important things you can do with your life, and it has nothing to do with money.

Why is adding value to others so important? Well, adding value is the only way to get another person's buy-in, and it's one of the few ways to get other people to believe in you as an individual.

When you're adding value to someone's life, you are contributing to that person in a meaningful way. This is important in all facets of life—in leadership positions, in friendships, while meeting and connecting with new people, at your job, and with your family.

If you want people to respect you, then you must add value to their lives. Otherwise you are dead weight, you are a cancer, a parasite, a bug on a dead thing. And we all know that that ain't you.

There are many ways you can add value. You can...

- Create something someone can use
- Inspire someone to take action
- Lend a helping hand
- Be a shoulder to cry on
- Show someone how to do something
- Show someone a better way
- Provide a new perspective
- Lead by example
- Listen more

- Give your full attention
- Just be there for someone
- Love them

It's important to add value in an authentic way, in a way that doesn't have an ulterior motive, in a way that is genuine and helpful and unassuming.

We have all benefited from someone's added value in the past. The two of us started this website last year because we were inspired and encouraged by the value created by four people, whose writing we've admired: Leo Babauta, Colin Wright, Joshua Becker, and Everett Bogue. Those four people added value to our lives, enough value that we were compelled to change and improve our own lives. Their work had a profound impact on us, leading us to make significant changes—some of which were incredibly difficult at times—and live a more meaningful life, a life in which we're growing as individuals and contributing to others in a meaningful way, a life in which we're not concerned with the ostensible value of material items but with the value we can add to other people's lives, and for that we are eternally grateful.

Thus, we find it important to add value to other people whenever we can. In fact, you're reading this because we created our site to add value to other people, to add value to your lives. We also donate our time to charity. We listen more than we talk. We care about other people. And we love.

Who adds value to your life? How do you add value to others?

MINIMALIST FAMILY: START WITH YOURSELF

By Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus

Minimalism is only for single white guys in their 20's with no kids and no family and no obligations.

If you're reading this, then you know that's not true, but unfortunately that's the misconception for many newcomers. They say things like, I couldn't be a minimalist because...

- I am too old/young
- I don't travel all over the world
- I have a spouse/child/large family
- I live in a house/a suburb/the country
- I own a car/television/furniture
- etc., etc., etc.

But the truth is that minimalism can work for anyone.

One of the biggest questions we get is about how to approach minimalism with your family, friends, and loved ones. The question usually sounds something like, "I really want to embrace a minimalist lifestyle, but my husband/wife/children/partner/friends/family isn't on board with me. What should I do?"

It's true, not everyone in your life is going to say "Minimalism? That sounds great! Where do I sign up?" In fact, it's often the opposite. The two of us have been asked if we joined a cult, if we were going through a phase, if we were experiencing an early mid-life crisis, and many other strange questions from people we love and care about.

When some people first hear about minimalism, they don't understand it. To them it sounds vaguely occult, unreasonable, outside the status quo, and far away from the comfort zone of the average consumer. In other words, they don't see why it is a necessary tool to live a more meaningful life.

So, how do you become a minimalist even though your friends or family might not be ready to take the plunge?

The answer is easier than you might think: start with yourself. You must first set the example for the people around you.

- Start with your stuff
- Declutter your closet/drawers
- Donate your time to help others
- Donate your stuff to charity
- Change your habits
- Change your exercise routine
- Reclaim your time
- Pursue your passions
- Find your mission

Once you begin to change yourself, others often follow. They see the *benefits* you're experiencing. They notice your changed life—your passion, freedom, and happiness—and they want in!

Before we knew it, many of the same people who thought we were crazy at first started asking us how they could declutter and donate and live a more meaningful life.

So, start with yourself.

See our 12 Minimalist Family Links at our website — TheMinimalists.com/familylinks — to help you further explore this question and help you create peace between you and your loved ones regarding your minimalist lifestyle.

PART SIX

PASSION & MISSION

I QUIT MY SIX-FIGURE JOB TO PURSUE MY PASSIONS

By Joshua Fields Millburn

March 1, 2011 was my point of no return. That's right, I quit my six-figure day job. It feels great to say those six words. And it is incredibly liberating to write those six words. It is also terrifying and exhilarating and scary and exciting and surreal and unbelievable and, in many ways, indescribable.

A New Day

*It's a new dawn
it's a new day
it's a new life for me.
And I'm feeling good.
—Nina Simone*

These words, sung by Nina Simone, are from my late mother's favorite song, "Feeling Good." And these words connote something utterly different for me now. A new beginning. A fresh start. The precipice of something incredibly exciting.

March 1 was my first day of freedom.

February 28, 2011 was my last day working at my big, fancy, suit-and-tie corporate job. I worked for a large telecom company for the last 12 years. I worked my way up the ladder from an 18 year-old sales rep to various management positions. Eventually I was promoted to Director of Operations where I managed a multi-million dollar operating budget for all of our consumer sales channels.

Most recently I was a Regional Manager (what many companies call a District Manager) for a region of retail stores. I led and managed up to 100 employees in 16 stores. During my career I opened 15 retail stores, hired hundreds of employees, and helped dozens of people grow and realize their full potential.

I was very, very good at my job. I won back-to-back President's Club trips to London and Hawaii for outstanding sales performance. I hired some of the best people in the industry, people who quickly grew and earned promotions throughout the organization. I contributed to people and helped them grow. And people respected me: when I announced my departure, dozens of people asked me where I was going and if they could come with me.

I'm not trying to impress you with these details. If I thought that these things would impress you, then I wouldn't have left my job in the first place. Rather, I give you these details to impress upon you my need for change. Because even though I was living the corporate dream with a big salary and elevated status, I was not completely happy. I was not pursuing my passions, I was not pursuing my mission in life, and I was not pursuing my dreams. Not completely at least. You see, I don't care about impressing you, I care about helping you live a more meaningful life.

And now, a few months before my thirtieth birthday, I'm starting a new chapter in my life. I'll still be leading people, it will just be a different group of people: you, the readers, for whom I am eternally grateful.

There are several reasons why I had to walk away from the corporate life...

Why?

You might want to know why I did this. I mean, you're probably thinking, the economy is in the toilet, right? And many people would give several digits off of their non-use hand to make that kind of money. *And yet you just walked away from it after working your way up the corporate ladder for twelve years?*

Yep.

Why? I did it to pursue my passions, to pursue my mission in life.

Passions? Mission? What does that mean? Yes, for me that specifically means writing (essays On our site and literary fiction) and helping people

by contributing to others through charity work and other means.

How Can You Afford To Do This?

I wrote three long essays that will help you understand the dynamics (all three are contained within this essay collection):

- Stop Living the Lie; Start Living the Life
- Screw You, I Quit!
- Minimalist Finances and Budgeting

With respect to finances, here's a hint: it's easier to survive when you get rid of the vast majority of your bills. You don't need cable TV or Internet or a \$600 car payment. You have a choice: freedom or extra bills. You can't spend money like a drunken sailor and expect to reclaim your freedom. It doesn't work that way.

I can also tell you that I don't have some big savings account to live off of for a long time either (the life I was living didn't allow me to build up some sort of huge nest egg; this is covered in the essays too). I have enough money to live off of for a few months as a safety net, because I will live a simple life with few expenses.

A Better Life Is Out There

I am not telling you to quit your job. Hell, you might love your job. Good for you if you do. In fact, I didn't hate my job. But if you're not happy (and let's be honest, you're probably not), if you're not truly fulfilled, if you're not living a meaningful life, then you must make a change. I'm excited to share those two essays with you so you can see how and why I made the change.

Contribution

I'll contribute to people via our site. I'm thankful that so many of you find inspiration here. I'll also contribute through other means, such as charity and donating my time to help others.

Writing and contributing. That's what I'm doing now. I refuse to be a slave to cultural expectations, ensnared by the trappings of money and power and status and perceived success.

STOP LIVING THE LIE; START LIVING THE LIFE

By Joshua Fields Millburn

You thought I was crazy

Admit it, you thought I was crazy, didn't you?

I heard what you said about me when I quit my six-figure job to pursue my passions.

You thought I was crazy when I said I was going to be a full-time fiction writer. *He'll never make it* , and *He'll be back in a few months* , and *God he is stupid!* That's what you said, isn't it?

You thought I was crazy when I got rid of all my junk and became a minimalist.

What the hell is a minimalist? Why would anyone want to get rid of all that stuff? Who the hell doesn't own a TV? And I think he's going through some sort of quarter-life crisis.

You thought I was crazy when I started a website with my best friend to help other people live a life of freedom. You said, *It sounds like a gimmick, and they sure do look gay in those pictures together, don't they?*

You thought I was crazy when I completely changed my diet and started exercising like it was a religion .

You thought I was crazy when I started an experiment and refused to buy any physical items for an entire year.

You even thought I was crazy when I started donating a lot more of my time to charities like soup kitchens and building homes for the poor. You couldn't understand why this would be important to me.

But wait. What if there's something wrong with *you* ?

Perhaps I am crazy

Fine, call me crazy. If living a more meaningful life—one that is filled with happiness and passion and freedom—is crazy, then I am utterly insane.

But let's be honest for a moment— you wish you could do it too. You said so. Even if you didn't say it to me directly, your body language said it for you. I can see it in you— in your eyes and the expression on your face. Other people can see it in you too. They can see through you.

You wish that you could quit your soul crushing job. You wish that you could pursue your passions. You wish that you could get rid of the stress in your life. You wish that you didn't give so much meaning to your possessions. You wish that you could reclaim your time and live a life of conscious freedom.

The truth is that you could do any of those things, and you know that you could, but you won't.

You want it to be one way, but it's the other way

I remember watching a great from the acclaimed HBO TV series *The Wire* . The scene's character, Marlo Stanfield, is a drug dealer, and a disgusting, reprehensible human being. But he has one incredibly powerful virtue: he knows exactly what he wants in life, and he is willing to walk the walk to get it.

In the scene, a rent-a-cop confronts Marlo outside the store, and after a moment of tension, Marlo calmly reminds him that “you want it to be one way, but it's the other way.”

You want to be the one with the power. But you're not.

You want it to be one way— you want to be happy, free, and have the right to pursue your passions and live a more meaningful life— but it's the other way. You choose to live the life that you're living, and don't change even though you think you want to.

So you hate what you do— you hate your job or your physical health or your debt or your depression or your life in general— and I'm crazy?

You can't be serious.

I'm living a more meaningful life now. I'm pursuing my passions (writing both fiction and non-fiction). I'm in the best shape of my life. I'm more free than you. I'm more passionate than you. I'm growing as an individual. And I'm contributing to other people in a more meaningful way.

And you're doing what? You're just talking.

Make change a must

It's not too late to stop talking and get up off your ass.

Do something.

Take action.

Turn off the TV .

Shutdown your computer.

Get out there and act.

Or you could just sit back and do nothing. You can just keep being you, content in the vast pool of mediocrity.

And you can continue down your current path if you'd like, and if you work really, really hard you can end up there—six figure job, all the stuff you can imagine—which on the surface didn't look too bad. Hell, I looked really successful too.

But displaying status symbols is simple. They're trophies—but I wasn't actually successful at all. I had luxury cars and a house with more bedrooms than inhabitants, a bunch of gadgets I hardly used, clothes I didn't wear, and all the trappings that our heavily-mediated culture tells us that we should have (and a nice size debt to accompany those “accomplishments”). But I wasn't happy at all, which is perhaps the true measure of success.

The people who envied my life didn't see the other side, they didn't see the life behind the curtain. I did a good job of masking my fear, my debt, my anxiety, my stress, my loneliness, my guilt, my depression. I displayed a impressive facade, revealing only what I thought the world wanted me to reveal.

Worst of all, my life was void of any real meaning, and it felt as if I was flying in ever-diminishing circles.

Not too long ago, I was you. I was that guy: Joshua Fields Millburn, the unhappy young executive. But then I did three things to change my life:

1. I made the decision to change my life.
2. I made that change a must instead of a should.
3. I took action.

I'm not saying that it's easy, and sometimes you'll be terrified by the changes you're making, but it's so much better than the alternative. It's so much better than walking with the living dead.

It's not too late for you. Make the decision to change, make it a must, and take action. You deserve to be happy. You deserve a better life.

But if you refuse to change, then perhaps you deserve the life that you already have.

SCREW YOU, I QUIT!

By Joshua Fields Millburn

Pay close attention, this story might be about you.

Once upon a time, there was a guy. This guy had it made. He was in his late twenties, he had a six-figure corporate job, he was well respected by his peers and subordinates and bosses at work, and he seemed passionate and friendly and outgoing and successful. He was living the corporate dream.

People saw his nice house with too many bedrooms, his too-fancy car, his ridiculous gadgets, and his life of opulence and thought, *I want to be like that guy*. They saw all of those things—all of that superfluous stuff—and they just knew he was successful.

But he wasn't successful at all. Maybe he was ostensibly successful—displaying his status symbols as if they were trophies—but he wasn't actually successful. The people who envied his life didn't see the other side, they didn't see the man behind the curtain. He did a good job of masking his fear, his debt, his anxiety, his stress, his loneliness, his guilt, his depression. He displayed an impressive facade, revealing only what he thought the world wanted him to reveal.

Worst of all, he wasn't happy with his life.

I know this story because I am that guy. Or at least I was that guy: Joshua Fields Millburn, the unhappy young executive. And this is my story about why I quit my job to pursue my passions and live a meaningful life, and I'm going to show you how and why you should pursue your passions too, why you must live a meaningful life if you want to be happy.

This journey started because I was tired of not being happy, plain and simple. Yes, I had a “great” job by cultural standards. But working 70 to 80

hours per week for a corporation was not cutting it for me. Not that working for a company is inherently bad or evil or wrong, it's not. In fact, I had a lot of mixed emotions about leaving my job. I love a lot of the people there, and there were a ton of things I enjoyed about the job itself: I enjoyed leading people, I enjoyed developing people and helping them see their true potential, and I got used to the comforts the big salary afforded me.

But I was empty inside. I was not living a meaningful life, I was not fulfilled or satisfied, and I certainly was not free. That's because I wasn't doing what I really wanted to do. I wasn't pursuing my passions. I wasn't living my mission.

Instead, I made six figures per year but got further into debt every time I got a pay raise. I was trying to buy happiness. I was trying to fill the void with things, attempting to give meaning to that which has no meaning.

And over the course of a year—in late 2009 and early 2010— my life came crashing down in front of me. It was as if I had no power over my life as it collapsed before my eyes. In 2009 my mother fell victim to cancer and I watched her die slowly and painfully as she battled it. Shortly thereafter, my marriage crumbled and it was completely my fault. During that time, my job became mundane and what I once thought was my mission in life became void of any meaning. And to top it off, my fiction writing—my true passion—halted. It was around that time I stopped caring about life, and my mental and physical health deteriorated. I was flying in ever-diminishing circles.

It's sad that it took that series of life-altering events to wake me up, to make me take massive action to become more free, to find meaning in my life.

In 2010 I stumbled across the concepts of minimalism and simplicity and unstoppable passion. More specifically, I stumbled across a handful of blogs that opened a door in my mind and changed my life and led me to today (N.B. prior to discovering these blogs, I never even read blogs and thought they were generally a waste of time). I first discovered Everett Bogue's, Colin Wright's, Joshua Becker's, and Leo Babauta's blogs via Twitter; I was intrigued by their stories, which lead me to other interesting sites.

All of these people had different stories and different perspectives on living a more meaningful life, and yet their fundamental message was the

same: the stuff in your life is not going to make you happy, and there is another way to live your life, a way in which you can grow as a person and contribute to others in a meaningful way, a way in which you can be happy and fulfilled and passionate and free.

The life that these people were living was the life that I wanted to live—not that I wanted their lives, but I wanted the freedom that their lifestyles afforded them—so I adopted the principals of minimalism and applied them to my life. I got rid of unnecessary things so I could focus on what's important in my life, so I could focus on relationships and pursuing my passions and living a meaningful life, so I could focus on growth and contribution.

Liberating Yet Terrifying

Once you do this—once you discover your passion and mission—it's eye opening. It's liberating, but it's also terrifying.

It's liberating because everything changes for you. You feel new and excited and free. Now you have something to focus on, and your life has a purpose, it has a meaning.

It's terrifying because you realize that the life you've been living has been total bullshit, you realize that you must change, because if you don't change then you're essentially dead.

This might sound like hyperbole or exaggeration, but I assure you it's not. It's the cold truth. You are either living a meaningful life or you are dead inside.

Burn The Boat

You've most likely heard that little old parable before, the one in which the warriors arrive on the island and burn their boats so they are forced to stay and fight because they have no other alternative. They must fight and win or die trying. There's no turning back.

On February 28, 2011, I burned my boat. That was my last day at my big corporate job. March 1, 2011, was my first day of freedom, the first day of my real life, my new life. This year I will focus on my passion (primarily writing) and on my mission (growth and contribution). I will publish my first novel *As a Decade Fades* towards the end of the year (my passion). I will publish content on our site that helps people change their lives (my

passion and mission). I will spend a lot more time contributing to others through charity and mentoring (my mission). And I will help you if you need my help.

Burning your boat is also terrifying. You begin to think things like, *What am I going to do for money?* and *What if I end up broke, will I be homeless?* and *What if I'm not successful at pursuing my passions?* and *What if I'm making a terrible mistake?*

You will probably think all of these things—and many other things—at some point in time. I did. It's natural. We've been conditioned to think this way. When you are going against the status quo, there is going to be some push back. Your friends might think you're insane, your co-workers won't understand, your family might think you're lazy. So what! Those things don't mean anything if you're not pursuing your passions, if you're not happy.

Burning your boat means that you must be successful: you are leaving yourself no options other than success. Nothing to fall back on, no safety net. You will find a way to succeed.

This doesn't mean that you can live the same lifestyle that you lived before though. The house with the two extra guest bedrooms isn't going to cut it. The \$600 car payment isn't going to cut it. Continuously buying stuff isn't going to cut it. You will have to drastically adjust your lifestyle if you want to pursue your passions.

But I don't have enough money to change my life, you might say. Really? How much money do your dreams cost? Are you pursuing the dream?

But I have a family and kids to take care of, you might say. Well, Leo Babauta has a wife and six kids and he changed his life, and Joshua Becker has a wife and two children, but he is living his mission and is living a minimalist lifestyle.

No matter what excuse you have, there is a way around it. You know it's true.

Screw You, I Quit!

The “screw you” here is a bit more subtle than it sounds. I didn't barrel into my boss's office and yell, “Screw you, I quit!” In fact, I had no desire to

do so. My former boss is an amazing guy. He who taught me a lot about life.

So, my “screw you” is not to my former job.

Instead, my “screw you” here is to my old lifestyle, to my old life, to a life without meaning. I’m not just quitting a job—the job is not the point here—I’m quitting the life that I lived, and I’m committed to living a meaningful life, one in which I do what I love.

And you can do it too .

I didn’t quit with some big savings account to live off of for a while, but I have enough money to live off of for a few months as a safety net, because I will live a simple life with few expenses. And you can do the same thing. You can refuse to be a slave to your current circumstances and to live a more meaningful life. You can pursue you passions.

That’s what I’m doing starting today. I refuse to be a slave to culture expectations, ensnared by the trappings of money and power and status and perceived success. So, to my old life, I bid you farewell. Oh, and screw you, I quit!

MINIMALIST FINANCES AND BUDGETING

By Joshua Fields Millburn

I'm a minimalist, not a communist. And minimalists aren't allergic to money.

Ever since I wrote about leaving my corporate job at age 29, a lot of people have asked a lot of questions, many of which revolve around finances: How are you going to make a living? How are you going to pay all of your bills? What expenses do you still have? What expenses do you get rid of? How can I apply this to my life when I still have to deal with X and Y and Z?

I hope this essay will address most of your questions.

But first, a note: living a meaningful life has nothing to do with how much money you make. I used to make a lot of money. I don't make nearly as much money anymore. Not even close. And that's OK because contribution and growth and pursuing your passions are more important. I'll address those concepts later in this essay and tie it all together—finances and living a meaningful life—with a neat little bow at the end .

Budgeting

Let's start with how I manage expenses. As you can imagine, I like to keep it simple, so let's look at it in a way that will apply to anyone: regardless of your income, you must spend less than you take in, otherwise the math does not work, and you will go into debt—or further into debt—if you spend more than you make.

This might sound overly simplistic or vapid or trite, and yet more people are in debt today than ever before.

And I know this first hand. I used to spend more than I made, even when I was making well over six figures. It didn't matter because I was spending more money than I brought home. That will never get you ahead. Never.

This all sounds like common sense, I know. But the problem is that common sense isn't all that common these days.

Bottom line: you must spend less than you make.

Resources

I realize that your situation is different than mine, but that doesn't mean you have an excuse, it doesn't mean you can keep putting it off, it doesn't mean that you have to remain trapped in a job you hate, in a life without freedom.

Because everyone's situation is different, I want you to have some resources to tackle your finance and debt problems:

Debt : Adam Baker over at ManVsDebt.com has some outstanding resources to help you get out of debt. That's a great place to get started. It doesn't happen over night (it took me two years to get out of debt), but you must get out of debt—or at least be on the journey towards a debt-free life—before you can live a life of freedom.

Money Management and Tracking : the best site to track all of your expenses (from what I can tell) is Mint.com. Mint brings all your financial accounts together online, automatically categorizes your transactions, lets you set budgets & helps you achieve your savings goals. And it's free.

Accountability : I respect writer Raam Dev for the way he holds himself accountable with respect to his finances. On his website — RaamDev.com — he publishes a monthly financial report in which he discloses all his expense (e.g., meals, housing, cellphone, etc.). Even when he overspends, he makes it public. While I don't aspire to live a similar lifestyle—the lifestyle of a perpetual peripatetic—I can tell that Raam's tracking method has changed his mindset for every dollar he spends. How will you hold yourself accountable?

My Expenses

Let's talk about absolute expenses. These are simply the things I must pay to live my current lifestyle:

- Rent (includes trash and water)
- Utilities (gas and electric)
- Car Insurance (I don't have a car payment)
- Gasoline (for what little I do drive; I walk when I can)
- Food (including tips; don't be a jerk, tip well)
- Savings Account (can also include retirement accounts)
- Health Insurance & Medical Expenses
- Cell Phone (optional)
- Gym Membership (optional)

That's it. I didn't include totals because yours will obviously be different. So plug in the numbers for yourself, and that's what you need to make to live. And for me these expenses don't count money for things I want to do outside of my absolute expenses, things like concerts or movies or other events that require money. But those things are optional, and I don't have to do them.

A note about health insurance: if you want to leave your job or start your own profitable business or are already self-employed, I still recommend having some type of health insurance. Sure, some people don't have health insurance, but there are options for non-corporate people. The most common options are as follows:

- Purchase a high-deductible policy
- Check prices with the Freelancer's Union
- Compare quotes with an insurance broker
- Get insurance through your spouse's employer

A note about your savings account: it is important to have an emergency fund saved that you don't touch. Rule of thumb is three to six months of basic living expenses (food and shelter). Adam Baker shows you how to

make money from selling your crap; that's a great way to build up some quick savings .

Expenses I Eliminated

These are the expenses I used to have, but got rid of (over a two year period):

- House payment (sold the house)
- Homeowner's insurance
- Car payment (paid off the car)
- Cable TV (got rid of my TV)
- Internet (go elsewhere for Internet)
- New clothes every month
- Credit card #1
- Credit card #2
- Credit card #3
- Credit card #4 (Yes, I had four credit cards. No, I am not kidding.)
- Student loans
- Other miscellaneous debt (paid off)
- Junk
- Junk
- Junk (Yes, I used to buy a lot of junk, but I'm not buying that stuff anymore.)

Trading Money For Freedom

One principal I live by is *questioning all of my purchases* . It takes time to earn money, and my time is my freedom, so by giving up my money I'm giving up small pieces of my freedom. Before I make a purchase (even for a cup of coffee) I say to myself, "Is this cup of coffee worth \$2 of my freedom?" This has significantly changed my mindset .

Income

Once people know how much money they need, they always want to know how to make that much money so they can leave their soul crushing job or find a job that they enjoy more that might pay less. These people

often say, *but I don't want to write or start a website* . I say, that's OK! If you start a website like this one with the intention of making money, you will probably fail. Yes we make some money from our site now, but that's not why we started it. But that's not your passion anyway, so...

First, you must identify your passions. This one is easy for some people, and you might already know the answer. If you do, that's great.

But if you don't know the answer, Jonathan Mead did a beautiful job explaining the his guide, *Seven Keys to Discovering Your Passion* .

Me? My Passion? Writing. Especially literary fiction. And by the end of 2012 I anticipate that my income from fiction will surpass the income generated from our popular site.

What about you? What is your passion? Do you want to start a profitable business? Do you want to teach children? Do you want to start a blog? Do you want to write a novel? Do you want to become a scientist? Do you want to travel the world? Do you want to feed the homeless?

Second, you must identify your mission in life. This one's a little more tricky and even a bit philosophical. Sometimes, if you're very lucky, your mission is the same thing as your passion, but it's OK if it's different too (it's different for me) .

Another way to look at this is to ask yourself, "What is the meaning of my life?" OK, I'll admit, this is an extremely complex question. The good news is that I've spent years thinking about it and helping other people with this same question.

So let's remove the complexities of this question. Regardless of the answer's specificity, the answer always revolves around two things:

- Personal Growth
- Contributing to Other People

In other words, the meaning of my life is to grow as an individual and contribute to other people in a meaningful way. And the good news is that you get to decide how you're going to do both.

Growth .

I grow in several ways, most notably:

- Writing & Reading strengthens my mind and my craftsmanship, and it also strengthens my relationships because we have interesting topics to discuss.
- Daily Exercise strengthens my overall physical and mental health.
- Relationships allow me to connect with others to get new ideas and learn more about myself through conversation.

Contribution .

I contribute to others in several ways too:

- Charity & Community Outreach . I donate my time to charitable organizations, I also organize larger teams to participate at local community outreach events.
- Coaching and Mentoring . I help others when they are looking for direction.
- Writing . Great writing contributes to readers in a special way. Great writing can connect with another person on a level that other forms of entertainment are incapable of doing.

How about you? In what ways do you grow? In what ways do you contribute? How would you like to grow and contribute? Make a list and pick your top three in each category. Focus on those, they are your mission.

PART SEVEN

TAKING ACTION

HOW TO MAKE A DAMN DECISION

By Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus

The first step in any journey is often the most difficult. This was true for our journey into minimalism. In this case, our first step had nothing to do with a task that we had to complete. Our first step was deciding. Or, rather, deciding that we wanted to make a significant change in our lives.

Making decisions is often difficult. And procrastination is easy, at least for the moment. But there is no reward in procrastination.

Whether it's leaving your wife, destroying your car, burning the bridges at your high paying job you hate, or running away from your childhood home. It's all the same, and it's all hard.

The truth is that you deserve to be happy, and something is in the way.

Our society is being reborn, but in order to follow the path we have to make tough choices. There will have to be yes or no answers. You can't keep it all and have freedom too.

Sooner or later the moment will come when you can't hide from the things we've done anymore. And you'll have to make a choice, which we believe is between life and death.

For years you couldn't figure out what the problem was, instead you had this raw aching feeling that something/somewhere was terribly wrong.

But the most difficult part of creating a change is deciding to make that change a reality, it's deciding when to take action, it's when you know that you must make a decision in order to change your life.

This might sound like hyperbole, so let's get more concrete.

Two Kinds of Decisions

Fundamentally, we believe that there are two kinds of decisions you can make: *intellectual* decisions and *emotional* decisions.

Intellectually, we knew that we wanted a change in our lives. We knew we were unhappy, unsatisfied, unfulfilled. We knew that we didn't have freedom. Not real freedom. The problem is that we knew these things intellectually but not emotionally. We didn't have the feeling in our guts that things must change. We knew they *should* change but the change wasn't a must for us. And, as we consistently reiterate, the fundamental shift occurs in one's life when they change their *shoulds* into *musts* .

Should vs. Must

And so it's just like anything else you tell yourself.

I should change.

I should stop wasting my money .

I should work less.

I should get rid of all this junk.

I should eat healthier food.

I should exercise.

I should write more.

I should read more.

I should watch less TV.

I should, I should, I should.

Eventually you end up shoulding all over yourself. You really do feel like shit after you've put everything off for so long, after you've procrastinated over and over and over.

But once you understand these things on an emotional level, you are able to turn your shoulds into musts. We believe that is the pivotal point. That is when you get leverage. That is when you are compelled to take action.

Thus, a decision is not a real decision until it is a must for you, until you feel it on your nerve endings and it effects you at a cellular level, until you are compelled to take action. Once your shoulds have turned into musts, then you have made a real decision.

I must change.

I must stop wasting my money.

I must work less.

I must get rid of all this junk.
I must eat healthier food.
I must exercise.
I must write more.
I must read more .
I must watch less TV (or no TV at all).
I must, I must, I must.

Go back and say these things out loud. Seriously, don't do anything else until you go back and say those musts out loud. Do you feel how much more powerful they feel than the same exact list of shoulds above? The should list is passive and defeated and lethargic and dead. The musts are alive and filled with vigor and strength and energy. I must take action!

Now, your only exercise for today is simple, it's to make your Must List. What are your musts? What must happen in your life for a fundamental change to occur? Take as much time as you need and write down all of your musts.

I must...
I must...
I must...

We must take action. That's what we decided when we started this journey. And you must take action too.

Your first day on your journey isn't even about taking action though (you'll take action every day after today), but your first day is still your hardest day. Today is the day that you must decide that things must change. You know, at least intellectually, that you are not happy with how things are in your life. But you can't have it both ways. You can't want it to be one way, when your actions are the other way. If your actions are not congruent with your desires, then you will never feel happy, never feel fulfilled, never be content.

Take a look at your Must List. Put that list somewhere where you will see it all the time. Now stop everything you are doing and make a decision. Make a decision to change your life, to live your life the way you want to live it. Don't just think about the change intellectually, feel it in your gut. Know that you must change. Feel the change on your nerve endings.

Today is the best day of your life, because today is the day that everything changes. Today is the day that your shoulds turn into

your musts. Today is the day you decide to take action. Today is first day of the rest of your new life, your new minimalist life.

NEVER LEAVE THE SCENE OF A GOOD IDEA WITHOUT TAKING ACTION

By Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus

People want options, it almost goes without saying. We get a few emails per week from overwhelmed readers asking us where to start on their journey into minimalism. They are lost and overwhelmed and are looking for direction. Really, these people are looking for options. Some of them are scared shitless. They don't know where to start and thus options make it easier for them to make a decision.

This presents a particular kind of double-bind though. You see, options are great until we have too many options. That's why it takes you twice as long to shop at Walmart than at your local grocery store. That's why you're wife/husband/significant other spends five minutes in the shampoo aisle. Paralysis by analysis. Options are good and helpful, but too many options are not.

So you want to live a more minimalist lifestyle? "But where the hell do I start?" you ask yourself. There are so many blogs out there that you feel overwhelmed just trying to scratch the surface. And there are ebooks and references and everyone has his or her opinion that they pretend is some sort of absolute truth or some kind of zen maxim or something. It's all a little crazy-making.

Whenever we get one of those emails asking us where to start, we usually respond with three options: extreme, moderate, and conservative.

1. Extreme . This is both the easiest and most difficult option of the three and it is not for most people (it certainly isn't for the two of us). Here's the best way to sum it up: *Rent a dumpster, throw all of your excess shit in it,*

and move on with your life. That's pretty much all there is to it, but be prepared to live with a bag or two of clothes and that's about it. There is nothing wrong with it, especially if you want to travel.

2. Moderate . Do what Ryan did and have a Packing Party. Pretend you're moving and unpack what you need over the course of the next week. Discard everything else thereafter. This option takes about a day of your life, but you can actually have fun doing it. This option tends to work very well for single people and for couples with one or no children. It is, however, too much for some people to handle at first.

3. Conservative . Start with one room and take baby steps towards your goal.

Whichever option you choose, the most important part is taking action. Once you make the decision, you must take action. This allows you to build momentum. You should never leave the scene of a good idea without taking some sort of immediate action.

And your actions can change over time too. Recently, Joshua donated the majority of his clothes to Goodwill.

Getting rid of most of your clothes might not sound practical. There's no doubt that it's a bit more on the extreme side. You see, Joshua started out initially with the conservative option, well over a year ago, slowly paring down his possessions and decluttering and getting rid of things he didn't use or want or need.

But he eventually moved to the more moderate option, beginning to question all his possessions. "Do I really need this?" was the question he started to ask himself about all his stuff, from clothes to furniture to kitchen utensils.

Recently, he realized that he could get by with less and by doing so he could appreciate what he had even more. So he got rid of anything he hadn't worn in the last 30 days, from coats and shirts to belts and shoes. His closet is down to the basics now and he feels great about the decision. The moral of the story is that it's OK to start out by taking baby steps. Walk before you run. If you can start off running, that's even better, but don't get

discouraged if you can't. You should only get discouraged if you refuse to take immediate action.

Don't wait until tomorrow. Tomorrow will always be a day away. Don't put up a barrier or an excuse that prevents you from taking action. You're so much better than that. Sure you're tired, sure you're busy, sure you're whatever, but don't let that stand in your way. The only person holding you back is you. And you don't need permission. Take action today. Take action now.

PACKING PARTY

By Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus

Note: This short essay was extracted from our 21 Day Journey Into Minimalism, all 21 of which days can be found on our website for free.

Today is the day we take real action. Massive, immediate action.

The Packing Party concept is simple: pretend you are moving on a whim and you have only one day to pack all of your stuff

Why a Packing Party? Well, the idea of turning this difficult event into a “party.” Everything’s more fun when it’s a party, right? Invite some friends over to share the fun.

We took eight hours and packed everything in Ryan’s kitchen, dining room, living room, family room, and all three bedrooms, including several very cluttered closets and overflowing drawers in each room.

For items that we couldn’t box (large furniture and appliances), we placed a sheet over those items, making them unusable. Even things like Ryan’s living room couch and coffee table were covered at the end of our Party .

The idea is to pack everything, including things you know you will use, like your toothbrush and deodorant and kitchen utensils; and then unpack only the things you need during the next week. So, if you need your toothbrush later today, you’ll unpack it. Need your shampoo and conditioner and moisturizing bodywash in the morning? Unpack it. Need some clothes to wear tomorrow. Unpack them.

After a week, you’ll notice the vast majority of your stuff still packed away in boxes. That’s when it’s time to make some interesting decisions: trash, sell, donate.

At the end of our part, Ryan had one room filled wall to wall with boxes and trash bags and big blue storage bins. More importantly, he had a bunch of empty rooms and empty cabinets, allowing him to move on with his life, allowing him to focus on what's important.

PART EIGHT

CHANGE & EXPERIMENTATION

STOP TRYING

By Joshua Fields Millburn & Ryan Nicodemus

There you are, standing at the center of a capacious warehouse in an abandoned building somewhere at the edge of the city, empty except for a single wooden chair that sits on the dusty concrete floor underneath your feet. You look around. It's just you and the chair and the scattered fragments of debris from several different decades and the muted sounds of the city.

Your mission: *try* to pick up the chair.

But this presents a unique problem, doesn't it? You see, you can't try to pick it up, either you pick it up or you don't, you can or you can't, you succeed or you fail, but you don't try. It is impossible to *try* to pick up that chair.

So instead of try, you lift the chair and smile a triumphant smile. Success. There was no try, you just did it. You didn't try to accomplish your goal, you took action and you accomplished it.

And yet you've failed in the past, you've set out to do something and you weren't able to accomplish what you intended to accomplish.

But I tried really, really hard, you say.

And therein lies the problem. *Trying* is the problem.

Stop Trying; Start Doing

Are you trying to live a simpler, more meaningful life? Stop trying; start living it.

Are you trying to declutter your life and sell a bunch of your stuff? Stop trying; get rid of it.

Are you trying to start a profitable business or write a book or lose weight or be a more positive person or travel more often or donate more

time to charity? Stop trying; start taking action.

What else are you trying? What do you want?

And do yourself a favor, try not to use the word *try* for a week, or better yet make a conscious effort to not use the word, catch yourself when you slip, notice the difference.

MINIMALIST NEW YEARS RESOLUTION

By Joshua Fields Millburn

I have a lot of goals this year. None of them will be discussed with any detail in this short essay though. Rather, I want to tell you about my one single resolution this year. It's more of a challenge for myself than anything.

This year, I resolve to purchase no physical items other than consumables (e.g., hygiene products and food).

That's right: no new clothes, no new shoes, no new books, no new electronics, no new gadgets, no new stuff. No new material items.

Why am I doing this? Because I want to prove to you—and to myself—that I already have everything I need. I don't need more stuff to be happy.

Don't get me wrong, I will still spend money on experiences this year (viz. doing things with my friends, things like concerts and movies and events), just not on stuff.

And I'm not doing this because I can't financially afford to buy stuff, I'm doing it because I'm certain I can do it, I'm certain I don't need more stuff to make me perfect, and I'm certain it will help me focus my precious time on things that are more important to me, things like growth and contribution and relationships and writing and finishing the novel I've been working on.

If I fail, I will tell you about my failures. But I don't plan on failing, I'm not that kind of person. Plus telling the world about my resolution is a cold reminder that people are counting on me to resolve.

A year without buying stuff is a long time (and I will certainly buy stuff after this year). And thus I realize this type of resolution is not for

most people, at least not for a full year. So why not try it for a week or a month or a quarter? I'm certain you can do it too.

There are a lot over other good resolutions out there this time of year.

Some of you want to lose weight.

Some of you want to live with 100 things.

Some of you might have impossible goals that you will still achieve.

Some of you want to get rid of your television.

Some of you want to travel and get in better shape and create more.

Some of you want to quit your job.

Some of you want to start taking yoga classes.

Some of you would rather start a revolution than have a resolution.

Whatever you want to do this year, do it. Pursue your passions. You deserve to do so.

YOU ARE NOT YOUR KHAKIS

By Joshua Fields Millburn

Back To The Future

I came home one day and it was all gone.

If my 28-year-old self would have walked into the home of my 30-year-old self, he would have thought he'd been robbed.

Where did all of my stuff go? He would have thought.

I worked so hard to buy all of that stuff, and now it's all gone!

My 28 year-old self would have panicked when he noticed that over 90% of his stuff was no longer there. It was gone. Vanished. Poof! He had given so much meaning to that stuff—the car, the clothes, the gadgets, the trappings of a consumer culture that he was a part of—but that stuff didn't have any real meaning.

He was part of the disease, not the cure.

There were so many lessons he learned in those two years...

Lessons Learned

Most of us know that Tyler Durden quote about how you are not your khakis, right? Well, suffice it to say, many of my learned lessons were similar to that quote.

I am not my stuff. I am not my jeans. I am not my television. I am not my car. I am not my bank account. I am not my vocation.

I am so much more. I am who I am on the inside. I do amazing things, yet I am imperfect. I accomplish incredible feats, yet I make mistakes. I am a caring person, yet I forget about important things from time to time. I am proud of who I am as a person, yet I make bad decisions sometimes. I am a human being, a mixed bag. I am just like you.

Stuff is just stuff. It can be replaced. You cannot. Stuff is not important. There are plenty of things that are important in life. Stuff is not on that list.

Important things in my life include my health, my relationships with other people, pursuing my passions, growing as an individual, and, most importantly, contributing to other people in a meaningful way.

You can not purchase a meaningful life. You can only live it, one day at a time.

Donating 90% of My Stuff: Baby Steps

But I wasn't robbed. It didn't happen over night. I didn't wake up one day and get rid of the vast majority of my stuff.

It took time.

It started with a pair of khakis that I didn't wear, grew into an entire basement of clothes that no longer fit, and expanded from there, one item at a time.

Once I got rid of one thing, I started questioning other things in my life

.

Questioning My Stuff

I started asking myself better questions to get to the root of why I had all this stuff that I didn't need (or even want most of the time).

Why did I buy this?

What could I have used that money for instead?

Do I really need this?

What would happen if I didn't have this anymore?

Could I replace this if I really needed to?

Can someone else use this more than I can?

I kept questioning my possessions and started getting rid of more and more stuff. A carload of clothes here, a piece of furniture there, one thing at a time, donating the majority of it. And then...

I came home one day last week, walked in, and realized that I didn't own much stuff anymore. I realized I could have less stuff and still be happy, still live a meaningful life.

I will continue to question my stuff. Do I need this couch even though I rarely sit on it? Do I need these jeans when I have two other pairs? Do I

need this watch when my phone has a clock on it? Do I need this, that, or the other?

A Certain Kind Of Prison

It's important to note that I don't think physical possessions are inherently evil or wrong or pernicious. I just think we give too much meaning to our stuff, stuff that doesn't really matter at all. Every dollar we spend on stuff is a dollar we have to work for, which takes our time away from us. Our precious time. Our time is our freedom. Thus our stuff has the potential to rob us of our freedom.

So maybe I was robbed. Robbed *by* my stuff. Robbed of my freedom.

No more though. I am in control now. I am aware that I am not my stuff.

WHY I DON'T OWN A TV

By Joshua Fields Millburn

What? You don't own a TV? Why?

That's a question I get quite often these days. And the answer is simple: because I'd watch it. A lot.

You see, I really enjoy TV. It's easy to watch. It's passive. It's entertaining at times. And I don't have to do much work (unless you consider pushing the buttons on the remote to work). But there are so many other important things I can do with my life.

Costs vs. Benefits

But the costs drastically outweigh the benefits...

Money

Sure, there are the monetary costs associated with TV.

There is the TV itself, which can cost up to a few thousand dollars. I know one guy who has eight flatscreen TVs in his house. That's a lot of money.

There's the monthly costs of cable or satellite (plus all of the little extra fees for cable boxes, DVRs, HD service, premium channels, etc.) .

There's the DVD or Blu-ray rentals or purchases, many of which we don't watch. Come on, I bet you've done it before: you've rented a DVD just to return the unwatched movie a week later. It's OK, we've all done it before. The trick is to stop.

And there's all of those fancy ancillary items that we think we need: the surround sound system (I know a guy with a \$4,000 surround sound system), the multi-disc DVD player, the Blu-ray player, and don't even get

me started on video games, that's an entirely different—and equally troubling—story (I know grown men in their thirties who play video games more than five hours per day).

But TV costs us a lot more than money...

Time

TV viewing robs us of our time, our most precious asset. Even with the Internet, the average person watches more than five hours of TV per day. That's 35 hours per week. That's a lot of TV.

If you get rid of your TV, you can reclaim this time for yourself. We'll talk about what you can do with this newly found free time in a moment.

Attention

This goes hand-in-hand with time. TV robs us of our attention. Sometimes we think we're "multi-tasking" if we're doing other things—folding laundry, working on the computer, etc.—while we're watching TV. Deep down we know this isn't true though. We know that TV distracts us from our tasks, which causes us to either:

- Take more time to complete the task (TV is robbing us of even more of our time), or
- It reduces the quality of what we're working on (have you ever tried to write something—a paper, an email, a work assignment—while watching TV and noticed that it just wasn't that good?)

That's because we aren't able to focus our attention on several things at once and still expect the same quality in our finished product.

Awareness

Awareness is the most precious kind of freedom. We should cherish it. But TV often makes us oblivious to the world around us. And thus, in a roundabout way, TV robs us of our freedom.

Relationships

If you're watching TV—especially if you're watching it alone—then you are taking away from your relationships with other people, time in which

you could contribute to others in a more meaningful way, time in which you could add value to someone else's life.

Creativity

If we are constantly consuming, then we are not creating. Thus, TV has the ability to rob us of our creativity.

Alternate Solutions

Sure, watching TV is easy. But is it worth it? That's the question you must ask yourself.

I'm not suggesting that you have to get rid of your TV to be a minimalist. You don't. But you do have some options...

1. Ryan disconnected his cable service during our journey into minimalism. He got rid of all his DVDs and video games, but he kept his TV. We still watch movies on that TV from time to time, which brings up another point...
2. If you get rid of your TV like I did in 2009, you can schedule time to watch TV with other people. I don't do it often, but if I want to watch something, I can watch TV at someone else's house (this includes movies), and we can discuss what we watched afterwards. Such planned viewing is far less passive and helps you build and strengthen your relationships, rather than take away from them.
3. You can get the TV out of your bedroom.
4. You can limit your viewing to one day per week. Schedule it and don't deviate from the schedule.
5. Or, if you need to take baby steps, turn off your TV for one week. Unplug it and put it somewhere out of sight if you can. Or cover it with a sheet and make sure you don't turn it on for a week.

What To Do With Your Free Time

So, if you get rid of your TV (or drastically reduce your viewing), what are you going to do with all of your reclaimed time?

The short answer is you can do whatever you want.

It's liberating to not have a TV. Television sucks so much life out of our lives. It takes our money, our time, our attention, our awareness, our freedom, our relationships, and our creativity. And in return it gives us a little entertainment, it pacifies us for the moment. For many of us it's our drug of choice.

But if you decide to get rid of your TV, then perhaps you can...

Take some time to declutter your home.

Create something.

Exercise.

Work towards achieving your dreams.

Do something awesome.

Do something impossible.

Or just live a more meaningful life.

KILLING THE INTERNET IS THE MOST PRODUCTIVE THING I'VE EVER DONE

By Joshua Fields Millburn

Earlier this year I made the conscious decision to remove all Internet service from my apartment. It ended up being the best decision I ever made with respect to productivity.

Why Kill the Internet?

Why did I get rid of the Internet at home?

Well, there is one primary reason: I was not content with my productivity. I felt I could do more meaningful things than spend time on the Internet—meaningful things like write, exercise, contribute to other people, establish new connections with new people, and strengthen existing relationships.

This doesn't mean I think the Internet is evil or bad or wrong (obviously it's not). The Internet is an amazing tool, one that has changed my life for the better. Also, I think it's OK to watch the occasional funny video or spend some time on Facebook and Twitter (especially if you follow me on Twitter).

The Internet is not evil, just like candy is not evil. But if your entire diet consists of candy, you get sick and fat fairly quickly. Thus, I don't keep bags of candy at home, just like I don't keep the Internet at home anymore either.

How to Kill the Internet

But you run a popular website, how could you possibly go without Internet service at home?

I get that question a lot, especially in person. And people are genuinely shocked when they find out I don't have an Internet connection at home.

But my answer is an easy one: I plan my Internet use. I don't do so in an organized way—it's not like I say, "OK, I'll be on Twitter from 2pm to 4pm next Thursday." Instead, if I see something I want to look up on the Internet, I write it down (in my phone) and use that list when I have access to an Internet connection (see additional tips below).

Now I'm forced to leave the house to access the Internet. So I'll go to the library or to a coffee shop or some other place with free public WiFi, and I'll grab a cup of coffee or something to eat and do all the stuff I need to do online (publish writing, check email, read blogs, get on goofy websites, etc.). Additionally, because I'm out of the house and there are people around, I meet new people. I've met quite a few new friends this way (bonus!).

But I Can't. I *Need* the Internet!

I know what you're thinking, so let me address it now. You're thinking: But you're a writer, Joshua, and that's why it made sense for you!

And you're thinking: I *need* the Internet for homework/work-work/Netflix/online dating/online gaming/updating my Facebook status/playing Farmville/surfing eBay for shit I don't need/stalking my high school boyfriend/etc.

But you don't! And it's time to look in the mirror and be honest with yourself.

Really, you don't need the Internet at home. Since I got rid of the Internet, my life has been better. The time I wasted before is mine again—I was able to reclaim that time. No longer am I taking unconscious breaks from my life to watch YouTube videos or movie trailers or look at funny pictures on some random site.

Now, when I'm on the Internet, it has a purpose—it is a tool I use to enhance my life. Sure, sometimes I get on to watch some funny videos or laugh at Damn You Autocorrect, but I go to the Internet with the intention of doing these silly things, and sometimes I get value (i.e., I laugh) from some of those silly things.

Whenever I'm on the Internet now, I use it in a very deliberate way, in a way that benefits me and my life, a way that adds value to my life.

Benefits of No Home Internet

When I got rid of the Internet at home, I did it mostly so I could focus on writing without distractions. But I found so many extra benefits since I got rid of the Internet:

- My time at home is more peaceful now, as if my home is a sanctuary.
- I do more meaningful things with my time.
- I have more time to read.
- I have more time to write.
- I have more time to think.
- I have more time for friends.
- I have more time to exercise.
- I have more time to walk.
- I am less distracted.
- I am less stressed.
- My thoughts are clearer and less fragmented.
- I no longer crave the Internet like I once did.
- My mind is more focused on meaningful things.
- I don't have an Internet bill, and that saves me money.

Tips For More Deliberate Internet Use

To make this possible, here are some of my tips to help you use the Internet in a deliberate, more productive way (this is what I do):

- Check email two or three times per week (or no more than once a day).
- Use your phone to update/check Twitter and Facebook.
- "Favorite" things on Twitter for future viewing.
- Use your smartphone to send short emails.
- Keep a list of what you want to do on the Internet (watch videos, listen to songs, stuff you want to read, etc.).
- Subscribe to your favorite websites and blogs via email, so they come directly to your inbox.

- Give yourself one or two hours per week to goof-off on the Internet (make it a treat—one piece of candy) .

Trial (Just Do It!)

You're probably still thinking: that's great for you, Joshua, but I could never do it!

So, to that I say, don't kill your Internet, but do this instead:

Do a 30-day trial. Take your modem and get it out of the house—take it to work, take it to a friend's house, or do whatever you need to do get it out of the house for 30 days, just make sure you don't have access to it.

You will hate it at first. You'll want to get online to do something stupid and you won't be able to. Then you'll want to get online to do something "important" but you won't be able to do that either. It's just like quitting smoking, you'll have a craving to get on the 'net and it will take a while to get rid of that craving (that's why I recommend at least 30 days).

You will be frustrated at first—very, very frustrated at times—but you will live, and your life will be better without it, you will be able to do more meaningful things, and you will remove some of the discontent from your life.

Do the trial—what do you have to lose?

KILLING TIME

By Joshua Fields Millburn

Somehow I got rid of time without even noticing it.

Last week, I was walking the streets of Dayton, Ohio, the scorching sun overhead, and someone stopped me and asked me for the time. I looked up at the sky and responded with two words: “It’s daytime.”

I didn’t mean for my answer to sound glib or off-putting in any way, but it was the only answer I had. I didn’t have my phone with me, and I don’t own a watch. And the truth is I didn’t have any idea what time it was.

Throughout my minimalist journey, I’ve learned a lot of things, often experimenting and forcing myself to change and grow: I stopped buying junk, I got rid of my TV, I killed the Internet at home, I stopped using a dishwasher, I started questioning my possessions, I donated 90% of my stuff, I left corporate America, I cleared my plate, I stopped trying, I got into the best shape of my life, I got rid of my goals, and I started contributing to other people in meaningful ways.

I did many of these things to test my limits, to grow as an individual, but I wrote about these experiences to show you they are possible, and often easier than we think .

Sometimes, however, my changes are accidental, as was the change I noticed most recently: These days, I rarely keep track of time.

Over time I got rid of time.

I sold my watches.

I donated all of my clocks.

I removed the clock from my computer.

I got rid of my microwave, which had a clock.

I donated my alarm clock (I use my phone if I need an alarm).

Now my apartment has no clocks at all. None. The only clock I have is the one on my phone, which I usually leave in a separate room if I'm home, and I often leave at home when I'm away. There is a clock in my car, but it's intentionally set to the incorrect time so I purposefully can't rely on it.

Now I wake when I want to wake, write when I want to write, exercise when I want to exercise, eat when I want to eat, and live life every minute of every day, irrespective of time.

I realize this time-free approach isn't practical for many people, but maybe it still has a practical application for everyone. Maybe you can take one day per month (or even one day per week) and kill the time. Or maybe you can get rid of any redundant time (e.g., Do we really need a watch and a phone with a clock? Do we really need clocks in every room of our homes?)

Lessons Learned

Without time, I can focus on the task at hand. If I'm spending time with a friend, I can acutely listen to the friend and not worry about the time. If I'm writing, I can get lost in the act of writing. If I'm exercising, I can focus on the specific exercise. And so forth.

Do you think you would be more focused—and perhaps enjoy your days more—if you were less constricted by time?

It's at least worth thinking about, isn't it?

FOCUS ON WHAT'S IMPORTANT

By Joshua Fields Millburn
An Unpublished Essay

Minimalism allows me to focus on what's important in my life, to focus on developing my personal relationships, improving my physical health, pursuing my passions, growing as an individual, and contributing to people in meaningful ways.

Sometimes my friends give me a hard time because I don't "get" Facebook. Sometimes "bloggers" laugh at me because I honestly only read a handful of websites and I don't know what CSS is and I can hardly spell HTML. Sometimes designers elbow me in the ribs because I don't know how to use InDesign or Photoshop or even MS Paint for that matter. The truth is that those things just aren't that important to me. Maybe I'll "get" Facebook one day (but I prefer Twitter at the moment); maybe I'll learn how to design and code a website (but I'm content with the way our site looks now—we've actually won awards and countless mentions for its design); and maybe I'll become more proficient with the aforementioned design programs (if/when I need to learn them, I will). But none of those things will make me happy.

What makes me happy is what's important in my life. So I focus my time on as few things as possible, always on one thing at a time, taking my time, slowing down, enjoying the journey, focusing on what's important.

I exercise daily, and when I do, I focus on the actual act, the exercise itself, and I enjoy every moment of it, even when it's difficult, I'm thankful for my health.

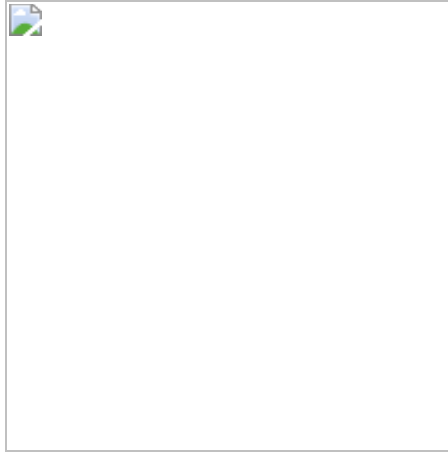
I dedicate much of my life to my close relationships, and when I'm with people, I focus my full attention on them. I don't check my email or

constantly look at my phone or drift away from the conversation. I listen. I care. I offer advice when solicited. And, above all, I'm present.

I write and read daily—this is my passion—and when I do, I focus on the process. I'm excited to get up early, to write every morning, to create, to improve my skills, to hone my craft without distractions.

I grow as person. I do things that take me outside of my comfort zone—not things I dislike, but I embark on new experiences in which I'm interested. I go to new places, enjoy new relationships with new people, I find the beauty in the banal.

I contribute to other people in meaningful ways, most notably to the tens of thousands of readers on our website, for whom I'm incredibly thankful and grateful. I focus on helping our readers live more meaningful lives with less stuff. I also contribute in other ways, through charitable organizations like Habitat for Humanity and local soup kitchens and various other ways. And I contribute to my close friends, helping them if they need help, going out of my way to be there for them in times of need. It is important for me to contribute beyond myself, for this is the only way to live a meaningful life.



THE MINIMALISTS, Joshua Fields Millburn and Ryan Nicodemus, write essays about living a meaningful life with less stuff for their online audience of more than 100,000 monthly readers. They have published several bestselling books about simple living and have been featured in the *Wall Street Journal* , NBC, FOX, NPR, CBC, *Zen Habits* , and numerous other outlets. Find more information at TheMinimalists.com.

B O O K S B Y T H E M I N I M A L I S T S

NONFICTION

Minimalism: Essential Essays
Minimalism: Live a Meaningful Life

FICTION by JOSHUA FIELDS MILLBURN

Falling While Sitting Down: Stories
Days After the Crash: A Novella
As a Decade Fades: A Novel

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