

# the not-so-big life

**making room for  
what really matters**

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the  
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# Blueprint for a New Way of Living

- **What Are We Missing?**
  - Living lives that are TOO BIG
    - Full of activities, urgencies, and obligations
    - “Bigger is not always better”
  - Need to remodel our lives and often our living spaces
    - We think the problems are not enough time/space
    - Need to rethink how we spend our lives, and how our surroundings can be changed to help us
  - Need to start LIVING what we learn

# Developing a Blueprint

- We tend to compartmentalize our lives & our surroundings
  - Work/home/internal-spiritual connections
- Need to connect/integrate them
  - Remove barriers to flow in all areas of our lives
- First must learn to understand ourselves better, and what inspires us

# Steps in Redefining Life

- Notice what inspires you
- Identify what isn't working
- Remove clutter
- Listen to your dreams
- Learn to see through obstacles
- Improve the quality of what you have

# Steps in Redefining Life cont.

- Proceeding through the construction process
- Moving into the not-so-big life
- Maintain the newly remodeled life
- Create a place and time of your own

# Keep a Notebook

## Categories:

- Routines that support my growth
- Strategies for engaging life differently
- Phrases to keep in mind
- Questions to ask myself
- Personal behavior flags
- Insights
- Subjects to inquire into
- Personal aspirations
- Related life events

# Notice What Inspires You

- As adults, we often lose touch with what inspires us
  - Those “aha!” moments where we are transported out of the ordinary
- “Too-busyness” is a normal state
  - Conditioned behavior for most of us
  - Must learn to recognize it, move beyond it
  - Make room for something new
    - Let go of things that hinder us

# Prepare for Change

- Soul-searching is best way to prepare
- Learn to engage time in a more conscious way – TAKE the time

*“When you make the time and the space for what you long to do, everything else shifts to accommodate it” – Sarah Susanka*

*“You must have a room or a certain hour or so a day...a place where you can simply experience...what you are and what you might be.....If you have a sacred space and use it, something eventually will happen.” Joseph Campbell, The Power of Myth*

# A Glimpse of Things to Come

- We are conditioned to seek fulfillment outside ourselves
- What we really long for is connection with Spirit/Self/innate wisdom – we call God
  - “Direct experience of ‘moreness’”
- Connection with beauty is part of that goal
  - Living with/having beauty around is an expression of who we are and who we are becoming
  - Beauty can be a tool to help transport us

# We Must Be the Change

***“When our to-do list is running us...we’ve lost sight of the inspiration and vision behind what we’re doing”*** – Sarah Susanka

- We must engage the project, live the project
  - Not the appearances, not the outcome
- True change comes from within each individual
- Change happens when the individual embodies it to others and they see the wisdom of it and change themselves

# Identify What Isn't Working

***Not everything that counts can be counted, and not everything that can be counted counts.***

- Albert Einstein (p.43)

- Our love affair with STUFF
  - Making the most of our time often involves paring down things that get in our way/obscure our view
  - Compare average US family to 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> World
    - US family “lost” amid possessions of little relative value
    - Much time, money, effort goes into purchase, housing, upkeep, insurance
    - More time goes into shopping for more/better/newer/faster

# Whose Expectations?

- **Subtle pressure** to meet others' expectations in our lifestyle
- Our collection of **things** is a “surrogate concocted by our heads to obscure the real longings of our hearts”
- Things that **fit the image** of our dream:
  - Fancy sports car to get stuck in traffic
  - Sports gear for activities we never do
  - Gourmet cooking utensils for those who seldom cook
- **“Real addiction = nut accumulation”** (p. 56)

***“No amount of stuff can fill the void created by our own absence.”***

# Why We Need Life Remodeling

- **Like remodeling a home, real issues are hidden from view**
- **What does it provide?**
  - Freedom from driven behaviors
  - Intentionality about life rather than autopilot
  - Being “at home” in our lives rather than living for a house, position, or lifestyle
    - Gives us time, money to do what we love
    - Minimizes the adrenaline rush of overwork

# Removing the Clutter

- **Changing our life is “psychological equivalent of spring cleaning”**
- **We become aware of habitual patterns based on hidden beliefs that become our filter of reality**
  - Early learnings shape our responses later in life
    - Not always helpful – some downright destructive
  - Recognizing behaviors is first step to changing them
    - Takes time to build new patterns

# Listening to Your Dreams

- **Dreams, imagination have much to teach us**
  - More than just “recycled fragments of daily life”
  - Pay attention to the messages from them
    - Point to some truth we can identify “in here”
    - Our waking sight is incomplete – focused on “out there”
- **More than one way to live our lives**
  - Never too late to change the choices and surroundings of our lives
- **New blueprint: we are happiest when we have meaningful work in our lives *at any age***

# Learning to See Through Obstacles

- **Like remodeling a house, we must look for ways to go around things that get in the way**
- **Integrate dreams into daily life in order to observe and participate on a deeper level**
  - “Step outside the movie of our lives” and see a different way – consciously, defenselessly
- **In objectively experiencing life, real living begins**
  - “All the rest is memory and conjecture” (117)

# Breathing Space

- Become a “watcher” in your own life
  - Take time to observe self: behaviors, responses
  - Understand that emotional responses are conditioned and do not have to be repeated

***“Peace. It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart.”*** (p. 122)  
(122)

# Improving the Quality of What You Have

- **The more we put off taking time to improve (self, possessions, etc.) the more out-of-balance we become**
- **Seeking “home” in life or residence has nothing to do with size of container**
  - Largest square footage / less like home
  - “Time container” best measured by quality, not quantity as well
- **Learn to step away and detach briefly from stressful situations**

# Going With the Flow: Be More Present In Your Life

- **Allow some things to happen instead of be controlled**
- **Use the time saved by not controlling to be more effective on important things**
  - “Being instead of doing” (135)
  - “Follow the synchronicities” (135)
- **Opposite: burnout – result of conditioned patterns**
  - Losing concentration; overburdened; overwhelmed

# Going With the Flow (continued)

***“If what you’re doing doesn’t inspire you and...allow you to flourish, then why are you doing it?”***

-- Sarah Susanka, p. 139

- Unpleasant tasks under pressure can have a different character when you have time to engage
- Become present by slowing down and becoming aware of your surroundings
  - “Experiencing the experience” <sup>(146)</sup>
- ***Now is the only time that exists*** – live in present
  - Past is past
  - Future is conjecture

# Create a Place and Time of Your Own

- **Change** only happens by making small changes in behavior – take time for self each day
  - Small changes you control result in larger ones that simply happen
- **Major change** for the overinvolved: *still time*
  - Begin with a timer and 5 minutes a day
  - Still the mind to focus only on breath
    - Let thoughts go – detachment will develop
  - Work up to 10, 15, 20 minutes a day

# Finding Time to Think

**“The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.”**

**--Albert Einstein, p. 160**

# The Construction Process

- **Know that remodeling of house or life is stressful**
  - Be prepared for surprising reactions
  - Do not force changes – let them flow
    - Recall the positive changes over which you had no control
    - Learn to recognize challenges as growth opportunities
- **Working mind:** flowing, no obstacles
- **Thinking mind:** ownership; planning; orchestrating = stressful

# Symptoms of Inner Peace

- Thinking and acting spontaneously rather than in response to past fears
- Ability to enjoy each moment
- Loss of interest in judging self or others
- Loss of interest in interpreting actions of others
- Loss of interest in conflict
- Loss of ability to worry
- Frequent episodes of appreciation

# Symptoms of Inner Peace continued

- Contented feelings of connectedness with nature and with others
- Frequent attacks of smiling
- Tendency to let things happen rather than make them happen
- Increased susceptibility to the love of others as well as the uncontrollable urge to extend it

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# Effects of Major Shock

- **Dramatic reappraisal of personal values after major shock** – 9/11, loss of loved ones, etc.
  - Familiar destroyed – gives us new eyes
- **Can bring about “cosmic consciousness”**
  - Knowledge of connectedness of all existence
    - Experience the moment – do what is before you
    - Understand that each moment is new and unpredictable

# Moving Into the Not-So-Big Life

- **Importance of repeatedly waking yourself up**
  - Follow your passions; try something new
  - Express your intentions, then let go
    - “Wishing Will Make it So” – self-fulfilling
  - Be obedient to the situation – do not be afraid to rise to the occasion
  - Go toward that with you are rejecting
  - Do one thing at a time

# About Life

***“We are not humans having the experience of awareness. We are awareness having the experience of being human.”***

***Sarah Susanka, p. 228***

# Maintaining the Remodeled Life

***“Don’t go back to sleep.”***

-- Rumi

- Schedule an annual review of your new life, and what may be your “newer” life
  - What did you learn/experience?
  - What do you long to explore in the coming year?
- Read books that give you a new perspective, make you aware of life possibilities
- Process of continuous learning

# Being At Home in Your New Life

- **Growing** beyond our controlling attachment to our “small self” lets us
  - Be more connected to others
  - Be less connected to things
- **Life lessons:**
  - Not about successes/failures, possessions
  - **Is** about **experiencing** it – not so we can **say** we did
    - Paying attention and changing along with the world
    - **Not about the goal, but about the journey itself**

# Resources

- Susanka, Sarah. *The Not-So-Big Life*. New York: Random House, 2007.
- <http://www.ntsobiglife.com/> accessed 10/8/07.