

*The Simple Living Guide*  
**By Janet Luhrs**

This is an awesome book. It is a balance to the noise out there that success is all about having more and doing more. My family adopted “simple living” as a mantra ten years ago. It has allowed us greater flexibility, the ability to save more, and has cut down on the stress in our lives. We are happier and healthier because of it.

This book is encyclopedic. There is no subject matter it doesn’t cover. Home, family, work, money, lifestyle, holidays, and much more. What follows are some of the ahas I gathered from this book.

1. Simplicity means stopping for a moment and asking what the heck we are doing with our lives.
2. What is life at 75 miles per hour?
3. “It is not enough if you are busy. The question is, What are you busy about?” Henry David Thoreau
4. It is much easier to stay busy and frantic than it is to love and know ourselves and others deeply. We’re busy because we want to be busy...staying busy is safe.
5. It is easier to stay frenetic and complain about not having time for other people than it is to actually do something about it.
6. *Stop trying to read everything.* (This has been a difficult one for me!)
7. Some ways to look at time in a new way:
  - a. Take a close look at intimacy
  - b. Adopt a new attitude
  - c. Do one thing at a time
  - d. Think of time as sacred.
  - e. Question “time-saving” gadgets.
  - f. Look at the big picture.
  - g. Leave your job at work.
  - h. Religious or not, rest one day a week.
8. We are afraid of down time because we are afraid to discover who we are. When we first try to relax, we don’t relax at all. Instead of joy or serenity, we feel anxiety and guilt. (This is a journey I’ve had to go on. It’s a lot about controlling less and showing up more.)

9. When we try to do two or more things at once, we do none of them well and we don't really experience anything.
10. It's not easy saying no. (As I've stated in my workshops, the greatest trap for the hero is over commitment.")
11. Here's the rule, *If you don't want to work too much, don't spend the money. Plain and simple.*
12. Pay yourself first. (This has been the advice since Biblical times. The reason why we don't do it has nothing to do with anything logical. I didn't figure that out until I was forty! Now we have to save 20% of our income every month to meet our goals.)
13. The more still your outer environment becomes, the more aware you are about what's going on inside. No more staying busy and running away from yourself. There you are. (Luhrs spends much time talking about the benefits of meditation. Every day I get up at least a half an hour before anyone in the house and spend 15 minutes of it engaging in spiritual reading and the next 15 minutes in meditation. I can't begin to tell you how much it's made me a better person. As with everything else in this book—just do it. Don't make excuses why it doesn't interest you or you can't accomplish it. Both are simply cop outs.)
14. Attachment is borne out of fear. (This is one reason why during the beginning weeks of a meditation practice can be very difficult. We are uncomfortable in our silence. Nobody said disconnecting from the ego comes easily!)
15. "Caring about our work, liking it, even loving it, seems strange when we see work only as a way to make a living. But when we see work as a way to deepen and enrich all of our experience, each one of us can find this caring within our hearts and awaken it in those around us, using every aspect of work to learn and grow." Tarthang Tulku, Buddhist teacher
16. "In the highest sense, work is meant to be the servant of men, not the master." Edmond Scekely, author of *Creative Work*
17. Engage in simple acts of pleasure. Luhrs gives wonderful examples of simple, easy to do, inexpensive pleasures we can all engage in. Here are a few of my favorites:
  - Go star gazing and bring along some wine.
  - Take a dance class together.
  - Hang out at a comfortable book store and have some coffee or tea.
  - Have a private wine and cheese party.
  - Take a nap together in a large patch of sunshine.
  - Rent a convertible.
  - Go to a concert in the park.
  - Ride a local ferry, trolley, or bus to the end of the line.
  - Watch a meteor shower with the astronomical society.

- Volunteer together.
- Join a local outdoor group such as the Audubon Society or Sierra Club.
- Write and read poems together.
- Spend time in an outdoor Jacuzzi at a nearby hotel or club.

18. Being content means enjoying today.

19. Don't over program and over commit your kids. You'll both get stressed out in the process. Time Magazine once described a sad phenomena: "If parents see parenting largely as an investment of their precious time, they may end up viewing children as objects to be approved, rather than individuals to be nurtured at their own pace." (I can remember the temptation of this. When I was a trial attorney my life was defined by the billable hour (even in contingency cases, it was all about the time put into the case). It was easy to see my life in terms of \$250 an hour everywhere I went. According to the math, I could vastly improve my family's financial picture by only working an extra two hours a week. It became a trap.)

The book is full of straightforward insight about simplifying overhead, living arrangements, food and clothing purchases, exercise, and much more.

20. Sit down at the beginning of the week and schedule which shows you and your children are going to watch. We allow no more than one hour of television per person in our home. Usually I watch no TV at all. I do, however, read a book a week and have done so for the last twenty years.

21. Work with your PTA or school board to make sure teachers are not using corporate curricula—fortunately many parents are waking up to the reality of not only the food children eat, but the messages they're exposed to every day. Being an uninformed parent is simply a cop out.

22. There is some great information on how to deal with holidays, birthdays, gift giving, and so on. I like the idea of celebrating the summer and winter solstices and the spring and fall equinoxes. Celebrations that are about the earth and not about what someone's going to buy. I see many families moving toward gift giving rules, but I still see plenty of families driving themselves into debt every holiday season and being stressed in the process.

23. Jacque and Dave both worked for corporations, "We wore suits every day and I had a whole set of those little ties. We had a new Audi 5000, Jeep Cherokee, we went skiing in Tahoe, went to Hawaii, put a hot tub on our deck, had a boat. We never thought about what we were doing."

24. Develop four weeks of recipes and rotate your favorites. I heard this suggestion previously and it works wonderfully. We plan four weekday meals and one weekend meal every week. Breakfast, lunch, and dinner. The others are left to chance and pizza delivery.

25. “A man is rich in proportion to the things he can leave alone.” Henry David Thoreau
26. “We were pretty house proud.” Chris Curtis who moved from a large house to a two bedroom, one bath bungalow. He stated that years after the move, “That was a real awakening to me that most of the stuff I thought was important we didn’t even remember we had.” The consistent theme—less is more.
27. The seven rules of natural health:
- i. Get pure air
  - ii. Get sunlight
  - iii. Moderation in what is good for you and abstinence from things that are not good.
  - iv. Get some rest
  - v. Exercise. In the book, Luhrs talks about the benefits of nature’s gym. I couldn’t agree more. I now find myself working out outside all the time (fortunately I live in Florida) and enjoying myself much more. Instead of running on a treadmill, I run on the beach. Instead of driving to the gym, I bike there. Instead of doing a yoga class at the gym, I do it at sunrise at the beach.
  - vi. Drink plenty of water. (And, as a corollary, don’t drink out of plastic bottles, please.)
  - vii. Lastly, eat right. One exercise guru said it’s a real simple formula—eat 20% less than what you do currently, and exercise twice as much and you’ll be in great shape within three months. Imagine that! Exercise more and eat less.
28. Luhrs talks about getting rid of things. There is a very simple formula in her book that I have followed for many years—when you buy something new, get rid of something. Every year, try to get rid of everything you haven’t touched for the last three. The shirt you like but never wear, the baseball glove you haven’t used in fifteen years, the pictures and endless pictures, the letters and cards, and other memorabilia. Getting rid of stuff isn’t easy. The best we can do is bring some mindfulness to the practice. Be with the object one last time and then let go. Think of how it may benefit somebody else or that you’ve kept the best pictures and haven’t lost any of the memories.
29. “Time is life...time is the beach.” JL

Much of the discussion in the book surrounding work I have tried to put into practice. When I was a hard-driving litigation attorney, my work was all-consuming. Since leaving my litigation practice at the age of 40, I have decided to build my business around the lifestyle I want. I decided I would grow my business as profitably as I can with no more than three employees. None of us will work more than forty hours a week unless we absolutely had to. Ten years later, I can say the experiment is working. My work brings me great satisfaction. I know I make a difference out there. My employees enjoy working with me. I have more time off than ever. And here’s the crazy thing—I’m making more money than ever!

The point is, I'm not alone on this journey. Many of you reading this may already be there yourselves. And we can always do better. Right after finishing this book, I went to my closets and created two more bags of clothing for Goodwill and another box of books for the library. Sometimes a little reminder is all it takes.

Smart employers out there will understand the need for “whole people” working at their company. What has been the experience employing folks who take views opposite of those expressed in this book? Who spend more than they make, live complicated lives, constantly running at 70 miles an hour? They bounce off their spouses, bounce off their kids, and then watch two hours of TV before going to sleep at midnight. No discipline to exercise or eat a proper diet and poor sleep habits at best. And they're working for you.

You see, if it was my company, I would want all of my workforce to think like this and see how we can have more fun and make more money in our jobs every day. What a trip that would be!

Conclusion – If there is one word I would use to describe our society, it's disconnected. We are disconnected at home, at work, in our communities, and with ourselves. As Janet asked: “What is life at 75 miles an hour?” The answer is it's a blur. It's one big stressful nothingness. Even if there are aspects to it that have meaning, they become swallowed by the unnecessary stress and drama. We can't feel ourselves. If we did, we might not like the way it feels, so we might as well keep on running. And we kid ourselves that we can feel our loved ones.

The answer is to live simply. Einstein stated that he knew the theory of relativity would work because it was “simple and beautiful.” What better standard can we have for our own lives?



## *Don's Rules for Simple Living*

1. Only debt is a mortgage. Spend less than you make. Watch expensive “habits.”
2. Pay yourself 10-20% first. Invest automatically into a balanced index portfolio and keep 30% in short term cash.
3. Don't buy more house than you can afford and don't buy a house bigger than you need.
4. Work no more than 40 hours a week. Less is OK too.
5. Rest one day a week. Completely.
6. Sleep 7-8 hours a night.
7. Don't over commit yourself or your children.
8. Learn to meditate. To be still and accept silence and nothingness.
9. Exercise at least 5 days a week, 30-60 minutes.
10. Eat right. Eat less. No fast food, soda, or late night binges.
11. Clear out the clutter. Don't buy it unless you need it. Can you rent it first?
12. Turn off the TV and read a book. Turn off the lights and light a candle.
13. Think of unique ways to celebrate holidays, birthdays, and other events. Create family rituals.
14. Get outside on a regular basis. Play golf, soccer, swim, bike, skate, walk, go camping, hiking, canoeing, cross-country skiing.
15. Buy a reliable car that is three years old with cash. Then drive it for an additional 100,000 miles. Keep it in good shape and it will pay for itself. Don't buy a bigger or more expensive car than you need.
16. Get a library card. Borrow books, music and movies.
17. Plan your meals at least one week in advance. Only buy food you will eat that week. Find the local farmers market and other sources of fresh organic produce.
18. Strike a good balance between going out for dinner and eating at home. Rotate dinner nights with a few friends.
19. Think natural. Think green. Non-toxic cleaners, clothing, bedding, flooring, packaging, etc. Use home remedies and organic cleaning solutions.
20. Be grateful. Say thanks for the gifts you have been given. Regularly!