

Voluntary Simplicity

A certain way of life is making its way across this modern world of stress and excess. It's called voluntary simplicity, and it focuses on paring down one's needs in an effort to do more with less. Many individuals are overwhelmed by today's economic stresses: worries about how to pay for education and healthcare, finance retirement, and combat the rising cost of living. These people are realizing that scaling back and making more out of what they already have is a refreshing change from today's consumer-driven culture.

People who practice voluntary simplicity insist that the simple life isn't about denying themselves things they really want or need. Rather, it is about asking themselves what is really important and calculating the effects of excess on their lives.

Claudio Leite had a well-paying but stressful job in Porto Alegre, Brazil, that forced him to work 12 hours a day and check his email at night from his home computer. He realized that though he could afford a large apartment and nice things, he wasn't spending enough time on things that really mattered to him, such as bicycling and socializing with friends. Through voluntary simplicity, he learned how to cut back and save money, and he was eventually able to quit his stressful job and work part-time, giving him more time to be outdoors and see his friends.

Having a full-time job can actually make you spend more money, simplicity advocates say. Having the right clothes for a particular job, eating out frequently, and commuting can add up to large expenditures over the course of a year.

Seung Won Lee and his wife, Clara, had everything a successful young couple could want: good jobs, a nice home outside of Pusan, Korea, two cars, and a healthy child. They had everything but the time to enjoy it. Because they were both commuting to work, driving their son to school, working different schedules, and spending weekends on the upkeep of their house and yard, the Lees were paying for a babysitter, eating out often, spending a lot of money on gas, and finding little time to do things as a family.

The Lees decided that a simpler life was the answer, so Seung Won quit his job and started a home business that allowed flexible working hours. Then they moved to a smaller apartment near their son's school and sold their second car. Now the Lees eat together every night, save money on gas and auto insurance, and have more time together on weekends.

Finding ways to save money and curtail spending in a modern world is hard work. However, the reward--time to do what you love--is priceless.