



What do you fill your life with? By Michelle Stimpson

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Look closely at your home and work environment. Think about your calendar and the events you schedule. Consider your relationships and the content they are comprised of. What do you see? What are you “filling” your life with?

We live in a society that rewards us for being busy, for working harder, and for accumulating ‘stuff.’ We receive kudos when we achieve superhuman limits, we are recognized when we multi-task and put out fires, we are viewed as self-less when we respond to the whims of others, and we might even be affirmed when we bring home more stuff that we found on sale...but didn’t really need. So where is the room in our lives to simply “be”? Many of us have a fascination with filling our lives with *more*...but where does that ultimately get us?

Our lives are filled. From the junk room downstairs to the cupboards in the kitchen. From scheduling activities on our once free evenings and weekends to turning on the TV, radio, or even a fan to drown out the silence. How about in our conversations with others? We fill the silence with ‘talk’ whether the conversation is meaningful or not. Cell phones now fill the space of previously protected alone time. Similarly, we fill voids or losses in our life: We run out and get a new puppy when our old canine companion dies; we run to friends or family the instant our spouse leaves on business—we certainly wouldn’t want to be alone.

The result of filling our lives too full is to feel distracted and overwhelmed. We get confused about our priorities. We become unclear about our purpose, focus, and meaning. Consequently, we cannot be present and we lose our sense of self. To ease the stress, we may even gravitate toward numbing activities such as excess TV, food, or alcohol.

What do YOU fill your life with and how meaningful is that filler to you?

A retired colleague recently shared with me that it is common for retirees to suddenly be busier than they ever were before. “It isn’t like they are doing meaningful stuff, though,” he said. “They simply don’t know ‘who they are’ now in this new role so they fill their time with busyness to stay distracted.”

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Interestingly enough, we aren't taught the skills of how *not* to fill up our lives. While we are a culture that has created ingrained patterns and habits, the good news is that we can change that! But, go lightly on yourself—creating new habits takes time, commitment, and work. If you see yourself getting caught up in the “filling” mode, here are some helpful pointers to keep in mind:

1. *Become aware* of the meaningless filler in your life
2. *Get clear on your priorities*: Focus on the important and let everything else go on hold
3. *Devise a plan of attack* to de-clutter: Start with small steps to set yourself up for success
4. *Embrace “constructive selfishness”*...by taking care of yourself first, you'll actually have more to offer others
5. *Find a partner*: Begin this journey with a friend, spouse, or coach—someone to support you, keep you on track, and cheer you on
6. *Learn to just “be”*: Slow down, breathe, and be present

Keep in mind that creating space can be scary. In our world, “quiet” or “space” is often thought of as “emptiness.” Reframe the way you think: Don't view the space as “empty,” think of it as a clean slate with endless possibilities!

My own personal story goes like this: After years of focusing on a corporate career, building my dream house with my husband, and living a lifestyle of abundant ‘things,’ something wasn't right. By saying “yes” to my full lifestyle, I was saying “no” to the more important things in my life. So I had to completely re-evaluate my life and decide what had to go, in order for me to have the life that I *really* wanted.

With my coach's help, I got clear on my priorities and devised a plan. I went back to school, left my corporate job, and launched a business that reflected my true calling. My husband and I sold the dream house, parted with unneeded possessions, and downsized into a townhouse. I continue to get rid of the clutter in my life that has held me back for so long. In letting go of all the filler, I am now able to say “Yes!” to the things that matter most to me. As a result, I am more at peace and living the life I have always dreamed of.

My journey continues. For me, it's all about de-cluttering and simplifying my life, while continuously re-evaluating what I choose to fill my life with. My sincere and heartfelt wishes to you as you begin your journey.

So, what will you choose to fill *your* life with?

Michelle Stimpson, owner of LifeShine Coaching and Consulting, Inc., is a personal coach/business consultant who helps her clients slow down, get clear on priorities, and create a life of purpose. She has an “Ultimate Living” coaching program aimed at professional women who, in the busyness of today's world, yearn to regain a sense of “Who am I?” and “What do I want?” Contact Michelle for a complimentary Life Balance Assessment to see if this program is a fit for you. She can be reached at 952.906.3432 or through her website: www.lifeshinecoaching.com.