

The Simple Life

YOU'D THINK THAT LIFE—AND BY "LIFE" I mean just accomplishing the basics of getting through the day—would be relatively simple. You'd think it was the one job for which there would be no prerequisites, no instructions, no expert help, no experience, and no training required. But sadly, it seems to me that we humans have over-thought a simple process into a big, honking project. Getting out of bed in the morning requires a plan.

Let's start out with the five basic *activities of daily living*, called ADLs by those in the health care and insurance industries who first discovered them. They are: eating, bathing, dressing, toileting, and getting from one place to another. Those are all pretty basic activities until you think about them. And you can't help but think about them if the first thing you do in the morning is turn on one of the morning news shows. Between news reports and commercials, you'll find there's a lot you didn't know about those basic ADLs that could ruin your life.

Of course, if you want to do more than just lay in a hammock all day, there are a few advanced ADLs you'll need to master.

To be fully functional in a modern world you need to be able to make and use tools. Tools, while not absolutely essential, make accomplishing the basic five ADLs a little more efficient and, therefore, create leisure time. Leisure time is important because it's necessary for the pursuit of a second advanced ADL: the ability to read and follow directions. Of course, the directions one has to be able to read and follow come with the tools.

Clearly, this paradoxical curve ball needs to be managed. The world becomes dangerously unstable if we use more leisure time than we have. Fortunately, the introduction of the concept of tool gender allows us to do that. A female tool is one that creates more leisure time than it consumes—like a vacuum cleaner, a dishwasher, or a microwave oven. A male tool is one that consumes more leisure time than it creates—like a broadband internet connection, a full-length mirror, or a motorcycle.

A stable world requires that the cumulative contribution female tools make to leisure time exceed the amount consumed by male tools. Any such excess, of course, would be called *quality time*. However, if male tool consumption of leisure time exceeds what's created by the use of female

tools, the excess reduces the time available for the five basic ADLs. We've all seen that happen and it's ugly.

Intuitively, men are seeking to maximize leisure time, so we pay little attention to directions. We never even look for them because

directions consume leisure time. On the other hand, women, I think, expect life to be complicated. Therefore, women look for and read directions, which is good because then there's something in the box for both of us.

Microwave Popcorn

Consider what's happened to eating. In the beginning we started with only one rule: Don't eat fruit from the tree of knowledge because it'll kill you. It was a simple rule with a powerful incentive. For someone waking up in the dawn of history, everything was on the table and good to eat except for the one forbidden fruit. How did we get from then to now, when everything is bad except for the possible exception of the apple, long rumored to have been the forbidden fruit?

Apples, of course, keep doctors away; it's everything else that'll kill us.

The problem is, we know too much. Eating itself isn't difficult. With a finger and a microwave oven, for example, any-

one can have popcorn in about five minutes. Notice that not even an opposable thumb is required to operate that tool. It couldn't be simpler.

No, the difficulty lies in the political, social, environmental, and health issues that are now, invariably, part of any eating decision. Who picked the corn? How much were they paid? Are the fumes poisonous? Am I going to have to share?

There are just too many questions and too much variety associated with eating today for it to be a simple decision. One of the hardest questions I've ever been asked is: What do you want for dinner?

You know, I think I really want a BLT. Two pieces of toasted bread, each spread with a little mayo, a layer of cool crunchy lettuce, a delicious slice of tomato lightly salted, and ... oh yeah, fried bacon. Try getting *that* past the instruction reader in our house.

My daughter, a serious outdoors woman, gave me a book awhile ago written by Kathleen Meyer. It was 100 pages on *How to S**t in the Woods*. The asterisks represent a four-letter word that means toileting, one of our



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basic ADLs.

Well, I can understand how this might be embarrassing, say, on a group hike or uncomfortable on a cold winter night, but I never thought it would be difficult. Certainly, it never occurred to me that a subject like toileting in the woods would require 100 pages of directions.

On reading the book, however, you'll find that it's really about its sub-title: *An Environmentally Sound Approach to a Lost Art*. Yes, that's right! There are environmental issues we are expected to consider in these types of decisions. So, once again, plan ahead. You'll want to have time for that!

What makes life so difficult is that we're expected to consider the consequences of every decision we make. And the consequences we're expected to consider aren't just to ourselves but to everyone else and the environment—the air, land, and sea—animals, fishes, and plants. What a burden! It's as if there's a code that won't countenance a little conflict of interest.

Life Without a Personal Trainer

How do you know when you're fully credentialed and ready for life? How do

you know you have the requisite education and experience, that you understand the code of life and would be no harm to yourself or others, running free through the sun-drenched, grassy-green, flower-filled fields of earth?

I know, I know, I know ... There's no way you would actually be allowed to do that. You, of course, would have to stay on the designated path, the sidewalk of life, so to speak.

Well, I've devised a simple test. It's a one-question, verbal-response, final exam that will help you determine if you're a fully qualified human being, able to get through life without a personal trainer.

The exam is based on the premise that intuitive responses, which are based on a direct knowing *without the use of conscious reasoning*, are bad. On the other hand, it recognizes that intellectual responses, which are based on *intelligence applied in a reasoning process*, are good because use of the intellect is required to keep one on the designated paths of life.

So, here's the exam. Ask yourself how old you are. If you've got the answer already, you fail. You better keep the personal trainer—and find a mentor. Quick answers mean reliance on the intuitive

side of your brain, reliance on a simple table look-up requiring no skills. You, as Master Kan would say to the young Kwai Chang Caine, are still a grasshopper.

But if you stopped reading to think, maybe went into a blank stare with a slight upward twist of the head away from the page, that's a sure sign that you're tapping the intellect side of your brain. What you're probably doing is the following calculation: calendar year of last birthday, less calendar year of birth. You're demonstrating the use of reasoning and intellect to solve a simple problem. You pass.

You, in fact, have earned the right to be smug. You have reached a professional level at which you have the knowledge to cause others to look past the difficulties of life that curious folk have embedded in its arcane rules.

Yes, you have had a political epiphany, suddenly coming to the realization that it's not how difficult life is but how simple you can make it seem that's important. You've found the simple life. It was there in front of you all along. It was the oasis in your desert of despair. It was the forest you couldn't see. You, my friend, are ready to be a leader of men, a politician, a mentor. ●

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