

# SIMPLIFY

Excerpts from an interview with Dr. Darek Dawda,  
psychologist and founder of DAVDA Psychology

BY MATHILDA WATERS

My life has been very busy and stressful these days. So I set out again to the comfortable clinic of our expert on well-being, Dr. Darek Dawda of DAVDA Psychology.

**Dr. DD: A big part of the solution to stress has to do with simplifying your life.**

*MW: Sounds simple enough! Why doesn't everyone do it?*

**Dr. DD: We often feel stuck in our busy lives, and feel we can do nothing about it. And as long as you blame your predicament on external circumstances or other people, you will end up feeling powerless. The first step is realizing the extent to which your own decisions have been affecting the situation you're in. Taking responsibility is important because it allows you to take charge of your life. Most people have the means and ability to extricate themselves from the circumstances that cause them stress, even if gradually, and even if with some sacrifice.**

*MW: OK, I can accept this logic. How does one simplify his/her life?*

**Dr. DD: Following are some general tips, but you can also find a list of specific suggestions on my website @ [www.davda.ca](http://www.davda.ca).**

**1. WHAT DO YOU LIVE FOR?** You need to determine what your core values are. What is it you live for? One way to do this is to imagine yourself on your deathbed looking back at your life. What will have mattered to you the most? Another way of doing this is to imagine that you wake up one day, after a major miracle, and everything is just the way you want it. How does your world look now? You can also ponder what gives you most satisfaction, most pleasure, most meaning, most sense of well-being, most feeling of being alive. Take the time to establish what matters to you most. Be honest with yourself and ensure you are writing your own list, not a list of expectations that others have for you. Once you get some ideas, order them in terms of importance. Then discuss the list with a trusted friend.

## **2. WHAT ARE YOUR OBSTACLES TO WELL-BEING?**

Examine the factors that have stood in the way of your well-being and led to you becoming so busy. Too many people want to fly without noticing the weights attached to their ankles. You need to become aware of what keeps you stuck. Consider the external pressures, such as family or societal expectations or norms, your role models, demands of an expensive lifestyle, etc. Also consider internal pressures. It is crucial to realize the power of your own implicit values or expectations that keep you stuck in your predicament. Do you believe that working hard automatically makes you a good person? Are you keeping busy to distract yourself from your true fears and desires? Do you have difficulties saying no? Perhaps you don't feel you deserve better because you don't value yourself enough? Clearly understanding the intricate play between external and internal contributors to unhealthy lifestyle might take some time. Be patient. Just ask the right questions, and be honest with yourself. Some coaching

or psychotherapy might be useful in helping you create a better awareness of these key issues, and a better acceptance that it is okay to fear and desire what you fear and desire. It might also be useful to discuss your past obstacles with a trusted friend, and together think of ways to free yourself from those traps, and how to avoid falling into them again in the future.

**3. WHAT IS YOUR LIFE PLAN?** Now that you've determined what you love and what has been keeping you from getting it, create a plan to do more of what you want to do, and get rid of or minimize everything else. Create a list of specific short and long-term goals you want to achieve. Make sure to maximize those that are consistent with your values, and minimize or eliminate those that are not. If you feel stuck and overwhelmed, take it one step at a time. Think of a long-term plan. Don't give up. Avoid thinking you won't be able to do it, but also ensure your plan is realistic and achievable, or you might be setting yourself up for failure. Do not fall prey to what used to be your obstacles to well-being. Research shows that people who feel a sense of self-determination and control over their lives are happier, healthier, and live longer. Share and discuss your life plan with a trusted friend.

## **4. IMPLEMENT YOUR PLAN & REVIEW YOUR**

**PROGRESS.** It's now time to start implementing the plan, to make changes in your life. Change can be difficult, but having a good plan behind which you strongly stand, and being flexible enough to modify it as needed should make the process easier. If the plan is too hard to implement, you might need to go back to steps 1, 2, or 3 and modify it. As you make changes to your life, be mindful of how your own habits and the expectations of others might be pushing you towards returning to the status quo. Be considerate and caring towards others and your old habits, but also be strong and determined. Treat obstacles as challenges and opportunities to become stronger and wiser. If you relapse, don't beat yourself up. Pick yourself up and start again. Meet weekly with your trusted friend to celebrate your progress, and brainstorm on how to overcome emerging obstacles.

For a list of specific suggestions on How to Simplify Your Life visit: [www.davda.ca](http://www.davda.ca)

