the moment minimalism got easier



the minimalist business

Originally published on xxnaomi.com.

I was very attached to being a minimalist. I saw minimalists, and they had what I wanted. They had a physical realm simplicity in which they were not constantly smothered by their belongings.



I looked at their homes, their phones, and their closets, and I imagined a future in which my home, my phone, and my closet were not so claustrophobic, so oppressive, so high-maintenance.

So I went on a minimalism journey.

I started with FlyLady, an old-school cleaning and decluttering guru. She was delightful. Her avatar was a cartoon Fairy Godmother with a feather duster instead of a wand. A key part of her decluttering system was "27 fling boogies" where you tore around your house throwing out 27 things in a great big, well, boogie. Then you did it again tomorrow.

I didn't do very well at FlyLadying (I'm not sure anybody really does) but it was a lot of fun.

I moved on to the KonMari method. Marie Kondo favors a much more spiritual approach. When Marie Kondo throws things out, there's a lot more kneeling than there is boogying. She's into kissing things and respectfully thanking the items for their service. (Kissing your old underwear before you throw it out is a trip, let me tell you.)

I did very well at Kondoing, and it, too, was a lot of fun. But it didn't feel like enough.

Eventually I found resources like Goodbye, Things, and it was much more in line with what I'd been envisioning. (I was *very* into the idea of going into a bathroom and only seeing two towels and two toothbrushes. Mmmm, simplicity.)

Now I'm mostly where I want to be. I have things, but not many of them, and almost all of them spark joy. I have less stuff than the average Kondo-ite, but more than the *Goodbye, Things* guy. I spent 100 days circumnavigating the globe with only a carry-on suitcase and a purse, and I still think I brought too much stuff. (Trying to find a place to donate your new but way-too-bulky Blundstones in Osaka when you don't speak Japanese? Also a trip.)

While there were a lot of lessons I learned on the journey from pre-FlyLady to today, there was one insight that I think unlocked the generally-happy place I find myself now, and I thought I'd share it with you.

minimalism is not about prediction, but about decision.

When you first start decluttering with an eye towards minimalism, your world is full of things that you don't want *and haven't for a long time*. Those Christmas dishes your aunt gave you when *she* was decluttering. That book you hated on the first page. Those pants that don't fit anymore and looked pretty stupid even when they did. We start our journey getting rid of those things, and it's relatively easy.

When we engage in this process, we run the item in question through a little flowchart in our mind. This is largely unconscious. We look ahead to our various future selves, and ask each of them if they would ever want these dishes, this book, those pants. The answer is a resounding "NO!", and so we confidently put them in the donate pile.

Sometimes we feel foolish for having kept things for so long. Sometimes we feel regret at how much money we spent. But the predominant feeling in that stage is relief. "Thank God, these things are finally out of our house!"

Phew!

When we're done that first stage of the journey, we move on to the next. In the next phase, the unconscious flowchart becomes a conscious one.

We look ahead to our predicted future selves to see if they'll ever want to play Monopoly again, or read that romance novel again, or use that popcorn maker again… but this time the answer isn't so clear. We don't know! What if the grandkids come over? What if we're bored? What if we want popcorn?

We try to look at the multiverse of future possibilities, every conceivable iteration of our future selves, and predict if they will ever want this item. And we can't, because we're not the Oracle of Delphi.

Then we do one of three things.

> **Option 1:** We keep the item "just in case". We mean "just in case Future Me wants it"
>
> **Option 2:** We tell ourselves we won't want it, and discard the item, although we're not very confident about it. It's mostly bravado and hope.
>
> **Option 3:** We quit the whole proceedings because the inability to predict the future seriously harshes our mellow.

Usually, we do a combination of Option 1 and Option 2 until it sucks so much that we go with Option 3. We keep the Monopoly (and about 400 other things), ditch the romance novel (and about 12 other things), and finally quit in despair, spending the weekend binge-watching Outlander.

I did that for a long time, until I realized I was going about it all the wrong way.

the future is infinite and unknowable.

Who you will be in the future cannot be known.

Ten Years From Now You is a person who has not been born yet.

Ten Minutes From Now You is a person who has not been born yet.

So trying to predict what they might want is an exercise in futility. That's like trying to predict what toy your future puppy will like playing with, or what major your future child will take in college.

minimalism is not about *predicting*. it's about *deciding*.

I started looking ahead and instead of trying to *predict* if I would ever use that eyeshadow, I simply *decided* that I would, or that I wouldn't.

I decided I would read that book again, or I decided I would not read that book again.

I decided I would use that moisturizer, or I decided I would not use that moisturizer.

I decided I would use that frying pan, or I decided I would not use that frying pan.

It became like moving away from a city.

We don't leave Toronto because we predict we will never want to eat at the Sunset Grill again, or go to the aquarium again, or see a show at the Rex again. We decide to go to a new place. If we want the Sunset Grill or the aquarium or the Rex later, we'll figure it out when we get there.

Maybe we'll find somewhere else to eat. Maybe we'll plan a weekend trip back. Maybe we'll meditate on the fleeting nature of desire. Whatever. It's all good.

The moment I decided to decide, rather than predict, it got easier.