your stop list
and
your start list



the minimalist business

This is an excerpt from *Like a Boss*, a lifestyle design and personal development program for entrepreneurs I ran a few years back.

This exercise, the stop list and the start list, is the most powerful tool I've ever seen for rapid transformation. It is revealing, it is clarifying, and it is blessedly simple. It will help you get to know yourself in unexpected ways, and it will give form to the wisps of dreams floating around in the shadows of your peripheral vision.

The stop list and start list are designed to access your true desires from the bottom up. Normally, I'm a top down kinda gal. I like strategy! Vision! Scope! But sometimes what's really needed is boots-on-the-ground, granular change in a physical, visceral way. Yes, it's all very well and good to philosophize about the nature of simplicity…

…but sometimes, you just really want to watch *Gilmore Girls*, and you never want to go to the post office ever again. Sometimes it really is that simple.

Whether you want to get fewer DMs or eat more cheese, the stop list and the start list have you covered.

As always, if you'd like to share your answers, or answers-in-progress, send them my way, as I can't wait to read them. I will be thrilled to bear witness and pat you on the back.



your stop list,
and your start list

In the lifestyle design world, much is made of the big, sweeping changes. The year in Paris, the backyard full of chickens, the tango lessons in Buenos Aires.

First, let me say that I *fully* support all that. I mean, Paris is cold a lot of the year, and the last time I took a dance lesson I did something hilarious to my knee, and I want chickens like I want a hole in my head. But if that's what you're into, I'm into it on your behalf. You won't find a louder cheerleader than me.

However!

There's a dark side to these types of goals. One of the big obstacles standing in the way of our lifestyle design goals is the belief that something else has to happen before we can do That Thing We're Swooning Over.

I can't do [this] before I [that]. I can't do [that] before I [other that]. And so on and so on, until forever.

And in general, for most desires, that's horsefeathers. Most of our desires can be had in a matter of minutes. You wanna write more poetry? Great. Go ahead. I'll wait. But when it comes to Paris, and Buenos Aires, and chickens? You best believe something has to happen first. A whole lot of somethings have to happen first.

We know that. And since we know that, we use that as our platform for our big, "Oh, but I couldn't!" story. We decide we couldn't possibly go to Paris for a whole year until [stuff], and we're right. Poetry, though? Yeah,

that we can have. *But we don't think about how we could have it because we're too busy mooning over Paris*.

My version of lifestyle design, and the one that I preach from the rooftops to anybody who will stay still long enough to listen, is far, far simpler than the one usually prescribed. And to get very nearly all the benefits, you only need two things.

Do these two things, and I believe you can have the best life you've ever lived, or ever even imagined. You'll be happier, and healthier, and mentally stronger. You'll spend less time at work, less time doing stuff you don't like, and less time around people you don't like. Your rest and relaxation time will be… restful! And relaxing! You will feel fulfilled and invigorated and like you are making the most of your minutes and your days and your years.

It starts with two things.

your stop list. and your start list.

In every lifestyle that isn't yet completely perfect, there are two main problems.

There are a number of things the person is doing that they wish they weren't.

And there are a number of things the person wishes they were doing that they're not.

The key to happiness is to get those two sets of things on lists. Then you:

a.) Systematically and deliberately stop doing things on the first list, and
b.) Systematically and deliberately start doing things on the second list.

Do that, and you will be happier forever.

Shall we?

first, your stopping list.

For a variety of reasons - old habits, bad habits, being a doormat and so on - most of us are doing many, many things we don't actually want to be doing.

These generally fall into two types.

- First, there are the things we have consciously engaged in - a diet, a social "obligation", jobs or work tasks.

- Second, there are things we do mindlessly - games on our phones, TV we don't like, uninspired food.

In therapy and self-development and life coaching circles, a lot of emphasis is put on figuring out why we do things we don't want to do. There's a lot of "self-work" and the making of big, complicated action plans. But it doesn't need to be that hard. Truthfully, we don't need to know why we've fallen into traps, or gotten into bad habits, or given away our power.

In my experience, the *why* doesn't really matter all that much. All we really need to know is *what* we don't want to do anymore. We don't need Freudian analysis. We just need a list.

So. Here's how to make yours.

Start a list. Make it EXTREMELY easy to access.

If you're a paper person, I want it on you at all times for a while or where you sit the most. Ideally, put it on some kind of clipboard, or just cut the pretense and stick the damn thing to a wall.

If you're digital, give it its own VERY special file, and have Siri or Google make a shortcut for it. I want you no more than two seconds from this document at all times.

Over the course of, say, a week or so, I want you writing down EVERY SINGLE THING you don't want to be doing anymore. You don't have to know how you're going to stop. You don't have to know when you're going to stop. All you have to know is that you want to.

Some examples:

- Answering my own email
- Taking things to the dry cleaners
- Wearing hand wash only clothes
- Checking social media in the morning
- Using plastic cutlery
- Mowing the lawn
- Talking to my sister every day
- Eating tacos on Tuesdays
- Wearing bulky socks
- Using that moisturizer
- Watching crime dramas
- Ordering so much takeout
- Going to pointless meetings
- Impulse buying at the grocery store

These are all examples of things a person might want to stop. Notice how many of them are frightfully small.

Don't underestimate the impact of making a few small changes – magazine articles and blog posts will have you believing that only the big, sweeping changes will lead to big, sweeping changes. But as you'll see within a few moments, it's not nearly that hard.

Because when you start taking out just a few of the things on your stop list, you'll find yourself having a little extra time or money or energy. And with that time or money or energy, you can start doing some of the things on your…

…Start list.

your start list.

Your start list is the same thing as your stop list, just in the reverse. All those things you're doing that you wish you weren't? It's time to make a similar list of all those things you wish you were doing that you're not.

These are not one-time goals. This is not a bucket list. It's a list of things you want to do more of. They're present tense verbs.

This is "eat more fresh berries", not "go to South Africa". The key to the items in this list is that these are the activities that will make up your lifestyle. We are what we repeatedly do, says Aristotle.

So this is a list of things we would like to be repeatedly doing. Aristotle goes on to say that excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.

Well, Aristotle can have his excellence. I'd rather be happy. So:

We are what we repeatedly do. Happiness, then, is not an act, but a habit.

Follow the same list rules as you did with your stop list. It needs its own special file or piece of paper, and I want you no more than two seconds away from it at all times. You'll want to keep this very close to hand for about a week or so.

Some examples:

- Eat Brie
- Take the train
- Write in my gratitude journal
- Make jam
- Grow herbs
- Listen to classical music
- Drink interesting wine and keep a wine list
- Watch smart TV
- Take road trips
- Use reusable bags
- Meatless Mondays
- Use up the food in the freezer
- Learn French verbs
- Take a walk after dinner

Just as your Stop List doesn't have much in the way of Big! Hard! Stuff! on it, your Start List is probably quite simple as well. If you're like most people doing this exercise, you'll probably find that many of the items on the Stop List, when eliminated, naturally lead to the addition of something on the Start List.

When you stop watching crime dramas, you have an intuitive place to put your smart TV. When you stop impulse buying at the grocery store, you have an organic place to put that Brie. When you pay a neighborhood kid to mow your lawn, that's a great place to put that walk you're always meaning to take.

Through the magic of the universe, whenever we create a space – eliminating something we don't want – there is almost always a perfect activity or small purchase to put in its place.

To me, this is where the magic really is. Because going to Paris is not a lifestyle. It's a vacation. But the things on that list? That's a lifestyle.

What do we know about a woman who went to Paris for 10 days at the end of April? Nothing. Absolutely nothing at all.

But a woman who has decided she prefers to travel by train?

And she brings a little bundle of softened Brie, and homemade jam, and a few leaves of fresh herbs from her garden?

A woman who goes for a walk in a new neighborhood every Sunday morning, who writes in her gratitude journal each evening after dinner, listening to classical music to put her in the right frame of mind?

Who pours herself one glass of a new wine and keeps a diary of the wines she's tried, learning more about notes and varietals as she grows her little collection?

And then she fully relaxes, curls up under a blanket, and watches something just right for her on TV?

That woman has a lifestyle, and she didn't have to go through airport security, buy new dance shoes, or step around chicken shit to get it.