

Buying Less Stuff



South Durham Green Neighbors

This is the second in a series on taking larger steps toward sustainability. You know yourself best. What would it take to get yourself to buy less stuff?

Can buying stuff be that bad?

The short answer is yes, it can be. Here are some facts:

- The average U.S. person now consumes twice as much as they did 50 years ago.
- The average person generates 4.3 pounds of waste per day. This is 1.6 pounds more than most produced back in 1960 (from Duke's Center for Sustainability & Commerce). Where does it all go?
- Seventy garbage cans of waste were generated in making the stuff in one garbage can of household waste.



The first and third facts come from *The Story of Stuff*, a 20-minute video you can find at <http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-stuff/>. It explains in an engaging way what is really going on when we buy things – all the extraction, production, distribution, consumption, and disposal of stuff. These five things take energy which leads to a larger carbon footprint as well as other forms of pollution.

So the less stuff you buy, the smaller your carbon footprint.

Motivating yourself

Facts are great, but what will inspire you to actually buy less?

Is money an issue for you? Try thinking of a goal that not spending will help you reach, such as paying off a credit card, paying off an educational loan, or saving for the down payment on a home.

Is clutter a problem? Less stuff equals less clutter.

Do you really need more things in your life? Think of all the people and things already in your life that you are grateful for. You might even keep a gratitude journal (<http://tinyurl.com/gratitudehowto>).

Practicing gratitude may give you the added benefits of lower blood pressure, better sleep, and a stronger immune system (<http://tinyurl.com/gratitudegood>).

Do ads make you want things? Try unsubscribing from commercial newsletters and from catalogs (<https://www.catalogchoice.org/>). Perhaps recording TV shows and fast forwarding through commercials would help.

Do you buy things to make yourself feel better? Ask yourself about past purchases of things you wanted but didn't need. Did buying them make you feel better? Did any happiness persist to today?

Carrying out the plan

Someone once asked me how I avoid buying things. I said, "I don't go into stores." They laughed. I was serious. But sometimes you do need to go into stores.

Before you buy, try asking yourself these questions:

- Do I really need this?
- Do I already have one or something similar?
- Where will I put it?
- What will I get rid of to prevent clutter?
- How long will this item last?
- Have I done the research on price & quality



You could even put these questions on a card and place it in your wallet, so that you see it before you spend.

Would it help to feel the cost more? You could leave your credit card at home and use cash instead. Or, if that is not practical, maybe paying off your credit card in full every month would make the expenditures seem more real.

Do you find yourself buying things you don't need online? Consider keeping a list of what you need to do online and sticking to it. Perhaps you could have a day of rest from the computer every week. Mine is Sunday.

What could you do when you need a little boost? Just as it better to avoid grocery shopping when we're hungry, it's also better to avoid other kinds of shopping when we are unhappy. If you do find yourself in a store, try having a 24-hour rule. Don't buy the item unless you still think it's a good idea 24 hours later.

How about rewarding yourself with something free? The library is full of books, movies, music, and magazines that you can get either in person or online. Or take a walk. With the pleasure of a walk in a park, you get the added benefit of exercise.

You know yourself best. So what's your plan?

References

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