

10 Ways to Keep the Small Stuff from Taking Over Your Life

Are you ready to live a more consciously meaningful, peaceful and less hectic life?

According to Richard Carlson, it is possible, as long as we remember not to get caught up in 'the small stuff.' In his bestselling book, ***Don't sweat the small stuff*** Carlson shares 100 strategies to help us keep life in perspective.

Here are 10 of his ideas to keep 'the small stuff' from taking over your life:

- 1. Make peace with imperfection:** The need for perfection and the desire for inner tranquility conflict with each other. Whenever we are attached to having something a certain way, better than it already is, we are, almost by definition, engaged in a losing battle. Rather than being content and grateful for what we have, we are focused on what's wrong with something and our need to fix it. When we are zeroed in on what's wrong, it implies that we are dissatisfied, disconnected. The solution here is to catch yourself when you fall into your habit of insisting that things should be other than they are. Gently remind yourself that life is okay the way it is, right now. In the absence of your judgement, everything would be fine. As you begin to eliminate your need for perfection in all areas of your life, you'll begin to discover the perfection in life itself.
- 2. Be happy where you are:** Sadly, many of us continually postpone our happiness - indefinitely. It's not that we consciously set out to do so, but that we keep convincing ourselves, 'Someday I'll be happy.' We tell ourselves we'll be happy when our bills are paid, when we get our first job, when we get a promotion. We convince ourselves that life will be better after we get married, have a baby, then another. Then we get frustrated the kids aren't old enough - we'll be content when they are. After that, we're frustrated that we have teenagers to deal with. And on, and on and on! The truth is, there's no better time to be happy than right now. If not now, when? Your life will always be filled with challenges. It's best to admit this to yourself and decide to be happy anyway. Alfred D'Souza put it well, "For a long time it had seemed to me that life was about to begin - real life. But there was always some obstacle in the way, something to be got through first, some unfinished business, time still to be served, a debt to be paid. Then life would begin. At last it dawned on me that those obstacles were my life.'
- 3. Allow yourself to be bored:** For most of us, our lives are so filled with stimuli, not to mention responsibilities, that it's almost impossible for us to sit still and do nothing, much less relax - even for a few minutes. Practice allowing yourself to be bored, even if it's just for an hour - and don't fight it! The feelings of boredom will be replaced with feelings of peace, and with a little practice, you'll learn to relax. Just sit still, perhaps look out the window and notice your thoughts and feelings. At first you might get a little anxious, but each day it will get a little easier. Just like your body, your mind needs an occasional break from its hectic routine. When you allow your mind to take a break, it comes back stronger, sharper, more focused and creative.
- 4. Repeat to yourself 'Life isn't an emergency':** Although most people believe otherwise, life isn't an emergency. We can take simple preferences and turn them into conditions for our own happiness. Or, we beat ourselves up if we can't meet our self-created deadlines. The first step is to admit that, in most cases, you're creating your own emergencies. Life will usually go on if things don't go according to plan. It's also helpful to keep reminding yourself and repeat to yourself, 'Life isn't an emergency.'
- 5. Quiet the mind:** A quiet mind is the foundation of inner peace, which then translates into outer peace. Although there are many techniques for quieting the mind, such as reflection, deep breathing, contemplation and visualisation, the most universally accepted and regularly used technique is meditation. In as little as five to ten minutes a day, you can train your mind to be still and quiet. This stillness can be incorporated into your daily life, making you less reactive and irritable and giving you a greater perspective to see things as small stuff rather than as emergencies. Meditation teaches you to be

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calm by giving you the experience of absolute relaxation. There are many different forms and variations of meditation. Essentially, however, meditation involves emptying your mind. I personally love listening to a mediation CD - you can find it at www.meditate.com.au or watching Shirley McLaine's chakra meditation DVD.

6. **Life is a test. It is only a test:** When you look at life and its many challenges as a test, or series of tests, you begin to see each issue you face as an opportunity to grow, a chance to roll with the punches. Whether you're being bombarded with problems, responsibilities, even insurmountable hurdles, when looked at as a test, you always have a chance to success, in the sense of rising above that which is challenging you. If on the other hand, you see each new issue you face as a serious battle that must be won in order to survive, you're probably in for a very rocky journey. The only time you're likely to be happy is when everything is working out just right and we all know how often that happens. See if you can redefine an issue that you face from being a 'problem' to being a test. Rather than struggling with your issue, see if there is something you can learn from it. Ask yourself, 'What is this issue in my life? What would it mean and what would be involved to rise above it?'
7. **See the glass as already broken (and everything else too):** The essence of this Buddhist teaching is that all of life is in a constant state of change. Everything has a beginning and everything has an end. In our modern world, this means that every car, every machine, every piece of clothing is created and all will wear out and crumble; it's only a matter of when. Our bodies are born and they will die. A glass is created and will eventually break. There is peace to be found in this teaching. When you expect something to break, you're not surprised or disappointed when it does. Instead of becoming immobilized when something is destroyed, you feel grateful for the time you have had. Play with this awareness and you'll find yourself not only keeping your cool but appreciating life as never before.
8. **Practice ignoring your negative thoughts:** It's been estimated that the average human being has around 50,000 thoughts per day. Some of these thoughts are going to be positive and unfortunately, many are going to be negative - angry, fearful, pessimistic, worrisome. You really only have two options when it comes to dealing with negative thoughts. You can analyze your thoughts - ponder, think through, study, think some more - or you can learn to ignore them - dismiss, pay less attention to, not take so seriously. This later option is infinitely more effective in terms of learning to be more peaceful.
9. **Lighten up!:** These days it seems that almost all of us are too serious. People are frustrated and uptight about virtually everything - being five minutes late, having someone else show up five minutes late, being stuck in traffic, witnessing someone look at us wrong or say the wrong thing, paying bills, waiting in line, overcooking a meal, making an honest mistake - you name it. We all lose perspective. The root of being uptight is our unwillingness to accept life as being different, in any way, from our expectations. The first step in recovering from over-seriousness is to admit that you have a problem. You have to want to change, to become more easygoing. You have to see that your own uptightness is largely of your own creation - it's composed of the way you have set up your life and the way you react to it. The next step is to understand the link between your expectations and your frustration level. Whenever you expect something to be a certain way and it isn't, you're upset and you suffer. On the other hand, when you let go of your expectations, when you accept life as it is, you're free. To hold on is to be serious and uptight. To let go is to lighten up.
10. **Be open to 'what is':** One of the most basic spiritual principles in many philosophies is the idea of opening your heart to 'what is' instead of insisting that life be a certain way. The idea is so important because much of our internal struggle stems from our desire to control life, to insist that it be different than it actually is. But life isn't always (or even rarely is) the way we would like it to be - it is simply the way it is. The greater our surrender to the truth of the moment, the greater will be our peace of mind.

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