

Joshua Becker:

The statistics are unbelievable when you look at them. According to UCLA, the average home has 300,000 things inside of it. The average American home has tripled in size in the last 50 years, and still 10% of Americans rent offsite storage. An even larger percentage can't fit both cars in the garage. An even higher percentage of that complain that their house is too small for the life that they're trying to live. Maybe our houses aren't too small, maybe we just put too much stuff inside of them. We can see it in our homes, we can see it in our garages, we can see it in our drawers, and in our closets. We can see it in our wardrobes. Statistically speaking, the average American woman today has over 30 outfits. 40 years ago, the average American woman owned only nine.

What's interesting is that one of the reasons this is the case is because it has become so ingrained in our culture, in our society, and in our thinking that more is better. That the more choice we have, the better we are going to be. One of the most influential TED talks and/or books that I've ever read is by Barry Schwartz. The name of the book is the Paradox of Choice. We'll link to the TED talk in the section below. In the TED talk and in the book, Barry cites a number of fascinating studies that help prove a counterpoint. Choice is good to a certain extent, but soon choice actually makes us less happy than we were when we didn't have any choice at all.

It's very interesting he cites a number of reasons that this is the case. He says, "Number one, too much decision leads to paralysis." Now when we have too many things to choose from, it becomes easier to not make any decision at all than to choose any of the things that are listed. A large company began offering some mutual fund options to its employees. It found that for every ten mutual fund options that it offered, there was a 6% drop in participation. Again, the choices were just too many. It was easier to not make any decision at all. Beyond that, he found that the more choices we have, there is an escalation of expectation. That the thinking is because there are more choices, we should be happier with the one that we choose, but in reality, things are just things. They can only bring so much happiness, so much value into our lives. Because we think that there are more and it should have been better, we are disappointed with the results.

Lastly, he points out that when there are more choices, we are ultimately less satisfied with the decision that we made. Not too long ago, I visited a restaurant. We were visiting a city, me and my wife. We asked at the hotel, we said, "What's the best restaurant in town?" They mentioned a hotel down the street. We're like, "Well, a hotel that recommends a hotel, that's probably a pretty good sign." We went and indeed there was a 45-minute wait to get in. Finally we were ushered to our table and we sat down, the waitress came. We asked for menus, and she said, "There's no menu." I said, "There's no menu? What are you talking about?" She said, "Well, we offer two things. We offer a filet, and we offer a vegetarian lasagna." I'm like, "You just offer two things?" She said, "For the last 75 years, all we've served is steak or vegetable lasagna," and yet the line was out the door, because they had become good at what they are serving, because the choices were limited, people ended up happier with their meals.

The more choices we have, the less satisfied we are with the one that we choose. You can picture it when you go to a restaurant and you order something off the menu and you're like, "Oh, gosh. I wish I would have gotten this instead." In a study they did at a grocery store, they sampled some jams. They put out six jars one day and offered the people any samples that they wanted. They found that 30% of the people who sampled the jars ended up purchasing one of them. The very next day they changed the experiment, and they placed 24 different jars of jam on the grocery store table. They said that the more jams attracted more people, so more people were attracted to the idea of having more choice, but at the end of the day, only 3% of people ended up purchasing a jam.

The more choice we have, the less satisfied we become with the one that we choose. Today we're going to talk about our clothes, our wardrobe, going through one of these closets that we've stuffed too full. Again, I think it's important to remember that this mentality, that the more clothes we have, the more choices we have, the happier we are going to be just isn't true. Years ago I had a full closet, and I cut it down. I am far happier with my clothes today. Everything I have in my closet I enjoy wearing, I can put on any day at any given time. This week we're going to go through our closet, and we're going to begin decluttering and minimizing the clothes that we wear. There's some more instructions in the assignment below, but just a couple things to keep in mind as we do this.

Number one, embrace the idea of one. That it's okay to own just one pair of black shoes. It's okay to own just one black belt. In fact, when we choose just one, we're able to own our absolute favorite of whatever that accessory or item might be. Also, as we begin to limit the number of clothes that we own, we're able to pursue quality over quantity. I used to be the type of person that whenever I would go to a department store and I would see a clearance rack of jeans, I would find one that fit me, and I would buy it. I'd be happy maybe a couple times of wearing it, but soon I would discover, "Ah, there's reason it was on the clearance rack in the first place." When I decided to start owning fewer clothes, I was able to say, "No, I don't need just what's on sale. I'm going to get something that I like, and it looks good on me."

I soon began to embrace the idea of less colors and fewer fads. The fashion industry, by its very makeup, requires us to buy new clothes every three months. This is how they make their money. If we were all just content with the clothes that we have, they would have nothing to sell. What they do is they just reinvent a new fashion, a new color, a new style, and they tell us that this the in-thing that we need to buy for this upcoming season. In that, we continue to buy and buy and accumulate more and more and more. In reality, we all have our styles that we like. We have our set styles that we're most happy with, that we found the most joy in, that we found the most comfort in. We have a few different colors that we like wearing more than the others. Embrace that, jump into it. The reality is that we wear 20% of our clothing 80% of the time.

Barry Schwartz's point and my point is this. That if just limit our closet to those 20% that we like in the first place, we'll find far more satisfaction every single morning when we choose something to wear. Let's get practical. This week we are going to declutter our closet. Take a look at

the clothes that you have in your closet and remove any item that doesn't fit, any item that you don't like, or any item that you haven't worn in the last six months. Also remove any seasonal items. You don't have to throw them away, but remove them, put them in a different space. When you're finished with that, here's the challenge. Anything that's still hanging in your closet, turn the hangers backwards. After you wear an item, you'll return the hanger right way. After three months, you'll be able to see which clothes you've worn in the last three months and which clothes you haven't touch. It will give you an even better picture of what clothes you can remove.