

## Overcome an Overloaded Life: Choose Wisely

We're all busy in the same sorts of ways. Our lives are consumed with the crushing weight of family, work, and church activities. Our lives are bombarded with requests, demands, and desires. Individual situations may be quantitatively less busy than others, and some more so, but as a society we are living a shared experience of an overwhelmed life.

Where does it all stop? When will things slow down? How can we recapture time lost?

Technology has delivered time-saving devices that actually consume more time. Progress moves our lives faster and faster, yet we seem incapable of enjoying little if any benefit. We desire and often achieve more. We have bought into a full-life timeshare to only find ourselves bankrupt in emptiness.

Are you asking this question?

***I don't have enough time to do the things I need to do, let alone the things I want to do.***

THE QUICK SUMMARY - [The Paradox of Choice](#) by Barry Schwartz

As Americans, we assume that more choice means better options and greater satisfaction. But beware of excessive choice: choice overload can make you question the decisions you make before you even make them, it can set you up for unrealistically high expectations, and it can make you blame yourself for any and all failures. In the long run, this can lead to decision-making paralysis, anxiety, and perpetual stress.

In *The Paradox of Choice*, Barry Schwartz explains at what point choice – the hallmark of individual freedom and self-determination that we so cherish – becomes detrimental to our psychological and emotional well being. In accessible, engaging, and anecdotal prose, Schwartz shows how the dramatic explosion in choice – from the mundane to the profound challenges of balancing career, family, and individual needs – has paradoxically become a problem instead of a solution.

### A SIMPLE SOLUTION

We are living at the peak of human possibility, overflowing in material abundance. As a society we have achieved what our ancestors could, at most only dream about, but it has come at a great price. We get what we say we want, only to discover that what we want doesn't satisfy us to the degree we expect. We are surrounded by timesaving devices but we never seem to have enough time.

The success of our lives today turns out to be bittersweet, and everywhere we look it appears that significant contributing factor is the overabundance of choice.

*The fact that **some** choice is good doesn't necessarily mean that **more** choice is better.*

There are steps we can take to mitigate – even eliminate – many sources of distress, but they aren't easy. They require practice, discipline, and perhaps a new way of thinking. On the other hand, each of these steps will bring its own rewards.

1.

**Choose when to choose** – To manage the problem of excessive choice, we must decide which choices in our lives really matter and focus our time and energy there, letting many other opportunities pass us by.

2.

**Be a chooser, not a picker** – Choosers are people who are able to reflect on what makes a decision important, or on whether none of the options should be chosen, or whether a new option should be created. Good decisions take time and attention, and the only way we can find the needed time and attention is by choosing our spots.

3.

**Satisfice more and maximize less** – Learning to accept “good enough” will simplify decision making and increase satisfaction. By settling for good enough even when the “best” could be just around the corner, satisficers will usually feel better about the decisions they make.

4.

**Think about the opportunity costs of opportunity costs** – When we decide to opt out of deciding in some area of life, we don't have to think about what the opportunity costs.

5.

**Make your decisions nonreversible** – What we don't realize is that the very option of being allowed to change our minds seems to increase the chances that we *will* change our minds. When a decision is final, we engage in a variety of psychological processes that enhance our feelings about the choice we made relative to the alternatives.

6.

**Practice an “attitude of gratitude”** – We can vastly improve our subjective experience by consciously striving to be grateful more often for what is good about a choice or an experience, and to be disappointed less by what is bad about it.

7.

**Regret less** – The sting of regret (either actual or potential) colors many decisions, and sometimes influences us to avoid making decisions at all. It pays to remember just how complex life is and to realize how rare it is that any single decision, in and of itself, has the life-transforming power we sometimes think.

8.

**Anticipate adaption** – When life is good, adaptation puts on a “hedonic treadmill,” robbing us of the full measure of satisfaction we expect from each positive experience. We must develop realistic expectations about how experiences change with time.

9.

**Control expectations** – What may be the easiest route to increasing satisfaction with the results of decisions is to remove excessively high expectations about them.

10.

**Curtail social comparison** – Though social comparison can provide useful information, it often reduces our satisfaction. So by comparing ourselves to others less, we will be satisfied more.

11.

**Learn to love constraints** – We should learn to view limits on the possibilities we face as liberating, not constraining. Choice within constraints and freedom within limits enable us to imagine a host of marvelous possibilities.

Barry Schwartz, [\*The Paradox of Choice\*](#)

## A NEXT STEP

There are costs to having an overload of choice, not the least of these is reduced time. Our culture is infatuated with freedom, self-determination, and variety, and we are reluctant to give up any of our options. But clinging to all the choices available to us contributes to bad decisions, anxiety, and stress.

Make a choice to take control of your decision-making. Set aside 30 minutes three days each week for the next month. During each of those 30-minute periods, review and reflect on one of the 11 actions listed above by doing the following:

Write the phrase on a chart tablet. Read it out loud, and then write down thoughts and actions that come to mind. Take no more than five minutes for this exercise.

Then, go back over the list and circle up to five items that most interest you. Spend several minutes on each one, adding additional thoughts to those as needed on the chart tablet.

After reviewing those, choose a single thought or action that you will immediately begin to implement in this area. On a new chart tablet sheet, list the 11 areas above again, and write this action beside the appropriate phrase.

At the end of a month, you will have worked through the list of 11 items above, and developed a single action item to help you improve in that area. Reflect back on what you have done, and how it has improved your decision-making.

Excerpt taken from SUMS Remix #87-3, released February 2018.

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