

BE IN CONTROL of Your Essentials & Desires

*"We are driven by five genetic needs:
survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun."
William Glasser*

We humans are way too wrapped up in pursuing our fantasies, dreams and pursuit of happiness that we often create a living environment that we despise and try to escape from. We are hooked into believing that we won't have more time or money in the future or that we won't be part of the "in crowd" if we don't spend NOW on this or that. To top it off we tend to do this to ourselves, like we are just a bunch of gluttons for punishment.



We are constantly bombarded with the images of the "perfect" kitchen gadget, garden tool, sweater, house, yard or look and style; that we have no true idea what we ourselves actually like or dislike. As a result we are often like the hamster on the training wheel, running in circles and getting nowhere.



We convince ourselves that we can control the future, if we just get this or do that NOW. We fail to keep in mind that we humans basically control nothing but ourselves. The future will be what it will be.

*"Without frugality none can be rich,
and with it very few would be poor."
Samuel Johnson*

For those of us that wish to be self-reliant or prepared, this distinction between needs and wants can be a major roadblock to our success.

WORKSHEET: WANTS OR NEEDS

WANTS	NEEDS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>A Porsche</i> - <i>An electric fireplace</i> - <i>A new desk (even though the one I have now is perfectly acceptable)</i> - <i>Crown molding</i> - <i>Mega Millions Lottery tkt</i> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - <i>Roof over our head (aka pay the mortgage)</i> - <i>Groceries</i> - <i>Get an oil change</i> - <i>Cat litter (*don't forget!)</i>

A *need* is something you *have* to have, something you can't do without. A good example is food. If you don't eat, you won't survive for long. Many people have gone days without eating, but they eventually ate a lot of food. You might not need a whole lot of food, but you do need to eat.



A *want* is something you *would like* to have. It is not absolutely necessary, but it would be a good thing to have. A good example is music. Now, some people might argue that music is a *need* because they think they can't do without it. But you don't need music to survive. You do need to eat.

“The highest manifestation of life consists in this: that a being governs its own actions. A thing which is always subject to the direction of another is somewhat of a dead thing.”

St. Thomas Aquinas

1225-1274, Italian Scholastic Philosopher and Theologian

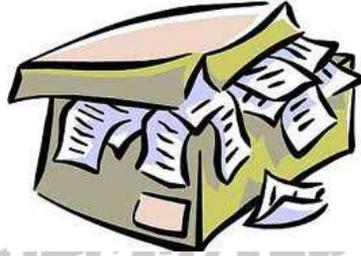
The most basic needs you as a human require for survival are oxygen, water, food, clothing and shelter. Anything beyond those are "wants".



We *need* to eat protein, vitamins, and minerals. How you get them is up to you (and your family). You can eat meat, nuts, or soy products to get protein. You can get fruits and vegetables to get vitamins and minerals. You can eat yogurt or cheese to get other vitamins and minerals. You can eat bread to get still more vitamins and minerals. These basic kinds of foods are *needs*.

*“If you want to feel rich,
just count the things you have that money can't buy”
Proverb*

Ice cream is a *want*. We don't really need to eat ice cream to survive. You can eat it to get some vitamins and minerals, but other foods like cheese and yogurt give you more of those same vitamins and minerals without giving you the fat that ice cream does. Still, ice cream tastes good to many people. We like to eat it. We *want* it, but they don't *need* it. We like it, but they don't have to have it to survive.



Other examples can be seen in our spending habits. Most people spend way too much money on things they don't really need. The more money we make, the more we tend to spend. This endless cycle of “things” (materialism) has led many people to confuse the word “need” with the word “want.” As in, “we need a big-screen TV for our new home theater.” Or, “I need a new pair of shoes to go with my new outfit.”

WANT	NEED
TOO MANY THINGS	TO WANT LESS

The pursuit of material success often is the root cause of burnout at midlife. In fact, a recent study at the University of California at Berkeley found that people primarily motivated by the love of their work grow dissatisfied as they begin to make more money.



Our needs are relatively few, even from birth. We don't need a lot of stuff, toys, gadgets, etc. We need shelter from the elements, clothing, food, love and understanding. We need friends and family around us.

*"Our necessities never equal our wants."
Benjamin Franklin*

We do not need 500 cable TV channels, brand new luxury cars, 5,000-square-foot homes in exclusive neighborhoods, lavish ski vacations, ice cream or potato chips and smart phones that seem to do everything but think for us.



We can see this when we look in our drawers, closets and kitchens. How many gadgets, trinkets and articles of clothing do we have that we really, really wanted when we purchased them, yet at best have only utilized once or twice in the last two years? These items were wants and desires and not needs or essentials.

*"You will never 'find' time for anything.
If you want time, you must make it"
Charles Buxton*

There is nothing wrong with wanting these things. However we need understand that these things, in and of themselves, are *not necessities to human life* and often do not make us happy. Plus they are often links in the chains that bind us to activities and jobs we ultimately despise.



When we cannot distinguish between wants versus needs, or if we can't identify a want as a want, we set ourselves up to live in a constant state of craving and disappointment.



The first step to breaking conquer this human "flaw" is to understand the difference between "need" and "want" or "essentials" and "desires". Determining the distinction between Need and want is even more difficult when you live in a prosperous society, like ours.

*"Beware of little expenses; a small leak will sink a great ship"
Benjamin Franklin*



Our "western" standard of living is so high that even many of our poor tend to live above the level of basic needs. In 1998, 97% of "poor" Americans (as defined by the Census Bureau) owned a television, something that could definitely be considered a non-necessity to life item. In many third-world countries, less than 30% of the population even has access to electricity; which most of us would consider an absolute necessity.

*"Men are so simple and so much inclined to obey immediate needs that a deceiver will never lack victims for his deceptions."
Niccolo Machiavelli*

This means that the distinction between want and need is often relative and uniquely based on perspective. It depends on the area in which we live, the company we keep, the lifestyle we choose and our *perceived* expectations of the society around us.

In the U.S. we tend to see transportation, electricity, healthcare, savings, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, as basic needs; on top of the true essentials such as food, water, basic clothing and shelter.



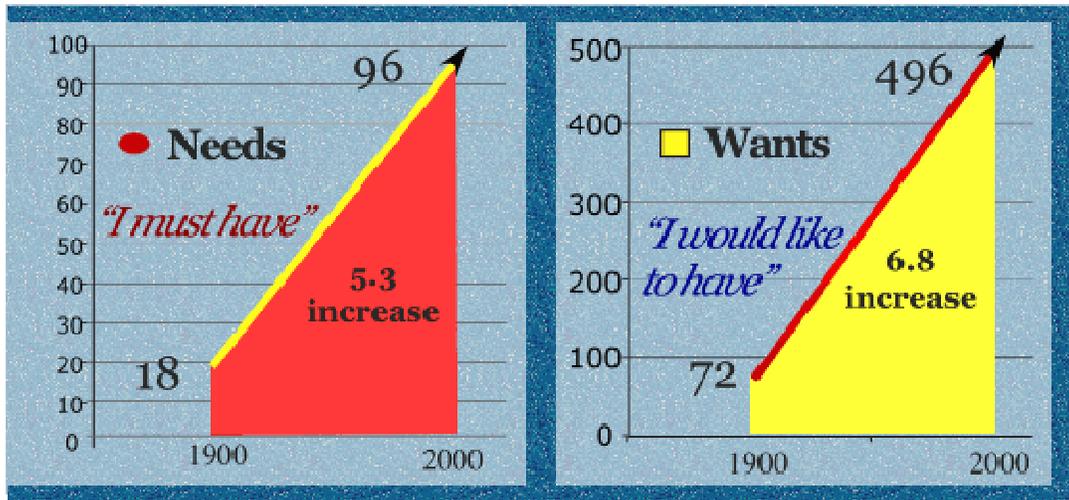
Again, "wanting" all these things and stuff is basically it is a human flaw. Rarely is it for survival, as even the homeless find a way to survive. We want because we seek a sense of self-enhancement, of fulfillment and because we don't know how to find what we feel we lack (the feelings that can only be found from within), we go looking outside ourselves for it. We look desperately through catalogues and want ads and malls and showrooms under the false pretense that if a little is good, more is better.

*"Every man is a consumer, and ought to be a producer. He is by constitution expensive, and needs to be rich."
Ralph Waldo Emerson*

The concept of “more” imprisons all of humanity with the never ending, never fulfilling promise of betterment. It stains our thoughts and very beings with its fear driven seeking; the kind of seeking that never allows you to once and for all, find.

We get stuck in a rut, as with each apparent find, the concept of more, though quelled momentarily, begins to rise anew, either through a perceived lack in the new find, or in some tangential direction. As long as the never ending, never satisfied addiction to “more” pervades our thoughts, happiness and peace of mind will stay just out of reach.

Needs vs. Wants



“At the beginning of this century, the average American had 72 wants and considered 18 of them important. By the end of the century, the average American had 496 wants and considered 96 of them as genuine necessities for happiness.” (Miller)

But how much money, how much love, how much stuff is enough? As long as we are addicted to more, there will *never* be enough of *anything*. We have to re-learn how to be happy and successful with what we have, rather than chasing what we think we lack.



Trimming non-necessity to life items, activities and expenses from our lives is a good way to start having more time and monies to actually enjoy and live life. So don't be too hard on yourself. There is nothing wrong with seeking pleasure. It is only wrong if you are fretting over finances, lack of time and or space because of giving in to all the desires.



The first step to breaking this cycle is to do what I call the “Reality Check”. Are you sheltered from sun and rain right now? If the answer is yes, then you have enough shelter. Can you pay for the basics of life in society and still eat and be clothed? If yes, then you have enough money. Can you enjoy yourself (when you make time to), no matter how little it costs? Then you have enough enjoyment. Do you spend time with and enjoy your friends and family? Then you are accepted and loved.



This is not saying that a “minimal” or “meager” existence is better than having abundance. Far from it – this is the Reality Check. Do we or do we not have what a human body needs to survive? This is the baseline, going a little beyond is NOT feeding the addiction. If we KNOW how much is enough (baseline) we are free of the addiction of needing more. We can see anything beyond the basics as what they truly are – surpluses.



The key to having more than enough is to not allow yourself to raise the bar for what constitutes enough as your fortune increases. Once you begin to raise your requirements for what is enough, you have once again become possessed by more. You have more, so you want more.

"I have learnt to seek my happiness in limiting my desires, rather than attempting to satisfy them."

John Stuart Mill

Because the concept of more resides in the future, if you don't set a rock bottom set of basics for what is enough, you will never have enough because you are always looking forward in time. Remember, the only time that can be lived is NOW.



As long as we are focused on “more”, we can never have “enough”. Once we recognize that we actually do have enough to survive, we realize that we are now dealing with a surplus to our needs. Knowing this simple fact is half the battle and in my book the hardest of all to accomplish.

“Frugality may be termed the daughter of Prudence, the sister of Temperance, and the parent of Liberty”
Samuel Johnson

When we recognize a want as just a want, we begin to realize the silliness of wanting things or situations based on nothing in particular; and the futility of being disappointed when they don't materialize.



For us self-reliant, Prepper types this is an important mindset. We can't be self-reliant or as prepared as we would like, if we keep raising our expectations of what constitutes self-reliance and preparedness to us. This is also why the more successful Preppers and homesteaders have written plans to keep this baseline rigid and fixed, so surpluses are much more noteworthy and visible.



Don't get me wrong--I want things I don't need, just as much as anyone else. Yet when it looks like I may not get them, I apply the Reality Check and ask myself what makes me want this and realize in almost every case, it was just an arbitrary want, brought on by a "that would be cool" whim (or commercial) that popped into my head out of seemingly nowhere.

*"Besides the noble art of getting things done,
there is the noble art of leaving things undone.
The wisdom of life consists in the elimination of nonessentials."
Lin Yu Tang*



Money and stuff are a product of your will to acquire. Physique, creativity and happiness and the amount of each you enjoy are controlled by you only and creativity, physical conditioning, are gifts you give to yourself; the love and sex we seek are given to us and shared by others. If you lack these things you have only to ask yourself why.

*"A hug is like a boomerang - you get it back right away."
Bil Keane*

When you love yourself first, the love you give others will be genuine, and though you shouldn't ever give anything away expecting some kind of return, love given away will be returned to you in ways you may not even notice. Giving it away might even feel better than getting it from others. If you feel you lack love coming from others, give yourself a bunch and that may just be enough.



It is said that we spend the first half of our life accumulating possessions and the second half giving them away. This is true for most people.

*"The chains of habit are too strong to be felt
until they are too strong to be broken"*
Samuel Johnson

Years ago in a budgeting seminar we were instructed to do a little exercise. This exercise is such a powerful tool that I believe is the best one to start with; it is still one of the most successful ones out there for consciously determining wants vs. needs.

*"Money never made a man happy yet, nor will it.
The more a man has, the more he wants.
Instead of filling a vacuum, it makes one."*
Benjamin Franklin

For a week every time you are about to buy something, ask yourself if it was just an arbitrary want. Will your health fail in the next year without it? Was it something you decided to want based on an advertisement or suggestion, or did it just pop into your head? Make note of your answer.

For the next week every time you are about to buy or pay to do something that is a want and not a need – every other time – DO NOT buy or do it. When you get home put the monies you would have spent into a can or jar.



At the end of this second week, count how much money you have saved and think about how much time, energy and space you have saved too.

"He who does not economize will have to agonize"
Confucius

If you continue this exercise, over time this will result in changing your mind (habit) and not buying the thing that you don't need. The longer you keep this two week exercise in mind (or repeat it), the more often you will NOT buy or pay to do something that you don't really need. Eventually this will become a new habit and you will find yourself enjoying life more fully. It will become easier to see all things you already do possess and you will not doubt start to feel good about making better choices in your day to day life.

"A prudent man foresees the difficulties ahead"

*and prepares for them;
the simpleton goes blindly on and suffers the consequences."
Proverbs 22:3*



This necessity vs. desires mentality is the *bases* of a booklet from the 1940's called the *Have More Plan – A little land – A lot of living* by Ed and Carolyn Robinson. This book is perfect for the person seeking to move from an urban area to a rural one. Especially since you can download it for free from http://www.webpal.org/SAFE/aaarecovery/1_farm_recovery/ftpfiles/the_have_more_plan.pdf. Once you save about \$30.00 I would then get the *Storey's Basic Country Skills* by John and Martha Storey.

*"I've never been poor -- only broke.
Being poor is a frame of mind.
Being broke is only a temporary situation."
Mike Todd*

If getting your budget under control is more important than your mental and spiritual needs vs. wants, then use a simple worksheet that will help you see if you are spending just as much or more on wants, instead of on the necessities to life.

A good worksheet to start with is downloadable from The Mississippi Council on Economic Education (MCEE) @ <http://www.mscee.org/downloads/wants%20vs%20needs%20worksheet.pdf>

*"Don't say you don't have enough time. You have exactly the
same number of hours per day that were given to Helen
Keller, Pasteur, Michelangelo, Mother Teresa, Leonardo da
Vinci, Thomas Jefferson, and Albert Einstein."
H. Jackson Brown*

To live for the very joy of life, to live in the now, is to live in **BEING** and you are far richer than any person with more stuff, prestige or money, as that person is most likely still striving to have enough, they are stuck on needing more. If that person that has more material things than you and knows that they have more than enough, then you both are equally wealthy. If you have enough now, you know you'll have enough in the future. That - is financial security. It knows no numbers, it only knows enough and you will always have enough.



*“Life belongs to the living,
and he who lives must be prepared for changes.”
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe*

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