



When in Doubt ... Simplify



By Christina Salwitz

I'll make this a quick and efficient read because I know you've already run 5 ½ miles of your 12-mile day today in the confines of the garden center, and you're reading this while you attempt to cram some lunch into your face, hit the bathroom and run back onto the sales floor with a big cheesy grin to sell and answer 11 billion questions.

I'm sending all the power I can muster from my laptop to all of you IGC superheroes!

If you've followed me for a bit now, you know that I'm forever going on about good container design, creativity, details, customer service, etc., but for just this crazy busy month where we're all looking forward to claiming ourselves "safe and accounted for" on our social media after we pass the first chaotic spring rushes, let's just look at the wee little possibility that maybe chilling out a bit might actually help us get to where we want to go, faster.

"You can't have everything. Where would you put it?"
— Steven Wright, comedian

The obsession with de-cluttering that author and professional organizer Marie Kondo brought to the world with her book "The Japanese Art of De-Cluttering" has had impact far beyond the idea of cleaning out our closets; it has led millions to look at cleaning out other parts of our lives too.

This leads me to suggest that maybe we should all look at what it might mean if we streamlined or even

simplified how we merchandise, how we buy plants and hardgoods, and how we design container combos and hanging baskets for example.

I know that when I'm exhausted, burnt-out and overwhelmed I need to think about what it means to strategize my use of energy. Simplifying and streamlining everything makes a huge difference. It means choosing which goal, which project, which role, problem or dream, or which idea hasn't been moving forward easily and to give it up that day, week or month. Because believe it or not, you will move more rapidly toward your truest and most important goals when you show discernment.

This doesn't in any way mean you're accepting defeat. It means you're going to move forward with bold confidence into areas where you can be sure you're investing in the likelihood of getting a good return on your energy output.

Maybe selling that next customer a colorful and complicated, multi-level container design is a great sale and design maverick move, but how many customers would be just as thrilled to have a mono-culture design container that's low maintenance and drought tolerant too? Or even using edible plants in lovely, sophisticated simplified combos?

What's the energy input versus output for both options look like? And if the sales are equal?

Distinctions to Draw

Simplify vs. Eradicate — Simplifying is to make things less complex, (sell three of one type of plant, as opposed to three different) versus eradicating means cutting a line of poorly selling products out entirely.

Space vs. Time — When you have room to think, breathe and your FitBit isn't saying you're going to have a heart attack if you keep going, you can better manage those goals and your time because you will be anticipating better. When you don't have the space,

time becomes a limited resource. There is plenty of time if you create enough space.

Outsource vs. Delegate — Outsource means you have access to professional minions to take the responsibility of handling a matter, function or problem. To delegate means that you still "own" the problem but are working with someone who will do their best to solve it.

Ask yourself these questions when you are overwhelmed this time of the year and can't come up with a design idea to save your life or can't possibly answer one more tomato question. Do you really need to order all 75 flavors of echinacea or will 40 do? Is it worth repainting the entire store interior or will creating colorful inexpensive backdrop panels and a few better lights do well enough? Do you really need to beat down that certain thorny problem once and for all to feel good about yourself before bed tonight?

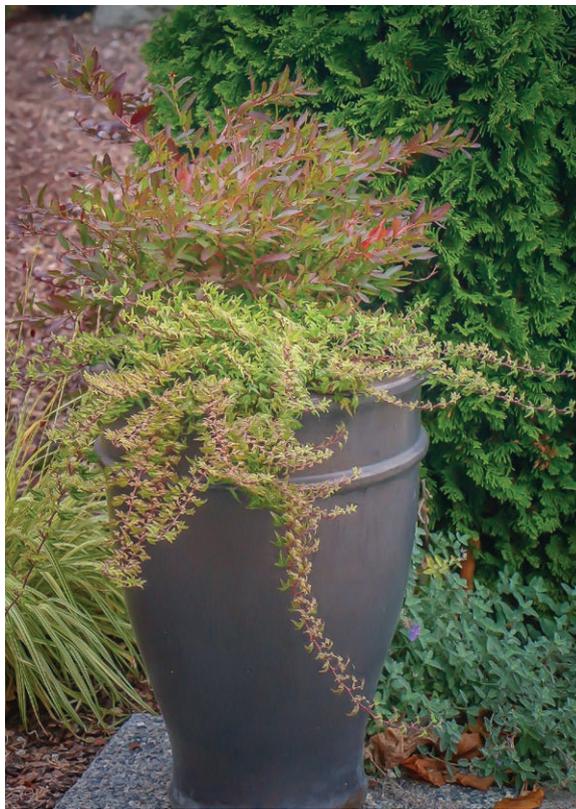
What if I gave you permission to give up? Wisely! One of the most interesting benefits of the entire simplifying and streamlining process is one very consistent side effect: you become irresistibly attractive to fresh, new, creative ideas because you gave them the space they needed to flow.

Love it or hate it the show on Netflix called "Tidying Up" starring Kondo features this phenomenon beautifully, just like so many before-and-after shows. Inevitably, the people featured on the show realize how much the "stuff" of their lives was stopping them from creating and living the lives they always wanted. Making the space in their lives stopped them from feeling stressed and overwhelmed.

Progress

Here's how you know you're making progress with this principle.

- You feel bored. Don't worry! It's just a little relaxation respite because REAL action is approaching, and you want to be ready.



- Before you jump on an opportunity now, you screen it first to see if it needlessly complicates your life, no matter how great it is.
- The feeling of excitement you've previously gotten from over-complication and stress becomes distasteful and you easily avoid stirring them up again.
- You spend less money.
- You have much less (stuff, backstock, human drama) to manage and more free time.
- You have a lot more emotional, physical and intellectual space to make room for fun things on the sales floor

(spontaneous silly videos, goofy gags, learning new sales techniques, true customer care)!

- Successes come more quickly because you have made the room for them!

Top Ways to Simplify Everything

- 1. Reduce errand running wherever possible.** Think about how much of your energy and attention goes into some of those details. If you were to pay someone hourly to do them, how much would it be worth? Think of it with regard to the 80/20 rule. Is your personal hourly rate (whatever you think that should be, \$75 per hour is mine) worth losing for only a 20 percent return?
- 2. Consider hiring a virtual assistant.** Anyone can do this with technology making it faster and easier than ever. Imagine the tasks you can outsource. It's limitless and quite affordable compared to my own time.
- 3. Automate as many tasks as possible.** Many of you do this by virtue of various software programs, etc., that we have access to now but think out of the box on this one. Where else can you automate to give you more space and time? Space isn't an add-on luxury to your evolution; it's a necessity.
- 4. Set reminders!** My phone background and alarms set throughout the day are my new favorite tool; even apps are helpful to keep us from processing too many silly pieces of paper or lists. Try setting a reminder for you to simply re-enforce a simple idea or positive mantra, so that when you hear the chime, it becomes automatic that you stop and breathe for a second.
- 5. Eliminate enough projects, promises and plans until you feel the creative space come back.** We have more choices and decisions to make in a single day now than our grandparents had in a week! How can you possibly be called on to create, sell, organize, design, run a business and a side business, work on self-development, advance your education, travel,

have hobbies, and enjoy entertainment when there's no space. Before you embark on your to-do list today, a project or a commitment, stop and ask yourself: "Self? Is this thing I'm about to do as important to my happiness, productivity and well-being than the new XYZ interest could possibly be?"

- 6. Clean out your backroom, office, car and closets.** This one might sound obvious, and it's often the project of last resort when we're lacking something to do in January at the garden center, if you're even open. But it's about being able to mess with the energy and symbolic importance of our stuff. I'm always telling groups in my talks that the best way to sell something that isn't moving is to park it smack in the middle of a busy thoroughfare with a big ol' SOLD sign on it. You have changed the energy of the "thing." You will automatically create desire for it because it looks irresistible. The same is true for your dusty old storage closets and backrooms in the garden center. I guarantee you will be asking why you ever kept half of that stuff. Think of it like a good pruning. The plant gets a surge of hormones and grows better because it can!

You might not be able to reach this place of "space," but for creatives in a fast-paced business like ours, it's a worthy thing to define what it might mean to tweak your various strategies for survival, not to mention thriving, just a hair during this season. Is it your actual life that needs simplifying or your lifestyle?

The litmus test is that your lifestyle should enhance your life rather than spending your life enhancing your lifestyle. 🌿

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