

9 Intentional Ways to Challenge Consumerism in Your Life

by JOSHUA BECKER



“Don’t buy what you don’t need.”

Consumerism is not a pathway to joy and meaning in life. This is not a new revelation. In fact, we all know it to be true.

If specifically asked the question, nobody would ever say the secret to a joyful, meaningful life is to buy a lot of stuff. Deep down in our hearts, we know we were made for something bigger—something more significant than mere consumption.

Nobody really believes happiness is directly tied to the number of things we own. Yet almost all of us live like it.

We work more hours than ever before, earn more income, but save less. Personal debt [has increased](#) dramatically over the previous three decades. And consumer spending has been exalted to a virtue in our society—even [patriotic](#).

As a result, the average credit card holder now carries [4 different credit cards](#) in his or her pocket. Shopping malls outnumber high schools 2 to 1. [70%](#) of Americans visit a

shopping mall each week. Televisions outnumber persons in American homes. Home sizes have doubled in the past 50 years. And consumer debt has risen to [35%](#) of household income.

Will Rogers said it like this, “*Too many people spend money they haven’t earned, to buy things they don’t want, to impress people they don’t like.*”

We never intentionally set out to buy more than we need or spend more than we make. But here’s the problem:

Mindless consumption always turns into excessive consumption.

And excess consumption results in more stress, more burden, more pressure to impress, more envy, less financial freedom, less generosity, less contentment—and I haven’t even begun to mention the environmental impact.

It is time to rethink our spending habits, rediscover thoughtfulness and intentionality in our purchases, and remind ourselves that happiness is not on sale at the department store. Buying more is not the solution. We were made for greater pursuits than material possessions. And our lives should reflect that truth.

How then, might we begin to rethink and challenge mindless consumerism in our lives? Consider this intentional approach:

1. Stop and reevaluate. Look at the life you have created. Are you finding the time, money, and energy for the things that matter most? Have your possessions become a burden on your life in any way? Slow down long enough to honestly evaluate the whole picture: your income, your mortgage, your

car payment, your spending habits, your day-to-day pursuits. Are you happy? Or is there, perhaps, a better way?

2. Stop copying other people. Just because your neighbors, classmates, and friends are chasing a certain style of life does not mean you need to as well. Your life is too unique to live like everyone else. And if you think you'll be happier by following all the latest trends in society, you are wrong. Just ask anybody who has stopped.

3. Understand your weaknesses. Recognize your trigger points. Are there certain stores that prompt unnecessary purchases in your life? Are there products, addictions, or pricing patterns (clearance sales) that prompt an automatic response from you? Maybe there are specific emotions (sadness, loneliness, grief) that give rise to mindless consumption. Identify, recognize, and understand these weaknesses. 51% of the solution can be found by simply recognizing the problem.

4. Look deep into your motivations. Advertisers play on our motivations by appealing to our desires in subtle ways. Advertisements are no longer based on communicating facts about a product. Instead, they promise adventure, reputation, esteem, joy, fulfillment, and sex. What inner-motivations are subconsciously guiding your purchases? What motivations (greed, envy) need to be rooted out? And what motivations (meaning, significance) need to find their fulfillment elsewhere?

5. Seek contribution with your life and usefulness in your purchases. To live is to consume. As contributing members of society, we are going to work and earn and purchase and consume. But we are more than consumers, we are contributors. Our presence on this earth ought to bring value to the people around us. Purchase only what you need to more effectively accomplish your unique role in this world—

everything else is only a distraction. Just because you *can* buy something doesn't mean you *should*.

6. Count the hidden cost of each purchase. Too often, when we purchase an item, we only look at the sticker price. But this is rarely the full cost. Our purchases always cost more. They require our time, energy, and focus (cleaning, organizing, maintaining, fixing, replacing, removing). They prompt worry, stress, and attachment. Henry David Thoreau said it best, "*The price of anything is the amount of life you exchange for it.*"

7. Test your limits. [Experiment](#) with a no-shopping challenge. You set the terms—even the world's biggest shopper can find one experiment to test their boundaries. Go 30 days with no consumer purchases, 60 days without visiting the mall, or 120 days without buying clothes. You set the specific challenge based on your needs. You will break the cycle of shopping in the short-term and lay the groundwork for greater victory in the long-term.

8. Give more things away. Your life will feel lighter. Your heart will feel warmer. The world will be better. And you will be reminded shopping is not the answer.

9. Do more of what makes you happy. Your possessions are not making you happy. Once our basic needs have been met, the happiness found in consumerism is fleeting at best. Instead, find what it is that truly makes you happy and do more of it. I find my happiness in faith, family, friends, and contribution. Your list may differ slightly. But either way, owning a whole bunch of stuff is almost certainly not on it. Make intentionality your highest pursuit. Not consumerism.

7 Life Inaccuracies Portrayed in the Super Bowl Ads

by JOSHUA BECKER



The last four Super Bowls have been the [four most watched](#) TV programs in U.S. history. And some [reports](#) predicted the 2014 edition of the big game would break all previous records to become the most-watched ever.

With this many people gathered around their television sets watching the exact same programming, marketers will invest significant time and money getting their products on screen: 30-second advertisement spots sold for [\\$4 million](#). They willingly make the investment knowing the most popular ads will be talked about in offices on Monday and watched over-and-over again on YouTube.

Watching and rating the commercials has become as important to the game as the events on the field. And only minutes after the final whistle, countless media sources rank [the best and the worst](#) advertisements declaring their own winners and losers.

Just to be fair, I do appreciate [clever advertisements](#) as much as the next guy. But as a whole, I have begun to watch them

with a different focus. As somebody who has developed a great frustration over our consumer-driven culture, I often watch the marketing of products to determine their underlying promise. To uncover what else, other than the product itself, marketers are trying to sell me. And I am rarely impressed with what I find.

Often times, I discover the underlying message promoted by marketers represents misconceptions and inaccuracies about life. They push forward faulty rationale. And we would be wise to recognize and reject each of them. Consider just a few of the inaccuracies on display in last night's football game:

7 Life Inaccuracies Portrayed in the Super Bowl Ads

1. To accomplish good in this world, buy more stuff. There has been [much conversation](#) about the softer, nicer tone of this Super Bowl's advertisements: less sexism, less sleaze, and less coarse humor. I welcome the change. Instead, we received ads designed to evoke fuzzy feelings and emotional responses. Some companies ([Axe](#), [Chevy](#), [U2](#)) even took the next step and offered social change through the purchase of their products. Now, don't get me wrong, I'm all for world peace, beating AIDS, and celebrating cancer survival. And I appreciate companies that are investing money into social good. I just don't think buying more stuff is the best way to accomplish it.

2. The best food is found in fast service and slick packages. In [Notes from a Blue Bike](#), Tsh Oxenreider speaks about the joy and pleasure of eating "slow food." She reminds us of the simple pleasure and benefit of purchasing quality food in season, including family in preparation, slowing down while we eat, and finding opportunity to linger at the table

afterwards. Perhaps that is why the foolishness of some food commercials stick out to me. At one point, [Subway](#) referred to their new Frito Chicken Enchilada as food that “could not be resisted” and [Sodastream](#) promoted a new soda that was both “better for you and better for us.” There is wonderful food out in the world to enjoy—it’s just not on sale in your local fast food establishment or candy aisle.

3. We don’t need less TV, we need better TV. I have learned one of the great subtleties of television is its ability to further its own cause—in other words, those who watch television are the most drawn to watch more of it. This is most often accomplished through television’s promotion of its own programming by highlighting “the most watched new show,” “the funniest new series,” “must-see tv,” or “the next great sporting event.” Television promotes more and more of itself to present viewers and boldly calls for even more of their attention. During the football game, I noticed countless advertisements for new shows and new television networks to improve our television-watching experience. But in a country where people spend [34 hours a week watching TV](#), [better](#), more personalized television is not the answer. Turning off the television is the answer.

4. If you can buy a luxury car, you should. Harvey Mackay once said, *“If you can afford a fancy car, you can make more of an impact driving an ordinary one.”* Car marketers would try to convince you otherwise. Their advertisements during the Super Bowl seem to presume that buying expensive new cars should be the goal of every American. [Jaguar](#), [Audi](#), and [Kia](#) all made claims to be the most luxurious vehicle on the market—as if luxury and reputation are the two most important goals anyone could achieve in their next car purchase. But as a nation that owes [\\$11.28 trillion](#) in consumer debt, we don’t need to buy more luxury cars, we

need to change our spending habits entirely. And even if we do have the money to buy a new luxury car, is that really the best possible use of it?

5. Buy a website and you'll become a successful entrepreneur. Websites are great. They provide opportunity to find your voice, interact with the world, and help bring about the change you desire. I am continually grateful for the opportunity this one provides for me. But I get a little nervous when I see companies make it sound too easy. Building a successful website takes time, money, energy, dedication, and passion. Both [GoDaddy](#) and [SquareSpace](#) seem to indicate it may be as simple as buying a new web address. And while purchasing a web site address is certainly your first step towards successful entrepreneurship, it is only the very first of many.

6. America is defined by football, soda, beer, and cars. American pride was an important theme for advertisers during this year's Super Bowl. [Coca-Cola](#), [Budweiser](#), and [Chrysler](#) were among those who intentionally used the theming to help promote their product (Chrysler even went so far as to use this line: *Detroit made cars. And cars made America*). Also, for some reason, Super Bowl Sunday was deliberately referred to as "[America's holiday](#)" over and over again this year. But it seems to me this country is about higher ideals than entertainment and consumerism—or at least, it could be.

7. Happiness is for sale. Advertisers often seek to convince us their products will increase our happiness and fulfillment in life—that the answer is found in spending more.

From [soda](#) and [alcohol](#) to [fashion](#) and [technology](#), happiness is offered to us in our very next purchase. But the truth of life is that happiness cannot be purchased no matter how hard we search for it in material possessions. And advertisers do a

great disservice to their audience by promising it in temporal packages. We would be wise to look for it elsewhere.

Becoming Minimalist Top Posts of 2013

by JOSHUA BECKER



A special thanks to each of you for making 2013 another incredible year at Becoming Minimalist. This website continues to grow well beyond my craziest expectations. The growth has occurred entirely from the support of readers like you—there is no advertising involved.

Thank you for sharing this website. But even more than that, thank you for sharing the life-giving message of owning less.

Indeed, over the past year, Becoming Minimalist has grown in significant ways:

- Monthly visitors to Becoming Minimalist grew from 150,000/month to over 350,000/month!
- [Facebook fans](#) grew from 18,000 to over 90,000!
- [Twitter followers](#) increased from 8,500 to 15,800.
- Our [Newsletter](#) unites and inspires 7,500 simple living advocates around the world.
- For the third year in a row, [Simplify](#) has sold over 10,000 copies.
- Becoming Minimalist's presence on [Tumblr](#), [Google+](#), and [Pinterest](#) continue to expand.

It has indeed been an incredibly exciting year. The metrics above prove the point. But going beyond the numbers, this past year I began writing and [speaking](#) on the topic of minimalism [full-time](#). This message is important. And the opportunity is great.

In case you missed any, here are some of the top posts on Becoming Minimalist from 2013.

Most Popular Posts from 2013 (as determined by the readers):

[10 Unconventional Habits to Live Distraction-Less.](#) It is increasingly clear that distractions are not going away on their own. Instead, the responsibility is ours to live attentive, intentional lives in a world of distraction. This is a goal we must continue to seek.

[A Helpful Guide to Becoming Unbusy.](#) Seemingly, busy has become the default state for too many of our lives. But it doesn't have to be this way. Busy is not inevitable. Each of us can take intentional steps to overcome it.

[A Simple, Helpful Guide to Overcome Consumerism.](#) Breaking free from excessive consumerism is an essential step not just for a simplified life, but for any life that desires to be lived intentionally. How then we can realize this freedom? What steps can we take to break free?

[7 Important Reasons to Unplug and Find Space.](#) We don't need statistics to tell us we are over-attached to our technology. We already know this to be true. It helps to be reminded again and again: Technology has a power-off button. And the wisest of us know when to use it.

[12 Intentional Actions to Choose Happiness Today.](#) Simply knowing that happiness is a choice is not enough. Fully experiencing it still requires a conscience decision to do so each day.

My Personal Favorite Posts from the past year:

[Why We Work.](#) Please don't view your work as something only to be endured or avoided. Instead, rethink your work. Regain focus and motivation to use your passions and abilities to contribute good to a society in need of them.

[9 Ways Generous People See the World Differently.](#) Generosity makes our world a better place. It improves the life of the receiver. And it improves the life of the giver. Yet, despite the benefits, generosity is still too rare.

[A Helpful Guide to Overcoming Envy.](#) The wasted emotions of envy and jealousy continue to be present in our lives. We experience envy over other peoples' appearance, talents, relationships, and bank accounts. But it offers no positive contribution to our lives. Why does it remain?

[There are Better Things to be than Rich.](#) I have come to realize the pursuit of riches is based on a faulty premise. It is based on the incorrect rationale that the presence of money is always good—that it always brings benefit into our lives. This is not always the case.

Most Popular Guest Posts in 2013:

[3 Lies That Kept Me From Simplifying My Life](#) by Allison Vesterfelt. Once we give up the idea that we have to follow a certain prescribed set of actions in order to look like an adult, we are released to do what we really want to do and become who we really want to be.

[10 Decluttering Principles to Help Anyone Clear the Clutter](#) by Colleen Madsen. Over these last three years of decluttering, I have removed over a thousand things from our home. And I have learned that understanding just a few key principles can help anyone clear their clutter.

[How Stuff Robs Us of Those We Love the Most](#) by Jeff Goins. Many of us are living over-crowded, busy lives that rob us of what really matters. We wait and bide our time, holding out for the “big things” in life, not realizing that the good stuff is happening right now.

Most Popular Outgoing Links from the past year:

[Eight Things You Can Live Without](#) | [Medium](#) by Lindsay Schauer. Want to declutter your life? Start here.

[Packing Light and Unloading the Excess Baggage in Your Life](#) | [Brian Gardner](#) by Brian Gardner. I'm a firm believer that far too often we miss calls in our life because we're too busy, or because we simply have too many things on our plate.

[If You Shop on Thanksgiving, You are Part of the Problem](#) | [The Matt Walsh Blog](#) by Matt Walsh. Honest, challenging, and humble. I appreciate this article very much.

Whether you have been reading *Becoming Minimalist* for one week, one month, one year or longer, thank you so much. This blog owes its success to the support of its readers. Thank you for reading. And thank you for sharing these posts with others.

We look forward to an exciting 2014. In fact, we have a number of fantastic opportunities to introduce in the coming weeks including a new book, *Clutterfree with Kids*, and a personal invitation to come hang out with my wife and me in our Peoria, AZ neighborhood.

In the coming year, *Becoming Minimalist* will continue to evolve and be redefined. But it will always stay true to its core message that there is more joy to be found in owning less than can be found in pursuing more. And we will continue to invite as many as possible to discover this truth in their lives. I do hope you will join us.
