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**Welcome to SIMPLICITY AND SUCCESS™ — THE E-ZINE**  
**A Newsletter About Creating What Matters Most in Life & Work**  
**Bruce Elkin, Personal/Professional Coach**  
**<http://www.BruceElkin.com>**

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"What is it you plan to do with this one wild and precious life?"  
— Mary Oliver

Hi Folks,  
Greetings from still-sunny Saltspring Island!

My reno is finally over. Things are settling back into some sense of normalcy.

This issue explores the question, "Is Growth Always Good?" in part 2 of a 3-part series called YOUR ORDINARY SELF IS GOOD ENOUGH.

If you like what you read, please forward the intact newsletter to friends and associates. (That's how we grow.) If you'd like to receive the newsletter regularly please e-mail me at [belkin@saltspring.com](mailto:belkin@saltspring.com) or go to <http://www.BruceElkin.com/newsletter.html> and sign yourself up.

There's no charge and it takes only a couple of seconds to sign up. You can also remove yourself at anytime at the above URL.

Enjoy!  
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**1. MY NEW ARTICLE IS FEATURED ON THE SIMPLE LIVING NETWORK**  
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My article "CHORDS OF LIFE: Creating Simple, Integrated, & Successful Lives -- In Harmony With Life Itself" is the featured piece on The Simple Living Network's on-line newsletter. To access Chords of Life, please go to

<http://www.simpleliving.net/news/default.asp?category=Article>

Please check out the article and feel free to send me any feedback you have.  
Thanks.  
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## 2. FEATURE ARTICLE: IS GROWTH ALWAYS GOOD?

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" You need only to claim the events of your life to make yourself yours. When you truly possess all you have been and done you are fierce with reality."

— Florida Scott-Maxwell

In Part 1 of this article, *The Cure Is Sometimes Worse Than The Disease* [<http://www.bruceelkin.com/newsletter.html>], I pointed out that many of those who visit counselors and therapists do not need "fixing." However, much of mainstream psychology, most of the self-help movement, and parts of the simplicity movement still take a problem-focused stance toward personal growth and development. But is this what's really best for us?

"Psychology," wonders author James Hillman (himself a practicing psychologist) in *We've Had A Hundred Years Of Psychotherapy And The World's Getting Worse*, "working with yourself, could that be part of the disease, not part of the cure?"

Could a focus on growth — by turning us inward, away from the world, its complexity, and the challenges it poses — ironically contribute to personal and social breakdown, not heal it? Hillman and his co-author Michael Ventura think so.

"The very word grow is a word appropriate to children," says Hillman. "After a certain age you do not grow." Personal growth he says, is "an idealization that sets you up to fail."

Although I think Hillman overstate his point, there is some truth to what he claims. When they become demands that we impose on ourselves, ideals do set us up to fail. Moreover, an overly narrow and narcissistic approach to personal growth is not what we need in these rapidly changing times.

When we cannot live up to a romantic, New Age fantasy of "an ever-expanding, ever-developing, ever-creating, ever-larger person," many of us define the situation as a problem. Our ordinary self, we fear, is not good enough. We must fix it, or improve it, before we do or create what we truly want.

Our flaws, failings, and bad feelings then become symptoms that need fixing. Focused on becoming what we think we should be, we forget to just "be" and to enjoy who we are. Frustrated with our efforts to eliminate our imperfections, we turn to experts seeking relief from the feelings generated by our judgments about those imperfections. However, many people who go to therapists and counselors neither want nor get real and lasting change.

"The talkier forms of psychotherapy are acceptable, at least to some degree," say George Leonard and Michael Murphy, in *The Life We Are Given*, "because they sometimes change nothing very much except the patient's ability to talk about his or her problems."

Talking about problems can be a way to avoid change. Often, it merely provides relief from bad feelings associated with the "problem," not real and lasting results. Moreover, when we turn to experts for this kind of problem-focused help, we run the risk of becoming consumers of therapy — clients.

The word "client" used to mean "a dependant or hanger-on." Its Latin root is *cluere*, "to hear, obey." When we shift the burden of responsibility for our lives and well being to experts, we risk becoming dependent on them. Although shifting the burden might help us feel better temporarily, the dependency it creates can make us feel much worse.

"This idea of growth can put you into a constant state of failure!" says Michael Ventura, "because you're constantly comparing yourself to the fantasy of where you should be on some ideal "growth" scale."

When Is Enough Enough?

People trying to simplify their lives and create success at what matters to them sometimes indulge in this kind of comparison. They "should" on themselves — demanding that they be different than they are. As well, what they want is often determined by comparing themselves to others.

When a couple that I described in my book *Simplicity and Success* tried to become "the most frugal simplifiers" around, their competitive approach to simplicity resulted in a life that was so austere that they could not sustain it.

I've also had clients who felt superior to those who lived less simply than they did, and clients who were jealous of those whose lives were simpler than theirs. Some, such as the woman with the highlighted simplicity book we saw in Part 1, try so hard to live up to ideal notions of simplicity that they end up feeling like abject failures.

Just as there is a point at which simplifiers realize that "enough is enough" and stop accumulating more stuff, might there not also be a state of personal development at which we say, "My ordinary self is good enough?"

I think there is such a point and that many of us have passed it.

So instead of focusing on ourselves and who we think we should be, I suggest we accept who we are, learn to love what we have, and focus on creating what truly matters to us. By mastering the skills and structure of the creative process, we can learn to work with our ordinary self to create results that matter to us and to the world we care about.

The choices to be and to create what matters, not the pursuit of some always-receding ideal of personal growth, best indicate our coming to maturity as persons and as simplicity seekers. This is, I think, what Erich Fromm meant when he said the healthiest among us are "moving in the direction of being ... transcending the having orientation of the majority."

Research into the lives of ordinary and great creators, combined with twenty years of teaching people how to create what matters in their lives and work has shown me that you do not have to be anyone other than who you are to create what you want to create. Your ordinary self is what you have to work with — and it is good enough.

Tragically, however, many simplicity and self-help devotees still take their cues from a medical and psychotherapeutic establishment that promotes the consumption of treatment (often in the form of pharmaceuticals). Or we fall prey to marketers and slick magazines that promote unlimited growth through unlimited consumption of relief products and services.

"This fantasy of growth," says Hillman, "fed by many sorts of therapies, can't help but make people feel more like failures in the long run. This in turn can't help but increase the general feeling of powerlessness. That's a pretty vicious circle."

#### Lost In Therapy

I've seen the results of such vicious circles in my coaching clients.

Gail, for example, came to me because she felt that her life was "a mess." In spite of warnings from her long-time therapist — who told her that she was not ready to do so on her own — Gail wanted to simplify her life and focus on what mattered most to her. However, after nearly ten years of therapy, she felt "mired in self doubt."

Worse, she feared she'd become "lost in therapy." She no longer trusted her ordinary self. She felt dependent on her therapist and wanted help reclaiming her own power. She longed to develop the ability to deal with challenges on her own.

She's not alone. Many people seem lost in therapy these days. Maybe it's because most problem-focused therapy assumes that the causes of problems are rooted in the past. Therapists who take such an approach often try to illuminate a problem's cause and then eliminate it. They try to fix what happened long ago.

This backward-searching approach reminds me of people lost in the woods who waste precious

time and energy fretting about how they got lost. Is that the best use of their time and focus? No, not in the woods or in life.

If you're lost — in the woods or in therapy — what matters is that you:

1. Get clear about and commit to your destination, to what matters to you and a vision of what you most want to create,
2. Get clear about your current reality, about where you are now, about what works, and without undue focus on flaws, problems, or how you got there,
3. Hold vision and current reality in creative tension,
4. Decide what your next steps are, and then take actions that consistently move you toward where you want to be,
5. Note the results you produce. Make adjustments as needed. Learn from experience. Lay out your next steps, and then take them,
6. Keep taking action that moves you toward your desired result until you get there. Be open to surprise, novelty, and invention
7. Finish fully. Celebrate your success! Then start on your next creation.

This outline of the seven steps for creating almost anything does over-simplify the challenge a bit. There are skills to learn and structural issues to deal with, as I describe in *Simplicity and Success*. However, such a results-focused approach is absent from "fix-it" forms of therapy. So when we get wrapped up in fix-it approaches, we can easily get lost backtracking the labyrinth paths of our past.

Gail, for example, told me she still "wallowed" in past pain. Although her therapist told her that life should be easy, joyful, and painless, she also told her that scars caused pain and that only by getting rid of her scars could she discover the joy she "should" feel.

Moreover, the therapist had tried to convince Gail not to simplify her life or reach for success until her scars were fully "healed." She wasn't strong enough, the therapist told her. Worse, she stressed that only more therapy could rid Gail of her scars and pain. No wonder Gail felt that her ordinary self was not good enough!

While she might be right that scarring can cause long-term pain, Gail's therapist was dead wrong when she said that scars must be eliminated. Getting rid of scars is cosmetic therapy. It has as much to do with being authentically healthy and true to yourself as stuffing silicone bags into your breasts or buttocks does with making you authentically fit and attractive.

"Just as you have physical scars," says James Hillman, "so you have soul blemishes. ... And they are what you are. It's peculiar to believe that this stuff all gets ironed out. ... (As the poet) Rilke said about therapy, 'I don't want the demons taken away, because they're going to take my angels too.' Wounds and scars are the stuff of character."

Wounds and scars are part of your ordinary self, and that self is all you have. It's a good thing that the best place to start creating what truly matters is with that ordinary self.

In the next issue of *Simplicity and Success*, we'll look at two remarkable women who knew that their ordinary self was good enough, and who embraced their scars, transcended great pain, and created outstanding results which benefited the lives of many.

We'll also see how Gail transcended her fix-it approach and learned to create the simple, successful life she longed for.

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### **3. NEED A SPEAKER? PLEASE CONSIDER ME**

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I'm, fun, entertaining, educational, and can challenge conventional ways of thinking and doing in positive, constructive ways.

"You have a remarkable ability to communicate."

- Richard Yank, Senior VP

"The most valuable program I have seen in terms of all-round communication Strategy."

- Sandy Carter, VP, Human Resources

To get a sense of my background and competency as a speaker, please go to

<http://www.prospeak.com/speakers/elkin.html>

You can book me for speaking engagements, large or small through the ProSpeak International website or by calling their main office. If you have questions about topic applicability and customizing a talk for your particular group, feel free to contact me directly at my number below.

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#### **4. FROM MY BOOKSHELF**

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WE'VE HAD A HUNDRED YEARS OF PSYCHOTHERAPY AND THE WORLD'S GETTING WORSE

— James Hillman and Michael Ventura, HarperSanFrancisco [1992]

This audacious and provocative series of interrelated dialogues and letters between the authors takes a novel and often critical look at the legacy of psychotherapy. Author Thomas Pynchon says, "Finally somebody has begun to talk out loud about what must change, and what must be left behind, if we're are to navigate the perilous turn of this millennium and survive."

Definitely not the whole truth about psychology and best read with a grain of salt, still this is a challenging and entertaining piece of writing and worth taking a look at.

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#### **5. SIMPLICITY AND SUCCESS: CREATING THE LIFE YOU LONG FOR**

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My book *Simplicity and Success* has topped the 1000 sales mark. Not bad for a self-published book and an author who lives on a small island off a larger island off the SW coast of Canada. Reviews have been great:

- "Wonderful!" says Greg Seaman, Editor of Eartheasy on-line Magazine
- "Highly Recommended!" says David Heitmiller, co-author of *Getting A Life*
- "Exciting and Challenging." says Wanda Urbanska, Host of the PBS Series, *Simple Living With Wanda Urbanska*
- "The gift-book-of-the-year," says Paul O'Brien, from Sacramento

*Simplicity and Success* subscribers get a discounted rate on the book. I'd love it if you'd buy it for yourself and for friends and family. Deeper discounts on orders of three or more. Even deeper on group orders of 12 or more.

If you'd like a personalized, signed copy of *SIMPLICITY AND SUCCESS: CREATING THE LIFE YOU LONG FOR*, send me: Canada: \$20 plus \$4.00 S&H; or US: \$15 plus \$4 S&H. Cheque, MC or VISA.

For more information about *SIMPLICITY AND SUCCESS: CREATING THE LIFE YOU LONG FOR*, go to: <http://www.bruceelkin.com/simplicity-book.html>

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#### **6. ASK THE COACH**

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I love questions and comments. Please feel free to send me questions and suggestions. Some I'll

reply to in the newsletter, others I'll reply to by e-mail. Send your questions to [belkin@saltspring.com](mailto:belkin@saltspring.com).

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## **7. MY BASIC COACHING PROGRAM**

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I'm interviewing now for new clients for September to December.

In my coaching, I help you integrate what your heart truly wants to create with the ability to want what you have. I help integrate life and work, and to create the results that make them both simple and successful.

My basic 8-week coaching program develops skills for creating outstanding results in almost anything. It also builds mastery of a dynamic life-planning framework through focussed practice and timely feedback.

It's a great launch platform for independent professionals and for those starting new businesses or wanting to integrate their business and/or career needs with their greater life goals and plans.

It's useful for anyone in mid-career who is stuck or stalled, not living up to what they know is their potential but don't know what do or where to go next.

If you'd like more information about my Basic Coaching Package, send me an e-mail at [belkin@saltspring.com](mailto:belkin@saltspring.com) with "Coaching Package" in the subject line.

You can also e-mail me to set up a 30 minute coaching session to help you clarify whether coaching would help you create what most matters to you. There is no charge, no pressure and no obligation.

NOTE: My coaching fees are going up 10% on September 1 but if you contact me before then and sign up before September 15, I'll give you the old rate. So best that you contact me as soon as you can.

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## **8. THE SMALL PRINT: Copyright; Getting On and Off the List**

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## **9. THE LAST WORD: Quotable Quotes**

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" In knowing how to overcome little things, a centimeter at a time, gradually when bigger things come, you're prepared."

-- Katherine Dunham, choreographer and dancer.

Great tranquility of heart is his who cares for neither praise nor blame.

-- Thomas á Kempis

Great hearts steadily send forth the secret forces that incessantly draw great events.

-- Ralph Waldo Emerson

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Well, folks, that's it for this issue. Thanks for reading. Please pass the intact newsletter along to friends, family, and colleagues. I do appreciate your help.

I hope you have a great week. Enjoy the season, wherever you are.

Until next time, all the best. Cheers!

Bruce

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Bruce Elkin: High Performance, Full Potential Coaching

Author of SIMPLICITY AND SUCCESS: Creating the Life You Long For

< A book about organizing life, work and relationships around what most matters to you.

<http://www.bruceelkin.com/simplicity-book.html>

" Find what you really care about and live a life that shows it."

— Kate Wolf

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