



10 Principles for a Happy Life and Career

Principle 8: Simplicity

By Michael A. Crawford, CPA

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Editor's Note: Mike Crawford has, by even his own accounts, had a successful and happy career as a CPA in Oklahoma. He says there are 10 basic principles that have guided him through a joyful life and a fulfilling career. In this and future issues of CPAFOCUS, Crawford shares that idea and those principles.

Life is really simple, we just insist on making it complicated." – Confucius

Simplicity in the context of a life principle can be thought of as a state of mind that places emphasis on the important matters in life and avoids unnecessary worrying about the less important. A simplistic lifestyle brings with it a sense of freedom from complexity and confusion and an inner peace when others are fretting about problems.

As we grow older and live through significant life experiences, like career changes, the start of a family or the suffering and loss of a parent or loved one, we begin to appreciate the fact that there are relatively few truly critical moments in life. That's why we should conserve our energy for these moments and avoid excessive worrying about the minor inconveniences or small problems we frequently encounter. It's too easy to let ourselves be consumed by the inevitable distractions of modern day life—harmful addictions, unrealistic work deadlines and expectations, endless technological access to information, constant invasions of privacy, ever-increasing mindless reality shows and other questionable entertainment and frustrating traffic, just to name a few.

Simplicity brings calmness to life once we realize that the happier things in life are those of quality not quantity, such as love of family and friends, good health, good food, good company, nature's beauty and joy through serving others.

While suffering through some tough times and being on the receiving end of some of my one-on-one counseling, my middle brother, with whom I have had limited contact over the past 40 years, offered up a surprising assessment of me that I had not expected. In a follow-up email to one of our counseling sessions, he thanked

me sincerely and commented on how much of an impact I had made on him. He then said to me "You are incredibly wise for any age—your gentle temperament and clear thinking make any problem or situation something you can work through. The Dalai Lama has very little on you!" Although honored to hear such praise from my brother, I was surprised to hear that coming from an attorney and former judge that was himself responsible for possessing and dispensing wisdom. Not only that, but to the best of my knowledge, it was the first time I could recall ever getting an open and express compliment from him. As I reflected on his comments, I began to realize that I did indeed live life with a sense of simplicity and an ability to separate the significant from the insignificant and calmly deal with the significant issues without excessive worrying.

That doesn't mean I haven't had tough emotional moments in my life. In fact, about 10 years ago, I suffered through several months of major depression, for which I received medication and treatment. To this day I don't truly understand what caused it, but I gained an appreciation for how powerful and controlling the human mind can be. It made me realize that to overcome tough times and real or perceived problems, I had to simplify my life and do more of the things that bring me pleasure and less of the things that do not. It sounds easy, but I used to have a hard time saying no. I had taken on too many activities and responsibilities and lost focus on the pursuit of happiness.

So, I made changes. I retired from an active accounting practice at the relatively young age of 53, cut back on my numerous professional authorship responsibilities and turned my accounting firm over to my youngest brother and the other valued members of our fabulous work family. The firm continues to flourish without me, the professional publications are in the hands of capable authors, and I do the simple things I like to do—care for family and others, volunteer and enjoy the world through travel and relaxation.

Relax. You don't need to have all the answers or solve all the problems. Try to keep it simple. €