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Acting for Self

Making Choices Based on Your Values Instead of the Latest Trend

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Source: pexels

“Values are like fingerprints. Nobody’s are the same, but you leave them all over everything you do.” –Elvis Presley

Run, walk, squat, bicep curl, row, sweat, wipe face, drink water, grasp for air, repeat. This is basically all I’m thinking about during one of the many workout classes I attend every week. My gym is in the center of a Miami town known for its megamall filled with high-end stores and throngs of window shoppers. Whenever I’m in the mall, where my gym happens to be located, I’m usually surrounded by women and men who look like they should be on the cover of a fitness magazine, rather than sweating it out with mere mortals who eat regular food portions and have more than 10% body fat. You can clearly see the physical standards and trends of our culture by simply signing up for a rigorous fitness class. Amidst Miami’s famous palm trees, clear blue skies, and juice bars, you’ll notice the large behinds, boobs, and lips; waistlines smaller than my toddler’s; and designer gym clothes with outrageous price tags. While I work out in my discounted Old Navy fitness gear, I wonder, “What are my fitness [goals](#), and how would I like my body to look? What are the personal values that push me to complete this workout? How can I stay focused on my goals without being influenced by my surroundings?” I ponder all of this in order to see if my actions match with my values—if

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what I'm taking my time to do is in line with my personal goals. I do this because I know just how easy it is to do things and jump on trends just because everyone else thinks it's a good idea.

You see, many of us kind of just do things on autopilot. We make decisions—even pretty major ones, like how many babies we should have—on impulse, without giving it much thought. We base our choices on our family traditions, other people's opinions, and the latest fads. We do things—sometimes pretty ridiculous things—to fit in and feel like we're part of something. When I look around and observe these patterns in our society, I'm not trying to judge anyone or their life choices; I'm merely curious to know why people do what they do. When does it seem like a good idea to put implants in your butt, plump up your lips with injections, or starve yourself to attain a certain body type? It seems like people's bodies, opinions, and actions change according to what's in style at the moment.

I often wonder what will come of us living in such extremes. Hearing that bigger is always better and then turning on the TV to see a show called Tiny Houses gets me scratching my head. Personally, I don't want to live in a castle or a dollhouse; but every time I turn on the TV, I see people showing off their massive mansions or tiny houses that look smaller than a typical hotel room. What happened to just living in a house, condo, or apartment that fits your needs and budget? When did we start choosing our homes according to what's in? I totally get it. The minimalist movement is a countercultural lifestyle to contrast the bigger-is-better ideal. There's no doubt that living in a culture of more, more, and then some more hasn't exactly benefitted us. We have an environmental crisis on our hands. People in this country are in massive debt, driving cars that don't fit in regular parking spots. Then there are those people who can fit all their belongings in a single backpack, traveling without attachments and driving cars that look like toys.

There will always be fads, trends, and crazes. If they happen to fit with what you truly like and value, that's great. But what happens if they don't? I personally don't fit into any of those categories. I don't want a massive house with built-in speakers; I don't want a tiny house; I don't want to live and travel out of a backpack; I don't want to drive my own personal bus or a car that barely fits my purse; I don't want a storage unit filled with stuff I'll never look at or a closet with only 5 shirts. What I've come to realize is that a life of balance works best for me. I'm not a go-big-or-go-home type of person. I don't want to spend my life traveling, and I don't want to live in a shoebox either. I'm not the person who needs a six-pack, or expensive gym clothes to feel worthy. I don't need a bunch of kids to leave my mark on society or prove that I'm a good, loving person.

With all the pressure we get from society, it isn't easy to know what we truly want or value. Most of the time it's easier to just go along with the consensus. We think

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if everyone is telling us the same thing, they must know more than we do. As I get older, I can more easily see this process working in myself. When I was a teenager, I wanted to go along with what was popular. In my 20s, I wanted to do the opposite of what everyone else was doing. Now, in my 30s, I want to check in with myself and see what I truly want and value, taking some people's opinions into account, but ultimately making my own decisions. I bring myself into the process by asking myself: What do I really want?

Doing things based on what other people say will make us happy can be dangerous. But it can be just as damaging to do the total opposite of what people expect from us. What matters to me more now than fitting in or trying hard not to fit in, is making choices by acting for Self—truly knowing why I'm doing something and ensuring that whatever I decide to do is based on my own values, goals, and desires. People and society will always have something to say about how you live your life. But you're the one who has to live with the consequences of your choices. Whether you're living a life based on your values or someone else's, you're still responsible for the outcome. So ask yourself these questions: What do I value? What are my goals? Are my actions in line with those goals? Why am I doing what I'm doing? Bring self-awareness to your life and decisions. Live a life of fulfillment, instead of a life that's supposed to make you happy—because chances are, if it came from the outside and not from you, it won't.