

Snap Shot | Transcript

1 The “no-buy challenge”

1 c Putting the “no-buy challenge” into practice

For the few of you who may not recognize this picture: this is what has come to be known as a junk drawer. It's a straightforward concept. Let me explain. It's usually the top drawer of any chest of drawers containing every random object we own but apparently haven't found a better spot for. The junk drawer is home for things like safety pins, scratched sunglasses, some unpacked aspirin rolling around. If you're lucky, a bunch of coins. It's also often a cemetery for broken tools or dried-out pens. It's simple: The bigger the drawer, the more junk you accumulate. You sometimes even have to rearrange your junk to be able to close the drawer again, after of course not having found what you were looking for. Does this sound familiar?

The junk drawer is, in my opinion, the ultimate proof of how we in Western societies have got it all wrong and are now trapped in a mad circle of consumption. Don't get me wrong, by no means am I an exception. I was part of it! I was lucky to be born into a loving comfortable household, where my needs were pretty much always met. If I ever happened to miss something, let's say another white T-shirt or this very specific kitchen gadget for this *one* recipe I weirdly felt like cooking, well, I would just go out and buy it. To make things a bit worse, I then developed my professional career in fast fashion, an industry which, in case you haven't heard, has the sole objective of convincing you to buy more, and more often, of what you don't need. In fact, that's pretty much the big picture of my life in the last couple of years, and probably what made me want to change something about it. I was working in retail, enjoying my job, and moving quite a lot, within Spain, where I'm from, then to Germany, then here to France. Stuff somehow seemed to accumulate in every new destination. So I would be dragging bigger and bigger suitcases with me, and shipping boxes across Europe with those useless but still indispensable extra items that were supposed to make me feel at home no matter where I was. Well, once I *was* home, I wondered: “What do I really need? Could I finally downsize my belongings? What if I spent a year without buying?”

I decided to give it a go, and this is what I'm here to share with you today. I spent the year 2018 without buying anything but food, and the lessons I learned were overwhelming. It wasn't easy at the beginning; I'm not going to lie to you. I started out frustrated. I missed shopping as a means of entertainment. I missed that buzz you get when the delivery service rings with your latest package. I missed the overall pleasure of using something for the very first time. After a couple of months, however, I found myself enjoying this reusing and saving old things, like my childhood Minnie Mouse towels or all of those little sample cosmetic samples that still keep me going today.

Half a year into the project, in an arrogant attempt to protect the planet from stuff, I started sharing as much as I could to prevent others from buying. By the time Black Friday came around, I had an email inbox full of shopping suggestions, but there was nothing I desired. In me, the magic had already happened. After all the decluttering and donating, immensely rewarding in itself, I began to appreciate so much more everything I had decided to keep. And what started out as an experiment, turned into a lifestyle, because when you don't buy, you become so much more creative, and discover that you can perfectly drain your pasta with your salad spinner, or peel carrots with a knife. You can develop a whole new set of skills when you organically go back to fixing things instead of simply replacing them and throwing them away. I started sewing buttons back to my shirts. I managed to repair my washing machine with the help of a YouTube video, and I had the chance to meet this superhero down the street called the shoemaker, who not only fixed my boots but also the wheels to my suitcase.

Most importantly, when you still need things, of course, but don't automatically buy them! This beautiful sense of community can come alive again. Because you'll knock on your neighbor's door to ask for that screwdriver you'll need only today. And from that moment on, your neighbor will be happy to know he can now borrow your air pump.

This one-year challenge was so worthwhile, I now feel I must encourage you to rethink your day-to-day behavior towards consumption. Maybe have a glance at your own junk drawers. You don't necessarily have to give up buying. Everyone has a different life situation. But I suggest you go back home, look around you, and question every single thing you own. Do you really need it? Does it add value to your life? Is it worth the space it takes up or the care it requires?

When it comes to consumption, getting over the want and becoming honest about the need is a scary, yet extremely insightful exercise. The good news is that, as always, the more you practice the better you get at it. Believe me, the day comes when you feel relieved, aware, thankful, happier, I would say. Suddenly, owning all these new available resources, the extra space, the time, and let's face it, the vast amounts of money you can save, to dedicate to the things that truly matter. Good luck and thank you!