
BOOK REVIEW

"The 100 Thing Challenge: How I Got Rid of Almost Everything, Remade My Life, and Regained My Soul" by Dave Bruno

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Have you ever felt weighed down by the thousands of things you possess? Do you ever wonder why you are driven to buy more and more things when most of them are stashed away and unused in closets or in your garage – so much so that you don't even park your car in your garage anymore?

You've heard of the "emotional baggage" that can hold you back from breaking free of past regrets and making improvements in your life to become happier, purposeful, and more fulfilled. *The 100 Thing Challenge: How I Got Rid of Almost Everything, Remade My Life, and Regained My Soul* makes the case that our tangible baggage, stuff, and excessive possessions can hold us back, too.

Dave Bruno had been railing against American and Western consumerism for some time when in 2008 he had had enough and decided to pare down his personal possessions to one hundred items. His idea gained somewhat of a cult following via the internet and media, and in 2010 he published *The 100 Thing Challenge* to tell the story of the birth of the idea, the preparations, the year he lived with fewer than one hundred possessions, and the aftermath and positive changes that can be found by leaving the treadmill of consumerism behind.

The book is written from the heart in a conversational style, and while not top-notch literature, it's a wise and fun look at our cluttered lives and what it can be like to unclutter them. The culture that teaches us to buy, buy, buy is reinforcing that we are not enough in and of ourselves, that possessions are needed to transform us into more than mere humans. Bruno wanted to experience the authentic humanness of living for himself, his family, his faith, and the intangible simplicity of life on earth.

Bruno's list of under one hundred items that he lived with for one year is just a bit contrived. For example, underwear is one item. And because he has a family, he considered their household possessions to be shared items that are not listed. For this reason, some aficionados of minimalist living do not consider his challenge to be very challenging. But for most of us, his approach to the challenge and to the book is relatable and realistic.

His decisions during the year he spent preparing to own only one hundred things are enlightening, and he uses them to recall memories and histories behind his possessions that illuminate what he went through and provide lessons for the rest of us. He doesn't reject that possessions do have meaning in our lives, but gets us thinking about whether it's the possessions themselves that provide the value we place in them or something more difficult to put our finger on, exploring positives and negatives that are wrapped up on what we own.

Certainly we all buy things we don't need, or on impulse, thinking they will bring us contentment. Many even consider shopping to be a favorite hobby. And of course, some become shopaholics and suffer the effects of being addicted to shopping. Learning to live without can open up huge amounts of space to fill with more important relationships, goals, and dreams – the stuff of true contentment. Bruno says his challenge was a way to "clean out the physical space around me in an effort to make more emotional and spiritual space inside."

If you're looking for some inspiration in uncluttering your life, *The 100 Thing Challenge* is a good place to start. Bruno includes an appendix called "How to Do a 100 Thing Challenge" that provides pointers. It's interesting to note that his day-to-day life didn't change all that much. He calls it "the naughty secret" of the 100-thing challenge that "life is just about the same without an abundance of stuff...except without all that crap, there's more room for living life to the fullest."

It's also interesting that after the year of living with one hundred things, when he started his list of what new possessions to allow himself, there weren't many things on it. The lessons stuck. He was humbled and at the same time empowered to continue resisting the need for more stuff. And he points out that the lesson goes beyond being about things to being about acquiring things in a more conscious manner.

Bruno is "no longer a participant in the reckless and hopeless cycle of American-style consumerism." And he himself is inspired by "the great privilege of connecting with many people the world over who want their lives to be more valuable than the sum of their material possessions."

He concludes with this; "Be careful doing the 100 Thing Challenge. It's quite possible that once you're done, you will find yourself content without much stuff. You'll find that you no longer have a compulsion to get more and more. Then you'll have to figure out something other than shopping to do with your time, money, and talents."

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