

Focus

by Leo Babauta – USA

A simplicity manifesto in the Age of Distraction

Part six

You don't need to respond

“Nature does not hurry, yet everything is accomplished.”

Lao Tzu

We have developed a fairly urgent need to respond to many things: emails, Tweets & other social network status updates, instant messages, phone calls, text messages, blog posts, blog comments, forum-posts, and more. This need to respond gives us anxiety until we've responded, but unfortunately, there is a never-ending stream of things that require your response.

If we allow these messages to force us to respond, almost as soon as they come, then we become driven by the need to respond. Our day becomes responsive rather than driven by conscious choices. We flit from one task to another, one response to another, living a life driven by the needs of others, instead of what we need, what we feel is important.

You don't need to respond. Think about why we feel we need to respond to everything. Often it's just a compulsion — we're so used to answering messages that we have developed an urge to respond. Often it's also out of fear: fear that people won't think we're doing our job, fear that we'll lose customers, fear that we'll miss out on something important, fear that people will think we're rude or ignoring them.

But what if we weaned ourselves from this compulsion? And what if we addressed these fears?

1. First, imagine that you're free from the compulsion. What would it be like? You'd choose what you're going to do today, and work on the