

The Great Simplification

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[00:00:00] **Nate Hagens:** Good morning. I expect 2027 will probably be the most chaotic year of our lives so far, unless you live in Iraq or Gaza or Ukraine or Madagascar or Haiti or Mozambique or Afghanistan or... So I guess 2027 will be the most chaotic place in the USA and Canada and Australia and Europe, but you get my point.

[00:00:33] So what do we do? what do we do ahead of, the headwinds and storm clouds and intersecting crises? You know, it's amazing. you, look at the world and many people are focused on one issue like AI, what's that gonna do? But then there's climate, and then there's geopolitics and war, and then there's financial overshoot and energy depletion, and any one of those, is a big freaking deal.

[00:01:03] but they all seem to be coalescing together. lots to say on that, but I just wanted to pause for a second and say, what do we do? and I think underpinning that is what do you do, as an individual? And the true answer, first of all, I am not an expert on what to do as individuals, because I'm learning and figuring it out m- myself.

[00:01:33] I have little Nate on my shoulder, that at least is reflective and honest, and we have authentic conversations with each other, so I'm learning and observing. and But the second thing is I don't know you. So I wanted to briefly reflect on the five things that are most important to me today.

[00:02:04] and those are gonna be different than for you, but I'll share what I've learned through reflection, practice, observation, failure, pattern recognition that are helpful to me to not be my best self, but to be more my true self, in these times.

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[00:02:40] Okay, first is self-care. exercise, sleep, nutrition I know people working on the metacrisis, more than one, more than three, who are working 18-hour days and killing themselves, because they correctly sense how urgent our situation is and are incorrectly burning the candle on both ends. There are things I'd be willing to die for, but burning out in this work is not one of them.

[00:03:25] and of course, to sign a deal with the devil, to give up your life for some ecological, biosphere condition on the Earth, is of course a thought experiment because there's counterparty risk and you can never know that it would happen. So, I will continue to do this work and my work, but I'm gonna take care of myself.

[00:03:49] And for me, sleep is essential, including a nap on some days that I no longer feel guilty about. Exercise is absolutely essential. I feel like a slug if I don't get my heart rate elevated for over an hour today, and two or three hours is better. Today I went for a two-and-a-half-hour bike ride. Yes, I'm privileged to be able to do that, but I've been traveling for three weeks and I wasn't able to exercise.

[00:04:22] and nutrition, you know, I've learned a lot on that front too. I love having a couple glasses of wine, especially with friends. I don't drink anymore because it disrupts my sleep and I feel sluggish and crappy the next day. so, you know, I'm getting older, as are many of you watching this. Well, by definition we're all getting older.

[00:04:48] and I know what my body needs and specifically, I need sleep, exercise, and healthy food, not crap. And in Wisconsin and Minnesota there's a lot of crap. Okay, that's number one. seemingly obvious, yet I think too few of us prioritize that, including me for much of my life, and I am now prioritizing that.

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[00:05:17] Number two is building spaciousness into my daily routine. And I told my partner earlier today that was one of my five and she's like, "Give me a break." She's like, "Who says spaciousness other than your new age coaches?" She's like, "It's free time." but free time almost seems like it's a recess or a break from work, so let's just put the word, slack.

[00:05:51] For me, who has a very busy, active, constantly moving mind and inbox, I need to build slack into my day, into my week, into my year, where I have nothing, and that my brain and body can slow down to process and reflect and not be stimulated. And if I don't do that, my cortisol spikes, and I think I, my base load of anxiety builds. You can look back to earlier this year in May and June, I don't remember exactly, but it was when I had a frank discussion on nuclear risk. I was strung out, from working too much and from internalizing too much of the craziness going on in our world. And, you know, I think it's healthy for me to build in slack, into my daily routine as a human being, but it's also essential for this work.

[00:07:04] If the words and the data and the concepts are perfect, but I'm stressed out and not grounded and in my sympathetic fight or flight system when I'm communicating these ideas to you I'm doing a disservice to the world. So for me, I take it very seriously that I have to be in a grounded, co-regulated state when I'm doing podcasts or these Franklys, because sometimes the transmission is as important as the facts themselves.

[00:07:51] Too much slack is also not a good thing, so I need a routine because of who the Nate, mammal is. I do need a routine, and I have one. I do one-and-a-half miles... Well, I have my coffee. I have a one-and-a-half mile walk with my dogs. Then I do some work. Then at night I also do a walk with the dogs.

[00:08:17] I have a sit spot routine. and I probably need more routines than just that. but to ha- oh, and chores, which sometimes I defer. But feeding the animals

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I don't defer, and every morning I feed the ducks and water them and the chickens. And I think routines are central to our internal circadian rhythm.

[00:08:45] So slacking with routine would be my second thing that for me works. Number three, and you can guess what I'm gonna say here, is I need daily time in nature. Many times a day I need to be in nature. Nature is normal stimuli, and my life is replete with supernormal stimuli, and supernormal stimuli will still shout louder than nature.

[00:09:11] But if you spend an hour, thinking, walking with the trees and the moss and the leaves and the grass, there's an ancestral feeling that I think we have a kinship with and a memory of that that bubbles up in our systems. And, the office, where I'm recording this that we rent, has 10 acres of field and forest behind it.

[00:09:39] But next to the office, is a local family who owns a few thousand acres that I have permission to walk with the dogs. But there's cows on the land, and so, my paternal grandfather was killed by a cow, and I heard stories about it, so when I see Frank chase the cows when we're on a hike, there's a little anxiety that interrupts my nature.

[00:10:07] I digress. Nature is very important to me, making me feel myself. The fourth item is, and I've talked about this, I think it was the beauty and the horror, frankly from a couple months ago, is not only friendship and companionship, but deep friendship. I can be with people, whoever they are, whatever their political affiliation, and be polite, have fun, talk about football and the weather and things.

[00:10:43] But for better or worse, I can't really be myself, unless I'm with people that recognize the tragedy that is slowly unfolding about our lives and our future. and I am fully on board for the end result of that slow-motion tragedy being much better than the default, and that's why we do the work.

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[00:11:11] But to focus on the trivia and suppress some of the actual biophysical, geopolitical events in the world, I can't really be myself. And if I'm in a s- a group of people that I feel comfortable with, I can totally be myself, and then I'm funny. and I- I'll digress here just for a moment. Last week I went to this environmental retreat, where there were 100 of us invited by a prominent environmentalist, and it was about coping skills and such.

[00:11:54] And she made a rule that there were no last names and no affiliations of work. I didn't think anything of it, but what had happened is I roomed with six other people, and for six days we didn't know who we were. And, I was really myself with those people because we were just talking about logistics and alarm clocks and coffee and transportation and dogs and nature and the birds we were hearing.

[00:12:24] And we all knew we cared about the environment and climate, so we didn't even talk about that. But there was no posturing or jockeying for funding or performing or transactions. And it made me just imagine tribal life where everyone knew each other and we didn't live in this performative superorganism culture.

[00:12:50] So, I think deep friendship, either people that I just have fun with or people that are deeply aligned with this work and the importance of it, is one of the things that is my true north, burnout compass. Last but not least, is doing... It's an extension of what I just said. It's doing work that means being alive for a short time, and time is flying, working on something that is worth my time to make the future better than the default.

[00:13:31] And I always thought that this was obvious, that everyone wanted to do this. and I'm learning that's not necessarily true. Some people's meaning is just stacking more digits in the bank, and then they die and the digits go to someone else or they dissipate. I, I don't, begrudge anyone the trajectory that they took and

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what they're optimizing for, but to me, pairing fun and joy and relaxation, which are also very important to me, kind of in a barbell way with deep, meaningful work is what drives me, is what, makes me wake up and be fired up to learn and share and communicate and, interrelate with others.

[00:14:28] And obviously, if you're listening to this, you feel something similar because we are unfolding and hopefully, rolling our sleeves up and working on the most important, times of recent centuries, and there's a lot at stake now So if I think about those five things, slack and, self-care and nature and deep friendship and meaning, I think for me, those things allow me to be myself.

[00:15:07] And when I'm most myself, I feel things feel effortless and easy and like this is what I'm supposed to be doing. Of course, this whole thing, I'm in, one of the highest energy per capita countries in the world, in a podcast, in an office with lights and food for myself and my animals, and, you know, this is a privileged position to be in, but I'd like to think I'm using that privilege for something greater than myself.

[00:15:46] so those are my five things, and I'll flip it back to you, the listeners and viewers of this show. What does your little Carolyn or Jeff or Kevin or Christine on your shoulder know about yourself, from reflection and pattern recognition? What are your five things that allow you to directionally be your best self?

[00:16:15] And if you recognize those things, how can you best obtain them, at least directionally? And lastly, if you have more of those five things, what might you be able to accomplish that's meaningful to you? I have a great deal of data-rich deep Franklys, on deck. Lots more to say. I hope you're all well.