

How To Do It

It's true that the Internet can be a huge time-suck. But it's also home to many sites that can help you meet your goals, work more efficiently and solve problems. I'm not talking about nifty tech tools, but good, old-fashioned tips and advice – many of them related to clearing through the electronic clutter that's supposed to help make life easier but can actually clog it up instead.

“Life hacks” is a newish term that's cropped up to describe tips that make your life simpler. The sites in this month's column include life hacks for everything from how to most effectively pack for a trip, to how to train yourself to wake up earlier.

43 Folders (www.43folders.com) is run by San Francisco hipster productivity guru Merlin Mann. Though he's very much at ease in the high-tech world, Mann and the people he links to are advocates of sane use of technology. You'll find good suggestions on topics like how to get your email inbox under control, remember names – and the packing techniques I mentioned above (read them and you will always travel lighter from now on). Mann has wide-ranging concerns, and it's always interesting to see what he'd like to turn his attention to improving next. I never thought, for instance, that this would be the place where I would find an assessment of shaving techniques. The best place to start is actually not the site's homepage, but it's “About” page (www.43folders.com/about).

Dave Cheong (www.davecheong.com) is a software engineer who has been chronicling his efforts to turn entrepreneur – and the helpful tips he's come up with along the way. I found his thoughts on training yourself to consistently wake up early doable and well thought-out (though I haven't exactly been a stellar success in implementing them).

The Lifehack blog (www.lifehack.org) is an eclectic collection of postings and links, broken down into categories (Communication, Lifestyle, Productivity, Money, Technology and Management). Recent posts include a guide to shopping in thrift stores (is there a Frenchy's trip in your near future?) and how to deal with that feeling of not having accomplished enough by the end of the day.

Generally, I am not post-literate enough to prefer video to text. But I do like Video Jug (www.videojug.com) because some life skills are simply easier to demonstrate visually. If you don't have someone in your life who can personally show you how to tie a Windsor knot, cook a rib-eye steak, eat sushi, or get out of a car while wearing a short skirt without showing your underwear, then this is the place for you.

Now, there is a certain element to all this that reminds of the Monty Python skit *How To Do It*:

“This week on 'How To Do It' we're going to show you how to play the flute, how to split an atom, how to construct a box girder bridge, and how to irrigate the Sahara Desert and make vast new areas of land cultivatable. But first, here's Jackie to tell you how to rid the world of all known diseases.”

I don't really think reading a lifehack.org blog posting is going to take the stress out of house repair. But there is plenty of truly useful information here. Now just don't turn reading it into yet another time-suck.

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