

Small, Simple Series



I believe small and simple things bring about great things when a great type and amount of energy is brought to them. The One Week Menu is evidence for and expression of this belief.

-Greg Muller

The One Week Menu

Another small and simple book by

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Discover The Obvious

Most people could sit down and create a one-week menu in just a few minutes. But I have a PhD, so it took me longer. About ten years!

I am one of those people who like to complicate their life with “simplicity”. I tend to be one of those who run hither and yon, to, in the end, discover the obvious. For example, it took me the first four years (and lots of trial and error) just to settle on a “one-week” menu (I tried an eight week, six-week, three-week, and two-week menu). When I finally worked my way down to the One Week Menu it was like magic. Everything started jelling, I found my groove.

Of course, what I had discovered is the obvious. I found that which already existed in my life, the same thing that exists in most people’s lives. **I discovered that we all have a one-week menu, though many people do not realize it.**

Some people don’t want to realize it. For years when I preached the One-Week Menu to food snobs (like me) they would emphatically inform me that, “Oh no, **our family couldn’t do like you—eat the same thing each week. No. We crave variety too much!**”

At first I’d try to beat these people over the head with my logic about the great virtues of a one-week menu. But they’d just cling tighter to their big-menu beliefs.

Eventually I learned a kinder, gentler way to lead people to food enlightenment. I learned to ask questions about their food. “Thinking about meals you have eaten over the last few months or years, what do you usually have for breakfast?” As they start to list their breakfasts, I hold out my hand and count my fingers as meals. Most people list, at most, four or five breakfasts. I remind them that a one-week menu would have seven different breakfasts. I then ask, “What do you regularly have for lunch?” Most people come up with five or six lunch meals (rarely seven). They usually have their “ah-hah” moment about the time I ask them to list their dinner meals. Most people come up with seven to ten different dinners they eat regularly.

My questions help people discover the obvious...that they already have **a one-week menu.**

For me, the next logical question is this, “**Do you want to get better at your One Week Menu, to master it?**”

Groovy

We tend to bump and grind around and eventually find our grooves in life. **Sometimes we lose our groove** and have to find it again. These grooves—what I call *small circles* are the regular recurring routines we have in our lives. Habits, ways. **The aim of this book is to help you find your food groove** and to make some improvements to it.

Groovy, right?.

As humans **we tend to find and follow paths of least resistance** (grooves). I celebrate our (mostly unconscious) ability to do what electricity, air, ocean currents and everything else tends to do: follow the path of least resistance (POLR).

The POLR-principle underlies a lesson I learned during the development of my one-week menu. **We live our lives in “small circles” and we are smart for doing so.** By “small” I mean much smaller than we would suppose (*imagine/believe*). And this lesson is not just about food. It is about everything in our lives.

Take for example folks who live in big cities. These people often imagine (perceive) that they live life much larger and with more variety than folks like me, living in a little town in rural Utah (Spring City, population >1,000). If they pay close attention to their day-in-and-day-out routines they will see that **there is not that much difference between their circles and mine.** They gas up down the block at the same service station they always do (just as I do); a mile or two down the road is their grocery store (just like mine); a few miles more, is their movie theatre (just like mine). The list goes on. But hold it. Don’t city-slickers have Broadway musicals, concerts and professional sports in their town (whereas I don’t). Sure, but ask them how often they go to such events: about as often as I do—rarely—and for the same reasons I don’t (cost, lack of time and interest).

Funny that some folks would say, “Oh, I couldn’t live in a small town like you, there is just nothing to do.” This, despite the fact that they end up doing about the same things we small-town folk do. Our circles end up being about the same size and shape.

THE INVITATION. Ok, you have a one-week. If you believe your food is easy, tasty, nutritious and cheap enough for you and those you serve, your good, your done. However, **if you want to get a little more groovy with your food, read on.**

Great Things

What happens when we **start paying more careful attention to our grooves** (small circles)? Again,

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I brought great energy (for ten years!) to my one-week menu. I kept at it. I went deep into my food groove.

It took a lot of time and energy because I wanted not just good, but great things out of my little one-week menu.

- 1.) I want my food to be **more than just food**. I want to believe and (often) have the sense that I am doing glorious things with my food, such as fulfilling prophesy (e.g. Jesus' command to feed the hungry)
- 2.) I want my food to be **tasty**. On a scale of 1 to 10 (with ten being food as tasty as my favorite restaurants), **near an 8**. And I want my food to taste this great not just once in a while, I want it to be tasty enough to eat once a week forever ("taste sustainability")
- 3.) I want my food to be **easy to prepare** (an 8)
- 4.) I want my food to be **very nutritious** (a 7)
- 5.) I want my food to be **low-cost** (a 7)

The high standards I set for my little one-week menu is the reason it took me so long to master it.

For it is one thing to work a recipe (cycle through it again and again) up to taste-level 8. But it is another thing to make it ALSO 'taste sustainable' for all of your family members AND easy to prepare AND very nutritious AND low cost.

I won't fool you, if you want these same things out of your One Week Menu it will take some extra effort. But not much.

Here is the logic that helped tip me towards taking up the task of greater mastery of my one-week menu. Unlike mastering the piano, soccer or Shakespeare, everybody has to eat to stay alive. Everybody will spend their life planning, gathering, storing, preparing, eating and cleaning up food.

I figure, your gonna spend the time and energy anyways. You might a well get good at it. You might as well master your One Week Menu.

Menu Mastery—Steps

1. **Select your meals.** Identify your favorite breakfasts, lunches, dinners and deserts (up to 7 each). Because I emphasize taste above all, I generate ideas for meals by thinking of my favorite meals at my favorite restaurants (initially without consideration for cost).
2. **Focus your energy, master one meal at a time.** Think about your one-week menu as an empty peg board. You are trying to fill each hole on the board with a meal that you (and your family) love and have mastered. The hole is "filled" when you (and your family) are satisfied (at a level you choose between 1 and 10) with the taste, ease of preparation, nutrition, cost and any other criteria you deem important.
3. **Find recipes and then prepare your meals again and again** *Cycle through* a meal until you master it. Sometimes I would prepare the same meal four or five days in a row, until I was satisfied with it. Each time you make a meal try to make it a little tastier than before (or a little easier to prepare, or a little more nutritious). Keep adjusting your recipe as needed to bring the taste up (fresher ingredients; taste test ingredients e.g. compare different brands of stewed tomatoes, test different recipes). Throw out (replace) recipes that don't make the grade.

Taste & Sufficiency Rule! I set taste as my highest criteria (8) for a strategic reason. To manage my weakness. I, like most people, can be quite easily seduced by the lush green grass on the other side of the fence ("oh that was such a good meal, let's ask her for the recipe!"), unless I can get myself to believe that my grass is lush enough ("You know, on second thought, that meal may be a 9, but I'm ok with my tasty-8 meals) and it's not worth jumping over the fence. Now if it's all about beliefs (which I pretty much believe it is) and you can learn to like and prefer most anything (rats are a delicacy in some countries), I could have saved myself lots of time by just working on my beliefs, not my meals. I chose the latter, in part because I have a wife and four kids who are hard to brain wash. So my general aim with my one-week menu has been towards finding meals that are sufficiently tasty enough that I and those I serve don't have food envy. This of course involves me asking my family questions ("do you like it? How much do you like it? Would you like something else better?") and making adjustments accordingly. And, again, because I am a food snob, I set my taste requirements quite high (8). You and yours may find satisfaction with food taste set at a much lower level than I. Good for you, you'll save time and energy. Regardless, developing a sense of sufficiency about the taste of your food is important because like me you were probably not sent to earth just to cook and eat. We both, therefore, have good reason to master our menu and get ourselves out of the food rat race.

4. **Tweak ease.** Keep working your recipe until you have it perfect, enough. Then, put in place whatever systems you need to make the meal easier and easier to prepare. Each time you make the meal ask yourself, how could I do this easier (without compromising taste or other criteria, too much).

Steps, cont.

5. **Tweak nutrition.** Find compromise between taste and nutrition. There is almost always a tradeoff between taste and nutrition. That is why I shoot for an 8 instead of a 10 in taste. My favorite restaurants maximize taste, not nutrition. But I want to eat healthier food than they serve, so I try to bump up the nutrition of my meals without ruining the taste. This is a balancing act. For example, it took me a number of years to master making my meals with 100% whole wheat (pizza, tortillas, pitas, English muffins and cookies) and retain taste at level 8. I think of "tweaking" nutrition this way.

There is, for most people in our society, a certain proportion of brown rice you can add to white rice before you fall below whatever standard of taste you have set. For some this cutoff might be 10/90 or 30/70. For our family it is 50/50. Same goes for salt. Same goes for butter. Same goes for greens in the soup.

In sum, try to inch up the nutrition of each meal without dropping taste too much (i.e. below your chosen standard).

6. **Develop a shopping list based on your one-week menu and find the best price** on each of the ingredients. Here again, you may need to compromise with taste and nutrition. Just remember taste rules when it comes to long-term satisfaction with food. If you have great taste you won't be tempted to keep changing what you eat in search of the next best thing, and suffering the costs of spending money on things you won't eat or won't enjoy eating.

From One, Many

Finally, **here's my big trick** with the one-week menu. It is the big selling point for many people. Understand this. Although I have less than a full one-week menu (4 breakfasts, 4 lunches, 8 dinners) I have mastered my meals to such an extent that I can do lots of things with them. I have ended up with a wider selection of meals than most people, even most food snobs, have. The trick is simple. But understand this—the principle I am sharing with you applies to more than just food. **When you truly master any one thing, you position yourself to quite easily master many things. From one, many.**

I end this book with evidence for this belief in the form of PIZZA, a meal I make every week. Think about how many different types of pizza can you make just changing a few toppings? Fold your pizza over, you have calzone. Smother it with sauce: stromboli. Leave off the sauce, sprinkle with cheese: cheese sticks. Sprinkle with onions and spices:focaccia bread. Cook the dough differently and you make pita bread, english muffins, scones, navajo taco shells, and, of course, just a plain loaf of bread (which itself can take many forms). For each meal you can do this magic multiplying, once you truly master the meal.

THE END