

Here is the full text of registered nurse Gillian Dunn's talk titled "***Change Your Closet, Change Your Life***" at TEDxWhiteRock conference.

**Best Quote from this talk:**

"No, because you know the present on the inside is even better than the wrapping. I think life gives us a present and it's called today and we hold back from unwrapping it and we give ourselves excuses and make it feel okay. But really what's on the inside is what matters."

**Listen to the MP3 Audio:** [Change Your Closet, Change Your Life by Gillian Dunn at TEDxWhiteRock](#)

**TRANSCRIPT:**

I believe there are two types of people in the world. Those that sing in the shower and those that perform in the shower. And I am a performer.

I don't know what it is about that small space with the water running. My shampoo bottle is my microphone and my loofah singing backup, all I know is when I'm done, I want to start touring instead of toweling.

Now after the shower is out of the way comes the really important part: choosing what to wear.

I stand in front of my closet, bursting at the seams and I still have the thought: *I have nothing to wear.*

Now usually this decision is made a little bit easier for me, because I work as a registered nurse and we wear scrubs to work. With the big bold blocks of colors that scrubs are, sometimes the decision feels more like

what giant Crayola crayon do I want to be today.

The closet is just one of the areas in which our stuff overwhelms us. We wear 20% of our clothing 80% of the time. We live in a time where with the click of a button, you can order something online and have it arrived at your doorstep without even leaving the couch.

Abundance is the name and spending is the game. We have no problem with gathering stuff but we have a problem with using it. And that's why I'm here today.

At this point you get to join me. I'm going to invite everybody to raise one hand. I won't make you do anything crazy like those guys.

I'm going to ask a series of questions. If you answer yes to any of the questions, I'm going to invite you to lower your hand.

Do you have clothes in your closet with tags on? Do you have clothes in your closet you haven't worn in a year? Do you have a candle in your house that has never been lit? Do you have special alcohol that you're saving for a special occasion? Do you drive a luxury vehicle that spends more time in the garage than out on the open road?

Finally, do you have dinnerware or China that you save for a special location or guests? If you find your hands back in your lap, you've earned yourself 10 more minutes of listening to me.

I returned from a family vacation in Mexico, and I bought myself a beautiful blue ornate candle. I was so excited to light it. I returned home and I thought: *Today is not the day. I'm going to save it for the right occasion.* So I tucked it in my closet and I forgot about it.

Two years passed and I remembered my candle. And I thought: *Today is the day. I'm going to light it.* So I pulled out my candle and I opened the

box and my beautiful blue candle had turned into a big puddle of wax. My candle had melted.

Now what struck me that's really strange about this was that my candle had done exactly what it's designed to do. It's designed to melt but it had done it without me.

That's the day that I learned: *Don't let your candle melt in the closet.*

After telling one man this story, he came up to me after and he said: "My wife and I have had candles in our house for 10 years and they've never melted. Perhaps it's your location, not your loss that you should be focusing on."

And I said "I think you might have missed my point there."

All of the things that we gather have one thing in common. We decide that they're special. We have no problem with cutting the tags off the sweatpants or putting the IKEA cutlery and dinnerware out. It's the good China, the expensive Scotch, the good suit that stay locked in the cupboard.

I learned this on a new level one day when I was out shopping. And I overheard a man compliment the other man on his watch. And the man responded "If you like this one, you should see the ones I don't wear."

This sounded really strange to me, until the other man responded: "Absolutely. The best ones never leave the box."

Now these watches tick instead of melts but I could see their batteries running low as their owners wore their second-best watch saving the best watch for another occasion.

I want you to reflect on that item that made you lower your hand. When

you think about using it or when you go to use it, what is the feeling it evokes in you? Is it a feeling of special, of importance, of poise?

ALSO READ: How Education Helped Me Rewrite My Life: Ashweetha Shetty (Transcript)

I learned recently when I don't wear something, it's because I decided it's too nice. I was recently given a necklace. It was a bit nicer than the kind of necklace I normally wear. So I put it on and I showed it to my sister. And I said, "This is too nice to wear everyday."

She looked at me and she said "It is really nice. But isn't your thing don't let the candle melt in the closet?" She was using my quote against me. A yet simple yes or no would have done; it struck me.

As soon as I had elevated this necklace to be too nice to wear every day, it got moved into my jewelry box and forgotten about, waiting for that special day.

This made me really curious. So instead of gathering stuff I decided to gather information. And I learned that our tendency as humans to stockpile stuff is based on two mindsets: ***I am not enough***; and ***I don't have enough***.

I'm going to begin with: ***I don't have enough***. This is a mindset that was ushered in by the Great Depression and sold us the lie that by gathering things around us, we can protect ourselves against hard times.

I believe it's best summarized with a quote by author Lynne Twist. She states:

"For me and for many of us, our first waking thought of the day is: I didn't get enough sleep. This is quickly followed by the

thought: I don't have enough time. Whether true or not, these thoughts occur to us automatically, before we even think to pause or examine them."

This mindset of *I don't have enough* means that we live in houses three times bigger than 50 years ago and yet our garages are so filled with stuff we can't park our cars in them.

The second mindset is **I am not enough**. I already said we're excellent at gathering stuff. We as a society love to shop. And when we're shopping, we're looking for those things that are missing in our lives.

You don't have enough time? Buy another power tool for that deck project you don't have enough time for.

You haven't lost the weight? Buy a pair of pants that will look so much better when you've lost that last 10 pounds.

And you don't feel special or important? Buy a pair of stilettos that make you feel so good in front of the mirror but they never leave the house.

When we're shopping, we're looking to fill our lives with the things that are missing. We stand in the store and we convince ourselves: *I can become enough for these items*.

But something happens between the cash register and our closets. Whatever convinced us in the store that we could become enough for these items disappears. We make room in the closet and we make room in the garage and we forget about them.

What if I told you these items aren't just items? They write promises... promises of someday when. These items dictate the milestones in our lives. We think to ourselves *I'll wear it when... I'll light the candle when...*

*I'll use it when.... you fill in the blank.*

When you make a partner, when you lose the weight, when your life finally matches your life on Pinterest, the mindset of *I am not enough* keeps our clothes in our closets and the champagne going flat in the bottle.

What if I told you that someday when wasn't coming? As I told you I work as a registered nurse in the emergency department. In emerge, we see it all.

Let me tell you when people... no, we plan to come to a emerge, you don't put it on your schedule and think three o'clock coffee, four o'clock emerge, five o'clock dinner. You'll never get out in an hour.

When people come to a emerge, they don't bring their special Scotch, they don't wear their finest suit. You come as you are and everybody gets the same blue cotton gown that looks terrible on everybody.

I have to admit I use that gown as a bit of a test with my patients. It's usually my first interaction and I give everybody the same instructions: *put on this gown, take everything off, the gown opens to the back.*

I pull back the curtain after they've completed the tasks and sometimes they've thrown it on like a housecoat, open to the front with all of their clothes still on.

Sometimes they throw it on the housecoat but without the clothes underneath, open to the front and a bit of a surprise behind the curtain and sometimes they put it on properly.

In emergency, change is our currency. We see it all the time. Sometimes it's good change. Bones get put back into place. Pain disappears with a powerful drug called morphine. Answers are given to questions. Those are the good days.

On the hard days, I'm reminded that life can change in an instant... heart attack, stroke, car crash.

ALSO READ: How to Win Friends and Influence People: Tom Hagerman + Friends at TEDxMileHigh (Transcript)

From the vantage point beside a hospital bed, what's important becomes very clear. Those excuses for why you didn't light the candle, didn't drink the Scotch become very small. You didn't drive that car to the hospital and you may never drive it again.

Now people ask me: So your takeaway from working with life and death is to use your stuff? No.

My takeaway from working with life and death is: life is what you make it. So make it one you enjoy.

I want to be really clear on what this idea is. It's a mindset shift of viewing yourself as enough to have and use your things.

It's also a reminder that you're in control of your life. So why not make it one that counts.

I want to be really clear on what this idea is not. The four most annoying letters of my generation: **YOLO**: *you only live once*.

This is not an excuse to blow the bank account, go to Europe on credit or buy that convertible you've been eyeing. You should be able to go home today without stopping by the store and look around your house and use your things.

That candle that melted triggered something in me. I thought this might be a candle but it represents so much more.

I started to tell that story of my candle to my friends and my family and I didn't realize that it could make an impact in other people's lives as well.

I told the story to one friend and the next time I was over at her house, she took me on a candle tour... lit, lit, lit, lit. *Gillian, I had waited a year to light that candle. You told me the story and I lit them all the next day.*

Another friend pointed up at a beautiful pair of stilettos on her shelf and she said: *those beautiful buggers are from when I booked my first speaking event.* She texted me later that week and she said *I'm wearing the shoes. No more melting.*

I started to see candles in my friend's closet but they weren't in the shape of a candle, they were in the shape of dresses that never seem to make it out of the closet. And so I decided to throw a party and the rule for this party was: you have to wear the dress you have nowhere else to wear.

The women are nodding. We all have a dress like this. It's a dress that whenever you go to get dressed up it never makes the cut. It's too tight, it's too bright, it's too long, it's too short. Whatever the excuse, the excuses are up and you have to wear this dress to this event.

I think my favorite part of this event: we went to a restaurant and you could tell that the patrons, once we were all gathered, were trying to figure out what the theme of this party was: is this a terribly coordinated wedding party, is this Halloween come early, what is up with this group of girls?

I think the thing that stood out the most was how much fun we were having. You see when you put excuses on hold, the other side of that is joy, confidence, freedom, all of these characteristics that we had kept hidden in our closet came out when you said: *no more excuses, today's the day.*

Recently a man was talking to me about when you're given a present



that's beautifully wrapped, you know the kind that they clearly went that extra mile to wrap it beautifully, do you put it on your shelf without unwrapping it and saying look how beautiful it is, how could I possibly unwrap it?

No, because you know the present on the inside is even better than the wrapping. I think life gives us a present and it's called today and we hold back from unwrapping it and we give ourselves excuses and make it feel okay. But really what's on the inside is what matters.

You might be sitting there thinking I think it takes more than wearing the clothes in my closet or popping the champagne or pulling out the good China. But I would say those small actions send a big message. You're no longer letting life slip or rather melt by.

My challenge to you is whatever made you lower your hand earlier in my talk, I ask that you use it within the next week. Pull out that China for a random Tuesday night, open that Scotch, take the car out, cut the tags off your clothes.

And don't let your candle melt in the closet.

Thank you.

### **Resources for Further Reading:**

[Coming Out Of Your Closet by Ash Beckham \(Full Transcript\)](#)

[Organize the World: Design Your Life to Spark Joy by Marie Kondo \(Transcript\)](#)

[Stasia Savasuk on Dressing for Confidence and Joy \(Full Transcript\)](#)



Change Your Closet, Change Your Life: Gillian Dunn  
(Transcript) | 10

[Thriving in the Face of Adversity: Stephanie Buxhoeveden at TEDxHerndon \(Transcript\)](#)

Sharing is caring! [Share on Facebook](#)[Share on Twitter](#)[Share on LinkedIn](#)[Share on Pinterest](#)  
[Multi-Page](#)