

Just Enough:

How the 5S Way Leads to Clarity, Connection, and Resilience

Disclaimer:

Views are personal and does not reflect the views of the organization I am employed.

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“Just Enough.”

The title of this reflection comes from a lesson I didn’t learn in a classroom, but in the middle of life itself. It was born from our right-sizing story — *“just enough for two.”* But as I reflected, I realized the phrase reached further. It captured the spirit of 5S, and the life it points toward.

Because **Just Enough** is not about having less. It is about having *what is right* — the right things, in the right place, with the right care. And in that balance lies clarity, connection, and a life well-lived.

It has been a while since I first studied the Japanese discipline of 5S. At the time, it was explained to me as a method to keep a factory floor clean, organized, and efficient. Useful, yes, but far away from my world as a white-collar worker, miles away from any assembly line.

I stored it in my memory as **“good to know,”** nothing more.

But life has a way of bringing old lessons back in new forms. A recent episode shook me, and I began to wonder: What if 5S is not only for factories? What if it is also a philosophy for how to live?

That moment came when our family decided to move. We had been living in a two-bedroom apartment with four occupants. Over time, the kids left home to pursue their dreams, and suddenly it was just the two of us. That’s when we chose a smaller apartment, easier to manage, lighter to maintain, and, in a way, just enough for two.

Looking back, I realized this was 5S in action without me even naming it: sorting what we really needed, setting in order the space for our new life stage, and finding freedom in simplicity. The Japanese call it **“Just in Time.”** I call it **“Just Enough.”**

At first glance, 5S may look like something only for factory floors. But the truth is, its wisdom travels far beyond assembly lines. Whether in homes, in families, or even in organizations living in a digital-first, AI-driven world, the principles remain the same: simplicity creates strength.

Introducing the Five Principles

Before I explain each step, let me pause here. The Japanese discipline of 5S may sound like a factory tool, but at its heart it is five simple principles, each a way of bringing order and meaning back into life.

- **Seiri (Sort):** the courage to let go of what no longer serves us.
- **Seiton (Set in Order):** the wisdom to place things where they belong, so life flows with less friction.

- **Seiso (Shine):** the discipline of cleaning and renewing, before dust and neglect become decay.
- **Seiketsu (Standardize):** the practice of creating shared rhythms, so life is not chaos but harmony.
- **Shitsuke (Sustain):** the quiet commitment to keep it going, day after day, so order does not fade.

These five are not rules. They are reminders. When lived with intention, they don't just tidy rooms but steady hearts, strengthen teams, and simplify the everyday.

Seiri (Sort):

Downsizing forced us to choose. What did we really need? Old furniture, piles of clothes, forgotten souvenirs, many had to go. Life, too, gets weighed down by clutter — old habits, outdated beliefs, friendships that once gave joy but now drain energy. Sorting is not just about things. It is about truth. To ask: ***Does this still serve me?***

In organizations every department clings to its own pile of data, reports, and systems. Each swears theirs is essential. Together, they have everything, yet no one can find what matters.

The result?

Siloes and confusion. Sorting restores clarity and clears the fog.

Seiton (Set in Order):

Once the sorting is done, the next question arises: Where does everything belong? In the new apartment, space mattered. Everything had to have its place, the cups near the kettle, the books within reach of the chair. **Ordnung, as the Germans call it, or simple order.**

Order creates ease. A home where things belong is a home where minds rest. Life is no different. When values, goals, and daily routines line up, we move with less friction. Misplaced priorities create chaos just like misplaced cups.

I've seen teams where everyone worked hard, but without order. They pulled in different directions, like a band without the same sheet of music. Once order was set, their effort became harmony.

Seiso (Shine):

But order alone is not enough. Over time, even well-placed things gather dust. Moving revealed dust we hadn't seen in years, behind cupboards, under beds, in corners left unvisited. We cleaned, polished, refreshed.

And it struck me: relationships too gather dust if we don't tend them. A forgotten call, an unsaid word, a small hurt left unhealed, all settle quietly until bonds feel heavy with neglect. To shine is to notice, to tend before neglect hardens into loneliness.

Workplaces gather dust too. Teams stop talking. Colleagues grow distant. They work side by side but carry invisible walls between them. Conflicts, loneliness, misunderstandings build silently. Shine is the discipline of reconnecting before silence becomes a wall.

Seiketsu (Standardize):

After shining comes the challenge of keeping it that way. In the smaller space, habits became standards. “Shoes by the door.” “Bills filed immediately.” “Dishes washed after meals.”. Little rituals kept life simple. Standards in life are not chains or about rigidity, they are rhythms, creating flows. Shared practices that keep stress from piling up.

Organizations also need rhythm. In companies, standards create shared language. Without them, each person solves problems in their own way, from their own narrow view. But when teams agree on simple habits— how to share knowledge, how to resolve conflict, how to make decisions — they create harmony with standards, different skills come together like instruments in tune, one shared flow.

Shitsuke (Sustain/Discipline):

And finally comes the hardest part: **not starting but sustaining**. Anyone can clean once sort once, start fresh once. The challenge is keeping it that way. Discipline is the daily act of protecting what you’ve built: peace, order, clarity.

In organizations, too, the launch is never the problem. It’s the drift. Without discipline, teams slide back into clutter, silos, and confusion. Without discipline, even strong beginnings fade. Sustaining is what keeps resilience alive.

My 5S Lesson

Looking back, I see that 5S was never just about factories. It was about life itself: stripping away what no longer serves, ordering what remains, tending what matters, building habits together, and sustaining balance.

Sometimes I think of it as a **butterfly effect**. One small act like choosing what to keep, where to place it, how to care for it, sets off ripples far beyond the moment. Right-sizing a home can right-size a life. One habit to sustain can become a rhythm of resilience.

And resilience, like love, is built quietly.

“True love is the love that sees the first tear form, catches the second as it falls, and stops the third from ever appearing.”

In the same way, true resilience is built one simple, disciplined act at a time — small in itself, but powerful enough to change the weather of a life.