

CONTENTS

Introduction: Why Disconnect?	1
Part I. Adopt the Off-Grid Mindset	5
1. Realize Off-Grid Benefits	6
2. Simplify Your Life	7
3. Go Green	10
4. Develop Self-Reliance	12
5. Escape Debt	14
6. Achieve Food Independence	16
7. Live on Your Own Terms	19
8. Build Community	22
Part II. Create an Action Plan	25
9. Set Yourself Up for Success	26
10. Take Stock	28
11. Start Where You Are	32
12. Unplug in the City	36
13. Unplug in the Suburbs	39
14. Unplug in Rural Areas	46
15. Define Your Land Needs	53
16. Avoid Flood Zones	63
17. Identify Water Sources	65
18. Make Sure the Land “Percs”	68
19. Research Land Rights	71
20. Connect to the Grid	73
21. Pick Your Area	76
22. Start Your Land Search	79
23. Find Potential Properties	83
24. Prepare to Tour Properties	89

25. Tour Promising Land	91
26. Take Land Notes	95
27. Make the Offer	97
28. Do Your Due Diligence	101
29. Order Your Operations	105
30. Start with the Basics	107
31. Make Your Land Habitable	110
32. Imagine Your Perfect Day	113
33. Prioritize	116
Part III. Make the Dream a Reality	119
34. Do the Work	120
35. Dwell, Temporarily	123
36. Build Your Off-Grid Home	126
37. Power Your Homestead	140
38. Use the Grid as Your Battery	156
39. Source Clean Water	157
40. Handle Gray Water	168
41. Handle Black Water	172
42. Wash Laundry Off-Grid	175
43. Cook Off-Grid	179
44. Preserve Your Food	188
45. Heat Your Homestead	192
46. Cool Your Homestead	197
47. Grow Your Own Food	201
48. Build a Business	204
49. Age in Place	207
50. Live Your Dream	210
<i>About the Author</i>	<i>211</i>

INTRODUCTION WHY DISCONNECT?

It was New Year's Eve, and after two weeks of overcast days, my batteries were finally tapped out. The power went off in my house, and that led me to pull out my backup generator, which I had for this exact purpose, but it didn't want to start.

I was working on the generator at 11:00 at night; it was 35 degrees out and the heaviest downpour of the year. My hands stung as I broke down the carburetor. All the while, I was trying to keep water out of it while I cleared the clog in the jet. I was fiddling with all the little pieces and trying not to lose one in the dark, but my fingers barely worked after being too cold for too long.

It was miserable.

In that moment—and many others, if I'm being honest—I cursed my decision to live off the grid.

But as I put the carburetor back together, gave it a little spray of starting fluid, and ripped the cord, the generator roared to life. The lights went back on in my house, and the batteries of my solar setup began to charge. I stomped back inside, soaked to the bone, for a hot shower.

So, is living off the grid worth it? If you asked me on that particular night, maybe not. If you asked me today, after not having had a power bill in over a decade, definitely.

I like telling this story to help others realize that unplugging from society's standard systems—public utilities, sewage systems, housing developments—and instead creating your own self-sufficient homestead isn't always the fantasy you imagined. But if you plan ahead and set yourself up for success, you'll have more good days than bad.

Despite all the hurdles, I now live on 11 acres of land, in a house that I designed and that I power with solar; I get my water from a well, have a composting toilet and septic system, eat from my garden, raise baby quail, and run my own business. My expenses are a

fraction of what they were when I paid rent and utilities, and I have infinitely more free time to pursue the things that fulfill me.

I never thought I'd live this way. Like many, I had followed the common path, going to school, getting good grades, heading off to college, and then later to graduate school. I landed my first adult job, believing that with a degree and hard work, everything would fall into place.

This is, after all, the American dream: pay your dues and move up the ranks, earn a good salary, and ultimately receive your reward: a nice home with a white picket fence, married with 2.5 kids, and a red convertible parked in the driveway that you jokingly refer to as your midlife crisis.

That was my worldview right up until, six months into my career, the Great Recession hit. The company I worked for closed its doors one Friday afternoon, leaving everyone standing in the parking lot with stunned looks on our faces while holding cardboard boxes filled with the contents of our desks.

It was there, in that parking lot, that I promised myself I'd never find myself in that position again. I realized that I had been following a script—a script that I had not given much thought to, but instead blindly followed because it's what you "should" do.

I won't disparage that lifestyle out of hand because, for some, it works just fine. But I will say that it's essential for you to be the decider in your own life. You want to be intentional about your choices: where you live, how you spend your time and money, how you interact with the broader world. If you don't, others will be happy to make those decisions for you, to their benefit.

This doesn't need to be some boisterous protest against the status quo, but a quiet consideration of what is important to you. For me, simply deciding what I wanted for myself was the most impactful thing I've ever done. After leaving that parking lot with my cardboard box, I set about building my new life.

That new life led me to build a house nestled in the woods, away from the hustle and bustle of the city. I had decided that by building my own home, I could skirt the need for a mortgage entirely. I chose the location because, after a year of reflection, I discovered I felt most comfortable in the quiet of nature.

It was here that I realized that pursuing a simpler life was often filled with complexities.

In my case, I wanted to live in the countryside, away from it all. But that came with its own set of challenges. I found out that city hall wouldn't grant me a permit for a septic system, but instead wanted me to connect to the sewer lines. The first quote I got was for tens of thousands of dollars and didn't include the government's fee of \$11,000 for the privilege of installing the meter to facilitate their charging me monthly for utilities.

I also learned that the power company wanted tens of thousands of dollars to run the power lines to my house. All these were significant setbacks because I didn't have that much money to my name.

It was then that I went searching for solutions and discovered a new way to solve these needs: going off the grid.

Your own interest in disconnecting may be different from mine, but you're likely here because you also want something better for yourself. In this book, I speak about things like self-sufficiency, empowerment, ownership, intentional living, and a slower way of being. There are many reasons that you might be drawn to living off-grid, from saving money and learning new skills to living closer to nature and shrinking your environmental footprint. Whatever your motivation, make no mistake, this is a lifestyle. What exactly that means for you is something I'll help you discover for yourself, then give practical advice for each part of your journey.

This book is structured in three main sections. The first section discusses adopting the mindset you'll need to pursue an off-grid lifestyle. The second section will help you develop a vision of your goals and then set up a plan to make them happen, including buying land. Finally, the last section gives my advice on approaching many of the key aspects of the life you want to build, including heating and cooling your home, handling gray and black water, doing laundry off the grid, and even aging in place.

It's important to realize that pursuing this lifestyle isn't something that will happen overnight, and it's not without its challenges, but if you're here reading this book, something tells me you're not one to shy away from hard work.

This book is for anyone flirting with the idea of living off the grid or those who have already gone down the proverbial rabbit hole. It is designed to be a wayfinding tool that will help you determine a direction and gives you the key milestones on the way to your final destination, from simply saving some money and carbon

with a few small solar arrays to developing a completely independent homestead.

I'll also advise those who are in a variety of scenarios. Whether you live in a small apartment in a city, a small lot in suburbia, or on acreage in the countryside, you'll find this book useful all the same.

I also want to point out that while this book focuses on off-grid living, the overlap with homesteading is substantial; I'll broadly speak to both and use the two terms interchangeably. While off-grid living and homesteading aren't quite the same, I find the differences to be more a matter of semantics, without much practical distinction.

Those who are interested in one are usually interested in the other. The one main difference might be that of food production, mainly through gardening and livestock. Off-grid living focuses on developing a self-sufficient life, and eating food is the core of living, which is why I think that producing both your own power and your own food are equally important.

The nature of this information means that we'll have to keep the discussion at a relatively high level. Although entire volumes could be written about any one of the topics I'll touch on, my goal isn't to provide you with a precise prescription but rather with the knowledge you'll need to forge your own path. After all, if you wanted to follow someone else's rules or take a cookie-cutter approach, you probably wouldn't consider living off the grid anyway. But while unplugging necessarily leads you down a road less traveled, you're not alone in this journey.

PART I

ADOPT THE OFF-GRID MINDSET

STEP 01 REALIZE OFF-GRID BENEFITS

We wouldn't choose the more difficult path unless we thought it was worth it. While we each have our own reasons for wanting this lifestyle, people often cite a few common motivations for disconnecting from the grid.

Going against the grain is not without its challenges, but I've learned that with enough resolve and a little bit of grit, this is all achievable, and the payoff is enormous. When I finally moved into my off-grid house, I went from paying \$1,500 a month in rent and utilities to \$15 per month. And yes, that is not a typo.

Having flipped the script on life, I saw many advantages you can enjoy, too. I'll go into more depth on each of these, but here are some of the main benefits of going off the grid:

- Simplifying your life
- Going green
- Developing self-reliance
- Escaping debt
- Eating healthfully
- Living on your own terms
- Building community.

STEP 02 SIMPLIFY YOUR LIFE

One of the main reasons that people decide to live off the grid is that it's an antidote to the chaos of the modern-day rat race. Many of us are glued to our devices, the world is moving faster and faster, and people brag about being busy like it's a badge of honor. All this hasn't worked out so well for us.

People are finding their quality of life going in the wrong direction, and their happiness with it. We're plagued by debt, unhealthy food is poisoning our bodies, and society is seeing an increasing level of mental health crises. It can be unsettling when we take stock of the state of our world.

Despite these troubling trends, the fact that you're here, reading this book, tells me that you're an optimist. After all, you don't sign up for years of hard work to create your own homestead if you think it will all be for naught. That spirit of building for the future is summed up nicely in the adage: "A society grows great when old men plant trees in whose shade they shall never sit."

Even if you're a cynic, the best practical course of action is to work to build a better life for yourself and those you love—regardless of what is going on in the wider world. As individuals, we may not have the power to change governments or institutions on our own, but we can take concrete steps to improve our situations and those of the people around us. The cosmic joke for a true skeptic is that positive action is the best bottom-up approach I've encountered. If enough people take ownership and lead through example, change can filter up.

Taking ownership means slowing down and being intentional. In fact, intentionality is the great superpower of modern life. In an age where we are equipped with endless information at our fingertips, if we just pause long enough to figure out what is right for us, we can leverage that information in the best way possible.

For many, myself included, being intentional leads to a simpler way of life. The idea of simplifying can have many meanings to different folks, but for me, it's about focusing on the things that are important and reducing the things that are not as important. Figure out what you want more of and do that; figure out what you want less of and don't do that. It's simple.

Figuring out what is and isn't important to you is challenging when you are too busy to think for yourself. I find that it takes at least a few hours of slowness to get my mind to settle before doing the deep work that is uncovering what matters to me. You might be different, but we'll go through how to do this in a later part of this book.

Living a simpler life takes some adjusting to, especially if those around you are still stuck on the hamster wheel. After moving into my off-grid house, my bills were cut by more than half, which meant I didn't have to work as much. I was saving more money than ever, but also working less at the same time.

It left me with a lot of time to fill and the challenge of doing it in a way that was right for me. Around this time, I made the jump to working for myself and I could do it from anywhere; this was before working from home was commonplace. So, I found myself reading books in a cozy coffee shop, taking afternoon walks every day, and grocery shopping at 3:00 p.m., when the store was less crowded.

It was a stark contrast to the way I had lived—and the way all my friends continued to live, working 40, 50, or even 60 hours a week. I found myself chatting with retirees I'd cross paths with on my walks, taking monthlong solo trips at times of year when most had to be at work or school, and I got lost in the books I read.

I had the flexibility to build and tend my gardens instead of struggling to keep the weeds at bay. I could check on my chickens and quail every morning instead of having to run off to a cubical. I spent more time outdoors and in nature, which left me feeling happier. I don't think it was just a placebo effect: studies have found that digging in the soil exposes gardeners to bacteria, which helps with serotonin levels, buffers against stress, and creates other positive health impacts.

In short, all those things I never had time to do, I suddenly had time to do. I sat down and wrote my first published book, setting me on a journey I couldn't have imagined, this book being my eighth. I

spent more time with those closest to me, something I barely got to do before this shift because I had to spend hours away on business.

It also gave me a lot of time to think and, more importantly, time to slow down enough to do it with a clear head. I woke in the mornings with energy. I suddenly could make a cup of coffee and enjoy it on my front porch before heading off for the day. I went on long hikes that left me feeling centered and having a better sense of equilibrium. All this was possible as a result of my decision to go off-grid, escape the rat race, and simplify.

STEP 03 GO GREEN

Living off the grid often involves things like solar panels, composting toilets, and food you grow yourself. Going green may be a major priority for you or simply a side benefit, but either way, I found that I could live a better life and be more sustainable in one fell swoop.

The biggest step to getting off the grid for me was disconnecting from the power grid. I did this because the cost of getting a power line run to my home was cost-prohibitive, but it also meant that I lessened my impact on the environment.

At the time, most of the power in my area was generated by burning coal. That meant that by cutting the cord, six tons of coal per year didn't need to be burned. It was nice to have the convenience of power without all the impact that normally went along with it. I also found that my solar setup was much more reliable than my area's grid power.

Water was also another big one for me. Living the way I did, I reduced my wastewater by around 3,000 gallons per year. Most of my wastewater was gray water, meaning it wasn't clean enough to drink, but it didn't have any pathogens like those found in sewage. That allowed me to water my landscaping with the gray water, keeping it on my property and not adding to an overburdened water system.

It took a little time to figure out the right mix of replacement soaps that were biodegradable, but eventually, I found some that worked just as well as "regular" soaps, detergents, and shampoos but didn't harm the Earth as they made their way to my landscaping beds.

Living in the woods meant that I didn't have a lot of open space to grow a garden, but I kept a small one at the house and then got involved with a community garden to grow some of my food. The time spent in the dirt was a great way to slow down, and it yielded a lot of veggies that I didn't need to buy at the store.

Bringing your food production home is the ultimate form of local shopping, even if you only cover some of your needs. Growing a garden keeps all those vegetables from being transported across vast distances; plus, you select the inputs so you know exactly what is in your food, and you have the option to grow organically.

Similarly, if you decide to raise livestock, you can do it in a way that aligns with your values. Since you're operating on a smaller scale than commercial farms, you can make choices that would not be practical for large-scale agribusiness—or choices they wouldn't be willing to make. These decisions include feeding your livestock organic grains, providing more space for your animals, and allowing grazing or free-ranging. You'll also be able to ensure the animals' quality of life in a way a large operation could never hope to achieve.

Whether you're tending livestock or installing solar panels, the point is that you can choose approaches that sustain yourself and the planet, rather than simply plugging into systems that may or may not benefit either.

STEP 04 DEVELOP SELF-RELIANCE

Becoming more self-reliant is a potent activator in your life. For the most part, we can count on ourselves to have our own best interests at heart. But more than that, developing independence gives you greater control over your circumstances.

Control is an essential part of finding fulfillment. And fulfillment is, to me, more important than even happiness, because happiness is subject to the conditions you find yourself in; being fulfilled has an enduring quality that can carry you through dark times.

When you look at disenfranchised employees, unmotivated teams, or a disgruntled populace, they all have one thing in common: a deep dissatisfaction with their ability to control outcomes. The opportunity to work hard and have it add up to an improvement in one's circumstances is essential. Yet in modern society, which has focused on specialization and segmenting the workforce into silos of people with deep expertise in very narrow fields, it can be difficult to exert broad control.

Going off the grid is opting to be a generalist in all your needs. We can still leverage specialist knowledge through books, YouTube videos, etc., but ultimately, adopting this life means skilling up in many practical ways. That doesn't mean you'll develop all these skills overnight. Being scrappy and figuring things out as you go along is important when you're under the gun and must make do with what you have.

When I started my journey, I had no business doing everything I undertook. I was a white-collar desk jockey who decided to build a house despite not having woodworking experience. I lived in the city when I broke ground on my first garden bed, despite not knowing the first thing about gardening.

It was hard and it was uncomfortable, but soon I found my stride after falling flat on my face so many times. Eventually, I learned

enough to become confident that I could figure most problems out on my own. I slept much easier knowing that my successes weren't just due to good fortune or the work of others: I had made them a reality. You can do the same; it's a matter of taking the first step, working through the issues that crop up, and adapting, until relying on your own abilities becomes second nature.

The truth is, when you go off-grid, things will go wrong, stuff will break, and your power will click off at some point. I can't tell you how many times I've checked my bank account and given myself a pat on my back, only to have Murphy come in and take me down a notch or two. Homesteaders might call this grit; farmers would just call it hard work. The point is that the more resilient you are, the better off you will be in life and this journey toward self-reliance.

The best way I've found to become more adaptable is to list the ways that I rely on outside elements (power companies, utilities, grocery stores, banks, etc.) and then look for strategies to offset those. You'll have many more things listed than you could realistically do in a lifetime, but choose a few that you can take practical steps on today, and start slowly.

Of course, you are not an island, and going through life as a lone wolf will only get you so far. There will be parts of your life that are simply out of your control; dwelling on them won't change those facts. But in the areas that are available to you, becoming more self-reliant will bear fruit. You will acquire tools, relationships, and wisdom, and through this accumulation of skills and resources, you will build resiliency.

Another key strategy is to seek out new experiences and challenges actively. Stepping outside of your comfort zone not only broadens your perspective, but also hones your ability to adapt to unfamiliar situations. This could mean taking on different types of projects at work, traveling to new places, and, of course, learning new things on your homestead. Each new experience is an opportunity to develop skills and insights that can make you more adaptable in other areas of your life.

STEP 05 ESCAPE DEBT

A song I love includes this lyric: “There is no dollar sign on peace of mind, this I’ve come to know.” It resonated so strongly with me when I first heard it. Debt is a dead weight that hangs heavy on our lives. For most, it’s necessary to make larger purchases like a home or land. For those who can work to get free of it, the impact is profound.

Moving into a tiny home let me flip the script on finances and allowed me to start paying down my student loans aggressively, save up to buy a large solar-panel system, and pay for my next vehicle in cash so I didn’t have to make car payments anymore.

Escaping those debts gave me the freedom to look forward, which proved empowering. I could save more, invest for retirement, roll with the punches, and take a load of stress off my plate. When tough times did come, I didn’t have a pile of bills to pay, but I did have cash in the bank for leverage if needed.

Being debt-free also gives you options that those in debt don’t have. There have been times when I have been an employee, and because of my financial security, I’ve had far more control over my work life. The employer–employee dynamic takes a different form when you don’t need their money. Suddenly, bad bosses behave better, business owners treat you with respect, and they value your contributions a lot more.

The decision to focus on financial freedom had far-reaching effects beyond just my bank account. It allowed me to pursue passions and hobbies, like travel and woodworking, that I had previously put on the back burner due to financial constraints. I had more time and less stress, leading to a healthier and more fulfilling life.

It allowed me to spend more time with the people that matter most to me. My relationships improved as I was no longer constantly preoccupied with working extra hours to offset financial worries or

working to pay the bills, enabling me to be more present and engaged with my loved ones.

Additionally, the journey toward debt-free living taught me valuable lessons in discipline and patience. It wasn't an overnight success; it required meticulous planning, consistent effort, and, sometimes, the strength to say no to immediate pleasures in favor of long-term gains. These skills proved beneficial in other areas of my life, making me more resilient and adaptable.

Going off the grid gave me time to do things that offset the need for certain purchases. Instead of buying all my foods at the grocery store, for example, I was able to grow items in my garden that really added up to a lot of savings and much better-quality food.

Similarly, after making the leap to solar, I was able to avoid having any power bill at all. The average person spends over \$3,000 per year on electricity. Having my own water and septic meant another \$1,800 in savings.

You'll find that in your first year or two, things tend to cost more than just going to the store, but dollar for dollar, I find that the elevated quality helps it to even out. After your initial upfront investments, you see a lot of savings and benefits on the long tail of these activities.

There is also the element of stress and its impact on your health and overall well-being. Doing some of these things might break even at best when you factor in all of your time and expenses, but the X factor is your health. What is the value of being less stressed about bills and debt over the long term?

How many fewer doctor visits will you need? What pills will you avoid taking? How many other expensive medical needs would you offset by spending quality time in the garden, working with your hands in the sunshine, and not dreading answering your phone for fear of a debt collector on the other end?

I'm sure we could quantify all of that into real numbers, but we intuitively know that putting in a little sweat equity to become debt-free has tremendous value.

STEP 06 ACHIEVE FOOD INDEPENDENCE

Eating is an integral part of our daily lives and vital to our survival, but today, more than any other time in history, we've relinquished the responsibility of food production to others. Specialization means that we end up focusing on a narrow set of skills to contribute to society, and in turn, we hope that the necessities of life will be there when we need them.

Many question the wisdom of relying so heavily on grocery stores for food. Even the most basic review of the system highlights its fragility and the serious disruptions that can happen with the machinations of the food industry. The average grocery store only has around a three-day supply on hand, keeping very little in storage, but instead relying on just-in-time inventory to keep its shelves full.

This three-day number always stood out to me in contrast to this quote by Alfred Henry Lewis: "There are only nine meals between mankind and anarchy." While the grocery execs were probably thinking of trucking logistics and rates of food spoilage, rather than looming social chaos, the coincidence is uncanny.

We see how little resilience our local grocery store has when a big storm is forecast by the weatherman. In a matter of hours, shelves become bare and can't be restocked for at least a few days. If those trucks can't get to the store, it can be challenging to keep your fridge full.

Every Thanksgiving, you watch as every item sells out with no more stock to replace it, despite the grocery store owners knowing for months that the rush was coming. It's unnerving to see this when you know that the store has a vested interest in keeping the shelves stocked so they can earn more profits, yet they can't seem to organize enough trucks and food.

Beyond just the reliability of the current system, many of us have

concerns about what is in our food. What sprays are used on the produce we eat? What does meat get treated with during its processing that isn't required to be reported on food labels?

There has been a growing sentiment of distrust as the veil gets pulled back through exposés, news reports, scandals, and social media. Good or bad, right or wrong, an increasing number of people want to grow more and more of their own food so that they can have full visibility into the process.

Growing your own food is a great way to mitigate many of the downsides of modern agriculture, along with improving the quality of the food you eat. In many cases, you might not save much money overall, but the value of the same amount of food goes way up. Where you might only be able to afford standard produce, which relies on pesticides, you can grow it yourself and have quality even better than what is certified as “USDA Organic.”

You might aspire to grow a large proportion of your food; you might even want to grow *all* your food. I will encourage you to approach your food independence by slowly, over time, whittling away your overall reliance on the stores. You will likely never get to the point where you grow 100 percent of your food, but you'll eventually get pretty close.

Once I started getting into my own food production journey, I focused on the foods that I most enjoyed of those that could be grown in my climate. I also considered the foods that were the most expensive at the store. For me, that meant tomatoes, apples, herbs, and eggs; for you, it most likely will be different.

I had pinpointed these items by looking at my grocery bill, looking at the things I either bought most often or spent the most on. From there, I had a short list, and I then consulted gardening references to find what grew well in my area.

I had to set aside some things for the time being for one reason or another. At the time, I only had a small patch of ground that I could work with, and some items simply weren't going to be practical for me at the time. I enjoy having a good cheeseburger or steak, but it wasn't practical for me to raise a cow. Instead, I joined a local meat CSA run by a farmer who, I knew, raised his herd close to the way I'd want to.

Every morning I enjoy having eggs for breakfast; I realized that chickens were a great option for the space I did have. I started there,

with a flock of hens that was a great way of dipping my toe into the livestock pool without getting over my head.

I decided on tomatoes because I loved them in so many forms when fresh from the garden, but they also were one of the easier things to can in jars because of their high acidity. There were also so many great varieties to choose from that grew well in my region.

Having the ability to grow and produce your own food independently means that you are taking control over a fundamental human need. You get to have greater visibility into the process, and you know your food will be there for you even if the shelves at the grocery store go bare.

You'll also come to appreciate the food you do have, because it isn't a matter of swinging by the grocery store on your way home from work. You'll instead understand the hard work that it takes to have any given item make its way to your plate.

STEP 07 LIVE ON YOUR OWN TERMS

There is a traditional path that many people (and I'm one of them) follow from the time they are born. In the beginning, we didn't really know better, so we decided to follow the herd, and for a long time, it made a lot of sense to do so. Today, the way the world works is different for so many reasons, and while wisdom is often baked into tradition, the world is constantly changing—which means we need to adapt to it.

You could interpret “the system” in many ways: societal norms, government, corporate influence, etc. Whatever your version of it, that's fine. The point is that there is a subtle pressure to operate within standard structures that might not actually benefit you.

Some might want to rail against the system at the top of their lungs, but actions speak louder than words. I think it's important to point out that bucking the system isn't a matter of being contrarian; it ultimately is just deciding what is best for you. If, after careful consideration, you realize that the life you wish to build veers from the norm, that's something worth pursuing. If you find that the established path is right for you, that is also something worthwhile.

Taking a path less traveled might not be comfortable at times; there are mechanisms that will try to force you back with the herd, but I've found that understanding why you're taking a different approach can carry you through. There will be moments of doubt, and it will be hard, but by the same token, the payoff will be huge.

An example of this was when I decided to pursue my own business venture as a means to escape being tied to a desk. I wanted a job where I could work from anywhere, on my own schedule, and at the time, working remotely wasn't a common thing. I never set out to start my own business, but since I couldn't find a job that let me be remote, I had to go out and make one: I started my website, TheTinyLife.com.

I maintained my regular 9-to-5 for more than three years, while I hustled to build up the business at night. I would come home from the office, make a sandwich, and work from 6:00 pm to midnight during the week. On weekends I was building my own tiny home on wheels from sunup to sundown. It was grueling at times, but knowing why I was doing it carried me through.

When the company I worked for was acquired by a competitor, I realized that we suddenly had two teams for my department and only needed one; layoffs were coming. In a moment of boldness, I marched into my boss's office and offered to be one of the people to be laid off if she gave me a good severance.

I didn't know what her reaction to be, but in that moment, I saw a wave of relief cross her face as she confided in me that she was dreading the cuts that, as I had surmised, were on the horizon. We ironed out the details then and there, and it was a done deal.

Later that week, I was visiting with my parents and shared the news that I was leaving my job to be self-employed. I hadn't told anyone that my master plan was to start a business and live according to my own terms, because part of me was scared I couldn't pull it off.

This news was met with a bit of shock and some concerns, but overall, my parents were supportive. They didn't fully understand how one could make money from publishing content on the Internet, let alone make a living from it, but I had been earning enough to cover my bills for a few months now.

Fast-forward many years: I had bought some land and wanted to build a house on it. However, the bank was having difficulty prequalifying me because they weren't used to working with self-employed people. They wanted to see a pay stub from a traditional W-2 job. They agreed that I had the financials to support the payments easily, but their underwriter wouldn't budge on my not having a W-2.

It was annoying at the time, but while I looked for a builder, I went out and got a traditional job to appease the bank. The difference was that I did all this according to my plan and for my own purposes. Finally, after a long time of searching, I found the right builder for me, and when it came time to sign, the underwriter happily stamped his approval.

This was one of those ways that the system works to keep you on the beaten path. If I hadn't had my own income, I'd need to get the job to live and obtain the loan, then keep the job to pay for that

monthly mortgage. Once the ink had dried, I knew I could keep that job as long or as short as I wanted. It also didn't hurt that while this was primarily a charade I was playing for the banks, it was nice to have double incomes.

You will find moments where it gets complicated, where you'll have to adhere to conventional norms to check the requisite boxes, and see it through to the other side. There will be times when others will judge you, and you might find relationships fade away because you've gone your own way, and that will be difficult to cope with at times.

I've found that those who pursue a life that is authentic to them ultimately find a level of contentment, fulfillment, and happiness that is truly rare in today's society. You will find moments of solace in the darker times.

Keep the faith and see it through.

STEP 08 BUILD COMMUNITY

You won't be able to do this alone, nor should you try. Finding others to learn from and, in turn, helping others who come behind you is an important part of the journey.

The current system makes everyday elements of life transactional. You don't know the farmer who grows your food; the clothes you wear were sewn by a disenfranchised laborer in another county; and a cow was slaughtered out of sight so you didn't have to face the reality of its life ending so that you can enjoy a hamburger at a cookout.

We've become accustomed to not knowing our neighbors, to just reporting a car accident instead of stopping to help, or turning the many little transactions of daily life into nothing more than the swipe of a credit card. It's the easy way out, not to get involved, but it also comes at a cost.

Getting things locally, like your power from solar panels and your food from the farmers market, or bartering for things you need, brings humanity back to the equation and helps those around you prosper. You'll have to wrestle with the difficult decisions that are typically externalized, and at night you'll need to be able to sleep with the choices you've made.

It will bring an entirely new perspective to your life and test your values all at the same time. The result is that you become connected to the world around you.

As you begin to build your homestead, you'll also start to bond with neighbors and community members who share similar values. At times, you'll work together on common goals. Other times, you'll find a sympathetic ear from someone who has been there during a tough time or a shared problem.

The Internet is an amazing resource for sharing knowledge and is a community in its own right, but it's hard to beat knowing a flesh-and-blood human whose brain you can pick. Each step of your

process will prompt you to learn something new, and the old-timer down the road will be a gold mine if you're able to connect.

This really came into play when I started to scale up my garden, to the point I couldn't do everything myself by hand. I had started out with a small, 100-square-foot plot, but it had slowly grown in size over the years. That year, I was on track to break 3,000 square feet of virgin ground.

The ground I was trying to add to my garden had never been tilled before, and my tiller just bounced off the surface. It barely made a scratch on this new plot I was trying to establish, to the point I was about to give up.

Seeing me struggle to make any progress for hours, an old-timer who lived across the street walked over and introduced himself. He had a tractor that he offered to bring over and make quick work of the space. After turning it over with a plow, he disked the whole area twice, and then it was broken up enough for me to use my tiller to finally get the bed to where I needed it.

That experience highlighted how valuable having a community could be. I had constant reminders throughout my journey, and I soon adopted the attitude of paying it forward as much as I could.

You'll find locals to connect with, too. It will be the lady down the road who keeps chickens, the person who had a bumper crop of apples, or the friend whom you swap seeds with at no charge. You'll find that this way of life is abundant, and it reinforces the fact that you reap what you sow.

Start from a place of generosity and be open to meeting others. You'll find that the more you go local, the more you tend to bump into like-minded people. I have friendships that came about because I just saw someone at the local farm supply or at a class on seed saving, or ran into them at the farmers market, or grabbed a cup at the locally owned coffee shop. You'll find your own people that way, too.

© Copyright, Princeton University Press. No part of this book may be distributed, posted, or reproduced in any form by digital or mechanical means without prior written permission of the publisher.

PART II

CREATE AN ACTION PLAN

STEP 09 SET YOURSELF UP FOR SUCCESS

The idea of taking on a life like this can be exciting and daunting, both at the same time. You want to roll up your sleeves and get started, but it's often the case that you don't know *where* to get started. On the flip side, I often see people who want to do it all, and do it all at the same time. Some of us are ready to begin right now; others are on a longer journey that requires additional steps before they can break ground on their dream.

It's at this point that I suggest taking a moment to do just enough planning to make sure you're going about things in a sensible way. When it comes to this planning, there are two major pitfalls: not planning enough, and jumping straight to action without sufficient knowledge; and getting stuck in endless planning that never gets to action. We want just enough to set ourselves up for success, without falling victim to paralysis by analysis.

Going off-grid can mean a lot of different things to many different people. In the next sections, we're going to help refine what your vision is and then what steps you can take to make it a reality. If you have a partner in life or other people who will be joining you in this journey, invite them to work through the planning stage here.

Too often, I meet a reluctant spouse who isn't on board with going off-grid. I've also met my fair share of couples who like the idea, but they get anxious about it because of the many unknowns surrounding the transition. Sometimes, these important people have valid concerns that stop them from getting on board.

Even if you are excited about your future off-grid together, you might have differing visions of what it's really going to be like. Planning with others is a great way to have important conversations to help understand their views, work on solving problems together, and make sure when you say, "We're going to live off the grid," it means the same thing to your partners.

All this will add up to a greater chance of success, a lot less friction, not wasting money, and often a faster path to what you want. Abe Lincoln said, “Give me six hours to chop down a tree, and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.” That’s exactly what we’re doing here; we are refining our edge to give us the best shot at achieving this dream.

STEP 50 LIVE YOUR DREAM

After 49 steps, it is probably clear that a lot goes into living off the grid, and it isn't always easy. There are many benefits, but in the end these choices come down to crafting a self-sufficient life that is right for you.

What self-sufficiency means in modern times can get complicated, forcing you to consider what is possible and what is practical. The only thing I really know is that building your slice of heaven on dirt that you own is a blessing, one that we are fortunate to achieve. It's a worthy dream to work toward, and also something worth starting right where you are now.

Developing a plan to live this dream is important in order to make sure that someday doesn't turn into never. There is much to consider, and with so many moving parts, it is easy to get overwhelmed. But giving yourself some grace and being armed with a plan will make it all possible.

Becoming self-sufficient means you're taking back control over your life and building a slower existence that brings so many rewards. It is impossible to give you all the information you need to prepare for every circumstance, but my goal is to give you a starting point, steer you in the right direction, and help you learn from my mistakes. You, too, will make many, many mistakes along your journey. I hope you have the chance to pass your hard-won wisdom along to the next generation.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Living on eleven acres in a homestead powered by solar, Ryan Mitchell has helped countless people simplify their lives and go off-grid. As the best-selling author of *Tiny House Living: Ideas for Building and Living Well in Less than 400 Square Feet*, he's been featured in the *New York Times*, BBC, Associated Press, *Forbes*, *Entrepreneur Magazine*, *Mother Earth News*, *Treehugger*, and National Public Radio.

