

*This is not the year to have everything you want.
This is the year to appreciate everything you have.*

There are no words in the dictionary that could correctly capture this whirlwind of a year. For lot of you quarantine was a trailer of how life after retirement could look like? It is beautiful to see people learning something new about the house they have lived in for years. We may curse this year but when was the last time you would have spent this much time with your family? When was last time you got to use the mop purchased from your money? 😊

I don't know whose idea it was but 2020 isn't a productivity competition. It is okay if your quarantine has not been as productive as my father (who singlehandedly compiled most of these articles back in March or months that looked like an extended version of March.) We are amidst a global pandemic and it is completely fine if you have successfully watched every show on Netflix or thought of going to MasterChef. No honestly, if you have completed your work just before deadline that's an achievement too.

This year we learned a valuable lesson, never underestimate the smallest of things, it took one small bat to lock us in our homes. We may all hate the bat but there's one insect that won our heart- The Fly. Everyone had it bad but no one has had it worse than Rudy Guilaini leaking hair dye, four seasons landscaping and the courtroom disaster. If you have no idea what I'm talking about please reconsider your news subscriptions because we can all agree there's more to headlines than Rhea Chakraborty.

2020 is the year where you are ready to believe everything. Every single day you wake up thinking to yourself how bad can it get. And then Pentagon releases videos of UFO sightings. Just to remind you how long this year was back in January there were World War III speculations. I bet ten years from now if we gave someone The Yearbook 2020 they would read it and think of it as a joke.

There's one thing that has kept us going and that is hope. The hope that next year we don't have to find humour from our pain.

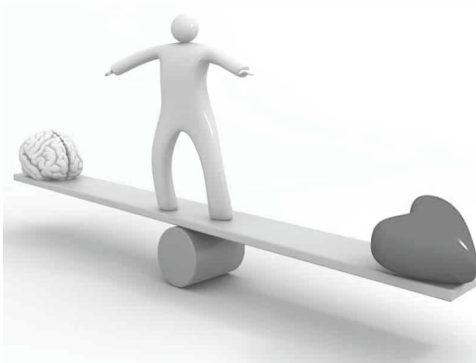
~ Harshvi Shah
Daughter of Parita and Kalpen Shah

“Head vs. Heart

Stop thinking.

Start feeling.

Creativity is an intellectual process, but it is also one driven by the heart. Irish writer James Stephens summed it up perfectly when he wrote:



What the heart
knows

today,

the head will
understand
tomorrow.”

Excerpt From:

Hegarty on Creativity: There Are No Rules

Alternative Forms of Wealth — by Morgan Housel

Covid has forced many of us to spend unprecedented amounts of time with a few people (spouses, kids, roommates). *You're wealthy if you still enjoy their company after six months of unbroken socialization.*

You have a level of independence that goes beyond money. *You can cook for yourself, do your own laundry, change a flat tire, and be alone without getting bored.*

You can make small mistakes *without crippling embarrassment.*

You could leave your job *if it got bad and find a better one.*

You have emotional stability, *accepting reality without it driving you crazy.*

You can lead a productive conversation *with a stranger from any background.*

You don't have to pretend to look busy *to justify your salary.*

You have enough time to prioritize eight hours of sleep *with stress levels low enough to allow sleep.*

You can say, "I have no idea" *when you have no idea.*

You have the patience to put up with petty hassle, annoyance, and delay. *So many rich people don't, and the stress it causes is a unique form of poverty.*

You can speak non-offensive truths about your industry or company *without fear of repercussions.*

Your expectations grow slower than your income. *It's the only way you'll feel wealthy regardless of how much money you have.*

(As Warren Buffett says, the people who you want to love you do love you. *It doesn't get any richer than that, does it?*)



Today's Tip

Improve Your Critical Thinking Skills

In the run-up to the new year, we're resharing some of our favorite tips from 2019.

To make good decisions, it's important to think critically. And, yet, too many leaders accept the first solution proposed to them or don't take the time to evaluate a topic from all sides. To guard against these mistakes, there are several things you can do to hone your critical thinking skills. First, question your assumptions, especially when the stakes are high. If you're coming up with a new business strategy, for example, ask: Why is this the best way forward? What does the research say about our expectations for the future of the market? Second, poke at the logic. When evaluating arguments, consider if the evidence builds on itself to produce a sound conclusion. Is the logic supported by data at each point? Third, seek out fresh perspectives. It's tempting to rely on your inner circle to help you think through these questions, but that won't be productive if they all look and think like you. Get outside your bubble and ask different people to question and challenge your logic.

The Basic Laws of Human Stupidity

By Ross Pomeroy

In the early 1600s, pioneering astronomer Johannes Kepler put forth his three laws of planetary motion, which, for the first time, provided an accurate and evidence-based description of the movement of the Solar System's planets around the Sun. By the end of the century, Isaac Newton followed Kepler's example with three laws of his own, describing the relationship between an object and the forces acting on it, thus laying the foundations for classical mechanics. Almost exactly three hundred years later, Carlo M. Cipolla, a professor of economic history at the University of California - Berkeley, introduced a set of laws no less revelatory than those of Kepler or Newton: The Basic Laws of Human Stupidity.

While these laws are not taught in grade school, they do hold lessons worthy of reflection in this modern era. Stupidity today is on display more than ever before -- on TV, YouTube, and the city streets you frequent each and every day. To better react to and avoid such dimwitted behavior, one must first understand it. Cipolla's insightful set of five laws is a helpful guide.

His first law sets the stage.

"Always and inevitably everyone underestimates the number of stupid individuals in circulation."

Glaringly pessimistic, the first law is meant to prepare you for what's out there, and what's out there are hordes of people who do stupid things, often without notice. And there are always more of them than you think.

Contributing to the first law is Cipolla's second law.

"The probability that a certain person will be stupid is independent of any other characteristic of that person."

Anybody, whether intellectual or ignorant, blue-collar or white collar, book smart or street smart, can be stupid. Moreover, idiocy persists at roughly equal proportions at all levels of society. The rate of stupidity amongst Nobel laureates is just as high as it is amongst male swimmers on the U.S. Olympic team.

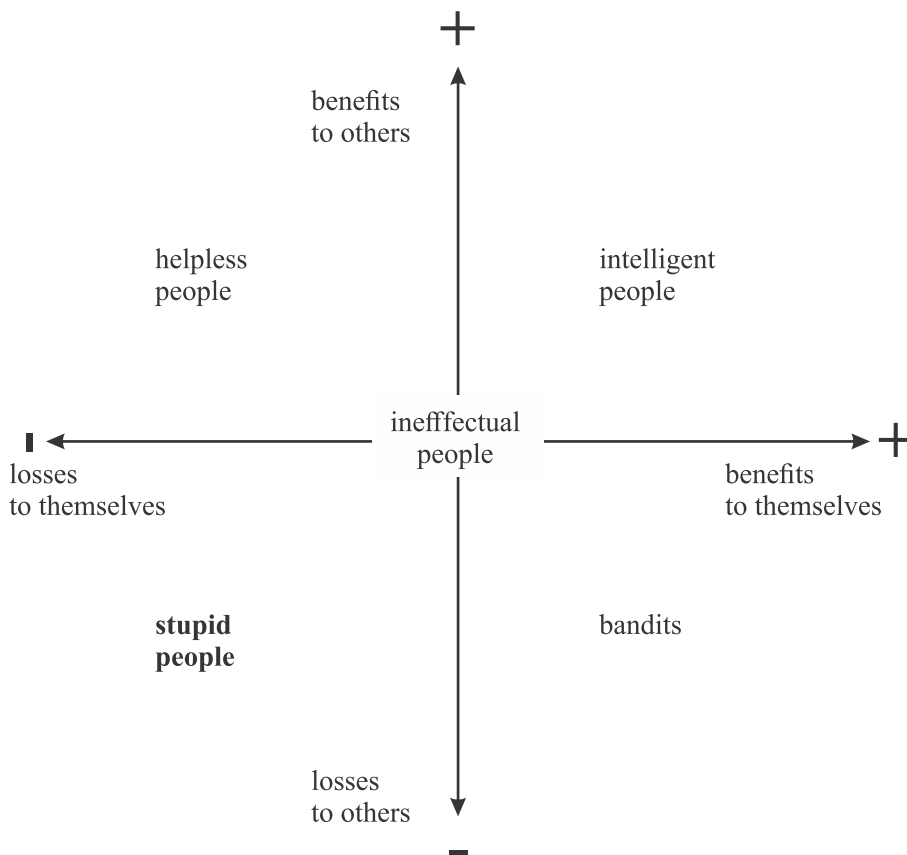
"[The Second Basic Law's] implications are frightening," Cipolla wrote. "The Law implies that whether you move in distinguished circles or you take refuge among the head-hunters of Polynesia, whether you lock yourself into a monastery or decide to spend the rest of your life in the company of beautiful and lascivious women, you always have to face the same percentage of stupid people -- which (in accordance with the First Law) will always surpass your expectations."

How can this be? Well, it might make more sense in light of the definition of

stupidity, which Cipolla provides in his third law. Understandably, given his background, he tackles the term from an economic perspective. (See the figure below for a visual explanation of the definition.)

"A stupid person is a person who causes losses to another person or to a group of persons while himself deriving no gain and even possibly incurring losses."

The brute who starts a bar fight; the tailgating driver; the football player who commits a flagrant personal foul; the video gamer throwing a temper tantrum



and deciding to sabotage his team; all of these are "stupid" people. Their actions are so utterly thoughtless and unreasonable that reasonable individuals have trouble fathoming how these people can function, Cipolla insists.

"Our daily life is mostly made of cases in which we lose money and/or time and/or energy and/or appetite, cheerfulness and good health because of the improbable action of some preposterous creature who has nothing

to gain and indeed gains nothing from causing us embarrassment, difficulties or harm. Nobody knows, understands or can possibly explain why that preposterous creature does what he does. In fact there is no explanation - or better there is only one explanation: the person in question is stupid."

With his next law, Cipolla admonishes the members of society who tacitly encourage stupidity. Most of us are guilty.

"Non-stupid people always underestimate the damaging power of stupid individuals. In particular non-stupid people constantly forget that at all times and places and under any circumstances to deal and/or associate with stupid people always turns out to be a costly mistake."

When we have a good idea of who stupid individuals are, we still hang out with them, even if it's to our detriment, Cipolla laments.

"Through centuries and millennia, in public as in private life, countless individuals have failed to take account of the Fourth Basic Law and the failure has caused mankind incalculable losses."

Cipolla's fifth law of stupidity is unequivocal.

"A stupid person is the most dangerous type of person."

Yes, more dangerous even than a bandit (refer back to the figure above), who inflicts losses upon others but at least reaps benefits for himself. Stupid people drag down society as a whole, Cipolla insists.

"Stupid people cause losses to other people with no counterpart of gains on their own account. Thus the society as a whole is impoverished."

It's the great and burdensome responsibility of everyone else, particularly the intelligent, to keep them in check.

Do Smartphones Make Us Dumber?

Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One's Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity

ADRIAN F. WARD, KRISTEN DUKE, AYELET GNEEZY, AND MAARTEN W. BOS

ABSTRACT Our smartphones enable - and encourage - constant connection to information, entertainment, and each other. They put the world at our fingertips, and rarely leave our sides. Although these devices have immense po-tential to improve welfare, their persistent presence may come at a cognitive cost. In this research, we test the 'brain drain' hypothesis that the mere presence of one's own smartphone may occupy limited-capacity cognitive resources, thereby leaving fewer resources available for other tasks and undercutting cognitive performance. Results from two experiments indicate that even when people are successful at maintaining sustained attention - as when avoiding the temptation to check their phones - the mere presence of these devices reduces available cognitive capacity. More-over, these cognitive costs are highest for those highest in smartphone dependence. We conclude by discussing the practical implications of this smartphone-induced brain drain for consumer decision-making and consumer welfare.

We all understand the joys of our always-wired world - the connections, the validations, the laughs ... the info.... But we are only beginning to get our minds around the costs.

A reader recently pointed me toward an intriguing article published in 2017 in the Journal for the Association of Consumer Research. It was titled, “Brain Drain: The Mere Presence of One’s Own Smartphone Reduces Available Cognitive Capacity.”

The authors of the paper report the results of a straightforward experiment. Subjects are invited into a laboratory to participate in some assessment exercises. Before commencing, however, they’re asked to put their phones away. Some subjects are asked to place their phone

on the desk next to the computer on which they're working; some are told to put their phone in their bag; some are told to put their phone in the other room. (The experimenters had clever ways of manipulating these conditions without arousing suspicion.)

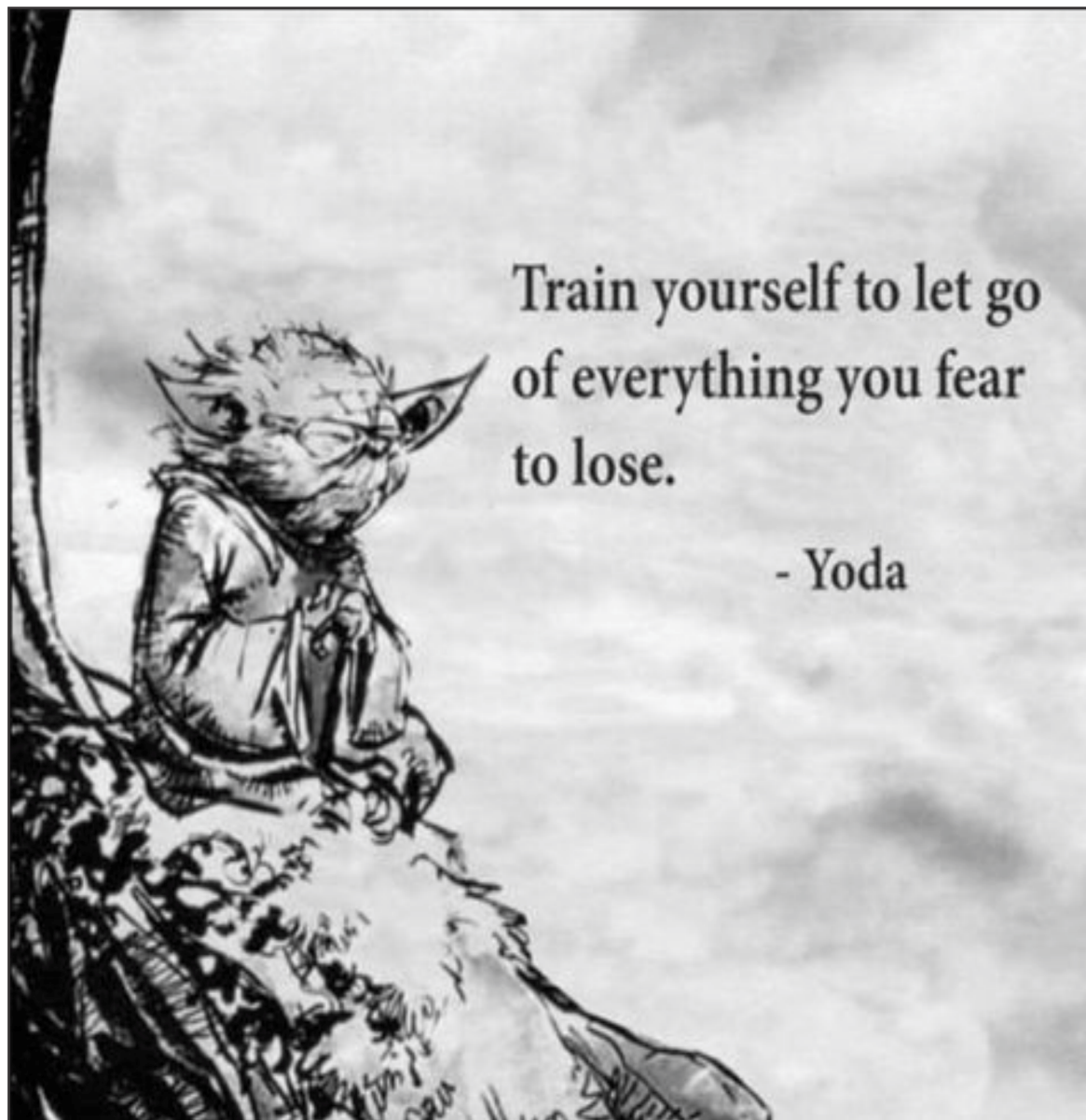
Each subject was then subjected to a battery of standard cognitive capacity tests. The result? Subjects measured notably lower on working memory capacity and fluid intelligence when the phone was next to them on the desk versus out of sight. This was true even though in all the cases the subjects didn't actually use their phones.

The mere presence of the device, in other words, sapped cognitive resources. The effect was particularly pronounced in those who self-reported to be heavy phone users.

I think we're only scratching the surface on the damage caused by our current technology habits. As I argued in *Digital Minimalism*, these tools are both

powerful and indifferent to your best interests. Until you decide to adopt a minimalist ethos, and deploy technology intentionally to serve specific values you care about, the damage it inflicts will continue to accumulate.





Train yourself to let go
of everything you fear
to lose.

- Yoda

Fix Your Command Center

Six easy swaps to make your workspace happy, healthy, and productive. - A. W.

1. Reduce clutter by uploading your sticky-note to-do lists into a productivity app like Wunderlist, where you can set reminders and assign tasks. (Bonus: It syncs across all your devices, so you'll never forget your list at work again.)

2. Pick a bulb that matches your work. Bluish lighting is good for analytical problem-solving, says environmental psychologist Sally Augustin, a principal at Design With Science. Warmer lighting is best suited for calming and soothing environments.

3. According to Augustin, office artwork should be "effortlessly fascinating." "These are things that draw you in and give the part of your brain that has to focus a break," she says. Try realistic nature art in a temperate climate, like a forest pathway.

4. "Paint walls a green that's not very saturated but relatively bright, like a sage," says Augustin. Research shows green encourages creative thinking, and light, bright hues are great for doing knowledge work.

5. Your morning buzz should perk you up, not weigh you down—and sugary drinks can carry 500 calories. Registered dietitian LeeAnn Weintraub recommends chai tea instead. "You get that spicy flavor without having the high-fat coffee drink," she says.

6. If the 3 P.M. munchies have you reaching for a salty snack with crunch, bag the chips in favor of pistachios, says Weintraub. "You get the fiber and protein that are going to make them more satisfying."



Career Decisions

Whenever you make a decision on what step to take next in your career[1], I think it is worth considering the following factors. Depending on your stage of life or career, different factors become more or less important[2].

by *Elad Gil*

FACTORS TO OVERWEIGHT

1. Network.

I view this as the most important thing to optimize for in a job. Network includes both who you work with, and for, day to day. But equally important, who are the network of people at and around the company (founders, employees, investors, advisors, etc.)?

In Silicon Valley networks of people work together repeatedly. If you fall in with the right crowd, you will have outsized opportunities over time. Being part of the original PayPal network exposed you to companies like LinkedIn, Yelp, Tesla, SpaceX, and Facebook. Similarly, ex-Googlers are now senior executives or VCs involved with the top companies in Silicon Valley (Facebook, Sequoia, Dropbox, Pinterest, etc.). People who were early

at Google now know people at every major company in Silicon Valley.

The people who invested in, partner with, or advise the company you join may get to know you over time and impact your career in large ways.

Falling into the right network early on usually means a career full of interesting opportunities. I would overweight this factor as well as market/growth rate below.

2. Market & Growth Rate.

Early in your career the market trend you ride may be the biggest future determinant for your success. Joining a company in a great market means there will be tons of companies who want to hire you, and many high growth opportunities within your own

company or across other companies in the same market. People went from Netscape to Google, from Google to Facebook, and now from Facebook to other leading Internet companies. In contrast, people who joined telecom equipment companies in the 90's are best case still at Cisco (if they are lucky). Choose your market wisely.

Similarly, only go to companies where you expect a good growth rate over time. Compounding growth creates new opportunities within the company itself, but also means the company is in a good market.

3. Optionality.

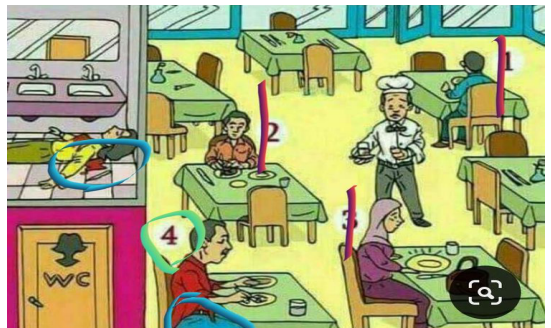
Have you been doing the same type of job in the exact same industry over and over again? Or can you find a role that sets you up for something new?

What are the new sets of future roles this job sets you up for? Could you work in a new market (e.g. shift from enterprise to consumer or vice versa) or new role (can you work on the product team instead of operations)? People dramatically underweight optionality and tend to stick to doing the same thing over and over. This becomes more important later in your career.

4. Brand.

The branding of a company matters mainly if you have never had a name brand on your resume. If you went to MIT and then worked as an engineer at Google, people will assume you are a great engineer. The institutions reputation will rub off on you. Once you have 1-2 brands, each subsequent brand is less important and I would optimize for the other factors above.

WHO IS THE KILLER ?



FACTORS THAT DONT MATTER AS MUCH AS YOU THINK

1. Role.

What will you be doing day to day? What will you be learning? Early in your career, you should optimize for going to a high growth early stage company rather than the exact role you could get.

E.g. if I wanted to be a product manager but could only get hired on the operations team at Stripe, I would still join Stripe as an operations manager over a low growth company as a PM. As a company expands and scales quickly, you will be given opportunities to move around or try new roles. It may take a year or two, but if you persist you will transfer over to the product team.

Alternatively, if you are really set on a specific role or function you may want to join only a handful of companies who do it well. In this case you are optimizing learning about a role over growth opportunities. For example, Google and Facebook are probably the two best places to learn how to be a great product manager. But it is unlikely you

will become VP of Product at Google 4 years out of school. In contrast, if you join a startup you may end up with a role larger then your experience level if the company does well.

If I wanted to join a rocket ship company, I would underweight exact role and overweight getting in early. If I wanted top optimize for role, I would join the company that does that role the best.

A **MANIFESTO** FOR A SIMPLE LIFE

EAT LESS, MOVE MORE
BUY LESS, MAKE MORE
STRESS LESS, LAUGH MORE
FEEL BLESSED, LOVE MORE

find a quiet spot
every day and

breathe

How do people work?

- *Dave Trott* -

Paul Rand is one of the most famous American graphic designers.

He designed logos for UPS, Westing-house, ABC, Enron, NeXT, Amex.

But the corporate redesign that really put him on the map was IBM.

Everything from stationery to buildings, trucks to business cards.

There was one particular IBM poster he did that dominated everything else.

And it was so basic as to be almost embarrassing.

It was just a simple graphic of an eye, a bee and the letter M.

Getting people to read the eye as I and the bee as B had an amazing impact on everyone.

Because Rand had just plugged back into the birth of written language.

It happened around 5,000 years ago and it's called the Rebus principle.

Obviously, spoken language evolved from grunts and hand signals.

But there was no way to record spoken language. For thousands of years, man had been making drawing of things on the walls of caves.

But the game-changing thought didn't happen until the Rebus principle.

Gradually the picture came to represent not just the thing itself, but the spoken sound of the word for the thing.

Over time the picture was simplified so it didn't even look

like the original thing, it just became an abstract symbol for the sound.

So a picture of a fish became the word “fish”, then it became a symbol for the sound “fish”, then simplified until it was just a symbol for the letter F.

So the Rebus effect was the relationship between the representational and the abstract.

We can see it in the text-speak that has naturally developed over phone messages: “Do it 2day”, or “I 8 her”, or “RU alone?”

We naturally slot back into the Rebus form of written language, using symbols for sounds that have no relationship to the original definition.

Art directors appreciate this because, being more visually inclined, they like visual puns.

Gordon Smith liked the feature

in the Daily Mail called Dingbats.

It had symbols from which you would have to deduce a well-known phrase.

It might be a number 1 with a number 8 under it.

So the phrase would be “One over the eight”.

Or maybe the word “secret” repeated vertically with the highest one circled.

The phrase would be “Top secret”.

That simple little game shows our minds haven’t evolved that far from the minds that developed written language 5,000 years ago.

What use is this historical knowledge to us in this age of technology?

Why should we even be interested in the distant past?

Well, as Bill Bernbach said: “It took millions of years for man’s instincts to develop. It will take millions more for them to even vary. It is fashionable to talk about changing man. A communicator must be concerned with unchanging man, with his obsessive drive to survive, to be admired, to succeed, to love, to take care of his own.”

We can see it used in Milton Glazer’s universally recognised: “I (heart) NY.”

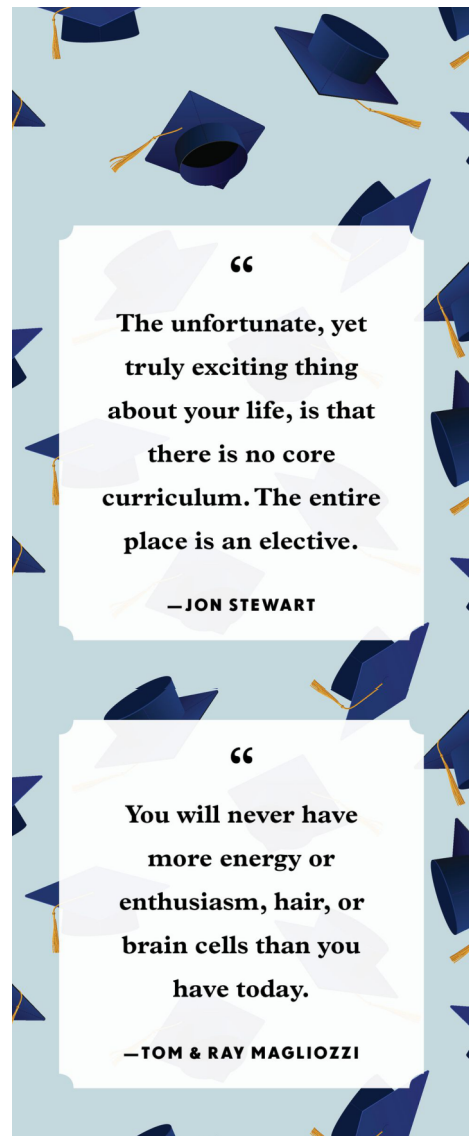
The heart symbol means we don’t even have to speak English to understand it.

He got the idea from initials carved into love hearts on trees, or sprayed as graffiti on New York walls, the way it has been since Roman times.

We should be interested because, as Rory Sutherland said: “We spend so much time thinking about how marketing works, how social media works, how targeting and technology

works, we’ve taken our minds off a more important question: how do people work?”

Dave Trott is the author of *Creative Blindness* and *How to Cure It*, *Creative Mischief*, *Predatory Thinking* and *One Plus One Equals Three*



Creativity is

- Having an idea for something that doesn't exist.

- Then shaping matter to make it exist.

- Concepts aren't sitting around waiting to be discovered.

- We have to create concepts, in our minds.

- Then we have to make the concept real, out of matter.

- Only then does it 'exist'.

- Creativity is creating something out of nothing.

Excerpt From:
Predatory Thinking
By Dave Trott

5 Levels of Leadership & Why Experience Isn't The Best Teacher| John Maxwell on The Knowledge Project with Shane Parrish

Key Takeaways

- Leadership is influence and everybody has influence, therefore, everyone is a leader in one form or another
- “Leaders are not made in a day, they’re made daily”
- “You can’t grow yourself unless you know yourself” – *John Maxwell*
- You have to be aware of who you are and what you could become
- Success is all about Me but Significance is all about We
- Success: Improving your life
- Significance: Improving the lives of others
- “I know a lot of successful people that aren’t happy. I mean, they have a lot of stuff, but they’re not happy. I’ve never known a person that committed to significance which is adding value intentionally to others on a consistent basis...that wasn’t happy.”
– *John Maxwell*
- Successful people do four things really well:
 - 1) They have good relationships: “People won’t go along with you if they aren’t getting along with you” – *John Maxwell*
 - 2) They can mobilize teams and empower their people
 - 3) They maintain a positive attitude during tough times
 - 4) They influence others and know how to lead people
- Experience isn’t the best teacher if experience were the best teacher, then everybody would be getting better as they got older
- A lot of people go through experiences and they learn nothing
- “I think evaluated experience is the best teacher. I think after the experience, we pull ourselves away and ask ourselves what did I learn from that?” – *John Maxwell*
- “To have all wins and no losses, would be a person that, in the long run, would lack character. Character is literally birthed out of adversity and you really never know much about a person till you watch them go through adversity.” – *John Maxwell*

Devanand had this incredible philosophy.. once he made a movie, he wouldn't look back.

Simi Grewal once asked him, 'How does it feel to have such a rich legacy behind him. Her reply was, 'That's right ... It's behind me ...can't see any more.'

Henning Holck-Larsen, one of the founders of L & T would never keep photographs. When asked about this peculiar habit he replied, 'Why should I think about the past when there is so much to think about the future'.

Look Forward

COVID 19 has ensured 2020 is unlike any other year of our lives. It has left us with two choices...

1. Look at 2020 and count all that could have been, all that was lost, and all the pains and sufferings.
2. Be like Devanand, Simi Grewal and Henning Holck-Larsen, and chose to look firmly ahead. There is much to do there. It is always energizing to think about the sun that is about to rise than to think about the sun that set last night.

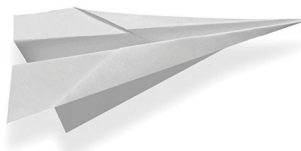


MATTHEW SYED

Author of **BOUNCE**

Black Box Thinking

**WHY MOST PEOPLE NEVER
LEARN FROM THEIR
MISTAKES—BUT SOME DO**



The Book in Three Sentences

1. Success can only happen when we confront our mistakes.
2. More people die from mistakes made by doctors and hospitals than from traffic accidents.
3. Aviation, on the other hands, has created an astonishingly good safety record because mistakes are learned from rather than concealed.

The Five Big Ideas

1. The single greatest obstacle to progress is failing to learn from mistakes.
2. A cornerstone to success is a progressive attitude to failure.
3. “Only by redefining failure will we unleash progress, creativity, and resilience.”
4. “When we are confronted with evidence that challenges our deeply held beliefs we are more likely to reframe the evidence than we are to alter our beliefs.”
5. “Marginal gains is not about making small changes and hoping they fly. Rather, it is about breaking down a big problem into small parts in order to rigorously establish what works and what doesn’t.”

I don't know, are three of the hardest words for fallible human beings to say.

We avoid them at all costs and at every turn.

Because in our eyes, giving the wrong answer is worse than having none at all.

But mistakes are not failings, they are data we can learn from.

Every failure inches us closer to progress.

A wrong turn is simply a sign that you're still on the journey.

thestoryoftelling.com

Key Takeaways In life, you always have 3 options: change it, accept it, or leave it

Anger is hot coal you hold in your hand while waiting to throw it at someone else

Reading is the ultimate meta-skill and can be traded for anything else

All the real benefits in life come from compound interest

Earn with your mind, not your time

Free education is abundant and readily available on the Internet. It's the desire to learn that's scarce.

If you eat, invest, and think according to what the "news" advocates, you'll end up nutritionally, financially, and morally bankrupt.

My one repeated learning in life: There are no adults. Everyone's making it up as they go along. Figure it out yourself, and do it

timferris.com

“Jeff, what does Day 2 look like?”

That’s a question I just got at our most recent all-hands meeting. I’ve been reminding people that it’s Day 1 for a couple of decades. I work in an Amazon building named Day 1, and when I moved buildings, I took the name with me. I spend time thinking about this topic.

“Day 2 is stasis. Followed by irrelevance. Followed by excruciating, painful decline. Followed by death. And that is why it is always Day 1.”

To be sure, this kind of decline would happen in extreme slow motion. An established company might harvest Day 2 for decades, but the final result would still come.

I’m interested in the question, how do you fend off Day 2? What are the techniques and tactics? How do you keep the vitality of Day 1, even inside

a large organization?

Such a question can’t have a simple answer. There will be many elements, multiple paths, and many traps. I don’t know the whole answer, but I may know bits of it. Here’s a starter pack of essentials for Day 1 defense: customer obsession, a skeptical view of proxies, the eager adoption of external trends, and high-velocity decision making.

True Customer Obsession

There are many ways to center a business. You can be competitor focused, you can be product focused, you can be technology focused, you can be business model focused, and there are more. But in my view, obsessive customer focus is by far the most protective of Day 1 vitality.

Why? There are many advantages to a customer-centric approach, but here’s the big one: customers are always

beautifully, wonderfully dissatisfied, even when they report being happy and business is great. Even when they don't yet know it, customers want something better, and your desire to delight customers will drive you to invent on their behalf. No customer ever asked Amazon to create the Prime membership program, but it sure turns out they wanted it, and I could give you many such examples.

Staying in Day 1 requires you to experiment patiently, accept failures, plant seeds, protect saplings, and double down when you see customer delight. A customer-obsessed culture best creates the conditions where all of that can happen.

Resist Proxies

As companies get larger and more complex, there's a tendency to manage to proxies. This comes in many shapes and sizes, and it's dangerous, subtle, and very Day 2.

A common example is process as

proxy. Good process serves you so you can serve customers. But if you're not watchful, the process can become the thing. This can happen very easily in large organizations. The process becomes the proxy for the result you want. You stop looking at outcomes and just make sure you're doing the process right. Gulp. It's not that rare to hear a junior leader defend a bad outcome with something like, "Well, we followed the process." A more experienced leader will use it as an opportunity to investigate and improve the process. The process is not the thing. It's always worth asking, do we own the process or does the process own us? In a Day 2 company, you might find it's the second.

Another example: market research and customer surveys can become proxies for customers – something that's especially dangerous when you're inventing and designing products. "Fifty-five percent of beta testers report being satisfied with this

feature. That is up from 47% in the first survey.” That’s hard to interpret and could unintentionally mislead.

Good inventors and designers deeply understand their customer. They spend tremendous energy developing that intuition. They study and understand many anecdotes rather than only the averages you’ll find on surveys. They live with the design.

I’m not against beta testing or surveys. But you, the product or service owner, must understand the customer, have a vision, and love the offering. Then, beta testing and research can help you find your blind spots. A remarkable customer experience starts with heart, intuition, curiosity, play, guts, taste. You won’t find any of it in a survey.

Embrace External Trends

The outside world can push you into Day 2 if you won’t or can’t embrace powerful trends quickly. If you fight them, you’re probably fighting the

future. Embrace them and you have a tailwind.

These big trends are not that hard to spot (they get talked and written about a lot), but they can be strangely hard for large organizations to embrace. We’re in the middle of an obvious one right now: machine learning and artificial intelligence.

Over the past decades computers have broadly automated tasks that programmers could describe with clear rules and algorithms. Modern machine learning techniques now allow us to do the same for tasks where describing the precise rules is much harder.

At Amazon, we’ve been engaged in the practical application of machine learning for many years now. Some of this work is highly visible: our autonomous Prime Air delivery drones; the Amazon Go convenience store that uses machine vision to eliminate checkout lines; and Alexa,1

our cloud-based AI assistant. (We still struggle to keep Echo in stock, despite our best efforts. A high-quality problem, but a problem. We're working on it.)

But much of what we do with machine learning happens beneath the surface. Machine learning drives our algorithms for demand forecasting, product search ranking, product and deals recommendations, merchandising placements, fraud detection, translations, and much more. Though less visible, much of the impact of machine learning will be of this type – quietly but meaningfully improving core operations.

Inside AWS, we're excited to lower the costs and barriers to machine learning and AI so organizations of all sizes can take advantage of these advanced techniques.

Using our pre-packaged versions of popular deep learning frameworks

running on P2 compute instances (optimized for this workload), customers are already developing powerful systems ranging everywhere from early disease detection to increasing crop yields. And we've also made Amazon's higher level services available in a convenient form. Amazon Lex (what's inside Alexa), Amazon Polly, and Amazon Rekognition remove the heavy lifting from natural language understanding, speech generation, and image analysis. They can be accessed with simple API calls – no machine learning expertise required. Watch this space. Much more to come.

High-Velocity Decision Making

Day 2 companies make high-quality decisions, but they make high-quality decisions slowly. To keep the energy and dynamism of Day 1, you have to somehow make high-quality, high-velocity decisions. Easy for start-ups and very challenging for large organizations. The senior team at

Amazon is determined to keep our decision-making velocity high. Speed matters in business – plus a high-velocity decision making environment is more fun too. We don't know all the answers, but here are some thoughts.

First, never use a one-size-fits-all decision-making process. Many decisions are reversible, two-way doors. Those decisions can use a light-weight process. For those, so what if you're wrong? I wrote about this in more detail in last year's letter.

1 For something amusing, try asking, "Alexa, what is sixty factorial?"

Second, most decisions should probably be made with somewhere around 70% of the information you wish you had. If you wait for 90%, in most cases, you're probably being slow. Plus, either way, you need to be good at quickly recognizing and correcting bad decisions. If you're good at course correcting, being

wrong may be less costly than you think, whereas being slow is going to be expensive for sure.

Third, use the phrase "disagree and commit." This phrase will save a lot of time. If you have conviction on a

particular direction even though there's no consensus, it's helpful to say, "Look, I know we disagree on this but will you gamble with me on it? Disagree and commit?" By the time you're at this point, no one can know the answer for sure, and you'll probably get a quick yes.

This isn't one way. If you're the boss, you should do this too. I disagree and commit all the time. We recently greenlit a particular Amazon Studios original. I told the team my view: debatable whether it would be interesting enough, complicated to produce, the business terms aren't that good, and we have lots of other opportunities. They had a completely different opinion and wanted to go

ahead. I wrote back right away with “I disagree and commit and hope it becomes the most watched thing we’ve ever made.” Consider how much slower this decision cycle would have been if the team had actually had to convince me rather than simply get my commitment.

Note what this example is not: it’s not me thinking to myself “well, these guys are wrong and missing the point, but this isn’t worth me chasing.” It’s a genuine disagreement of opinion, a candid expression of my view, a chance for the team to weigh my view, and a quick, sincere commitment to go their way. And given that this team has already brought home 11 Emmys, 6 Golden Globes, and 3 Oscars, I’m just glad they let me in the room at all!

Fourth, recognize true misalignment issues early and escalate them immediately. Sometimes teams have different objectives and fundamentally different views. They

are not aligned. No amount of discussion, no number of meetings will resolve that deep misalignment. Without escalation, the default dispute resolution mechanism for this scenario is exhaustion. Whoever has more stamina carries the decision.

I’ve seen many examples of sincere misalignment at Amazon over the years. When we decided to invite third party sellers to compete directly against us on our own product detail pages – that was a big one. Many smart, well-intentioned Amazonians were simply not at all aligned with the direction. The big decision set up hundreds of smaller decisions, many of which needed to be escalated to the senior team.

“You’ve worn me down” is an awful decision-making process. It’s slow and de-energizing. Go for quick escalation instead – it’s better.

So, have you settled only for decision quality, or are you mindful of

decision velocity too? Are the world's trends tailwinds for you? Are you falling prey to proxies, or do they serve you? And most important of all, are you delighting customers? We can have the scope and capabilities of a large company and the spirit and heart of a small one. But we have to choose it.

A huge thank you to each and every customer for allowing us to serve you, to our shareowners for your support, and to Amazonians everywhere for your hard work, your ingenuity, and your passion.


As always, I attach a copy of our original 1997 letter. It remains Day 1.

Sincerely,
Jeff



Jeffrey P. Bezos
Founder and Chief Executive Officer
Amazon.com, Inc.



A black and white photograph of a vintage black rotary telephone sitting on top of a white, rectangular pedestal. The pedestal has a quote printed on it in a serif font. The background is a dark, cluttered space, possibly a museum or workshop, with some papers and a cup visible on the floor to the left.

**When the phone
was tied
with a wire-
Humans were free..**

THE MOMENT

The moment when, after many years of hard work and a long voyage you stand in the centre of your room, house, half-acre, square mile, island, country, knowing at last how you got there, and say, I own this,

is the same moment when the trees unloose their soft arms from around you, the birds take back their language, the cliffs fissure and collapse, the air moves back from you like a wave and you can't breathe.

No, they whisper. You own nothing. You were a visitor, time after time climbing the hill, planting the flag, proclaiming. We never belonged to you. You never found us. It was always the other way round.

— *Margaret Atwood*

The Day You Became A Better Writer

-Scott Adams

I went from being a bad writer to a good writer after taking a one-day course in “business writing.” I couldn't believe how simple it was. I'll tell you the main tricks here so you don't have to waste a day in class.

Business writing is about clarity and persuasion. The main technique is keeping things simple. Simple writing is persuasive. A good argument in five sentences will sway more people than a brilliant argument in a hundred sentences. Don't fight it.

Simple means getting rid of extra words. Don't write, “He was very happy” when you can write “He was happy.” You think the word “very” adds something. It doesn't. Prune your sentences.

Humor writing is a lot like business writing. It needs to be simple. The main difference is in the choice of words. For humor, don't say “drink” when you can say “swill.”

Your first sentence needs to grab the reader. Go back and read my first sentence to this post. I rewrote it a dozen times. It makes you curious. That's the key.

Write short sentences. Avoid putting multiple thoughts in one sentence. Readers aren't as smart as you'd think.

Learn how brains organize ideas. Readers comprehend “the boy hit the ball” quicker than “the ball was hit by the boy.” Both sentences mean the same, but it's easier to imagine the object (the boy) before the action (the hitting). All brains work that way. (Notice I didn't say, “That is the way all brains work”?)

That's it. You just learned 80% of the rules of good writing. You're welcome.

Glossary

Techies have their own colorful jargon, often indecipherable to outsiders. Here, some terms to listen for--and hope they're not directed your way.

Caching error: An all-purpose explanation for a tech-support problem with no obvious cause

Completion date: To a developer, the date something is ready to test--not, as you might have thought, ready to launch

Empire builder: An insecure IT administrator or engineer who tries to make himself indispensable by keeping code, passwords, or other knowledge of a system to himself. Bad for morale; bad for your business

Geek: Someone with an intense curiosity about a specific subject. Not limited to tech--there are also gaming geeks, music geeks, etc.

Hardware problem: A problem your programmers want nothing to do with

HKI error: Human-keyboard-interface error (i.e., it's your fault, stupid)

ID10T (pronounced Eye-dee-ten-tee): The user is an idiot. Used in tech support when passing along said idiot to some other sucker to deal with: "I've got an I-D-ten-T coming your way."

I/O error: Ignorant-operator error. Derived from the term "input/output error"

Known issue: As in, "That's a known issue." In other words, you're

the 4,000th person who's called about this problem in the past week--and no, we haven't fixed it.

Nerd: Some technologists self-identify as nerds; others find the term insulting. When in doubt, use geek instead.

NIH: Not invented here. This is language you might hear from an engineering team that will not consider working with anyone's code except its own. It's an attitude that will cost your company time and money.

PEBCAK: Problem exists between chair and keyboard (i.e., it's your fault, stupid)

PICNIC: Problem in chair, not in computer

RTFM: Read the f---ing manual!

Geek Humor

Q: How many programmers does it take to screw in a light bulb?

A: None; it's a hardware problem.

MOST COMMON REGRETS IN LIFE

01. Too much time on worrying
02. Not showing my real feelings to people I love
03. Caring too much about what others think
04. Not following my passion
05. Not fully living in the present and enjoying the amazing moments
06. Not enough travel
07. Not dare to take risks
08. Too little quality time with loved ones

© Lifehack

Ans.

**Killer is No. 4
No Knife,
Near to the Bathroom**



**Your degree
is just a piece
of paper,
your education
is seen in your
behavior.**



Entrepreneur Colin Dowling on how to get better at sales:

1. Sales is a lot like golf. You can make it so complicated as to be impossible or you can simply walk up and hit the ball. I've been leading and building sales orgs for almost 20 years and my advice is to walk up and hit the ball.
2. Sales is about people and it's about problem solving. It is not about solutions or technology or chemicals or lines of code or artichokes. It's about people and it's about solving problems.
3. People buy 4 things and 4 things only. Ever. Those 4 things are time, money, sex, and approval/peace of mind. If you try selling something other than those 4 things you will fail.
4. People buy aspirin always. They buy vitamins only occasionally and at unpredictable times. Sell aspirin.
5. I say in every talk I give: "All things being equal, people buy from their friends. So make everything else equal, then go make a lot of friends."
6. Being valuable and useful is all you ever need to do to sell things. Help people out. Send interesting posts. Write birthday cards. Record videos sharing your ideas for growing their business. Introduce people who would benefit from knowing each other, then get out of the way, expecting nothing in return. Do this consistently and authentically and people will find ways to give you money. I promise.
7. No one cares about your quota, your payroll, your opex, your burn rate, etc. No one. They care about the problem you are solving for them."

There is more than 100 trillion dollars in the global economy just waiting for you to breathe it in. Good luck."

Source: Hacker News

WHAT IS LUXURY? ...

They made us believe that luxury was the rare, the expensive, the exclusive, everything that seemed unattainable ... Now we realize that luxury were those little things that we did not know how to value when we had them and now that they are gone, we miss them so much ... Luxury is being healthy. Luxury is not stepping into a hospital. Luxury is being able to walk along the seashore. Luxury is going out on the streets and breathing without a mask. Luxury is meeting with your whole family, with your friends. Luxury are the looks. Smiles are luxury. Luxury are hugs and kisses. Luxury is enjoying every sunrise. Luxury is the privilege of loving and being alive. All this is a luxury and we did not know ..

Stay blessed. Stay grateful.

Ten Principles for Good Design

These design principles from the legendary product designer Dieter Rams has influenced not only the iconic product designs from Braun in the 1960s, but also the design of Apples products.

“My heart belongs to the details. I actually always found them to be more important than the big picture. Nothing works without details. They are everything, the baseline of quality”

– Dieter Rams

1. Good design is innovative

The possibilities for innovation are not, by any means, exhausted. Technological development is always offering new opportunities for innovative design. But innovative design always develops in tandem with innovative technology, and can never be an end in itself.

2. Good design makes a product useful

A product is bought to be used. It has to satisfy certain criteria, not only functional, but also psychological and aesthetic. Good design emphasises the usefulness of a product whilst disregarding anything that could possibly detract from it.

3. Good design is aesthetic

The aesthetic quality of a product is integral to its usefulness because products we use every day affect our person and our well-being. But only well-executed objects can be beautiful.

4. Good design makes a product understandable

It clarifies the products structure. Better still, it can make the product talk. At best, it is self-explanatory.

5. Good design is unobtrusive

Products fulfilling a purpose are like tools. They are neither decorative objects nor works of art. Their design should therefore be both neutral and restrained, to leave room for the users self-expression.

6. Good design is honest

It does not make a product more innovative, powerful or valuable than it really is. It does not attempt to manipulate the consumer with promises that cannot be kept.

7. Good design is long-lasting

It avoids being fashionable and therefore never appears antiquated. Unlike fashionable design, it lasts many years - even in today's throwaway society.

8. Good design is thorough down to the last detail

Nothing must be arbitrary or left to chance. Care and accuracy in the design process show respect towards the consumer.

9. Good design is environmentally friendly

Design makes an important contribution to the preservation of the environment. It conserves resources and minimises physical and visual pollution throughout the lifecycle of the product.

10. Good design is as little design as possible

Less, but better - because it concentrates on the essential aspects, and the products are not burdened with non-essentials.

Back to purity, back to simplicity.

An Indian proverb on kindness and mortality:

"Never postpone a good deed which you can do now, because death does not choose whether you have or haven't done the things you should have done. Death waits for nobody and nothing. It has neither enemies, nor friends."

Meet Niksen - the Dutch Concept of Doing Nothing

The medical community is starting to recognize that the Dutch practice of giving yourself time to “just be” can be beneficial to your well-being.

- By Sophia Gottfried

First there was hygge, the Danish concept that made staying in and getting cozy cool. Then there was lagom, the Swedish mindset of approaching life with an “everything in moderation” mindset. Now there’s another Northern European trend that’s being embraced as a way to combat our increasingly busy and often stressful lives: niksen. The Dutch concept is as simple as, well, doing nothing.

What is niksen?

Niksen “literally means to do nothing, to be idle or doing something without any use,” says Carolien Hamming, managing director of CSR Centrum, a coaching center in the Netherlands that helps clients manage stress and recover from burnout. Practicing niksen could be as simple as just hanging around, looking at your surroundings or listening to music—“as long as it’s without purpose,” she says, and not done in order to achieve something or be productive.

Think “simply sitting in a chair or looking out of the window,” says Ruut Veenhoven, a sociologist and professor at Erasmus University Rotterdam in the Netherlands who studies happiness. Whereas mindfulness is about being present in the moment, niksen is more about carving out time to just be, even letting your mind wander rather than focusing on the details of an action.

“We should have moments of relaxation, and relaxation can be combined with easy, semi-automatic activity, such as knitting,” Veenhoven says. “One aspect of the ‘art of living’ is to find out what ways of relaxing fit you best.” There’s not necessarily a one-size-fits-all approach; rather, you’ll discover which behaviors are most effective for you through trial and error, he adds.

What are the potential benefits?

In the Netherlands, niksen has historically been dismissed as laziness or as the opposite of being productive,

Hamming says. But as stress levels climb in the U.S. and globally and their crushing health impacts, like burnout, are getting more recognition from the medical community, doing nothing is increasingly being framed as a positive, stress-fighting tactic.

“Everyone is looking for some way back to ease and connection,” says Eve Ekman, director of training at the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley, who calls the national levels of stress among adults and teens in the U.S. “daunting.”

But Ekman, who studies stress and burnout, says the research is strong when it comes to the benefits of slowing down, from emotional perks—like reducing anxiety—to physical advantages—like curtailing the aging process and strengthening the body’s ability to fight off a common cold. These potential health effects might be enough to encourage even the most hectic and overburdened among us to consider carving out time to practice *niksen*.

Another benefit of *niksen* is that it can help people come up with new ideas, according to Veenhoven, who is also the director of the World Database of Happiness, an archive of research related

to life enjoyment. “Even when we ‘niks,’” or do nothing, “our brain is still processing information and can use the available processing power to solve pending problems,” he says, which in turn can boost one’s creativity. This could manifest in having a breakthrough solution to a problem on a walk or a great business idea reveal itself while daydreaming.

Research also supports the idea that doing simple tasks that allow your mind to wander can foster creative problem solving, even improving your ability to work through a problem you might have been stuck on earlier. A 2013 study published in *Frontiers in Psychology*, on the pros and cons of a wandering mind, showed that this process can help an individual get inspired about achieving his or her goals and gain clarity about the actions to take in order to meet those goals in the future.

How do people practice *niksen*?

For many, doing nothing isn’t as simple as it sounds. In fact, it can be somewhat challenging to sit still and stare out a window, for instance. Hamming says it can even feel “quite creepy” at first, when people are used to doing something at all times. She encourages her clients to push through the discomfort, taking a

few minutes each day to practice nixsen (she recommends using this resource for accountability) and to work up to longer stretches, ideally reserving one evening a week without appointments and obligations. “Dare to be idle,” she says. “It is all about allowing life to run its course, and to free us from obligations for just a moment.”

What are the possible downsides?

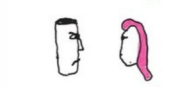
Scientific literature suggests that a drawback of letting the mind wander for too long could be getting “caught up in ruminations” rather than feeling refreshed, Ekman says, which may have some physiological effects. In the 2013 study *Pros and Cons of a Wandering Mind*, researchers observed participants had an increased heart rate for a 24-hour period after the mind wandering exercise and had trouble falling asleep the next night. (The researchers noted, however, that these consequences in the immediate aftermath were not predictive of people’s emotional states in the long-term and that daydreaming—especially about family and friends—is associated with higher life satisfaction.)

“We need to train our minds to wander in a way that’s imaginative and creative,” Ekman says. Some “gateway” practices to nixsen could be taking a walk in nature

or writing a letter of gratitude, she suggests, as a way of easing into what true downtime feels like.

And of course, it’s not practical to practice nixsen constantly—we can’t do nothing all the time. Rather, carving out time to be idle balanced with an active lifestyle can maximize the benefits of nixsen, according to Veenhoven. “Though rest is functional and may make one feel better after activity, it is not a main way to happiness in the sense of life satisfaction,” he says. In fact, people who participate in more productive activities tend to be happier due to more robust social connections and a stronger sense of self-efficacy, according to a 2016 study of older adults. Research has also shown that happiness begets productivity, meaning there’s a correlation between relaxation, happiness, and productivity.

What it all comes down to is finding out what ways of relaxing fit you best, says Veenhoven, whether that’s something actively passive and somewhat second nature, like knitting or taking a walk—as long as you’re giving yourself permission to niks regularly and without an intention.



HAMMURABI'S CODE of MANNERS

1. BE SHARP WITH A SHARP PERSON.
2. BE RUDE TO A RUDE PERSON.
3. BE BLUNT WITH A BLUNT PERSON.
4. IF SOMEONE CUTS YOU IN LINE, CUT HIM BACK.
5. IF A MANSREADER TAKES HALF YOUR SEAT ON THE SUBWAY, CONGRATULATIONS, HIS LEG IS NOW YOUR ARMREST.
6. IF A SOUR PERSON TRIES TO STARE YOU DOWN, DO NOT SMILE INGRATIATINGLY AT HIM. STARE BACK.
7. DO NOT APOLOGIZE FOR YOUR UNINTENDED REACTION TO ANOTHER'S RUDENESS.
8. MEET AGGRESSION WITH REFUSAL. MEET PASSIVE AGGRESSION WITH FEIGNED OBLIVIOUSNESS.
9. IF YOUR ROOMMATE LEAVES THE DOOR UNLOCKED, LEAVE THE DOOR SWINGING OPEN.
10. ANSWER VAGUENESS WITH VAGUENESS.
11. IDENTIFY YOUR FRIENDS WHO ARE NEEDY. YOU MUST WITHHOLD FROM THESE FRIENDS.
12. IF SOMEONE LEANS AGAINST YOU AS IF YOU WERE A WALL, AND IF THIS PERSON IS IN HIS RIGHT MIND, QUIETLY MARK HIS SHIRT WITH YOUR PEN. HE'LL BE SORRY.
13. IF YOUR ROMANTIC PARTNER STARTS TAKING YOU FOR GRANTED, FEIGN DISINTEREST OR CALLOUSNESS.
14. IF YOUR FRIEND PUSHES YOU TO COME TO HER GROUP SHOW, PUSH HER TO COME TO YOUR BOOK SIGNING, BUT NOT RIGHT AWAY.
15. WHEN FACED WITH FALSE POLITENESS, OFFER FALSE GRATITUDE.
16. TO THE CONVENIENTLY SPACEY PERSON, BE DENSELY PUSHY.
17. NEVER RAISE YOUR VOICE IN ANGER. (YOU CAN ALWAYS LEAVE A VERY SLIGHTLY BAD REVIEW.)



12 Inspiring Commencement Speech Quotes for Soon-to-Be Graduates

Cue “Graduation (Friends Forever)” by Vitamin C

1. “Dreams do not come true just because you dream them. It's hard work that makes things happen, it's hard work that creates change... Ditch the dream and be a doer, not a dreamer... My dreams did not come true. But I worked really hard. And I ended up building an empire out of my imagination. So my dreams? Can suck it.”
— Shonda Rhimes , television producer and writer, and author
2. “As we journey along with the hero of any story, we realize that we too are the lead characters of our own lives. I am here today to remind each of you that you are the heroes of your story...Your life is your story and the adventure ahead of you is the journey to fulfill your own purpose and potential.”
—Kerry Washington, actress
3. “I often hear from new graduates that it's better to wait until you have more experience...but I'm a big believer in the power of inexperience. It was the greatest asset I had when I started TFA (Teach for All). If I had known at the outset how hard it was going to be, I might never have started. The world needs you before you stop asking naïve questions and while you have the time to understand the true nature of the complex problems we face and take them on.”
—Wendy Kopp, CEO and cofounder of Teach For All
4. “The trick is to listen to your instinct, grab the opportunity when it presents itself, and then give it your all. You will stumble and fall, you will experience both disaster and triumph, sometimes in the same day, but it's really important to remember that like a hangover, neither triumphs nor disasters last forever. They both pass and a new day arrives. Just try to make that new day count.”
—Helen Mirren, Academy Award–winning actress
5. “Be present. I would encourage you with all my heart just to be present. Be present

and open to the moment that is unfolding before you. Because, ultimately, your life is made up of moments. So don't miss them by being lost in the past or anticipating the future.”

—Jessica Lange, Academy Award–winning actress

Read more: [10 Common Interview Questions & How to Answer Them](#)

6. “America needs your commitment, and, here's the thing, you need the commitment. Advocacy—getting involved in issues you care about and fighting for them—can reshape our country, and I guarantee it will reshape you.”

—Elizabeth Warren, politician, lawyer, and Massachusetts senator

7. “The most important thing I learned is that we are not born with a certain amount of resilience. It is a muscle, and that means we can build it. We build resilience into ourselves. We build resilience into the people we love. And we build it together, as a community. That's called 'collective resilience.' It's an incredibly powerful force—and it's one that our country and our world need a lot more of right about now. It is in our relationships with each other that we find our will to live, our capacity to love, and our ability to bring change into this world.”

—Sheryl Sandberg, author, COO of Facebook, founder of LeanIn.org

8. “I encourage you to live with life. Be courageous, adventurous. Give us a tomorrow, more than we deserve.”

—Maya Angelou, poet, singer, memoirist, and civil rights activist

9. “The best years are very much ahead of you. And they can be whatever you want them to be...As much as you've changed during your time here, more change is coming. You're going to continue to evolve in unforeseen ways. You are full of complexities and wonders that haven't even begun to surface. Life's unpredictability will draw these out and what defines you now will be mere shades and hues of a more vibrant you over the next five, 10, 50 years. Honestly, I can't think of anything more liberating than that, knowing that life will look differently than you think it will.”

—Octavia Spencer, Academy Award–winning actress

10. “I just want y'all to know there will be ups and downs. Prepare for that but don't give up, and I know you may hear that all the time but if I had given up, a long time ago, I wouldn't be standing here today. So, you have come too far to quit....As long as you are breathing it is never too late.”

—Missy Elliot, rapper, songwriter, producer, and dancer

Read more: [How to Survive and Thrive During Your Quarter-Life Crisis](#)

11. “It doesn't matter how far you might rise. At some point you are bound to stumble.... If you're constantly pushing yourself higher... the law of averages, not to mention the Myth of Icarus, predicts that you will at some point fall. And when you do I want you to know this, remember this: There is no such thing as failure. Failure is just life trying to move us in another direction.”

—Oprah Winfrey, author, talk show host, producer, and philanthropist



12. “I was not someone who should have the life I have now, and yet I do. I was sitting in the chair you are literally sitting in right now, and I just whispered, “Why not me?” And I kept whispering it for seventeen years; and here I am, someone that this school deemed worthy enough to speak to you at your commencement. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do something, but especially not yourself. Go conquer the world. Just remember this: Why not you? You made it this far.”

—Mindy Kaling, actress, comedian, and writer

THOMAS KOULOPOULOS

On Keeping Your Personal Brand Competitive

Author and founder of the Delphi Group

The Industrial Age trajectory was simple:

Spend 20 years educating, 40 years working, and 20 years retiring. Those lines of demarcation are disappearing, which means, to be competitive, you'll need to do three things:

- 1) Become obsessive about learning and relearning. If you're not uncomfortable, you're not learning quickly enough to keep up.
- 2) Actively build and curate your digital self and online behaviors to form a foundation for a lifelong personal brand.
- 3) Forget about retirement. Plan for a long third act in which you never stop creating value.

Every Self-Help Book Ever, Boiled Down To 11 Simple Rules

-BY CHRIS TAYLOR

The first self-described self-help book was published in 1859. The author's name, improbably, was Samuel Smiles; the title, even more improbably, was Self-Help. A distillation of lessons from the lives of famous people who had pulled themselves up by their bootstraps, it sold millions of copies and was a mainstay in Victorian households. Every generation since had its runaway bestseller, such as *How to Live on 24 Hours a Day* (1908), *Think and Grow Rich* (1937), or *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff* (1997).

By now, the \$11 billion self-help industry is most definitely not small stuff. Yet when you strip it down, there's very little new information. After all, we were consuming self-help for centuries before Smiles, just under different names. Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius gave tweet-sized advice in *Meditations*; so did Benjamin Franklin in *Poor Richard's Almanack*. Even self-help parody isn't new. Shakespeare did it with Polonius' "to thine own self be true" speech in *Hamlet*: basically a bullet-point list from a blowhard.

The 21st century has seen a measure of self-awareness about our self-help addiction. There's the wave of swearsy self-help bestsellers I wrote about, such as *The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck*. They hover

somewhere between parody and dressing up the same advice as their forebears in earthier language. More recently, there's a trend you might call meta-self-help: books in which people write about their experiences following self-help books, such as *Help Me!* (2018) and *How to Be Fine* (2020), based on the similar self-help podcast *By the Book*.

But hey, if it's all pretty much the same stuff — and it is — why stop at distilling it into a single book? Why not condense the repeated lessons of an entire genre into one article? That's what I've attempted here, after reading dozens of history's biggest bestsellers so you don't have to. Here is the essence of the advice I've seen delivered again and again.

1. Take one small step.
2. Change your mental maps.
3. Struggle is good. Scary is good.
4. Instant judgment is bad.
5. Remember the end of your life.
6. Be playful.
7. Be useful to others.
8. Perfectionism = procrastination
9. Sleep, exercise, eat, chill out. Repeat.
10. Write it all down.
11. You can't get it all from reading.

Rory's Rules of Alchemy

1. The opposite of a good idea can also be a good idea.
2. Don't design for average.
3. It doesn't pay to be logical if everyone else is being logical.
4. The nature of our attention affects the nature of our experience.
5. A flower is simply a weed with an advertising budget.
6. The problem with logic is that it kills off magic.
7. A good guess which stands up to observation is still science. So is a lucky accident.
8. Test counterintuitive things only because no one else will
9. Solving problems using rationality is like playing golf with only one club.
10. Dare to be trivial
11. If there were a logical answer, we would have found it.

The unspoken questions

-Seths Blog

Before we make a decision, we wonder about our dreams, our stories and our needs. Some of the things we wonder about, even if we don't verbalize them to ourselves:

- What will I tell my friends?
- What will I tell my boss?
- What is everyone else doing?
- Will this make me feel dumb?
- Is this good for me right now?
- Does it help my family?
- Is it scarce?
- Does it raise my status?
- Will this help me be part of a group I care about?
- Would my mom be proud of me?
- Will I get blamed?
- Is there a shortcut?
- Is it safe?
- Is it thrilling?
- How will I feel if they run out?
- Will it make the pain go away?
- Is it forbidden?
- [And then, maybe, if we've got many choices, "how much does it cost?"]

*"Concentration produces wealth.
Diversification protects wealth."*

Inspiration + Aspiration

By Leo Babauta

I deal every day with questions about how to stay motivated, how to stay on track, how to be excited about what I'm doing, how to stay grounded and balanced. Do you face these same issues?

What I've been playing with are inspiration and aspiration. Followed by perspiration.

Each of these words have the Latin verb for "to breathe" at their roots. We breathe in inspiration, breathe out our aspirations, and breathe through our hard work that brings us perspiration.

When we're plagued with self-doubt or a lack of motivation, we can breathe in the inspiration of others. Seek out the passion that other people have for their work, the compassion they bring for other people, the goodness in their hearts that inspires them to do their work. We don't have to copy what they're doing, but instead be inspired by their spirit.

When we feel this inspiration, we can then look inward and find what it is that we're called to do. And why: is it to build a better world, to help others who are struggling? Take this good intention, and infuse it with the newly inspired spirit you have. And then breathe it out into the world as your aspiration for today. What do you aspire to create? How do you aspire to help others?

And then finally, put in the hard work to make this aspiration happen. The best inspiration and aspirations are nothing but hot air without perspiration.

*The Japanese writer Haruki Murakami on love:
"If you remember me, then I don't care if everyone else forgets."*

Distributed Work's Five Levels of Autonomy

1. Level Zero autonomy is a job which cannot be done unless you're physically there. Imagine construction worker, barista, massage therapist, firefighter. Many companies assumed they had far more of these than it has turned out they really did.
2. The first level is where most colocated businesses are: there's no deliberate effort to make things remote-friendly, though in the case of many knowledge workers, people can keep things moving for a day or two when there's an emergency. More often than not, they'll likely put things off until they're back in the office. Work happens on company equipment, in company space, on company time. You don't have any special equipment and may have to use a clunky VPN to access basic work resources like email or your calendar. Larger level one companies often have people in the same building or campus dialing into a meeting. Level one companies were largely unprepared for this crisis.
3. Level two is where many companies have found themselves in the past few weeks with the COVID-19 pandemic. They've accepted that work is going to happen at home for a while, but they recreate what they were doing in the office in a "remote" setting, like Marshall McLuhan talked about new media mediums initially copying the generation before. You're probably able to access information from afar, you've adapted to tools like Zoom or Microsoft Teams, but everything is still synchronous, your day is full of interruptions, no real-time meetings have been canceled (yet), and there's a lot of anxiety in management around productivity — that's the stage where companies sometimes install surveillance software on laptops. Pro tip: Don't do that! And also: Don't stop at level two!
4. At the third level, you're really starting to benefit from being remote-first, or distributed. That's when you see people invest in better equipment — from a

good desk lamp to solid audio gear — and in more robust asynchronous processes that start to replace meetings. It's also the point at which you realize just how crucial written communication is for your success, and you start looking for great writers in your hiring. When you are on a Zoom, you often also have a Google Doc up with the other meeting participants so you can take and check real-time notes together. Your company has a zero-trust BeyondCorp security model. In a non-pandemic world you plan meetups so teams can break bread and meet each other in person a week or two a year.

5. Level four is when things go truly asynchronous. You evaluate people's work on what they produce, not how or when they produce it. Trust emerges as the glue that holds the entire operation together. You begin shifting to better — perhaps slower, but more deliberate — decision-making, and you empower everyone, not just the loudest or most extroverted, to weigh in on major conversations. You tap into the global talent pool, the 99% of the world's population and intelligence that doesn't live near one of your legacy physical office locations. Employee retention goes way up, and you invest more in training and coaching. Most employees have home-office setups that would make office workers green with envy. You have a rich social life with people you choose. Real-time meetings are respected and taken seriously, almost always have agendas and pre-work or post-work. If you get good at baton passes work will follow the sun 24/7 around the world. Your organization is truly inclusive because standards are objective and give people agency to accomplish their work their way.
6. Finally, I believe it's always useful to have an ideal that's not wholly attainable — and that's level five, Nirvana! This is when you consistently perform better than any in-person organization could. You're effortlessly effective. It's when everyone in the company has time for wellness and mental health, when people bring their best selves and highest levels of creativity to do the best work of their careers, and just have fun.

I hope you find acceptance. The kind that rings through your bones, the kind that quiets the voice inside of you that tells you that you are not good enough or that you are falling behind. I hope you forgive yourself for the mistakes you have made, for the past you keep alive inside of you. I hope you learn to let go - of the things you had to do in order to heal or to grow or to survive. You are doing your best. You are human. Please don't ever forget that.

I hope you find the kind of moments that take your breath away. The kind of moments that change you. I hope you travel to places that cleanse you; I hope you go to concerts that ring

through your bones and make you feel alive. I hope you connect with the small things - I hope you look at someone mid-conversation and you feel your stomach surge with the feelings you have for them. I hope you surround yourself with the kinds of friends that encourage your spontaneity, that are always there for you. I hope you live. Truly. I hope you don't hold back. There is so much to feel in this world. I hope you feel it all.

But most of all, I hope you find yourself out there. I hope you figure out your heart, I hope you figure out your mind. I hope you learn how to be kind to yourself, how to embrace the journey you are on.

Don't ever save
anything for a special occasion.
Being alive is the special
occasion





How Marcus Aurelius Conquered Stress (and the Rest of Us Can Too)

To say that Marcus Aurelius had a stressful life would be a preposterous understatement.

He ran the largest empire in the world. He had a troublesome son. He had a nagging and painful stomach issue. There was a palace coup led by one of his closest friends. Rumors that his wife was unfaithful. The Parthians invaded the Roman client-state of Armenia, triggering a war that would last five years.. The Antonine Plague struck in 165 CE and killed, by conservative estimates, more than 10 million. The River Tiber had one of the worst floods in history, destroying homes and livestock and leaving Rome in famine.

Should we be surprised that he talks openly in *Meditations* about his anxiety? About losing his temper? That he sometimes felt ground down and exhausted by life?

Of course he did.

He had all our problems and more.

He was besieged by stress.

And yet that's exactly why he inspires us. Because he conquered that stress, just like we can.

"Today I escaped anxiety," he writes. "Or no, I discarded it, because it was within me, in my own perceptions -not outside."

How did he do that? What can he show us about slaying that demon of stress that we all suffer from?

A lot.

For starters, the fact that we even know about his anxiety is because of one of those strategies. It was in the pages of his journal that Marcus worked through his problems. Instead of letting racing thoughts dominate his mind and drive him crazy, he put them down on paper. It was also in these pages that Marcus prepared himself for difficulties in advance. He reminded himself that the people he was going to meet during the day would be troublesome, he reminded himself that things were not going to go perfectly, he reminded himself that getting angry never made things better.

By taking the time to journal and write, he was chipping away at his anxiety, just as we all can—in the morning, at night, on our lunch break. Whenever.

To calm his anxiety, Marcus was also

constantly trying to get perspective. Sometimes he zoomed way out. He meditated on his insignificance. "The infinity of past and future gapes before us," he wrote, "a chasm whose depths we cannot see. So it would take an idiot to feel self-importance or distress." Other times, he zoomed way in, telling himself to take things step by step, moment by moment. No one can stop you from that, he said. Concentrate like a Roman, he said, on what's in front of you like it's the last thing you're doing in your life.

Don't worry about what's happened in the past or what might happen in the future.

This idea of being present is key to overcoming our stress.

We are often anxious because of what we fear will happen next, or after what happens next. We worry about worst case scenarios. We dread potential obstacles. But Marcus, from Epictetus, knew that "Man is not worried by real problems so much as by his imagined anxieties about real problems."

That's why Marcus Aurelius spent some much time trying to be present, reminding himself to return to the present moment where nothing is "novel or hard to deal with, but familiar and easily handled."

Like all busy people, Marcus Aurelius had a million things going on. But he also knew that much of what people expected of him or even that he found himself focusing on was not important or necessary. So to reduce stress, he tried hard to separate the essential from the inessential.

"If you seek tranquility, do less." But then he makes a critical clarification, "Or (more accurately) do what's essential... Because most of what we say and do is not essential. If you can eliminate it, you'll have more time."

Was there stuff he had to do that he didn't want to do? Problems he was stuck with that he'd rather not be stuck with? You bet. That's life.

Which is why he, and all of us, have to practice acceptance.

That's all we need, he said, willing acceptance at every moment. You can scream "until you turn blue" and curse the world "as if the world would notice!" Or you can "accept the obstacle and work with what you're given."

Finally, Marcus Aurelius worked hard to be a good friend to himself. Although he was firm and strong and self-disciplined, he did not whip himself. He knew that it was inevitable that he would mess up. We all do.

The key, he said, is to just focus on getting back on track. Don't dwell. Don't call yourself an idiot. Don't smack your forehead in anger.

No, "get back up when you fail," he said, "celebrate behaving like a human." "When jarred, unavoidably, by circumstances," he said, "revert at once to yourself, and don't lose the rhythm more than you can help. You'll have a better grasp of the harmony if you keep on going back to it."

It would be wonderful if we didn't have to do any of this.

If life was easy. If things always went right.

That's just not possible though.

Stress is an inevitable part of life. It is the friction of the plates of our responsibility rubbing against each other.

But if stress is inevitable, anxiety and anger and worry are not. Marcus believed that these things were a choice. That we could work past them, through them, that we could discard them, as he said, because they are within us, or at least up to us.

We can slay our stress because it's not an external enemy.

It is an inner battle.

What does it mean to be smart?

Seth's Blog

Termites and squirrels are successful. They've persisted through millennia, and they do things to survive that we could never figure out. They have good instincts. But they're not smart, not smart in the sense that we hope a leader or a colleague will be.

That kind of smart requires you to be open about how you do your work, how you make choices and the sort of change you seek to make in the world. There's no need for a smart person to change the story or be evasive or lie, because that's not part of being smart.

You want a smart heart surgeon, because she can tell you precisely why she's going to do one procedure instead of another one.

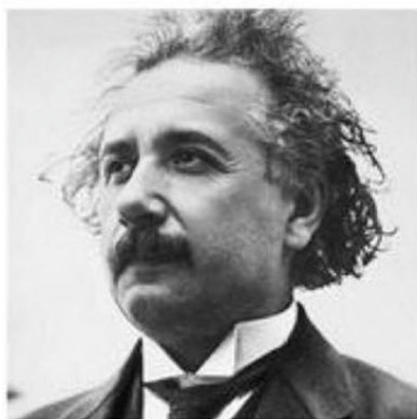
This kind of smart also requires domain knowledge. Smart people have done the reading, and they understand what has come before. They know that history doesn't repeat itself, but it rhymes. And they're not interested in making a mistake that they could have avoided with informed preparation.

And a smart person, in addition to revealing their methods and goals, and being alert as to what works, most of all, will change their methods and goals based on what they've learned.

Look around you. If you're seeing buildings that don't fall down, public health systems that are functioning and products that delight you, it's because a smart person did the difficult work of creating them.



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$$\text{Ego} = \frac{1}{\text{Knowledge}}$$

*"More the Knowledge
Lesser the Ego,
Lesser the Knowledge
More the Ego..."*

- Albert Einstein -



If You're Going Through Hell*

Well you know those times when you feel like
There's a sign there on your back
That says, I don't mind if you kick me"
Seems like everybody has
Things go from bad to worse
You think it can't get worse than that
And then they do

You step off the straight and narrow
And you don't know where you are
Used the needle of your compass
To sew up your broken heart
Ask directions from a genie in a bottle of Jim Beam
And she lies to you
That's when you learn the truth

If you're goin' through hell, keep on going
Don't slow down, if you're scared don't show it
You might get out before the devil even knows you're there

I've been deep down in that darkness
I've been down to my last match





Felt a hundred different demons breathin' fire down my back
And I knew that if I stumbled I'd fall right into the trap
That they were layin'

But the good news is there's angels everywhere
Out on the street
Holdin' out a hand to pull you back up on your feet
The ones that you've been draggin' for so long
You're on your knees might as well be prayin'
Guess what I'm sayin'

If you're goin' through hell keep on going
Don't slow down, if you're scared don't show it
You might get out before the devil even knows you're there
If you're goin' through hell, keep on movin'
Face that fire, walk right through it
You might get out before the devil even knows you're there

If you're goin' through hell keep on going
Don't slow down, if you're scared don't show it
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If you're goin' through hell, keep on movin'
Face that fire, walk right through it
You might get out before the devil even knows you're there



68 Bits of Unsolicited Advice

-Kevin Kelly

It's my birthday. I'm 68. I feel like pulling up a rocking chair and dispensing advice to the young 'uns. Here are 68 pithy bits of unsolicited advice which I offer as my birthday present to all of you.

- Learn how to learn from those you disagree with, or even offend you. See if you can find the truth in what they believe.
- Being enthusiastic is worth 25 IQ points.
- Always demand a deadline. A deadline weeds out the extraneous and the ordinary. It prevents you from trying to make it perfect, so you have to make it different. Different is better.
- Don't be afraid to ask a question that may sound stupid because 99% of the time everyone else is thinking of the same question and is too embarrassed to ask it.
- Being able to listen well is a superpower. While listening to someone you love keep asking them “Is there more?”, until there is no more.
- A worthy goal for a year is to learn enough about a subject so that you can't believe how ignorant you were a year earlier.
- Gratitude will unlock all other virtues and is something you can get better at.
- Treating a person to a meal never fails, and is so easy to do. It's powerful with old friends and a great way to make new friends.
- Don't trust all-purpose glue.

- Reading to your children regularly will bond you together and kickstart their imaginations.
- Never use a credit card for credit. The only kind of credit, or debt, that is acceptable is debt to acquire something whose exchange value is extremely likely to increase, like in a home. The exchange value of most things diminishes or vanishes the moment you purchase them. Don't be in debt to losers.
- Pros are just amateurs who know how to gracefully recover from their mistakes.
- Extraordinary claims should require extraordinary evidence to be believed.
- Don't be the smartest person in the room. Hangout with, and learn from, people smarter than yourself. Even better, find smart people who will disagree with you.
- Rule of 3 in conversation. To get to the real reason, ask a person to go deeper than what they just said. Then again, and once more. The third time's answer is close to the truth.
- Don't be the best. Be the only.
- Everyone is shy. Other people are waiting for you to introduce yourself to them, they are waiting for you to send them an email, they are waiting for you to ask them on a date. Go ahead.
- Don't take it personally when someone turns you down. Assume they are like you: busy, occupied, distracted. Try again later. It's amazing how often a second try works.
- The purpose of a habit is to remove that action from self-negotiation. You no longer expend energy deciding whether to do it. You just do it. Good habits can range from telling the truth, to flossing.

- Promptness is a sign of respect.
- When you are young spend at least 6 months to one year living as poor as you can, owning as little as you possibly can, eating beans and rice in a tiny room or tent, to experience what your “worst” lifestyle might be. That way any time you have to risk something in the future you won't be afraid of the worst case scenario.
- Trust me: There is no “them”.
- The more you are interested in others, the more interesting they find you. To be interesting, be interested.
- Optimize your generosity. No one on their deathbed has ever regretted giving too much away.
- To make something good, just do it. To make something great, just re-do it, re-do it, re-do it. The secret to making fine things is in remaking them.
- The Golden Rule will never fail you. It is the foundation of all other virtues.
- If you are looking for something in your house, and you finally find it, when you're done with it, don't put it back where you found it. Put it back where you first looked for it.
- Saving money and investing money are both good habits. Small amounts of money invested regularly for many decades without deliberation is one path to wealth.
- To make mistakes is human. To own your mistakes is divine. Nothing elevates a person higher than quickly admitting and taking personal responsibility for the mistakes you make and then fixing them fairly. If you mess up, fess up. It's astounding how powerful this ownership is.

- Never get involved in a land war in Asia.
- You can obsess about serving your customers/ audience/ clients, or you can obsess about beating the competition. Both work, but of the two, obsessing about your customers will take you further.
- Show up. Keep showing up. Somebody successful said: 99% of success is just showing up.
- Separate the processes of creation from improving. You can't write and edit, or sculpt and polish, or make and analyze at the same time. If you do, the editor stops the creator. While you invent, don't select. While you sketch, don't inspect. While you write the first draft, don't reflect. At the start, the creator mind must be unleashed from judgement.
- If you are not falling down occasionally, you are just coasting.
- Perhaps the most counter-intuitive truth of the universe is that the more you give to others, the more you'll get. Understanding this is the beginning of wisdom.
- Friends are better than money. Almost anything money can do, friends can do better. In so many ways a friend with a boat is better than owning a boat.
- This is true: It's hard to cheat an honest man.
- When an object is lost, 95% of the time it is hiding within arm's reach of where it was last seen. Search in all possible locations in that radius and you'll find it.
- You are what you do. Not what you say, not what you believe, not how you vote, but what you spend your time on.
- If you lose or forget to bring a cable, adapter or charger, check with your hotel. Most hotels now have a drawer full of cables, adapters and chargers others have left behind, and probably

have the one you are missing. You can often claim it after borrowing it.

- Hatred is a curse that does not affect the hated. It only poisons the hater. Release a grudge as if it was a poison.
- There is no limit on better. Talent is distributed unfairly, but there is no limit on how much we can improve what we start with.
- Be prepared: When you are 90% done any large project (a house, a film, an event, an app) the rest of the myriad details will take a second 90% to complete.
- When you die you take absolutely nothing with you except your reputation.
- Before you are old, attend as many funerals as you can bear, and listen. Nobody talks about the departed's achievements. The only thing people will remember is what kind of person you were while you were achieving.
- For every dollar you spend purchasing something substantial, expect to pay a dollar in repairs, maintenance, or disposal by the end of its life.
- Anything real begins with the fiction of what could be. Imagination is therefore the most potent force in the universe, and a skill you can get better at. It's the one skill in life that benefits from ignoring what everyone else knows.
- When crisis and disaster strike, don't waste them. No problems, no progress.
- On vacation go to the most remote place on your itinerary first, bypassing the cities. You'll maximize the shock of otherness in the remote, and then later you'll welcome the familiar comforts of a city on the way back.

- When you get an invitation to do something in the future, ask yourself: would you accept this if it was scheduled for tomorrow? Not too many promises will pass that immediacy filter.
- Don't say anything about someone in email you would not be comfortable saying to them directly, because eventually they will read it.
- If you desperately need a job, you are just another problem for a boss; if you can solve many of the problems the boss has right now, you are hired. To be hired, think like your boss.
- Art is in what you leave out.
- Acquiring things will rarely bring you deep satisfaction. But acquiring experiences will.
- Rule of 7 in research. You can find out anything if you are willing to go seven levels. If the first source you ask doesn't know, ask them who you should ask next, and so on down the line. If you are willing to go to the 7th source, you'll almost always get your answer.
- How to apologize: Quickly, specifically, sincerely.
- Don't ever respond to a solicitation or a proposal on the phone. The urgency is a disguise.
- When someone is nasty, rude, hateful, or mean with you, pretend they have a disease. That makes it easier to have empathy toward them which can soften the conflict.
- Eliminating clutter makes room for your true treasures.
- You really don't want to be famous. Read the biography of any famous person.

- Experience is overrated. When hiring, hire for aptitude, train for skills. Most really amazing or great things are done by people doing them for the first time.
- A vacation + a disaster = an adventure.
- Buying tools: Start by buying the absolute cheapest tools you can find. Upgrade the ones you use a lot. If you wind up using some tool for a job, buy the very best you can afford.
- Learn how to take a 20-minute power nap without embarrassment.
- Following your bliss is a recipe for paralysis if you don't know what you are passionate about. A better motto for most youth is “master something, anything”. Through mastery of one thing, you can drift towards extensions of that mastery that bring you more joy, and eventually discover where your bliss is.
- I'm positive that in 100 years much of what I take to be true today will be proved to be wrong, maybe even embarrassingly wrong, and I try really hard to identify what it is that I am wrong about today.
- Over the long term, the future is decided by optimists. To be an optimist you don't have to ignore all the many problems we create; you just have to imagine improving our capacity to solve problems.
- The universe is conspiring behind your back to make you a success. This will be much easier to do if you embrace this pronopia.



Writer Ralph Marston on the power of confident humility:

"Whatever you're doing, a sense of superiority will make you worse at it. Humility, on the other hand, will make you better. The moment you think you've got it all figured out, your progress stops. Instead, continue to advance and improve by reminding yourself how much more there will always be to discover.

Confidence is positive and empowering, but arrogance is deadly. Be confident, but not at the expense of your respect for others.

Don't burn up all your energy proving how great you are. Invest your time and energy being thoughtful and helpful. See the victories not as proof of your supremacy, but as opportunities to offer more value to life. See the defeats not as personal affronts, but as chances to learn and grow stronger.

Take care not to waste your time in delusions of grandeur. Embrace the power of confident humility, and live well

“You can’t produce a baby in one month by getting nine women pregnant. It just doesn’t work that way.”

— *Warren Buffett*

Someone hired a social media consultant at an old employer. During a three-hour session she walked us through hashtags, what time of day you should post on Twitter, how threading posts increases engagement, and a slew of other hacks.

She was nice. But she never mentioned the most effective social media trick: Write good stuff that people want to read.

That’s because writing good stuff isn’t a hack. It’s hard. It takes time and creativity. It can’t be manufactured. It works, with a near 100% success rate. But it is the social media equivalent of burpees.

That story is pervasive. Diets, finances, marketing. Everyone wants a shortcut. It’s always been this way, but I suspect it’s getting worse as technology inflates our benchmark of how fast results should happen. Hacks are appealing because they look like paths to prizes without the effort. Which, in the real world, rarely exists.

A few of the only useful hacks I know:

Marketing hack: Make a good product that people need.

PR hack: Do something newsworthy.

Writing hack: Write every day for years.

Learning hack: Read a book. When finished, read another.

Work culture hack: Trust people and pay them well.

Investing hack: Give compounding the decades it requires.

Networking hack: Email people you admire and ask them out to coffee.

Savings hack: Lower your ego and live below your means.

Career hack: Work harder than is expected of you and be nice to people.

Relationship hack: Deserve to be loved.

Organization hack: Clean up your mess.

Diet hack: Burn more calories than you consume.

Fitness hack: Sweat and lift heavy stuff.

Fundraising hack: Make a product lots of people will pay for with decent or better margins.

Scale-to-a-million-users hack: Make a product a million people need.

Product hack: Solve a legitimate problem.

Making college more affordable hack: Go to an in-state public school and work full time.

Productivity hack: Realize the consequences of being unproductive.

There's a scene in Lawrence of Arabia where one man puts out a match with his fingers, and doesn't flinch. Another man watching tries to do the same, and yells in pain.

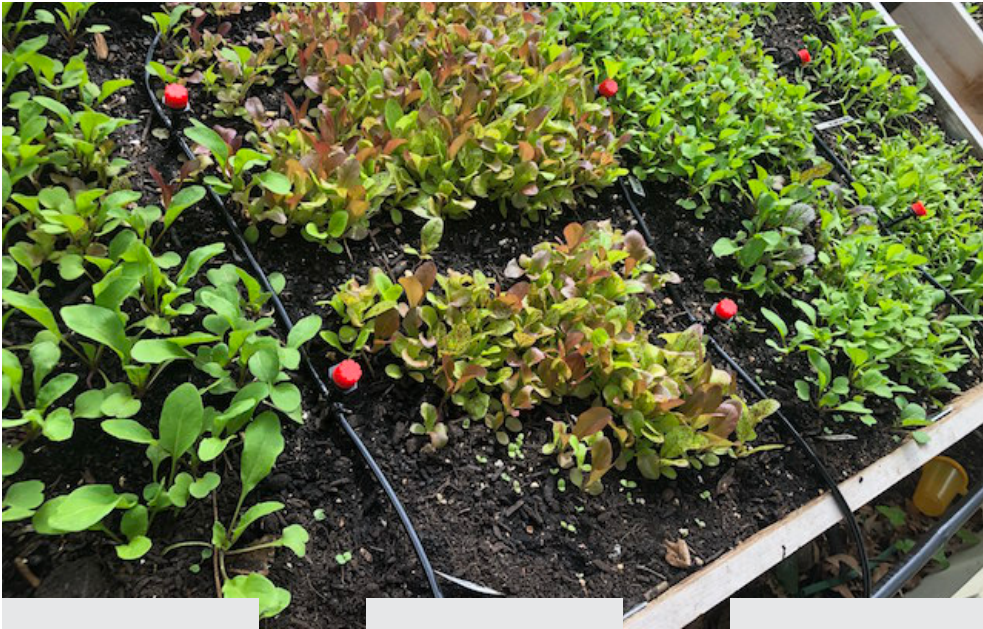
"It hurts! What's the trick?" he asks.

"The trick is not minding that it hurts," the first man says.

Another useful hack.

- by Morgan Housel

More on Cultivating a Deep Life: Mindset



Do less

Do better

Know why

To “do less” is to slow down. Focus on one activity at a time. Do less total activities. Be willing to pass through occasional interludes of full non-productivity. Who first comes to mind when you ponder meaningful living? If you’re like most people, it’s probably someone who, in the spirit of Thoreau, approaches life deliberately, doing a small number of things, but each with

full focus (often somewhere scenic).

To “do better” is to direct your focused energy toward quality activities, when possible. Given the same scraps of weekend free time, you could either painfully coax a garden irrigation system into efficient operation (see above), or you could binge Netflix. In their book *All Things Shining*, philosophers

Hubert Dreyfus and Sean Dorrance Kelly note that the appreciation of quality — especially once refined — can provide a source of sacredness in an otherwise de-romanticized world.

Finally, to “know why” is to get at the very core of the deep life mindset. Working backwards from your values to determine your activities creates a lifestyle dramatically more meaningful than working forward from whatever seems appealing in the moment. It’s the difference between resilience and anxiety; satisfaction and distraction. As I argue in *Digital Minimalism*, the fight to “know why” has been made harder in

recent years due to the engineered compulsion of the attention economy. But, in a way I never could have imagined when I was writing that book, we now find ourselves in a circumstance where the shallowness of these diversions is being made unmistakably clear as our hunger for something greater increasingly gnaws.

The deep life is not an ambitious one-shot goal, like completing a marathon, that you work hard at until you one day obtain it all at once. It’s a state of being with which you become increasingly comfortable. A process that starts with your mind.

“

**Dance like nobody’s
watching, because they
are not, they are all
checking their phones.**

— UNKNOWN

Foreword by
TIM FERRISS

THE
ALMANACK
OF
**NAVAL
RAVIKANT**

A guide to wealth and happiness
ERIC JORGENSEN

Key Highlights

- “Getting rich is about knowing what to do, who to do it with, and when to do it.”
- “Seek wealth, not money or status. Wealth is having assets that earn while you sleep. Money is how we transfer time and wealth. Status is your place in the social hierarchy.”
- “You're not going to get rich renting out your time. You must own equity—a piece of business—to gain your financial freedom.”
- “You will get rich by giving society what it wants but does not yet know how to get. At scale.”
- “Play iterated games. All the returns in life, whether in wealth, relationships, or knowledge, come from compound interest.”
- “Learn to sell. Learn to build. If you can do both, you will be unstoppable.”
- “Specific knowledge is found by pursuing your genuine curiosity and passion rather than whatever is hot right now.”
- “Study microeconomics, game theory, psychology, persuasion, ethics, mathematics, and computers.”
- “Become the best in the world at what you do. Keep redefining what you do until this is true.”
- “The most important skill for getting rich is becoming a perpetual learner.”

If I HAD MY CHILD TO RAISE OVER AGAIN



“If I had my child to raise over again:
I’d build self-esteem first and the house later
I’d finger paint more and point the finger less
I would do less correcting and more connecting
I’d take my eyes off my watch and watch with my eyes
I would care to know less and know to care more
I’d take more hikes and fly more kites
I’d stop playing serious and seriously play
I would run through more fields and gaze at more stars
I’d do more hugging and less tugging
I’d see the oak tree in the acorn more often
I would be firm less often and affirm much more
I’d model less about the love of power
And more about the power of love.”

Diane Loomans

LETWHYLEAD.COM

PERSONAL PRODUCTIVITY BLUEPRINT

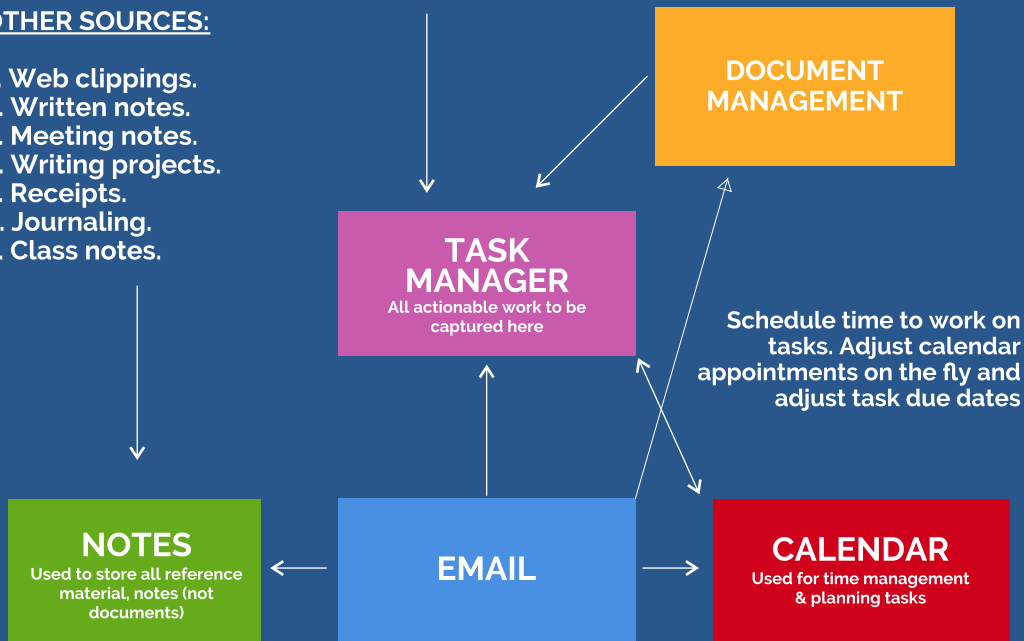
Minor Workshop Ltd

OTHER SOURCES:

1. Project/goal planning.
2. Personal to-dos.
3. Recurring tasks.

OTHER SOURCES:

1. Web clippings.
2. Written notes.
3. Meeting notes.
4. Writing projects.
5. Receipts.
6. Journaling.
7. Class notes.



Email makes up the majority of our inputs:

DO IT - Do the things that take less than 2 minutes.
DEFER IT - Create a task in task manager.
DELEGATE IT - Create a task and assign to someone.
DROP IT - Archive email.

OTHER SOURCES:

1. Tasks that have been scheduled.
2. Meetings and phone calls.
3. Recurring appointments.
4. Social events.
5. Appointments from email.

“I’ve learned that no matter what happens, or how bad it seems today, life does go on, and it will be better tomorrow. I’ve learned that you can tell a lot about a person by the way he/she handles these three things: a rainy day, lost luggage, and tangled Christmas tree lights. I’ve learned that regardless of your relationship with your parents, you’ll miss them when they’re gone from your life. I’ve learned that making a “living” is not the same thing as making a “life.” I’ve learned that life sometimes gives you a second chance. I’ve learned that you shouldn’t go through life with a catcher’s mitt on both hands; you need to be able to throw something back. I’ve learned that whenever I decide something with an open heart, I usually make the right decision. I’ve learned that even when I have pains, I don’t have to be one. I’ve learned that every day you should reach out and touch someone. People love a warm hug, or just a friendly pat on the back. I’ve learned that I still have a lot to learn. I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

- Maya Angelou

A Few Rules

by Morgan Housel

The person who tells the most compelling story wins. *Not the best idea. Just the story that catches people's attention and gets them to nod their heads.*

Something can be factually true but contextually nonsense. *Bad ideas often have at least some seed of truth that gives their followers confidence.*

Tell people what they want to hear *and you can be wrong indefinitely without penalty.*

Woodrow Wilson said government "is accountable to Darwin, not to Newton." *It's a useful idea. Everything is accountable to one of the two, and you have to know whether something adapts and changes over time or perpetually stays the same.*

Behavior is hard to fix. *When people say they've learned their lesson they underestimate how much of their previous mistake was caused by emotions that will return when faced with the same circumstances.*

"Logic is an invention of man and may be ignored by the universe," *historian Will Durant says. That's why forecasting is hard.*

Being good at something doesn't promise rewards. *It doesn't even promise a compliment. What's rewarded in the world is scarcity, so what matters is what you can do that other people are bad at.*

The world is governed by probability, *but people think in black and white,*

right or wrong – did it happen or did it not? – because it's easier.

Henry Luce said, “Show me a man who thinks he’s objective and I’ll show you a man who’s deceiving himself.” *People see what they want to see, hear what they want to hear, and view the world through the lens of their own unique life experiences.*

People learn when they’re surprised. *Not when they read the right answer, or are told they’re doing it wrong, but when their jaw hits the floor.*

Most fields have only a few laws. *Lots of theories, hunches, observations, ideas, trends, and rules. But laws – things that are always true, all the time – are rare.*

The only thing worse than thinking everyone who disagrees with you is wrong is the opposite: *being persuaded by the advice of those who need or want*

something you don’t.

Simple explanations are appealing even when they’re wrong. *“It’s complicated” isn’t persuasive even when it’s right.*

Self-interest is the most powerful force in the world. *Which can be great, because situations where everyone’s interests align are unstoppable; bad because people’s willingness to benefit themselves at the expense of others is so seductive.*

History is deep. Almost everything has been done before. The characters and scenes change, but the behaviors and outcomes rarely do. *“Everything feels unprecedented when you haven’t engaged with history.”*

Don’t expect balance from very talented people. *People who are exceptionally good at one thing tend to*

be exceptionally bad at another, due to overconfidence and mental bandwidth taken up by the exceptional skill. Skills also have two sides: No one should be shocked when people who think about the world in unique ways you like also think about the world in unique ways you don't like.

Progress happens too slowly to notice, setbacks happen too fast to ignore. *There are lots of overnight tragedies, but no overnight miracles. Growth is driven by compounding, which always takes time. Destruction is driven by single points of failure, which can happen in seconds, and loss of confidence, which can happen in an instant.*

It is way easier to spot other people's mistakes than your own. *We judge others based solely on their actions, but when judging ourselves we have an*

internal dialogue that justifies our mistakes and bad decisions.

Reputations have momentum in both directions, *because people want to associate with winners and avoid losers.*

History is driven by surprising events, forecasting is driven by predictable ones. *It's not an easy problem to solve.*

Make
yourself a
priority

The Rules of Reading

Naval Ravikant

- The number of books you read is a vanity metric
- “I read for understanding. So, with a really good book, I’ll flip through it. I won’t actually read it in consecutive order. I might not even finish it. I’m looking for ideas and things that I don’t understand. When I find something really interesting, I’ll reflect on it, research it, and then when I’m bored of it, I’ll drop it, or I’ll flip to another book.”
- “It’s better to go through a book really slowly, and struggle and stumble and rewind, than it is to fly through it quickly just to say, ‘Well now I’ve read 20 books.’”
- “I would rather read the best hundred books over and over again until I absorb them, rather than read every single book out there”

**“Your current habits are perfectly designed to
deliver your current results.”**

-James Clear

What Should You Read ?

- “Read what you love until you love to read”
- That said, keep these two points in mind:
- “It’s far more important in life to know the basics really well across a few domains and combine that than it is to try and be a deep expert in any one domain”
- Whatever you start out reading will form the basis for your worldview (AKA the foundation). When you read new things, you’ll judge whether they’re accurate based on the foundation you’ve already built. For this reason, the foundation is critical.
- “When it comes to reading, I’d make sure your foundation is very, very high quality”
- Here’s the best way to build a rock solid foundation:
- Read lots of science
- Read lots of microeconomics (NOT macroeconomics)
- Read what people agree on
- Read the originals and classics
- “If you start with the originals and the foundations, then you will have enough of a worldview and understanding that you won’t fear any book.”

True Wisdom Comes From Understanding, Not Memorization

- “It’s much better to know the basics from the ground up and have a solid foundation of understanding than it is to have a scaffolding where you’re just memorizing advanced concepts”
- For example, understanding basic mathematics is way more important than memorizing calculus concepts
- The best thinkers are clear thinkers; they could explain a complex topic to a 5 - year -old
- “When you’re memorizing something, it’s an indication that you don’t understand it. You should be able to re-derive anything on the spot, and if you can’t, you don’t know it.”

Wealth's greatest power: having the freedom to do what you want, when you want (and people are happier when they have control over their schedules)

33 Things I Stole From People Smarter Than Me on the Way to 33

-Ryan Holiday.



Last year was the first year I really forgot how old I was. This year was the year that I started doing stuff over again. Not out of nostalgia, or premature memory loss, but out of the sense that enough time had elapsed that it was time to revisit some things. I re-read books that I hadn't touched in ten or fifteen years. I went back to places I hadn't been since I was a kid. I re-visited some painful memories that I had walled off and chosen not to think about.

So I thought this year, for my birthday piece (more than 10 years running now—here is 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, and 32) , I would revisit an article I wrote several years ago, which has remained popular since I first published it: 28 Pieces of Productivity Advice I Stole From People Smarter Than Me.

I'm not so interested in productivity advice anymore, but I remain, as ever, focused on taking advice from people smarter than me. So here are some of the best pieces of advice—things I try

to live by, things I tried to revisit and think about this year—about life. Enjoy. And remember, as Seneca said, that we are dying everyday. At 33, I don't say to myself that according to actuary tables, I have 49 years to live. I say instead that I have already died three and one-third decades. The question is whether I lived those years before they passed. That's what matters.

- George Raveling told me that he sees reading as a moral imperative. "People died," he said, speaking of slaves, soldiers and civil rights activists, "so I could have the ability to read." He also pointed out that there's a reason people have fought so hard over the centuries to keep books from certain groups of people. I've always thought reading was important, but I never thought about it like that. If you're not reading, if books aren't playing a major role in your life, you are betraying that legacy.
- Another one on reading: in his

autobiography, General James Mattis points out that if you haven't read widely, you are functionally illiterate. That's a great term, and one I wish I'd heard earlier. As Mark Twain said, if you don't read, you're not any better than people who can't read. This is true not only generally but specifically on specific topics. I am functionally illiterate about many things and that needs to be fixed.

- Sue Johnson talks about how when couples or people fight, they're not really fighting, they're just doing a dance, usually a dance about attachment. The dance is the problem—you go this way, I go that way, you reach out, I pull away, I reach out, you pull away—not the couple, not either one of the people. This externalization has been very helpful.
- The last year has certainly revealed some things about a lot of folks that I know or thought I did. But before I get too disappointed, I think of that

beautiful line from F. Scott Fitzgerald at the beginning of *The Great Gatsby* (discovered on a re-read): “Whenever you feel like criticizing any one, just remember that all the people in this world haven't had the advantages that you've had.”

- I've heard this many times from many different writers over the years (Neil Strauss being one), but as time passes the truth of it becomes more and more clear, and not just in writing: When someone tells you something is wrong, they're almost always right. When someone tells you how to fix it, they're almost always wrong.
- It was a French journalist who was writing a piece about *Trust Me*, I'm Lying who happened to tell me something about relationships. LOVE, he said, is best spelled T-I-M-E. I don't think I've heard anything truer or more important to my development as a husband or

father.

- Also, Seinfeld's concept of quality time vs. garbage time has been almost as essential to me as Robert Greene's concept of alive time vs. dead time. I would be much worse without these two ideas.
- A few years ago I was exploring a book project with Lance Armstrong and he showed me some of the texts people had sent him when his world came crashing down. “Some people lean in when their friends take heat,” he said, “some people lean away.” I decided I wanted to be a lean-in type, even if I didn't always agree, even if it was their fault.
- When I was in high school, I was in this English class and I shared something with the discussion group we were in. Then later, I heard people use what I had said in their essays or in presentations and get credit for it. I brought this up to the teacher later, that people were using my ideas. The teacher looked at me and said,

“Ryan, that's your job.” I'm very glad she said that and that I heard it at 16.

- Another thing about being a writer. I once read a letter where Cheryl Strayed kindly pointed out to a young writer the distinction between writing and publishing. Her implication was that we focus too much on the latter and not enough on the former. It's true for most things. Amateurs focus on outcomes more than process. The more professional you get, the less you care about results. It seems paradoxical but it's true. You still get results, but that's because you know that the systems and process are reliable. You trust them with your life.
- Speaking of which, that distinction between amateur and professional is an essential piece of advice I have gotten, first from Steven Pressfield's writings and then by getting to know him over the years. There are professional habits and amateur ones. Which are you practicing? Is

this a pro or an amateur move? Ask yourself that. Constantly.

- Peter Thiel: “Competition is for losers.” I loved this the second I heard it. When people compete, somebody loses. So go where you're the only one. Do what only you can do. Run a race with yourself.
- This headline from Kayla Chadwick is one of the best of the century, in my opinion. And true. And sums up our times: “I Don't Know How To Explain To You That You Should Care About Other People.”
- Tim Ferriss always seems to ask the best questions: What would this look like if it were easy? How will you know if you don't experiment? What would less be like? The one that hit me the hardest, when I was maybe 25, was “What do you do with your money?” The answer was “Nothing, really.” Ok, so why try so hard to earn lots more of it?
- It was from Hemingway and Tobias

Wolff and John Fante that I learned about typing up passages, about feeling great writing go through your fingers. It's a practice I've followed for... 15 years now? I've probably copied and typed out a couple dozen books this way. It's a form of getting your hours, modeling greatness so that it gets seeded into your subconscious. (For writing, you can substitute any activity.)

- Steve Kamb told me that the best and most polite excuse is just to say you have a rule. “I have a rule that I don't decide on the phone.” “I have a rule that I don't accept gifts.” “I have a rule that I don't speak for free anymore.” “I have a rule that I am home for bath time with the kids every night.” People respect rules, and they accept that it's not you rejecting the [offer, request, demand, opportunity] but that the rule allows you no choice.
- Go to what will teach you the most, not what will pay the most. I forget

who this was from. Aaron Ray, maybe? It's about the opportunities that you'll learn the most from. That's the rubric. That's how you get better. People sometimes try to sweeten speaking offers by mentioning how glamorous the location is, or how much fun it will be. I'd be more impressed if they told me I was going to have a conversation that was going to blow my mind.

- I've been in too many locker rooms not to notice that teams put up their values on the wall. Every hallway and doorway is decorated with a motivational quote. At first, it seemed silly. Then you realize: It's one thing to hear something, it's another to live up to it each day. Thus the prints we do at Daily Stoic, the challenge coins I carry in my pocket, the statues I have on my desk, that art I have on my wall. You have to put your precepts up for display. You have to make them inescapable. Or the idea will escape you when it

counts.

- Amelia Earhart: “Always think with your stick forward.” (Gotta keep moving, can't slow down.)
- I was at Neil Strauss's house almost ten years ago now when he had everyone break down what an hour of their time was worth. It's simple: How much you make a year, divided by how many hours you realistically work. “Basically,” he said, “don't do anything you can pay someone to do for you more cheaply.” This was hard for me to accept—still is—but coming to terms with it (in my own way) has made my life much, much better. It goes to Tim's question as well: What would it look like if this were easy? Most of the time, it means getting someone to help.
- No man steps in the same river twice.” That's Heraclitus. Thus the re-reading. The books are the same, but we've changed, the world has changed. So it goes for movies,

walking your college campus or a Civil War battlefield, and so many of the things we do once and think we “got.”

- “Well begun is half-done” is the expression. It has been a long journey but slowly and steadily optimizing my morning has more impact on my life than anything else. I stole most of my strategies from people like Julia Cameron (morning pages), Shane Parrish (wake up early), the folks at SPAR! (no phone in the AM), Ferriss (make before you manage), etc. (You can see more about my morning here.)
- “Your last book won't write your next one.” Don't remember who said it, but it's true for writing and for all professions. You are constantly starting at zero. Every sale is a new sale. Every season is a new season. Every fight is a new fight. If you think your past success guarantees you anything, you're in for a rude awakening. In fact, someone has

already started to beat you.

- David French: “Human beings need forgiveness like we need oxygen—a nation devoid of grace will make its people miserable.”
- Dov Charney said something to me once that I think about a lot. He said, “Run rates always start at zero.” The point there was: Don't be discouraged at the outset. It takes time to build up from nothing.
- I read this passage in a post from Chris Yeh, which apparently comes from a speech by Brian Dyson:

“Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling some five balls in the air. You name them—work, family, health, friends and spirit ... and you're keeping all of these in the air. You will soon understand that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls— family, health, friends and spirit—are made of glass. If you drop one of these, they will be irrevocably

scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged or even shattered. They will never be the same.”

- There is no party line. That's what Allan Ginsberg's psychiatrist told him when he asked for the professional opinion on dropping out of college. This is good advice for life. There is no party line on what you should or shouldn't do. And if you think there is, you're probably missing stuff.
- James Altucher once pointed out that you don't have to make your money grow. You can just have it. It can just sit there. You can spend it. Whatever. You don't have to whip yourself for not investing and carefully managing every penny. The reward for success should not be that you're constantly stressed you're not doing enough to “capitalize” on that success.
- At the same time, I love Charlamagne's “Frugal Vandross.”

The less expensive stuff you have, the less there is to worry about.

I've talked before how I got my notecard system from Robert Greene. Only later did I realize—to steal a concept from Tyler Cowen—that doing notecards is an effective way to “do scales.” Meaning: How do you practice whatever it is that you do? What's your version of playing scales or running through drills? For me, it's the notecards. That's how I get better at my job. Do you have something like that?

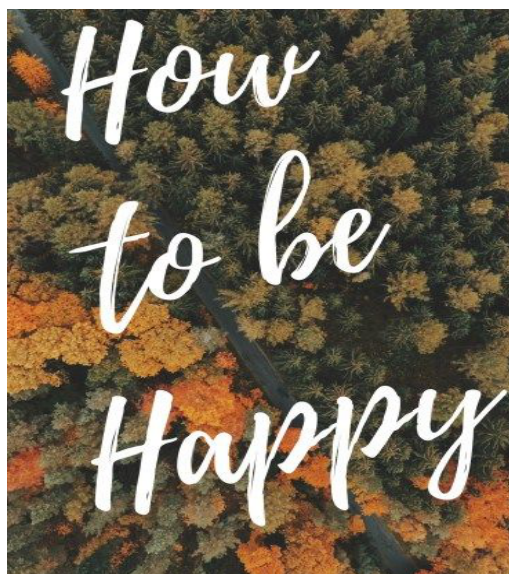
Ramit Sethi talks about how you can just not reply to stuff. It felt rude at first, but then I realized it was ruder to ignore the people I care about to respond to things I didn't ask for in the first place. Selective ignoring is the key to productivity, I'm afraid.

- Before we had kids, I was in the pool with my wife. “Do you want to do laps?” I said. “Should we fill up the rafts?” “Here help me dump out the

filter.” There was a bunch of that from me. “You know you can just be in the pool,” she said. That thought had not occurred to me. Still, it rarely does. So I have to be intentional about it.

Who better to close another year, another piece than with the Stoics. “You could be good today,” the Roman emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote. “But instead you choose tomorrow.”

That quote haunts me as much as it inspires me. And it does a lot of each. It's worth stealing if you haven't already.



Become More Resilient by Adopting the Finnish Approach of 'Sisu'

Elizabeth Yuko

If 2020 has taught us anything, it's that most people are capable of handling far more than they thought. During the past few months, many of us have experienced unprecedented changes to our work, home and social lives. And just when you think you there's no possible way of taking on another single thing, something happens, and somehow we manage. But at the same time, six months into the year, it's getting to be a lot. That's why it's the ideal time to learn about the Finnish concept of "sisu." Here's what it means and how it can help.

What is 'sisu'?

If you're looking for an exact English translation of sisu, you're not going to find it here (or anywhere). In fact, an article published on January 14, 1940 in the New York Times under the headline: "Sisu: A word that explains Finland" notes that the word "is not easily translated, because no other language has its precise equivalent."

Probably the closest we'll get to a definition of sisu is found in Joanna Nylund's 2018 book "Sisu: The Finnish Art of Courage." According to Nylund, this "action-oriented mindset" has been around for at least 500 years, and can refer to "stoic determination, hardiness, courage, bravery, willpower, tenacity and resilience."

And here's a helpful description of sisu from Finlandia University:


Sisu is not momentary courage, but the ability to sustain that courage. It is a word that cannot be fully translated. It defines the Finnish people and their character. It stands for the philosophy that what must be done will be done, regardless of cost.

Sisu is an inherent characteristic of the Finnish people. You might call it backbone, spunk, stamina, guts, or drive and perseverance. It is a measure of integrity that surpasses the hardship and sees through to the end.


Sisu is the quality that lets them pick up, move on, and learn something from previous failures. It's the hard-jawed integrity that makes them pay their war debts in full. In short, it's the indomitable will that sets Finns apart and explains many of the incredible things they do.

How to apply 'sisu'

Given that this is a pretty broad concept that can take be applied to almost all aspects of life, there isn't a straightforward sisu checklist. But throughout her book, Nylund does provide readers with sisu-based tips to help you use actions and strength to overcome obstacles. For example, her "top tips to help you recharge" are to:

- 
1. Truly disconnect
 2. Embrace the silence
 3. Schedule alone time

She also provides some "top tips for getting back to nature," which are to:

- 
1. Think low-key
 2. Think know-how
 3. Think preparation.

Getting into the mindset of thinking of failures and mistakes as learning opportunities and chances to improve is an important part of sisu. At the same time, though, this combination of resilience and integrity could also have another side to it; namely, stubbornness and hesitation for showing weakness or asking for help when you need it, a BBC article explains. The key to avoiding this and using sisu to your advantage, Emilia Lahti, a researcher of sisu from Aalto University in Helsinki tells the BBC, is combining sisu with compassion for yourself and others.

*Jeffrey D. Sachs, an economist and author, on money, spending, and status:
"Living doesn't cost much, but showing off does."*

Expiring vs. Permanent Skills

Robert Walter Weir was one of the most popular instructors at West Point in the mid-1800s. Which is odd at a military academy, because he taught painting and drawing.

Weir's art classes were mandatory at West Point. Art can broaden your perspective, but that wasn't the point.

Nineteenth-century West Point cadets needed to be good at drawing because cartography was in its infancy. High-quality maps of the United States – let alone, say, Mexico – were scarce, if they existed at all. Military officers were expected to draw maps on the fly and record a battlefield's topography. It wasn't a niche; it was vital to war. Weir's favorite student, who passed the time at West Point drawing river bends and mountain ranges, was Ulysses S. Grant.

West Point no longer offers drawing or painting classes. Its sole cartography course emphasizes mapping software and technology, as you might expect.

Drawing was an expiring military skill. Critical in one era, diminished in the next, unmentionable thereafter.

A lot of things work that way.

Every field has two kinds of skills:

- Expiring skills, which are vital at a given time but prone to diminishing as technology improves and a field evolves.
- Permanent skills, which were as essential 100 years ago as they are today, and will still be 100 years from now.

Both are important. But they're treated differently.

Expiring skills tend to get more attention. They're more likely to be the cool new thing, and a key driver of an industry's short-term performance. They're what employers value and employees flaunt.

Permanent skills are different. They've been around a long time, which makes them look stale and basic. They can be hard to define and quantify, which gives the impression of fortune-cookie

wisdom vs. a hard skill.

But permanent skills compound over time, which gives them quiet importance. When several previous generations have worked on a skill that's directly relevant to you, you have a deep well of relevant examples to study. And when you can spend a lifetime perfecting one skill whose importance never wanes, the payoffs can be ridiculous. Anything that compounds over decades usually is.

A few permanent skills that apply to many fields:

Not being a jerk. Being a jerk offsets being talented one for one, if not more. They don't teach this in school, but it's the single most important career skill. Part of this includes empathizing with jerks who are being jerks because they're dealing with stress.

The willingness to adapt views you wish were permanent. Accepting when expiring skills have run their course. A lot of what we believe about our fields is either right but temporary, or wrong but convincing. Sam Arbesman's book *The Half-Life of Facts* makes this uncomfortably clear. "Medical knowledge about cirrhosis or hepatitis takes about forty-five years for half of it

to be disproven or become out-of-date," he writes. "This is about twice the half-life of the actual radioisotope samarium-151."

Getting along with people you disagree with. Equally smart people can come to different conclusions. And as Larry Summers once noted, "There are idiots; look around." Some of these people can be avoided. Many can't. You have to deal with them diplomatically. People who view every disagreement as a battle that must be won before moving on end up stuck and bitter.

Getting to the point. Everyone's busy. Make your point and get out of their way.

Respecting luck as much as you respect risk. Acknowledging risk is when something happens outside of your control that influences outcomes and you realize it might happen again. Acknowledging luck is when something happens outside of our control that influences outcomes and you realize it might not happen again.

Staying out of the way as much as you offer to help. You can add as much value by getting out of people's way and minimizing your burden as you can by

actively helping. This is especially important for two groups: new employees eager to get involved, and senior managers eager to get involved.

Accepting a certain degree of hassle and nonsense when reality demands it. The ability to be comfortable being miserable. Frances Perkins, Franklin Roosevelt's Secretary of Labor, said the most remarkable thing about the president's paralysis was how little it seemed to bother him. He told her: "If you can't use your legs and they bring you milk when you wanted orange juice, you learn to say 'that's all right,' and drink it." A useful and permanent skill in a world that's constantly breaking and evolving.

The ability to distinguish "temporarily out of favor" from "wrong." Endurance is key because every industry is cyclical, and putting up with its dark days is the only way to ensure you're part of the good ones. Gracefully exiting when you realize that whatever fueled past success doesn't work anymore is also key. Warren Buffett says his favorite holding period is forever, then dumped \$7 billion worth of airline stocks based on a few weeks of data. That might look like a contradiction, but it's likely an example of being always patient but never stubborn.

Those never get old.

I'm slowly learning that even
if I react, it won't change anything,
it won't make people suddenly love
and respect me, it won't magically
change their minds. Sometimes it's
better to just let things be, let people
go, don't fight for closure, don't ask
for explanations, don't chase answers
and don't expect people to understand
where you're coming from. I'm slowly
learning that life is better lived
when you don't center it on what's
happening around you and center
it on what's happening inside you
instead. Work on yourself
and your inner peace.

-Unknown Author

Will Showering at Night Help Me Sleep?

Showering in the evening can help prepare your body to fall asleep faster.

- By Abigail Abrams

A hot morning shower can wake you up and even boost creativity, according to some research. But if you want to improve your sleep, showering at night is the way to go. Experts say there's evidence that a night shower can help you drift off, if you time it just right.

The main trick is to not start too late. "You don't want to heat yourself up right before bed," says Dr. Dianne Augelli of the Center for Sleep Medicine at New York-Presbyterian/ Weill Cornell Medical Center. That's because body temperature plays an important part in regulating circadian rhythm, which tells the body when to feel sleepy or alert. During the day, body temperature naturally rises until the late afternoon, when it reverses and begins to fall. "Cooling down is a signal that tells us we're supposed to go to sleep," she says, so interrupting this process can make it harder to fall asleep.

Showering earlier in the evening gives your body a chance to cool off and can

even trigger sleep, says Shelby Harris, a clinical psychologist in New York who specializes in behavioral sleep medicine. Several studies have shown that warming your body by taking a bath can help induce sleep when there's enough time to cool off afterward. While much of the research has focused on baths, a 20-minute shower would have similar effects, Harris says.

Time your shower so you're done about an hour and a half before you want to hit the sack, Harris recommends. That way, by the time you lay down in bed, your body will be cool, dry and ready for sleep.

As a bonus, you can fold the very important step of washing your face into your nighttime shower. According to the National Sleep Foundation, cleansing before bed can help clear your skin and reduce breakouts, guard against wrinkles and help night creams and moisturizers work more effectively.