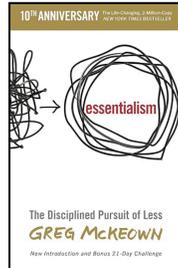


Your Kindle Notes For:



Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less

Greg Mckeown

166 Highlight(s)

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Instead of making just a millimeter of progress in a million directions he began to generate tremendous momentum towards accomplishing the things that were truly vital.

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In this example is the basic value proposition of Essentialism: only once you give yourself permission to stop trying to do it all, to stop saying yes to everyone, can you make your highest contribution towards the things that really matter.

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He believes very few things are essential. His job is to filter through that noise until he gets to the essence.

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Dieter's design criteria can be summarized by a characteristically succinct principle, captured in just three German words: Weniger aber besser. The English translation is: Less but better.

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Essentialism is not about how to get more things done; it's about how to get the right things done.

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The way of the Essentialist rejects the idea that we can fit it all in. Instead it requires us to grapple with real trade-offs and make tough decisions. In

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In other words, Essentialism is a disciplined, systematic approach for determining where our highest point of contribution lies, then making execution of those things almost effortless.

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If you don't prioritize your life, someone else will.

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Curiously, and overstating the point in order to make it, the pursuit of success can be a catalyst for failure. Put another way, success can distract us from focusing on the essential things that produce success in the first place.

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We have lost our ability to filter what is important and what isn't. Psychologists call this "decision fatigue": the more choices we are forced to make, the more the quality of our decisions deteriorates.⁵

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It is not just information overload; it is opinion overload.

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If you're not quite there, ask the killer question: "If I didn't already own this, how much would I spend to buy it?" This usually does the trick.

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We aren't looking for a plethora of good things to do. We are looking for our highest level of contribution: the right thing the right way at the right time.

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Everything changes when we give ourselves permission to be more selective in what we choose to do.

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What if the whole world shifted from the undisciplined pursuit of more to the disciplined pursuit of less...only better?

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I had chosen law school—not because I actually or actively wanted to be there, but by default. I think that’s when I first realized that when we surrender our ability to choose, something or someone else will step in to choose for us.

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Our options may be things, but a choice—a choice is an action. It is not just something we have but something we do.

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This experience brought me to the liberating realization that while we may not always have control over our options, we always have control over how we choose among them.

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To become an Essentialist requires a heightened awareness of our ability to choose.

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After all, we have been taught from a young age that hard work is key to producing results, and many of us have been amply rewarded for our productivity and our ability to muscle through every task or challenge the world throws at us. Yet, for capable people who are already working hard, are there limits to the value of hard work? Is there a point at which doing more does not produce more? Is there a point at which doing less (but thinking more) will actually produce better outcomes?

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Yet, for capable people who are already working hard, are there limits to the value of hard work? Is there a point at which doing more does not produce more? Is there a point at which doing less (but thinking more) will actually produce better outcomes?

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Working hard is important. But more effort does not necessarily yield more results. “Less but better” does.

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Think of Warren Buffett, who has famously said, “Our investment philosophy borders on lethargy.”⁵

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The overwhelming reality is: we live in a world where almost everything is worthless and a very few things are exceptionally valuable. As John Maxwell has written, “You cannot overestimate the unimportance of practically everything.”⁹

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An Essentialist, in other words, discerns more so he can do less.

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Which Problem Do I Want?

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It was an example of his Essentialist thinking at work when he said: “You have to look at every opportunity and say, ‘Well, no...I’m sorry. We’re not going to do a thousand different things that really won’t contribute much to the end result we are trying to achieve.’”

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According to Porter, “A strategic position is not sustainable unless there are trade-offs with other positions.”³ By trying to operate by two incompatible strategies they started to undermine their ability to be competitive.

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The moral of the story: ignoring the reality of trade-offs is a terrible strategy for organizations. It turns out to be a terrible strategy for people as well.

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Her story demonstrates a critical truth: we can either make the hard choices for ourselves or allow others—whether our colleagues, our boss, or our customers—to decide for us.

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A Nonessentialist approaches every trade-off by asking, “How can I do both?” Essentialists ask the tougher but ultimately more liberating question, “Which problem do I want?” An Essentialist makes trade-offs deliberately. She acts for herself rather than waiting to be acted upon. As economist Thomas Sowell wrote: “There are no solutions. There are only trade-offs.”⁷

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Instead of asking, “What do I have to give up?” they ask, “What do I want to go big on?” The cumulative impact of this small change in thinking can be profound.

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Trade-offs are not something to be ignored or decried. They are something to be embraced and made deliberately, strategically, and thoughtfully.

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Essentialists spend as much time as possible exploring, listening, debating, questioning, and thinking. But their exploration is not an end in itself. The purpose of the exploration is to discern the vital few from the trivial many.

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ESCAPE The Perks of Being Unavailable WITHOUT GREAT SOLITUDE NO SERIOUS WORK IS POSSIBLE. —Pablo Picasso

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We need space to escape in order to discern the essential few from the trivial many. Unfortunately, in our time-starved era we don't get that space by default—only by design.

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In order to have focus we need to escape to focus.

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"In that instant," Ephron recalls, "I realized that journalism was not just about regurgitating the facts but about figuring out the point. It wasn't enough to know the who, what, when, and where; you had to understand what it meant. And why it mattered." Ephron added, "He taught me something that works just as well in life as it does in journalism."¹

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The best journalists, as Friedman shared later with me, listen for what others do not hear.

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He was listening more for what was not being said. Essentialists are powerful observers and listeners. Knowing that the reality of trade-offs means they can't possibly pay attention to everything, they listen deliberately for what is not being explicitly stated. They read between the lines.

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Nonessentialists listen too. But they listen while preparing to say something. They get distracted by extraneous noise. They hyperfocus on inconsequential details. They hear the loudest voice but they get the wrong message. In their eagerness to react they miss the point.

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A journalist is, in the word's most literal sense, someone who writes a journal. Therefore, one of the most obvious and yet powerful ways to become a journalist of our own lives is simply to keep a journal.

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Capture the headline. Look for the lead in your day, your week, your life. Small, incremental changes are hard to see in the moment but over time can have a huge cumulative effect.

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By getting out there and fully exploring the problem, they were able to better clarify the question and in turn to focus on the essential details that ultimately allowed them to make the highest contribution to the problem.

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The word school is derived from the Greek word *schole*, meaning "leisure." Yet our modern school system, born in the Industrial Revolution, has removed the leisure—and much of the pleasure—out of learning.

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Play, which I would define as anything we do simply for the joy of doing rather than as a means to an end—whether

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But in fact play is essential in many ways.

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Stuart Brown, the founder of the National Institute for Play, has studied what are called the play histories of some six thousand individuals and has concluded that play has the power to significantly improve everything from personal health to relationships to education to organizations' ability to innovate.

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a researcher who has spent fifteen years studying the behavior of grizzly bears, discovered bears who played the most tended to survive the longest. When asked why, he said, "In a world continuously presenting unique challenges and ambiguity, play prepares these bears for a changing planet."⁴

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Play is fundamental to living the way of the Essentialist because it fuels exploration in at least three specific ways. First, play broadens the range of options available to us.

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Second, play is an antidote to stress, and this is key because stress, in addition to being an enemy of productivity, can actually shut down the creative, inquisitive, exploratory parts of our brain. You know how it feels: you're stressed about work and suddenly everything starts going wrong.

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Recent findings suggest this is because stress increases the activity in the part of the brain that monitors emotions (the amygdala), while reducing the activity in the part responsible for cognitive function (the hippocampus)⁷—the result being, simply, that we really can't think clearly.

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Third, as Edward M. Hallowell, a psychiatrist who specializes in brain science, explains, play has a positive effect on the executive function of the brain.

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Play stimulates the parts of the brain involved in both careful, logical reasoning and carefree, unbound exploration.

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These efforts challenge the Nonessentialist logic that play is trivial. Instead, they celebrate play as a vital driver of creativity and exploration.

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The best asset we have for making a contribution to the world is ourselves.

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If we underinvest in ourselves, and by that I mean our minds, our bodies, and our spirits, we damage the very tool we need to make our highest contribution.

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While sleep is often associated with giving rest to the body, recent research shows that sleep is really more about the brain.

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In just one example, a report from the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences revealed that even a single REM—or rapid eye movement—cycle enhanced the integration of unassociated information.

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The key is to put the decision to an extreme test: if we feel total and utter conviction to do something, then we say yes, Derek-style. Anything less gets a thumbs down. Or as a leader at Twitter once put it to me, “If the answer isn’t a definite yes then it should be a no.” It is a succinct summary of a core Essentialist principle, and one that is critical to the process of exploration.¹

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Like any Essentialist skill, it forces you to make decisions by design, rather than default.

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Making our criteria both selective and explicit affords us a systematic tool for discerning what is essential and filtering out the things that are not.

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They begin with the basic assumption that they would rather be understaffed than hire the wrong person quickly. Accordingly, when they are looking for a new employee, they have a rigorous and systematic selection process. First, they interview someone by phone. This is deliberate because they want to strip away all visual cues while forming their first impression.

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If it isn’t a clear yes, then it’s a clear no.

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Like any true Essentialist, they are trying to gather the relevant information so they can make an informed, calculated, deliberate decision.

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Here’s a simple, systematic process you can use to apply selective criteria to opportunities that come your way. First, write down the opportunity. Second, write down a list of three “minimum criteria” the options would need to “pass” in order to be considered. Third, write down a list of three ideal or “extreme criteria” the options would need to “pass” in order to be considered. By definition, if the opportunity doesn’t pass the first set of criteria, the answer is obviously no. But if it also doesn’t pass two of your three extreme criteria, the answer is still no.

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why not conduct an advanced search and ask three questions: “What am I deeply passionate about?” and “What taps my talent?” and “What meets a significant need in the world?” Naturally there won’t be as many pages to view, but that is the point of the exercise. We aren’t looking for a plethora of good things to do. We are looking for the one where we can make our absolutely highest point of contribution.

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This feeling is normal; studies have found that we tend to value things we already own more highly than they are worth, and thus find them more difficult to get rid of. If you’re not quite ready to part with that metaphorical blazer, ask the killer question: “If I didn’t already own this, how much would I spend to buy it?”

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Likewise, in your life, the killer question when deciding what activities to eliminate is: “If I didn’t have this opportunity, what would I be willing to do to acquire it?”

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You can train leaders on communication and teamwork and conduct 360 feedback reports until you are blue in the face, but if a team does not have clarity of goals and roles, problems will fester and multiply.

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In gathering data from more than five hundred people about their experience on more than one thousand teams, I have found a consistent reality: When there is a serious lack of clarity about what the team stands for and what their goals and roles are, people experience confusion, stress, and frustration.

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Likewise, five different jobs in five different industries do not add up to a forward-moving career. Without clarity and purpose, pursuing something because it is good is not good enough to make a high level of contribution. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, “The crime which bankrupts men and states is that of job-work;—declining from your main design to serve a turn here or there.”

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An essential intent, on the other hand, is both inspirational and concrete, both meaningful and measurable. Done right, an essential intent is one decision that settles one thousand later decisions. It’s like deciding you’re going to become a doctor instead of a lawyer. One strategic choice eliminates a universe of other options and maps a course for the next five, ten, or even twenty years of your life. Once the big decision is made, all subsequent decisions come into better focus.

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ASK, "HOW WILL WE KNOW WHEN WE'RE DONE?"

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That said, when it comes to achieving clarity of purpose, inspiration does matter. When we think of inspiration, we often think of lofty rhetoric. But while rhetoric can certainly inspire, we need to remember that concrete objectives have the power to elevate and inspire as well.

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The right "no" spoken at the right time can change the course of history.

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Navigating these moments with courage and grace is one of the most important skills to master in becoming an Essentialist—and one of the hardest. I did not set out to write a chapter about courage. But the deeper I have looked at the subject of Essentialism the more clearly I have seen courage as key to the process of elimination.

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The fact is, we as humans are wired to want to get along with others. After all, thousands of years ago when we all lived in tribes of hunter gatherers, our survival depended on it.

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We are worried about damaging the relationship. But these emotions muddle our clarity. They distract us from the reality of the fact that either we can say no and regret it for a few minutes, or we can say yes and regret it for days, weeks, months, or even years.

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The only way out of this trap is to learn to say no firmly, resolutely, and yet gracefully.

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Since becoming an Essentialist I have found it almost universally true that people respect and admire those with the courage of conviction to say no.

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Below are general guidelines followed by a number of specific scripts for delivering the graceful "no." SEPARATE THE DECISION FROM THE RELATIONSHIP When people ask us to do something, we can confuse the request with our relationship with them.

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Essentialists choose “no” more often than they say no. There may be a time when the most graceful way to say no is to simply say a blunt no. But whether it’s “I am flattered that you thought of me but I’m afraid I don’t have the bandwidth” or “I would very much like to but I’m overcommitted,” there are a variety of ways of refusing someone clearly and politely without actually using the word no.

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The “No” Repertoire Remember, Essentialists don’t say no just occasionally. It is a part of their regular repertoire.

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1. The awkward pause.

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The soft “no” (or the “no but”).

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E-mail is also a good way to start practicing saying “no but” because it gives you the chance to draft and redraft your “no” to make it as graceful as possible.

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3. “Let me check my calendar and get back to you.”

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4. Use e-mail bouncebacks. It is totally natural and expected to get an autoresponder when someone is traveling or out of the office. Really, this is the most socially acceptable “no” there is. People aren’t saying they don’t want to reply to your e-mail, they’re just saying they can’t get back to you for a period of time. So why limit these to vacations and holidays?

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5. Say, “Yes. What should I deprioritize?”

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6. Say it with humor.

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7. Use the words “You are welcome to X. I am willing to Y.”

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I particularly like this construct because it also expresses a respect for the other person's ability to choose, as well as your own.

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8. "I can't do it, but X might be interested."

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Tom Friel, the former CEO of Heidrick & Struggles, once said to me, "We need to learn the slow 'yes' and the quick 'no.'"

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A sense of ownership is a powerful thing. As the saying goes, nobody in the history of the world has washed their rental car!

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This is because of something called "the endowment effect," our tendency to undervalue things that aren't ours and to overvalue things because we already own them.

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Instead of asking, "How much do I value this item?" we should ask, "If I did not own this item, how much would I pay to obtain it?" We can do the same for opportunities and commitment. Don't ask, "How will I feel if I miss out on this opportunity?" but rather, "If I did not have this opportunity, how much would I be willing to sacrifice in order to obtain it?" Similarly, we can ask, "If I wasn't already involved in this project, how hard would I work to get on it?"⁷

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lifetime of exposure to the "Don't waste" rule, so that by the time we are adults we are trained to avoid appearing wasteful, even to ourselves.⁸ "Abandoning a project that you've invested a lot in feels like you've wasted everything, and waste is something we're told to avoid," Arkes said.⁹

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When asked, "Which ski trip will you go on?" more than half said they would opt for the more expensive trip, even though they would enjoy it less. Their (faulty) reasoning was that using the cheaper ticket would be wasting more money than using the expensive ticket. It's natural not to want to let go of what we wasted on a bad choice, but when we don't, we doom ourselves to keep wasting even more.

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The tendency to continue doing something simply because we have always done it is sometimes called the “status quo bias.”

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While this takes more effort it has many advantages: it efficiently allocates resources on the basis of needs rather than history, it detects exaggerated budget requests, it draws attention to obsolete operations, and it encourages people to be clearer in their purpose and how their expenses align to that project.

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Instead of trying to budget your time on the basis of existing commitments, assume that all bets are off. All previous commitments are gone. Then begin from scratch, asking which you would add today. You can do this with everything from the financial obligations you have to projects you are committed to, even relationships you are in. Every use of time, energy, or resources has to justify itself anew. If it no longer fits, eliminate it altogether.

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ask yourself, “Is this essential?”

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Even using these techniques, it’s true that “uncommitting” can be harder than simply not committing in the first place. We feel guilty saying no to something or someone we have already committed to, and let’s face it, no one likes going back on their word. Yet learning how to do so—in ways that will garner you respect for your courage, focus, and discipline—is crucial to becoming an Essentialist.

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Yet what most people don’t know is that the two awards are highly correlated: since 1981 not a single film has won Best Picture without at least being nominated for Film Editing. In fact, in about two-thirds of the cases the movie nominated for Film Editing has gone on to win Best Picture.¹

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What I mean is that a good editor is someone who uses deliberate subtraction to actually add life to the ideas, setting, plot, and characters.

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Or, as one book editor put it: “My job is to make life as effortless as possible for the reader. The goal is to help the reader have the clearest possible understanding of the most important message or takeaway.”

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The Latin root of the word decision—*cis* or *cid*—literally

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means “to cut” or “to kill.”

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“What Is an Editor?” there are “two basic questions the editor should be addressing to the author: Are you saying what you want to say? and, Are you saying it as clearly and concisely as possible?”⁷ Condensing means saying it as clearly and concisely as possible.

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But to be clear, condensing doesn’t mean doing more at once, it simply means less waste. It means lowering the ratio of words to ideas, square feet to usefulness, or effort to results.

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Thus to apply the principle of condensing to our lives we need to shift the ratio of activity to meaning. We need to eliminate multiple meaningless activities and replace them with one very meaningful activity.

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Boundaries are a little like the walls of a sandcastle. The second we let one fall over, the rest of them come crashing down.

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The Nonessentialist tends to always assume a best-case scenario. We all know those people (and many of us, myself included, have been that person) who chronically underestimate how long something will really take: “This will just take five minutes,” or “I’ll be finished with that project by Friday,” or “It will only take me a year to write my magnum opus.” Yet inevitably these things take longer; something unexpected comes up, or the task ends up being more involved than anticipated, or the estimate was simply too optimistic in the first place.

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The way of the Essentialist, on the other hand, is to use the good times to create a buffer for the bad.

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Have you ever underestimated how long a task will take? If you have, you are far from alone. The term for this very common phenomenon is the “planning fallacy.”⁶ This term, coined by Daniel Kahneman in 1979, refers to people’s tendency to underestimate how long a task will take, even when they have actually done the task before.

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One way to protect against this is simply to add a 50 percent buffer to the amount of time we estimate it will take to complete a task or project

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When Erwann works with national governments to create their risk management strategies, he suggests they start by asking five questions: (1) What risks do we face and where? (2) What assets and populations are exposed and to what degree? (3) How vulnerable are they? (4) What financial burden do these risks place on individuals, businesses, and the government budget? and (5) How best can we invest to reduce risks and strengthen economic and social resilience?¹¹

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Essentialists accept the reality that we can never fully anticipate or prepare for every scenario or eventuality; the future is simply too unpredictable. Instead, they build in buffers to reduce the friction caused by the unexpected.

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Essentialists don’t default to Band-Aid solutions. Instead of looking for the most obvious or immediate obstacles, they look for the ones slowing down progress. They ask, “What is getting in the way of achieving what is essential?”

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Essentialist simply makes a one-time investment in removing obstacles. This approach goes beyond just solving problems; it’s a method of reducing your efforts to maximize your results.

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1. BE CLEAR ABOUT THE ESSENTIAL INTENT We can’t know what obstacles to remove until we are clear on the desired outcome.

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When we don’t know what we’re really trying to achieve, all change is arbitrary. So ask yourself, “How will we know when we are done?”

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When identifying your “slowest hiker,” one important thing to keep in mind is that even activities that are “productive”—like doing research, or e-mailing people for information, or rewriting the report in order to get it perfect the first time around—can be obstacles. Remember, the desired goal is to get a draft of the report finished. Anything slowing down the execution of that goal should be questioned.

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However, at any one time there is only ever one priority; removing arbitrary obstacles can have no effect whatsoever if the primary one still doesn't budge.

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To reduce the friction with another person, apply the “catch more flies with honey” approach. Send him an e-mail, but instead of asking if he has done the work for you (which obviously he hasn't), go and see him. Ask him, “What obstacles or bottlenecks are holding you back from achieving X, and how can I help remove these?” Instead of pestering him, offer sincerely to support him. You will get a warmer reply than you would by just e-mailing him another demand.

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The Power of Small Wins EVERY DAY DO SOMETHING THAT WILL INCH YOU CLOSER TO A BETTER TOMORROW. —Doug Firebaugh

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So how well did Richmond's unconventional effort to reimagine policing work? Amazingly well, as it turned out. It took some time, but they invested in the approach as a long-term strategy, and after a decade the Positive Tickets system had reduced recidivism from 60 percent to 8 percent.

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Research has shown that of all forms of human motivation the most effective one is progress. Why? Because a small, concrete win creates momentum and affirms our faith in our further success. In his 1968 Harvard Business Review article entitled “One More Time: How Do You Motivate Employees?” among the most popular Harvard Business Review articles of all time, Frederick Herzberg reveals research showing that the two primary internal motivators for people are achievement and recognition for achievement.⁴

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Amabile and Kramer concluded that “everyday progress—even a small win” can make all the difference in how people feel and perform. “Of all the things that can boost emotions, motivation, and perceptions during a workday, the single most important is making progress in meaningful work,” they said.⁵

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As former Stanford professor and educator Henry B. Eyring has written, “My experience has taught me this about how people and organizations improve: the best place to look is for small changes we could make in the things we do often. There is power in steadiness and repetition.”⁶

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FLOW The Genius of Routine ROUTINE, IN AN INTELLIGENT MAN, IS A SIGN OF AMBITION. —W. H. Auden

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According to researchers at Duke University, nearly 40 percent of our choices are deeply unconscious.⁷

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Since going public, their stock price has never fallen below its IPO price. Ray credits this success to their highly disciplined focus on profitability.

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But as we learned in the last chapter, to get big results we must start small. So start with one change in your daily or weekly routine and then build on your progress from there.

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When he says, “win,” he’s also referring to a single question, with its apt acronym, that guides what he expects from his players: “What’s important now?”

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As he tells his players: “There is a difference between losing and being beaten. Being beaten means they are better than you. They are faster, stronger, and more talented.”

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To Larry, losing means something else. It means you lost focus. It means you didn’t concentrate on what was essential. It is all based on a simple but powerful idea: to operate at your highest level of contribution requires that you deliberately tune in to what is important in the here and now.

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Chronos is quantitative; kairos is qualitative. The latter is experienced only when we are fully in the moment—when we exist in the now.

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Getting my work done not only became more effortless but actually gave me joy. In this case, what was good for the mind was also good for the soul.

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Essentialists live their whole lives in this manner. And because they do, they can apply their full energy to the job at hand. They don't diffuse their efforts with distractions. They know that execution is easy if you work hard at it and hard if you work easy at it.

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What we can't do is concentrate on two things at the same time. When I talk about being present, I'm not talking about doing only one thing at a time. I'm talking about being focused on one thing at a time. Multitasking itself is not the enemy of Essentialism; pretending we can "multifocus" is.

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After a moment of reflection I realized that until I knew what was important right now, what was important right now was to figure out what was important right now!

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Get present in the moment and ask yourself what is most important this very second—not what's most important tomorrow or even an hour from now. If you're not sure, make a list of everything vying for your attention and cross off anything that is not important right now.

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"the pause that refreshes." This technique is easy. He stops for just a moment. He closes his eyes. He breathes in and out once: deeply and slowly. As he exhales, he lets the work issues fall away. This allows him to walk through the front door to his family with more singleness of purpose.

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attributed to Lao Tzu: "In work, do what you enjoy. In family life, be completely present."

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BEWARE THE BARRENNESS OF A BUSY LIFE. —Socrates

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We can all live a life not just of simplicity but of high contribution and meaning.

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There is a big difference between being a Nonessentialist who happens to apply Essentialist practices and an Essentialist who only occasionally slips back into some Nonessentialist practices. The question is, “Which is your major and which is your minor?”

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“As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he” (*italics added*).⁶ Once the essence of Essentialism enters our hearts, the way of the Essentialist becomes who we are. We become a different, better version of ourselves.

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While other people are living a life of stress and chaos, you will be living a life of impact and fulfillment. In many ways, to live as an Essentialist in our too-many-things-all-the-time society is an act of quiet revolution.

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I continue to discover almost daily that I can do less and less—in order to contribute more.

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Remember that if you don’t prioritize your life someone else will. But if you are determined to prioritize your own life you can. The power is yours. It is within you.

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As the Dalai Lama, another true Essentialist, has said: “If one’s life is simple, contentment has to come. Simplicity is extremely important for happiness.”

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The first is the exquisitely important role of my family in my life. At the very, very end, everything else will fade into insignificance by comparison. The second is the pathetically tiny amount of time we have left of our lives. For me this is not a depressing thought but a thrilling one. It removes fear of choosing the wrong thing. It infuses courage into my bones. It challenges me to be even more unreasonably selective about how to use this precious—and precious is perhaps too insipid of a word—time.

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But in reality one wrong hire is far costlier than being one person short. And the cost of hiring too many wrong people (and one wrong hire often leads to multiple wrong hires because the wrong person will tend to attract more wrong people) is what Guy Kawasaki called a “Bozo explosion”—a term he uses to describe what happens when a formerly great team or company descends into mediocrity.¹

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Clear intent leads to alignment; vague direction produces misalignment every time.

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The Nonessentialist disempowers people by allowing ambiguity over who is doing what. Often this is justified in the name of wanting to be a flexible or agile team. But what is actually created is a counterfeit agility.

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An Essentialist understands that clarity is the key to empowerment. He doesn't allow roles to be general and vague. He ensures that everyone on the team is really clear about what they are expected to contribute and what everyone else is contributing.

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The Nonessentialist leader is not great on accountability.

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In fact, a Nonessentialist leader may unintentionally train his people to expect no follow-up at all. In turn, the members of the team soon learn that there are no repercussions for failing, cutting corners, or prioritizing what is easy over what is important.

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Out of all virtues simplicity is my most favorite virtue.

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Look at each commitment on your calendar for the week. Ask, “If I wasn't already involved, how hard would I work to get involved now?”

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Here is what I learned: Trying too hard makes it harder to get the results you want.

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My motivation in writing this book is singular: to help you feel this way more of the time. Of course, we can't make everything in our life effortless. But we can make more of the right things less impossible. Then easier, then easy, then ultimately: effortless.