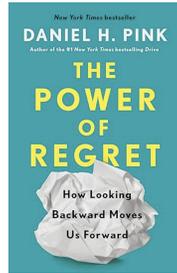


Your Kindle Notes For:



The Power of Regret: How Looking Backward Moves Us Forward

Daniel H. Pink

66 Highlight(s) | 0 Note(s)

Location: 181

Regret is not dangerous or abnormal, a deviation from the steady path to happiness. It is healthy and universal, an integral part of being human. Regret is also valuable. It clarifies. It instructs. Done right, it needn't drag us down; it can lift us up.

Location: 254

That's because negative emotions are essential, too. They help us survive. Fear propels us out of a burning building and makes us step gingerly to avoid a snake. Disgust shields us from poisons and makes us recoil from bad behavior. Anger alerts us to threats and provocations from others and sharpens our sense of right and wrong. Too much negative emotion, of course, is debilitating. But too little is also destructive.

Location: 282

Nearly all regrets fall into four core categories—foundation regrets, boldness regrets, moral regrets, and connection regrets. This deep structure, previously hidden from view, offers new insights into the human condition as well as a pathway to a good life.

Location: 409

In all, a whopping 82 percent say that this activity is at least occasionally part of their lives, making Americans far more likely to experience regret than they are to floss their teeth.[17]

Location: 585

Two decades of research on counterfactual thinking exposes an oddity: thoughts about the past that make us feel better are relatively rare, while thoughts that make us feel worse are

exceedingly common. Are we all self-sabotaging masochists? No—or at least not all of us. Instead, we are organisms programmed for survival. At Least counterfactuals preserve our feelings in the moment, but they rarely enhance our decisions or performance in the future. If Only counterfactuals degrade our feelings now, but—and this is key—they can improve our lives later.

Blue highlight | Location: 590

Regret is the quintessential upward counterfactual—the ultimate If Only. The source of its power, scientists are discovering, is that it muddles the conventional pain-pleasure calculus.[10] Its very purpose is to make us feel worse—because by making us feel worse today, regret helps us do better tomorrow.

Location: 623

1. Regret can improve decisions.

Location: 640

During their subsequent encounters, regretful negotiators expanded the size of the pie and secured themselves a larger slice. The very act of contemplating what they hadn't done previously widened the possibilities of what they could do next and provided a script for future interactions.[4]

Location: 644

Leaning into regret improves our decision-making process—because the stab of negativity slows us down. We collect more information. We consider a wider range of options. We take more time to reach a conclusion. Because we step more carefully, we're less likely to fall through cognitive trapdoors like confirmation bias.[6] One study of CEOs found that encouraging business leaders to reflect on their regrets exerted a “positive influence on their future decisions.”[7]

Location: 677

This is one of the central findings on regret: it can deepen persistence, which almost always elevates performance.

Location: 710

These Silver Emmas of science were subsequently cited much more often, and they were 21 percent more likely to produce a hit paper. The researchers concluded that it was the setback itself that supplied the fuel. The near miss likely prompted regret, which spurred reflection, which revised strategy, which improved performance.[15]

Location: 745

Sparked by this regret, she and her siblings bought their father, who's in his seventies, a subscription to StoryWorth. Each week the service sends an email that contains a single question (What was your mother like? What is your fondest childhood memory? And—yes—what regrets do you have?). The recipient responds with a story. At the end of the year, those stories are compiled into a hardcover book.

Location: 762

When we handle it properly, regret can make us better. Understanding its effects hones our decisions, boosts our performance, and bestows a deeper sense of meaning. The problem, though, is that we often don't handle it properly.

Location: 776

Thinking is for doing.[21] We act in order to survive. We think in order to act.

Location: 797

“Individuals who ruminate on their regrets are more likely to report reduced life satisfaction and to experience difficulty coping with negative life events,” concludes one paper.[25] This is especially true when regrets become repetitive. Repetitive thought can worsen regret, and regret can exacerbate repetitive thought, creating a descending spiral of pain.[26]

Blue highlight | Location: 803

When it comes to regret, a third view is healthier: Feeling is for thinking. Don't dodge emotions. Don't wallow in them either. Confront them. Use them as a catalyst for future behavior. If thinking is for doing, feeling can help us think.[27]

Location: 810

Chronic, omnipresent stress is poisonous. But occasional, acute stress is helpful, even essential.

Location: 814

Ample research shows that people who accept, rather than judge, their negative experiences end up faring better.[29]

Location: 817

Regrets that hurt deeply but dissolve quickly lead to more effective problem solving and sturdier emotional health.[30]

Blue highlight | Location: 819

The key is to use regret to catalyze a chain reaction: the heart signals the head, the head initiates action. All regrets aggravate. Productive regrets aggravate, then activate. The chart on the next page explains the process. It also demonstrates the key point: your response determines your result.

Location: 828

When feeling is for thinking, and thinking is for doing, regret is for making us better.

Location: 838

Kintsugi (which translates to “golden joinery”) considers the breaks and the subsequent repairs part of the vessel’s history, fundamental elements of its being. The bowls aren’t beautiful despite the imperfections. They’re beautiful because of the imperfections. The cracks make them better.

Location: 850

Because of the pain, she sees the rest of her life with greater urgency and purpose. “If you have a broken heart, it means you have done something big enough and important enough and valuable enough to have broken your heart.” As Mara Abbott suggests, the cracks are how the light gets in. And as we’ll see in the next section, peering through those cracks offers a glimpse of the good life.

Location: 1,083

Chomsky demonstrated that what appeared complicated and disorderly wasn’t the full story; beneath the Tower of Babel cacophony ran a common human melody. It took me a while to figure out, but I’ve discovered that regret, too, has both a surface structure and a deep structure. What’s visible and easy to describe—the realms of life such as family, education, and work—is far less significant than a hidden architecture of human motivation and aspiration that lies beneath it.

Location: 1,103

One of the most robust findings, in the academic research and my own, is that over time we are much more likely to regret the chances we didn’t take than the chances we did. Again, the surface domain—whether the risk involved our education, our work, or our love lives—doesn’t matter much.

Location: 1,107

Yet we often face choices that tempt us to take the low road. When we travel that path, we don’t always feel bad immediately. (Rationalization is such a powerful mental weapon it should require a background check.) But over time, these morally dubious decisions can gnaw at us.

Location: 1,113

Fractured or unrealized relationships with spouses, partners, parents, children, siblings, friends, classmates, and colleagues constitute the largest deep structure category of regret.

Location: 1,172

Foundation regrets sound like this: If only I'd done the work.

Location: 1,219

Compounding. It's a powerful concept, but one our grasshopper minds struggle to comprehend. Suppose I offered you a choice—\$1 million in cash today or one penny that will double in value every day for a month. Most people, experimental evidence shows, would opt for the million bucks.[4] And during the first three and a half weeks of our pact, that decision would seem wise. But after just a little more time—on day thirty—that penny would become more than \$5 million. We can explain the power of compounding with another chart, which you'll notice is essentially the mirror image of its predecessor.

Location: 1,270

Remember that what distinguishes regret from disappointment is personal responsibility.

Location: 1,275

Do you have a meager retirement account because you spent too much on frivolities or because you started your career burdened with student debt and lacking even a thin financial cushion?

Location: 1,278

is called the "fundamental attribution error." When people, especially Westerners, try to explain someone's behavior, we too often attribute the behavior to the person's personality and disposition rather than to the person's situation and context.

Location: 1,297

All deep structure regrets reveal a need and yield a lesson. With foundation regrets, the human need it lays bare is stability: we all require a basic infrastructure of educational, financial, and physical well-being that reduces psychological uncertainty and frees time and mental energy to pursue opportunity and meaning.

Location: 1,344

Regrets of boldness often begin with a voice that isn't heard.

Location: 1,368

As a card-carrying ambivert who prefers the company of quiet people, I've cheered from the sidelines when others have decried the "extrovert ideal" in Western culture.

Location: 1,386

The pain of boldness regrets is the pain of “What if?” Thomas Gilovich, Victoria Medvec, and other researchers have repeatedly found that people regret inactions more than actions—especially in the long term. “Regrettable failures to act . . . have a longer half-life than regrettable actions,” Gilovich and Medvec wrote in one of their early studies.[3] In my own American Regret Project survey, inaction regrets outnumbered action regrets by nearly two to one.

Location: 1,400

The consequences of actions are specific, concrete, and limited. The consequences of inaction are general, abstract, and unbounded. Inactions, by laying eggs under our skin, incubate endless speculation.

Location: 1,441

“It’s not the bad or stupid things I’ve done but the things I didn’t do that have caused me the most regret in life,” said Gemma West of Adelaide, Australia.

Location: 1,452

Boldness regrets, as with the Ohio man above, are often about exploration. And some of the most significant exploration, respondents said, is inward. Authenticity requires boldness. And when authenticity is thwarted, so is growth. The most telling demonstration of this point came from several dozen people from all over the world who described their regret—their failure to be bold—with the same five words: “Not being true to myself.”

Location: 1,480

All deep structure regrets reveal a need and yield a lesson. With boldness regrets, the human need is growth—to expand as a person, to enjoy the richness of the world, to experience more than an ordinary life. The lesson is plain: Speak up. Ask him out. Take that trip. Start that business. Step off the train.

Location: 1,867

“People misunderstand the consequences of social connection,” Epley and Schroeder wrote.[4] Commuters feared that reaching out would be uncomfortable for everyone, but their fears were misplaced. It wasn’t awkward at all.

Location: 1,899

As the Harvard Gazette summarized in 2017: Close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives. . . . Those ties protect people from life’s discontents, help to delay mental and physical decline, and are better predictors of long and

happy lives than social class, IQ, or even genes. That finding proved true across the board among both the Harvard men and the inner-city participants.[7]

Location: 1,905

People with strong marriages suffered less physical pain and emotional distress over the course of their lives. Individuals' close friendships were more accurate predictors of healthy aging than their cholesterol levels. Social support and connections to a community helped insulate people against disease and depression. Meanwhile, loneliness and disconnection, in some cases, were fatal.

Location: 1,924

Hundreds of people described regrets about marrying the wrong spouse or choosing a disappointing partner, but fewer than twenty respondents out of more than sixteen thousand regretted having children.[9]

Blue highlight | Location: 1,933

After eight decades, hundreds of subjects, thousands of interviews, and millions of data points, he said he could summarize the conclusion of the longest-running examination of human flourishing in five words: "Happiness is love. Full stop." [11]

Location: 1,936

In the end, the problem we contend with as people is remarkably simple. What give our lives significance and satisfaction are meaningful relationships.

Location: 1,947

All deep structure regrets reveal a need and yield a lesson. With connection regrets, the human need is love. Not love only in the romantic sense—but a broader version of love that includes attachment, devotion, and community and that encompasses parents, children, siblings, and friends. The lesson of closed doors is to do better next time. The lesson of open doors is to do something now. If a relationship you care about has come undone, place the call. Make that visit. Say what you feel. Push past the awkwardness and reach out.

Location: 1,981

A solid foundation. A little boldness. Basic morality. Meaningful connections. The negative emotion of regret reveals the positive path for living.

Location: 2,000

We feel a greater sense of urgency about ought-related regrets, so we're more likely to begin repair work—by undoing past behavior, apologizing to those we've wronged, or learning from

our mistakes.[2] “Couldas” bug us longer than “shouldas,” because we end up fixing many of the “shouldas.”[*]

Location: 2,013

As Neal Roese and Amy Summerville have written, “Regrets of inaction last longer than regrets of action in part because they reflect greater perceived opportunity.”[4]

Location: 2,019

The longer and more intriguing answer is that the differences that did emerge reinforced the centrality of opportunity as a driver of regret.

Location: 2,093

If regrets make us human, how do we enlist them to make us better, more satisfied people? The starting point is to revisit one of the key distinctions in the architecture of regret: the difference between regrets of action and regrets of inaction—between

Location: 2,122

For instance, with moral regrets, which often involve actions like bullying a weaker kid, cheating on a spouse, or insulting coworkers, one form of undoing is to apologize. Apologies, wrote the great sociologist Erving Goffman, are “admissions of blameworthiness and regret for an undesirable event that allow actors to try to obtain a pardon from audiences.”[2] If that pardon is granted, the emotional and moral debt of the past is reduced, which at least partially rebalances the ledger.

Location: 2,147

Finding a silver lining doesn’t negate the existence of a cloud. But it does offer another perspective on that cloud.

Location: 2,187

Cheryl’s best response—and the optimal response to most regrets, action and inaction alike—is to use the regret to improve the future. If we look backward with the specific intent of moving forward, we can convert our regrets into fuel for progress. They can propel us toward smarter choices, higher performance, and greater meaning. And science shows us how.

Location: 2,230

The explanation—and the reason self-disclosure is so crucial for handling regret—is that language, whether written or spoken, forces us to organize and integrate our thoughts. It converts blobby mental abstractions into concrete linguistic units. That’s a plus for negative emotions.[7]

Location: 2,238

Dissecting terrific events can diminish their terrificness.[8]

Location: 2,242

But the evidence shows that self-disclosure builds affinity much more often than it triggers judgment.

Location: 2,287

Rather than belittling or berating ourselves during moments of frustration and failure, we're better off extending ourselves the same warmth and understanding we'd offer another person. Self-compassion begins by replacing searing judgment with basic kindness. It doesn't ignore our screwups or neglect our weaknesses. It simply recognizes that "being imperfect, making mistakes, and encountering life difficulties is part of the shared human experience." [15]

Blue highlight | Location: 2,291

By normalizing negative experiences, we neutralize them. Self-compassion encourages us to take the middle road in handling negative emotions—not suppressing them, but not exaggerating or overidentifying with them either.

Location: 2,389

When we simulate looking at the problem retrospectively, from the binoculars of tomorrow rather than the magnifying glass of today, we're more likely to replace self-justification with self-improvement.[39]

Blue highlight | Location: 2,393

"subtle shifts in the language people use to refer to themselves during introspection can influence their capacity to regulate how they think, feel, and behave under stress."

Location: 2,534

Regret lotteries have been effective in changing behavior in many domains.[3] They exploit a cognitive quirk similar to "loss aversion." In general, we find the pain of losing something greater than the pleasure of gaining the equivalent thing—so we go to extraordinary (and often irrational) lengths to avoid losses.

Location: 2,549

When we envision how awful we might feel in the future if we don't act appropriately now, that negative emotion—which we simulate rather than experience—can improve our behavior.

Location: 2,568

Anticipating regret offers a convenient tool for judgment. In situations where you're unsure of your next move, ask yourself, "In the future, will I regret this decision if I don't do X?" Answer the question.

Location: 2,726

Our everyday lives consist of hundreds of decisions—some of them crucial to our well-being, many of them inconsequential. Understanding the difference can make all the difference. If we know what we truly regret, we know what we truly value. Regret—that maddening, perplexing, and undeniably real emotion—points the way to a life well lived.