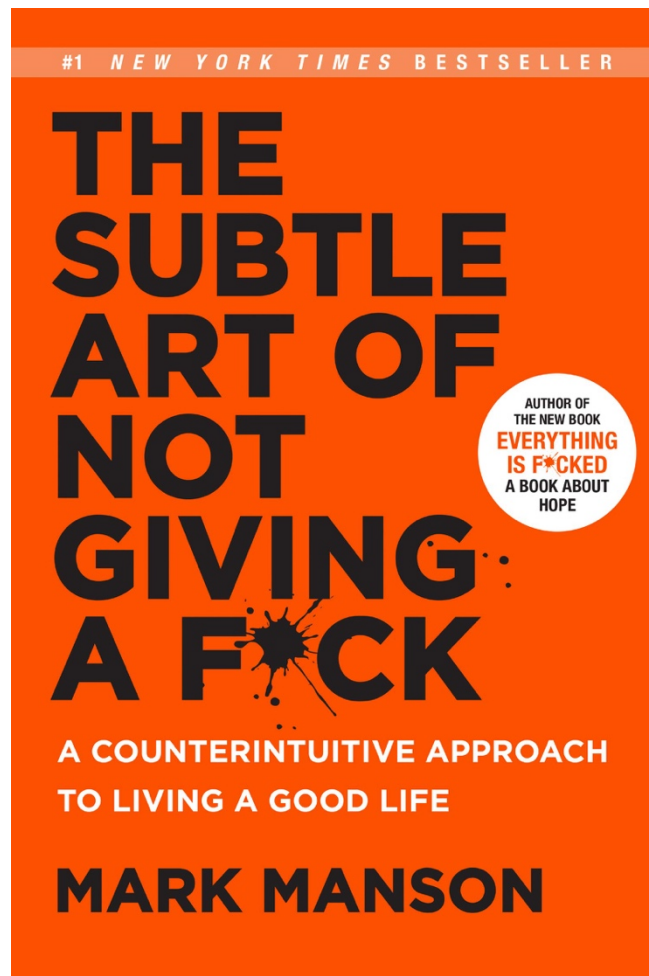


SELECTED NOTES FROM THE BOOK

THE SUBTLE ART OF NOT GIVING A F*CK

by Mark Manson



NOTES COMPILED BY JUSTIN JOHNSON

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CHAPTER 1 – DON'T TRY

Interesting story about Charles Bukowski, an alcoholic who became a writer at an old age.

“I have one of two choices – stay in the post office and go crazy... or stay out here and play at writer and starve. I have decided to starve.”

Bukowski wrote his first novel in three weeks.

“It is strange that on Bukowski’s tombstone, the epitaph reads: “Don’t try”... See, despite the book sales and the fame, Bukowski was a loser. He knew it. And his success stemmed not from some determination to be a winner, but from the fact that he *knew* he was a loser, accepted it, and then wrote honestly about it. He never tried to be anything other than what he was. The genius in Bukowski’s work was not in overcoming unbelievable odds or developing himself into a shining literary light. It was the opposite. It was his simple ability to be completely, unflinchingly honest with himself – especially the worst parts of himself – and to share his failings without hesitation or doubt.”

“Fame and success didn’t make him a better person. Nor was it by becoming a better person that he became famous and successful.”

Fame and success won’t make you a better person. And becoming a better person doesn’t mean that you’re going to be famous or successful.

“Self-improvement and success often occur together. But that doesn’t necessarily mean they’re the same thing.”

“... when you stop and really think about it, conventional life advice – all the positive and happy self-help stuff we hear all the time – is actually fixating on what you *lack*. It lasers in on *what you perceive your personal shortcomings and failures to already be*, and then emphasizes them for you. You learn about the best ways to make money *because* you feel you don’t have enough money already. You stand in front of the mirror and repeat affirmations saying that you’re beautiful *because* you feel as though you’re not beautiful already. You follow dating and relationship advice *because* you feel that you’re unlovable already. You try goofy visualization exercises about being more successful *because* you feel as though you aren’t successful enough already... Ironically, this fixation on the positive – on what’s better, what’s superior – only serves to remind us over and over again of what we are not, of what we lack, of what we should have

been but failed to be. After all, no truly happy person feels the need to stand in front of a mirror and recite that she's happy. She just *is*."

"There's a saying in Texas: 'The smallest dog barks the loudest.' A confident man doesn't feel a need to prove that he's confident. A rich woman doesn't feel a need to convince anybody that she's rich. Either you are or you are not. And if you're dreaming of something all the time, then you're reinforcing the same unconscious reality over and over; that you are *not that*."

"The world is constantly telling you that the path to a better life is more, more, more – buy more, own more, make more, fuck more, *be* more. You are constantly bombarded with messages to give a fuck about everything, all the time. Give a fuck about a new TV. Give a fuck about having a better vacation than your coworkers. Give a fuck about buying that new lawn ornament. Give a fuck about having the right kind of selfie stick... Why? My guess: because giving a fuck about more stuff is good for business... And while there's nothing wrong with good business, the problem is that giving too many fucks is bad for your mental health. It causes you to become overly attached to the superficial and fake, to dedicate your life to chasing a mirage of happiness and satisfaction. The key to a good life is not giving a fuck about more; it's giving a fuck about less, giving a fuck about only what is true and immediate and important."

The Feedback Loop from Hell

"You get anxious about confronting somebody in your life. That anxiety cripples you and you start wondering why you're so anxious. Now you're becoming *anxious about being anxious*. Oh no! Doubly anxious! Now you're anxious about your anxiety, which is causing *more* anxiety. Quick, where's the whiskey?"

"Or let's say you have an anger problem. You get pissed off at the stupidest, most inane stuff, and you have no idea why. And the fact that you get pissed off so easily starts to piss you off even more. And then, in your petty rage, you realize that being angry all the time makes you a shallow and mean person, and you hate this; you hate it so much that you get angry at yourself. Now look at you: you're angry at yourself getting angry about being angry. Fuck you, wall. Here, have a fist."

"Or you're so worried about doing the right thing all the time that you become worried about how much you're worrying. Or you feel so guilty for every mistake you make that you begin to feel guilty about how guilty you're feeling. Or you get sad and alone so often that it makes you feel even more sad and alone just thinking about it."

“Welcome to the Feedback Loop from Hell. Chances are you’ve engaged in it more than a few times. Maybe you’re engaging in it right now: “God, I do the Feedback Loop all the time – I’m such a loser for doing it. I should stop. Oh my God, I feel like such a loser for calling myself a loser. I should stop calling myself a loser. Ah, fuck! I’m doing it again! See? I’m a loser! Argh!”

“Very few animals on earth have the ability to think cogent thoughts to begin with, but we humans have the luxury of being able to have thoughts *about* our thoughts... So I can think about watching Miley Cyrus videos on YouTube, and then immediately think about what a sicko I am for wanting to watch Miley Cyrus videos on YouTube... Now here’s the problem: Our society today, through the wonders of consumer culture and hey-look-at-my-life-is-cooler-than-yours social media, has bred a whole generation of people who believe that having these negative experiences – anxiety, fear, guilt, etc. – is totally not okay. I mean, if you look at your Facebook feed, everybody there is having a fucking grand old time... Meanwhile, you’re stuck at home flossing your cat. And you can’t help but think your life sucks even more than you thought.”

“The Feedback Loop from Hell has become a borderline epidemic, making many of us overly stressed, overly neurotic, and overly self-loathing... Back in Grandpa’s day, he would feel like shit and think to himself, “Gee whiz, I sure do feel like a cow turd today. But hey, I guess that’s just life. Back to shoveling hay.” ... But now? Now if you feel like shit for even five minutes, you’re bombarded with 350 images of people *totally happy and having amazing fucking lives*, and it’s impossible to not feel like there’s something wrong with you.”

“It’s this last part that gets us into trouble. We feel bad about feeling bad. We feel guilty for feeling guilty. We get angry about getting angry. We get anxious about feeling anxious. *What is wrong with me?*”

“This is why not giving a fuck is so key. This is why it’s going to save the world. And it’s going to save it by accepting that the world is totally fucked and that’s all right, because it’s always been that way, and always will be.”

“By not giving a fuck that you feel bad, you short-circuit the Feedback Loop from Hell; you say to yourself, “I feel like shit, but who gives a fuck?” And then, as if sprinkled by magic fuck-giving fairy dust, you stop hating yourself for feeling so bad.”

“George Orwell said that to see what’s in front of one’s nose requires a constant struggle. Well, the solution to our stress and anxiety is right there in front of our noses, and we’re too busy watching porn and advertisements for ab machines that don’t work, wondering why we’re not banging a hot blonde with a rocking six-pack, to notice.”

“Stress-related health issues, anxiety disorders, and cases of depression have skyrocketed over the past thirty years, despite the fact that everyone has a flat-screen TV and can have their groceries delivered. Our crisis is no longer material; it’s existential, it’s spiritual. We have so much fucking stuff and so many opportunities that we don’t even know what to give a fuck about anymore.”

“Because there’s an infinite amount of things we can now see or know, there’s also an infinite number of ways we can discover that we don’t measure up, that we’re not good enough, that things aren’t as great as they could be. And this rips us apart inside.”

“Here’s the thing that’s wrong with all of the “How to Be Happy” shit that’s been shared eight million times on Facebook in the past few years – here’s what nobody realizes about all of this crap: **The desire for more positive experience is itself a negative experience. And paradoxically, the acceptance of one’s negative experience is itself a positive experience.**”

“Wanting positive experience is a negative experience; accepting negative experience is a positive experience. It’s what the philosopher Alan Watts used to refer to as “the backwards law” – the idea that the more you pursue feeling better all the time, the less satisfied you become, as pursuing something only reinforces the fact that you lack it in the first place. The more you desperately want to be rich, the more poor and unworthy you feel, regardless of how much money you actually make. The more you desperately want to be sexy and desired, the uglier you come to see yourself, regardless of your actual physical appearance. The more you desperately want to be happy and loved, the lonelier and more afraid you become, regardless of those who surround you. The more you want to be spiritually enlightened, the more self-centered and shallow you become in trying to get there.”

“As the existential philosopher Albert Camus said...: “You will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of. You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life.”

“Ever notice that sometimes when you care *less* about something, you do better at it? Notice how it’s often the person who is least invested in the success of something that actually ends up achieving it? Notice how sometimes when you stop giving a fuck, everything seems to fall into place?... What’s with that?”

“What’s interesting about the backwards law is that it’s called “backwards” for a reason: not giving a fuck works in reverse. If pursuing the positive *is* a negative, then pursuing the negative generates the positive. The pain you pursue in the gym results in

better all-around health and energy. The failures in business are what lead to a better understanding of what's necessary to be successful. Being open with your insecurities paradoxically makes you more confident and charismatic around others. The pain of honest confrontation is what generates the greatest trust and respect in your relationships. Suffering through your fears and anxieties is what allows you to build courage and perseverance."

"Everything worthwhile in life is won through surmounting the associated negative experience. Any attempt to escape the negative, to avoid it or quash it or silence it, only backfires. The avoidance of suffering *is* a form of suffering. The avoidance of struggle *is* a struggle. The denial of failure *is* a failure. Hiding what is shameful *is* itself a form of shame."

"Pain is an inextricable thread in the fabric of life, and to tear it out is not only impossible, but destructive: attempting to tear it out unravels everything else with it. To try to avoid pain is to give too many fucks about pain. In contrast, if you're able to not give a fuck about the pain, you become unstoppable."

"In my life, I have given a fuck about many things. I have also *not* given a fuck about many things. And like the road not taken, it was the fucks not given that made all the difference."

"The moments of non-fuckery are the moments that most define our lives. The major switch in careers; the spontaneous choice to drop out of college and join a rock band; the decision to finally dump that deadbeat boyfriend whom you caught wearing your pantyhose a few too many times."

"Most of us struggle throughout our lives by giving too many fucks in situations where fucks do not deserve to be given. We give too many fucks about the rude gas station attendant who gave us our change in nickels. We give too many fucks when a show we like was canceled on TV. We give too many fucks when our coworkers don't bother asking us about our awesome weekend."

"You and everyone you know are going to be dead soon. And in the short amount of time between here and there, you have a limited amount of fucks to give. Very few, in fact. And if you go around giving a fuck about everything and everyone without conscious thought or choice – well, then you're going to get fucked."

"There is a subtle art to not giving a fuck. And though the concept may sound ridiculous and I may sound like an asshole, what I'm talking about here is essentially learning how to focus and prioritize your thoughts effectively – how to pick and choose

what matters to you and what does not matter to you based on finely honed personal values.”

“... when you give too many fucks – when you give a fuck about everyone and everything – you will feel that you’re perpetually entitled to be comfortable and happy at all times, that everything is supposed to be just exactly the fucking way *you* want it to be. This is a sickness. And it will eat you alive. You will see every adversity as an injustice, every challenge as a failure, every inconvenience as a personal slight, every disagreement as a betrayal. You will be confined to your own petty, skull-sized head, burning with entitlement and bluster, running circles around your very own personal Feedback Loop from Hell, in constant motion yet arriving nowhere.”

The Subtle Art of Not Giving a Fuck

“When most people envision giving no fucks whatsoever, they imagine a kind of serene indifference to everything, a calm that weathers all storms. They imagine and aspire to be a person who is shaken by nothing and caves in to no one... There’s a name for a person who finds no emotion or meaning in anything: a psychopath. Why you would want to emulate a psychopath, I have no fucking clue... So what *does* not giving a fuck mean? Let’s look at three “subtleties” that should help clarify the matter.”

Subtlety #1: Not giving a fuck does not mean being indifferent; it means being comfortable with being different.

“... indifferent people often attempt to be indifferent because in reality they give way too many fucks. They give a fuck about what everyone thinks of their hair, so they never bother washing or combing it. They give a fuck about what everyone thinks of their ideas, so they hide behind sarcasm and self-righteous snark. They’re afraid to let anyone get close to them, so they imagine themselves as some special, unique snowflake who has problems that nobody else would ever understand.”

“Indifferent people are afraid of the world and the repercussions of their own choices. That’s why they don’t make any meaningful choices. They hide in a gray, emotionless pit of their own making, self-absorbed and self-pitying, perpetually distracting themselves from this unfortunate thing demanding their time and energy called life.”

“... here’s the sneaky truth about life. There’s no such thing as not giving a fuck. *You must give a fuck about something.* It’s part of our biology to always care about something and therefor to always give a fuck... The question, then, is, *What* do we give a fuck about? What are we *choosing* to give a fuck about? And how can we not give a fuck about what ultimately does not matter?”

“This illustrated the first subtlety of not giving a fuck. When we say, “Damn, watch out, Mark Manson just don’t give a fuck,” we don’t mean that Mark Manson doesn’t care about *anything*; on the contrary, we mean that Mark Manson doesn’t care about adversity in the face of his goals, he doesn’t care about pissing some people off to do what he feels is right or important or noble. We mean that Mark Manson is the type of guy who would write about himself in third person just because he thought it was the right thing to do. He just doesn’t give a fuck... This is what is so admirable. No, not me, dumbass – the overcoming adversity stuff, the willingness to be different, an outcast, a pariah, all for the sake of one’s own values. The willingness to stare failure in the face and shove your middle finger back at it. The people who don’t give a fuck about adversity or failure or embarrassing themselves or shitting the bed a few times. The people who just laugh and then do what they believe in anyway. Because they know it’s right. They know it’s more important than they are, more important than their own feelings and their own pride and their own ego. They say, “Fuck it,” not to everything in life, but rather to everything *unimportant* in life. They reserve their fucks for what truly matters. Friends. Family. Purpose... And because of that, because they reserve their fucks for only the big things that matter, people give a fuck about them in return.”

“... here’s another sneaky little truth about life. You can’t be an important and life-changing presence for some people without also being a joke and an embarrassment to others. You just can’t. Because there’s no such thing as a lack of adversity. It doesn’t exist. The old saying goes that no matter where you go, there you are. Well, the same is true for adversity and failure. No matter where you go, there’s a five-hundred-pound load of shit waiting for you. And that’s perfectly fine. The point isn’t to get away from the shit. The point is to find the shit you enjoy dealing with.”

Subtlety #2: To not give a fuck about adversity, you must first give a fuck about something more important than adversity.

“The problem with people who hand out fucks like ice cream at a goddamn summer camp is that they don’t have anything more fuck-worthy to dedicate their fucks to.”

“If you find yourself consistently giving too many fucks about trivial shit that bothers you – your ex-boyfriend’s new Facebook picture, how quickly the batteries die in the TV remote, missing out on yet another two-for-one sale on hand sanitizer – chances are you don’t have much going on in your life to give a legitimate fuck about. And that’s your real problem.”

“I once heard an artist say that when a person has no problems, the mind automatically finds a way to invent some. I think what most people – especially educated, pampered

middle-class white people – consider “life-problems” are really just side effects of not having anything more important to worry about.”

“... finding something important and meaningful in your life is perhaps the most productive use of your time and energy. Because if you don’t find that meaningful something, your fucks will be given to meaningless and frivolous causes.”

Subtlety #3: Whether you realize it or not, you are always choosing what to give a fuck about.

“When we’re young, everything is new and exciting, and everything seems to matter so much. Therefore, we give tons of fucks. We give a fuck about everything and everyone – about what people are saying about us, about whether that cute boy/girl called us back or not, about whether our socks match or not, or what color our birthday balloon is... As we get older, with the benefit of experience (and having seen so much time slip by), we begin to notice that most of these sorts of things have little lasting impact on our lives. Those people whose opinions we cared about so much before are no longer present in our lives. Rejections that were painful in the moment have actually worked out for the best. We realize how little attention people pay to the superficial details about us, and we choose not to obsess so much over them... Essentially, we become more selective about the fucks we’re willing to give. This is something called maturity. It’s nice; you should try it sometime. Maturity is what happens when one learns to only give a fuck about what’s truly fuck-worthy.”

“Then, as we grow older and enter middle age, something else begins to change. Our energy level drops. Our identity solidifies. We know who we are and we accept ourselves, including some of the parts we aren’t thrilled about... And, in a strange way, this is liberating. We no longer need to give a fuck about everything. Life is just what it is. We accept it, warts and all. We realize that we’re never going to cure cancer or go to the moon or feel Jennifer Aniston’s tits. And that’s okay. Life goes on. We now reserve our ever-dwindling fucks for the most truly fuck-worthy parts of our lives: our families, our best friends, our golf swing. And, to our astonishment, *this is enough*. This simplification actually makes us really fucking happy on a consistent basis.”

So Mark, What the Fuck is the Point of This Book Anyway?

“I believe that today we’re facing a psychological epidemic, one in which people no longer realize it’s okay for things to suck sometimes.”

“... when we believe that it’s not okay for things to suck sometimes, then we unconsciously start blaming ourselves. We start to feel as though something is

inherently wrong with us, which drives us to all sorts of overcompensation, like buying forty pairs of shoes or downing Xanax with a vodka chaser on a Tuesday night or shooting up a school bus full of kids.”

“The belief that it’s not okay to be inadequate sometimes is the source of the growing Feedback Loop from Hell that is coming to dominate our culture.”

“... practical enlightenment... not that airy-fairy, eternal bliss, end-of-all-suffering, bullshit kind of enlightenment... I see practical enlightenment as becoming comfortable with the idea that some suffering is always inevitable – that no matter what you do, life is comprised of failures, loss, regrets, and even death. Because once you become comfortable with all the shit that life throws at you (and it will throw a lot of shit, trust me), you become invincible in a sort of low-level spiritual way. After all, the only way to overcome pain is to first learn how to bear it.”

“... greatness is merely an illusion in our minds, a made-up destination that we obligate ourselves to pursue, our own psychological Atlantis.”

“... moving lightly despite your heavy burdens, resting easier with your greatest fears, laughing at your tears as you cry them.”

Learn how to lose and let go.

“... take inventory of your life and scrub out all but the most important items.”

CHAPTER 2 – HAPPINESS IS A PROBLEM

About twenty-five hundred years ago, in the Himalayan foothills of present-day Nepal, there lived in a great palace a king who was going to have a son. For this son the king had a particularly good idea: he would make the child's life perfect. The child would never know a moment of suffering – every need, every desire, would be accounted for at all times.

The king built high walls around the palace that prevented the prince from knowing the outside world. He spoiled the child, lavishing him with food and gifts, surrounding him with servants who catered to his every whim. And just as planned, the child grew up ignorant of the routine cruelties of human existence.

All of the prince's childhood went on like this. But despite endless luxury and opulence, the prince became kind of a pissed-off young man. Soon, every experience felt empty and valueless. The problem was that no matter what his father gave him, it never seemed enough, never *meant* anything.

So late one night, the prince snuck out of the palace to see what was beyond its walls. He had a servant drive him through the local village, and what he saw horrified him.

For the first time in his life, the prince saw human suffering. He saw sick people, old people, homeless people, people in pain, even people dying.

The prince returned to the palace and found himself in a sort of existential crisis. Not knowing how to process what he'd seen, he got all emo about everything and complained a lot. And, as is typical of young men, the prince ended up blaming his father for the very things his father had tried to do for him. It was the riches, the prince thought, that had made him so miserable, that had made life seem so meaningless. He decided to run away.

But the prince was more like his father than he knew. He had grand ideas too. He wouldn't just run away; he would give up his royalty, his family, and all of his possessions and live in the streets, sleeping in the dirt like an animal. There he would starve himself, torture himself, and beg for scraps of food from strangers for the rest of his life.

The next night, the prince snuck out of the palace again, this time never to return. For years he lived as a bum, a discarded and forgotten remnant of society, the dog shit caked to the bottom of the social totem pole. And as planned, the prince suffered greatly. He suffered through disease, hunger, pain, loneliness, and decay. He confronted the brink of death itself, often limited to eating a single nut each day.

A few years went by. Then a few more. And then... nothing happened. The prince began to notice that this life of suffering wasn't all that it was cracked up to be. It wasn't bringing him the insight he had desired. It wasn't revealing any deeper mystery of the world or its ultimate purpose.

In fact, the prince came to know what the rest of us have always kind of known: that suffering totally sucks. And it's not necessarily that meaningful either. As with being rich, there is no value in suffering when it's done without purpose. And soon the prince came to the conclusion that his grand idea, like his father's, was in fact a terrible fucking idea and he should probably go do something else instead.

Totally confused, the prince cleaned himself up and went and found a big tree near a river. He decided that he would sit under that tree and not get up until he came up with another grand idea.

As the legend goes, the confused prince sat under that tree for forty-nine days. We won't delve into the biological viability of sitting in the same spot for forty-nine days, but let's just say that in that time the prince came to a number of profound realizations.

One of those realizations was this: that life itself is a form of suffering. The rich suffer because of their riches. The poor suffer because of their poverty. People without a family suffer because they have no family. People with a family suffer because of their family. People who pursue worldly pleasures suffer because of their worldly pleasures. People who abstain from worldly pleasures suffer because of their abstention.

This isn't to say that all suffering is equal. Some suffering is certainly more painful than other suffering. But we all must suffer nonetheless.

Years later, the prince would build his own philosophy and share it with the world, and this would be its first and central tenet: that pain and loss are inevitable and we should let go of trying to resist them. The prince would later become known as the Buddha. And in case you haven't heard of him, he was kind of a big deal.

There is a premise that underlies a lot of our assumptions and beliefs. The premise is that happiness is algorithmic, that it can be worked for and achieved as if it were getting accepted to law school or building a really complicated Lego set. If I achieve X, then I can be happy. If I look like Y, then I can be happy. If I can be with a person like Z, then I can be happy.

This premise, though, *is the problem*. Happiness is not a solvable equation. Dissatisfaction and unease are inherent parts of human nature and, as we'll see, necessary components to creating consistent happiness.

"... life itself is a form of suffering. The rich suffer because of their riches. The poor suffer because of their poverty. People without a family suffer because they have no family. People with a family suffer because of their family. People who pursue worldly pleasures suffer because of their worldly pleasures. People who abstain from worldly pleasures suffer because of their abstention."

"This isn't to say that all suffering is equal. Some suffering is certainly more painful than other suffering. But we all must suffer nonetheless."

“... pain and loss are inevitable and we should let go of trying to resist them.”

“Happiness is not a solvable equation. Dissatisfaction and unease are inherent parts of human nature and, as we’ll see, necessary components to creating consistent happiness.”

“... making a lot of money makes you feel good, but it won’t make your kids love you.”

“If you have to ask yourself if you trust your wife, then you probably don’t.”

“What you consider ‘friendship’ is really just your constant attempts to impress people.”

“... the greatest truths in life are usually the most unpleasant to hear.”

“We suffer for the simple reason that suffering is biologically useful. It is nature’s preferred agent for inspiring change. We have evolved to always live with a certain degree of dissatisfaction and insecurity, because it’s the mildly dissatisfied and insecure creature that’s going to do the most work to innovate and survive. We are wired to become dissatisfied with whatever we have and satisfied by only what we do not have. This constant dissatisfaction has kept our species fighting and striving, building and conquering.”

“... our own pain and misery aren’t a bug of human evolution; they’re a feature.”

“Pain, in all of its forms, is our bodies most effective means of spurring action.”

“... pain, as much as we hate it, *is* useful. Pain is what teaches us what to pay attention to when we’re young or careless. It helps show us what’s good for us versus what’s bad for us. It helps us understand and adhere to our own limitations. It teaches us to not fuck around near hot stoves or stick metal objects into electrical sockets. Therefore, it’s not always beneficial to avoid pain and seek pleasure, since pain can, at times, be life-or-death important to our well-being.”

“But pain is not merely physical... Research has found that our brains don’t register much difference between physical pain and psychological pain... Like physical pain, our psychological pain is an indication of something out of equilibrium, some limitation that has been exceeded. And like our physical pain, our psychological pain is not necessarily always bad or even undesirable. In some cases, experiencing emotional or psychological pain can be healthy or necessary. Just like stubbing our toe teaches us to walk into fewer tables, the emotional pain of rejection or failure teaches us how to

avoid making the same mistakes in the future... This is what's so dangerous about a society that coddles itself more and more from the inevitable discomforts of life: we lose the benefits of experiencing healthy doses of pain, a loss that disconnects us from the reality of the world around us."

"... problems don't end... problems never fucking go away... they just improve... Warren Buffet's got money problems; the drunk hobo down at Kwik-K Mart's got money problems. Buffet's just got *better* money problems than the hobo. All of life is like this."

"Life is essentially an endless series of problems... The solution to one problem is merely the creation of the next one."

"Don't hope for a life without problems... There's no such thing. Instead, hope for a life full of good problems."

Happiness Comes from Solving Problems

"Problems never stop; they merely get exchanged and/or upgraded."

"Happiness comes from solving problems. The keyword here is "solving." If you're avoiding your problems or feel like you don't have any problems, then you're going to make yourself miserable. If you feel like you have problems that you can't solve, you will likewise make yourself miserable. The secret sauce is in the *solving* of the problems, not in not having problems in the first place."

"To be happy we need something to solve. Happiness is therefore a form of action; it's an activity, not something that is passively bestowed upon you, not something that you magically discover in a top-ten article on the Huffington Post or from any specific guru or teacher. It doesn't magically appear when you finally make enough money to add on that extra room to the house. You don't find it waiting for you in a place, an idea, a job – or even a book, for that matter... Happiness is a constant work-in-progress, because solving problems is a constant work-in-progress – the solutions to today's problems will lay the foundation for tomorrow's problems, and so on. True happiness occurs only when you find the problems you enjoy having and enjoy solving."

Whatever your problems are, the concept is the same: solve problems; be happy. Unfortunately, for many people, life doesn't feel that simple. That's because they fuck things up in at least one of two ways:

1. *Denial*. Some people deny that their problems exist in the first place. And because they deny reality, they must constantly delude or distract themselves

from reality. This may make them feel good in the short term, but it leads to a life of insecurity, neuroticism, and emotional repression.

2. *Victim Mentality*. Some choose to believe that there is nothing they can do to solve their problems, even when they in fact could. Victims seek to blame others for their problems or blame outside circumstances. This may make them feel better in the short term, but it leads to a life of anger, helplessness, and despair.

“People deny and blame others for their problems for the simple reason that it’s easy and feels good, while solving problems is hard and often feels bad. Forms of blame and denial give us a quick high. They are a way to temporarily escape our problems, and that escape can provide us a quick rush that makes us feel better.”

“Highs come in many forms. Whether it’s a substance like alcohol, the moral righteousness that comes from blaming others, or the thrill of some new risky adventure, highs are shallow and unproductive ways to go about one’s life. Much of the self-help world is predicated on peddling highs to people rather than solving legitimate problems. Many self-help gurus teach you new forms of denial and pump you up with exercises that feel good in the short term, while ignoring the underlying issue. Remember, nobody who is actually happy has to stand in front of a mirror and tell himself that he’s happy.”

“Highs also generate addiction. The more you rely on them to feel better about your underlying problems, the more you will seek them out. In this sense, almost anything can become addictive, depending on the motivation behind using it. We all have our chosen methods to numb the pain of our problems, and in moderate doses there is nothing wrong with this. But the longer we avoid and the longer we numb, the more painful it will be when we finally do confront our issues.”

Emotions Are Overrated

“Emotions evolved for one specific purpose: to help us live and reproduce a little bit better. That’s it. They’re feedback mechanisms telling us that something is either likely right or likely wrong for us – nothing more, nothing less.”

“Much as the pain of touching a hot stove teaches you not to touch it again, the sadness of being alone teaches you not to do the things that made you feel so alone again. Emotions are simply biological signals designed to nudge you in the direction of beneficial change.”

“Emotions are simply biological signals designed to nudge you in the direction of beneficial change.”

“... when it comes down to it, if you feel crappy it’s because your brain is telling you that there’s a problem that’s unaddressed or unresolved. In other words, negative emotions are a *call to action*. When you feel them, it’s because you’re supposed to *do something*. Positive emotions, on the other hand, are rewards for taking the proper action.”

“Emotions are part of the equation of our lives, but not the *entire* equation. Just because something feels good doesn’t mean it *is* good. Just because something feels bad doesn’t mean it *is* bad. Emotions are merely signposts, *suggestions* that our neurobiology gives us, not commandments. Therefore, we shouldn’t always trust our own emotions. In fact, I believe we should make a habit of questioning them.”

“Decision-making based on emotional intuition, without the aid of reason to keep it in line, pretty much always sucks. You know who bases their entire lives on their emotions? Three-year-old kids. And dogs. You know what else three-year-olds and dogs do? Shit on the carpet.”

“... emotions never last. Whatever makes us happy today will no longer make us happy tomorrow, because our biology always needs something more. A fixation on happiness inevitably amounts to a never-ending pursuit of “something else” – a new house, a new relationship, another child, another pay raise. And despite all of our sweat and strain, we end up feeling eerily similar to how we started: inadequate... Psychologists sometimes refer to this concept as the “hedonic treadmill”: the idea that we’re always working hard to change our life situation, but we actually never feel very different.”

“... our problems are recursive and unavoidable. The person you marry is the person you fight with. The house you buy is the house you repair. The dream job you take is the job you stress over. Everything comes with an inherent sacrifice – whatever makes us feel good will also inevitably make us feel bad. What we gain is also what we lose. What creates our positive experiences will define our negative experiences.”

“We *like* the idea that there’s some form of ultimate happiness that can be attained. We *like* the idea that we can alleviate all of our suffering permanently. We *like* the idea that we can feel fulfilled and satisfied with our lives forever... But we cannot.”

Choose Your Struggle

“Everybody enjoys what feels good. Everyone wants to live a carefree, happy, and easy life, to fall in love and have amazing sex and relationships, to look perfect and make money and be popular and well-respected and admired and a total baller to the point that people part like the Red Sea when they walk into the room... Everybody wants that. It’s easy to want that... A more interesting question, a question that most people never consider is, “What *pain* do you want in your life? What are you willing to struggle for?” Because that seems to be a greater determinant of how our lives turn out.”

“... most people want to get the corner office and make a boatload of money – but not many people want to suffer through sixty-hour workweeks, long commutes, obnoxious paperwork, and arbitrary corporate hierarchies to escape the confines of an infinite cubicle hell... Most people want to have great sex and an awesome relationship, but not everyone is willing to go through the tough conversations, the awkward silences, the hurt feelings, and the emotional psychodrama to get there. And so they settle. They settle and wonder, “What if?” for years and years, until the question morphs from “What if?” into “What else?” And when the lawyers go home and the alimony check is in the mail, they say, “What for?” If not for their lowered standards and expectations twenty years prior, then what for?”

“... happiness requires struggle. It grows from problems. Joy doesn’t just sprout out of the ground like daisies and rainbows. Real, serious, lifelong fulfillment and meaning have to be earned through the choosing and managing of our struggles.”

“You can’t win if you don’t play.”

“What determines your success isn’t, “What do you want to enjoy?” The relevant question is, “What pain do you want to sustain?” ... You have to choose something. You can’t have a pain-free life. It can’t all be roses and unicorns all the time.”

“What is the pain that you want to sustain?”

You can’t just be in love with the results of getting better. You need to fall in love with the process.

Don’t just sit around imagining the summit. Fall in love with the climb.

“Who you are is defined by what you’re willing to struggle for. People who *enjoy* the struggles of a gym are the ones who run triathlons and have chiseled abs and can bench-press a small house. People who *enjoy* long workweeks and the politics of the corporate ladder are the ones who fly to the top of it. People who *enjoy* the stresses and

uncertainties of the starving artist lifestyle are ultimately the ones who live it and make it.”

“Our struggles determine our successes.”

“It’s a never-ending upward spiral. And if you think at any point you’re allowed to stop climbing, I’m afraid you’re missing the point. Because the joy is in the climb itself.”

Some people want the reward without the struggle; the result and not the process; the victory without the fight. But life doesn’t work that way. Who we are is defined by what we’re willing to struggle for. Our struggles determine our successes.

CHAPTER 3 – YOU ARE NOT SPECIAL

Sometime in the 1960s, developing “high self-esteem” – having positive thoughts and feelings about oneself – became all the rage in psychology. Research found that people who *thought* highly about themselves generally performed better and caused fewer problems. Many researchers and policymakers at the time came to believe that raising a population’s self-esteem could lead to some tangible social benefits: lower crime, better academic records, greater employment, lower budget deficits. As a result, beginning in the next decade, the 1970s, self-esteem practices began to be taught to parents, emphasized by therapists, politicians, and teachers, and instituted into educational policy. Grade inflation, for example, was implemented to make low-achieving kids feel better about their lack of achievement. Participation awards and bogus trophies were invented for any number of mundane and expected activities. Kids were given inane homework assignments, like writing down all the reasons why they thought they were special, or the five things they liked most about themselves. Pastors and ministers told their congregations that they were each uniquely special in God’s eyes, and were destined to excel and not be average. Business and motivational seminars cropped up chanting the same paradoxical mantra: every single one of us can be exceptional and massively successful.

But it’s a generation later and the data is in: we’re *not* all exceptional. It turns out that merely feeling good about yourself doesn’t really mean anything unless you have a *good reason* to feel good about yourself. It turns out that adversity and failure are actually useful and even necessary for developing strong-minded and successful adults. It turns out that teaching people to believe they’re exceptional and to feel good about themselves no matter what doesn’t lead to a population full of Bill Gateses and Martin Luther Kings.

“The problem with the self-esteem movement is that it measured self-esteem by how positively people felt about themselves. But a true and accurate measurement of one’s self-worth is how people feel about the *negative* aspects of themselves.”

Entitled people feel as though they deserve good things without actually earning them.

Entitled people can become so fixated on feeling good about themselves that they manage to delude themselves into believing that they are accomplishing great things even when they’re not.

“Entitled people exude a delusional degree of self-confidence. This confidence can be alluring to others, at least for a little while. In some instances, the entitled person’s delusional level of confidence can become contagious and help people around the entitled person feel more confident in themselves too... But the problem with

entitlement is that it makes people *need* to feel good about themselves all the time, even at the expense of those around them. And because entitled people always need to feel good about themselves, they end up spending most of their time thinking about themselves. After all, it takes a lot of energy and work to convince yourself that your shit doesn't stink, especially when you've been living in a toilet."

"Once people have developed the thought pattern to constantly construe what happens around them as self-aggrandizing, it's extremely hard to break them out of it. Any attempt to reason with them is seen as simply another "threat" to their superiority by another person who "can't handle" how smart/talented/good-looking/successful they are."

"Entitlement closes in upon itself in a kind of narcissistic bubble, distorting anything and everything in such a way as to reinforce itself. People who feel entitled view every occurrence in their life as either an affirmation of, or a threat to, their own greatness. If something good happens to them, it's because of some amazing feat they accomplished. If something bad happens to them, it's because somebody is jealous and trying to bring them down a notch. Entitlement is impervious. People who are entitled delude themselves into whatever feeds their sense of superiority. They keep their mental façade standing at all costs, even if it sometimes requires being physically or mentally abusive to those around them."

"The true measurement of self-worth is not how a person feels about her *positive* experiences, but rather how she feels about her *negative* experiences."

"A person who actually has a high self-worth is able to look at the negative parts of his character frankly – "Yes, sometimes I'm irresponsible with money," "Yes, sometimes I exaggerate my own success," "Yes, I rely too much on others to support me and should be more self-reliant" – and then acts to improve on them. But entitled people, because they are incapable of acknowledging their own problems openly and honestly, are incapable of improving their lives in any lasting and meaningful way."

"My parents are good people. I don't blame them for any of this (not anymore, at least). And I love them very much. They have their own stories and their own journeys and their own problems, just as all parents do. And just as all of *their* parents do, and so on. And like all parents, my parents, with the best of intentions, imparted some of their problems to me, as I probably will to my kids."

"When "real traumatic shit" like this happens in our lives, we begin to unconsciously feel as though we have problems that we're incapable of ever solving. And this assumed inability to solve our problems causes us to feel miserable and helpless... But it also

causes something else to happen. If we have problems that are unsolvable, our unconscious figures that we're either uniquely special or uniquely defective in some way. That we're somehow unlike everyone else and that the rules must be different for us... Put simply: we become entitled."

The deeper the pain, the more helpless we feel against our problems, and the more entitlement we adopt to compensate for those problems. This entitlement plays out in one of two ways:

1. I'm awesome and the rest of you all suck, so I deserve special treatment.
2. I suck and the rest of you are all awesome, so I deserve special treatment.

Opposite mindset on the outside, but the same selfish creamy core in the middle. In fact, you will often see entitled people flip back and forth between the two. Either they're on top of the world or the world is on top of them, depending on the day of the week, or how well they're doing with their particular addiction at that moment.

"What most people don't correctly identify as entitlement are those people who perpetually feel as though they're inferior and unworthy of the world... Because construing everything in life so as to make yourself out to be constantly victimized requires just as much selfishness as the opposite. It takes just as much energy and delusional self-aggrandizement to maintain the belief that one has insurmountable problems as that one has no problems at all... The truth is that there's no such thing as a personal problem. If you've got a problem, chances are millions of other people have had it in the past, have it now, and are going to have it in the future. Likely people you know too. That doesn't minimize the problem or mean that it shouldn't hurt. It doesn't mean you aren't legitimately a victim in some circumstances... It just means that you're not special."

"Often it's this realization – that you and your problems are actually *not* privileged in their severity or pain – that is the first and most important step toward solving them."

"The more freedom we're given to express ourselves, the more we want to be free of having to deal with anyone who may disagree with us or upset us. The more exposed we are to opposing viewpoints, the more we seem to get upset that those other viewpoints exist. The easier and more problem-free our lives become, the more we seem to feel entitled for them to get even better."

“We’re all, for the most part, pretty average people. But it’s the extremes that get all of the publicity. We kind of know this already, but we rarely think and/or talk about it, and we certainly never discuss why this could be a problem.”

“All day, every day, we are flooded with the truly extraordinary. The best of the best. The worst of the worst. The greatest physical feats. The funniest jokes. The most upsetting news. The scariest threats. Nonstop... Our lives today are filled with information from the extremes... The vast majority of life is *unextraordinary*, indeed quite average... The flood of extreme information has conditioned us to believe that exceptionalism is the new normal. And because we’re all quite average most of the time, the deluge of exceptional information drives us to feel pretty damn insecure and desperate, because clearly we’re somehow not good enough. So more and more we feel the need to compensate through entitlement and addiction. We cope the only way we know how: either through self-aggrandizing or through other-aggrandizing.”

“... the pervasiveness of technology and mass marketing is screwing up a lot of people’s expectations for themselves. The inundation of the exceptional makes people feel worse about themselves, makes them feel that they need to be more extreme, more radical, and more self-assured to get noticed or even matter.”

“This constant stream of unrealistic media dogpiles onto our existing feelings of insecurity, by overexposing us to the unrealistic standards we fail to live up to. Not only do we feel subjected to unsolvable problems, but we feel like losers because a simple Google search shows us thousands of people without those same problems... Technology has solved old economic problems by giving us new psychological problems. The Internet has not just open-sourced information; it has also open-sourced insecurity, self-doubt, and shame.”

B-b-b-but, If I’m Not Going to Be Special or Extraordinary, What’s the Point?

“The fact that this statement is inherently contradictory – after all, if *everyone* were extraordinary, then by definition *no one* would be extraordinary – is missed by most people. And instead of questioning what we actually deserve or don’t deserve, we eat the message up and ask for more.”

“When a culture’s standard of success is to “be extraordinary,” it then becomes better to be at the extreme low end of the bell curve than to be in the middle, because at least there you’re still special and deserve attention. Many people choose this strategy: to prove to everyone that they are the most miserable, or the most oppressed, or the most victimized.”

“Once you accept the premise that a life is worthwhile only if it is truly notable and great, then you basically accept the fact that most of the human population (including yourself) sucks and is worthless. And this mindset can quickly turn dangerous, to both yourself and others.”

“The rare people who do become truly exceptional at something do so not because they believe they’re exceptional... They become amazing because they’re obsessed with improvement. And that obsession with improvement stems from an unerring belief that they are, in fact, not that great at all. It’s *anti*-entitlement. People who become great at something become great because they understand that they’re not already great – they are mediocre, they are average – and that they could be so much better.”

“... the knowledge and acceptance of your own mundane existence will actually free you to accomplish what you truly wish to accomplish, without judgment or lofty expectations.”

CHAPTER 4 – THE VALUE OF SUFFERING

“If suffering is inevitable, if our problems in life are unavoidable, then the question we should be asking is not “How do I stop suffering?” but “*Why* am I suffering – for what purpose?”

The Self-Awareness Onion

“Self-awareness is like an onion. There are multiple layers to it, and the more you peel them back, the more likely you’re going to start crying at inappropriate times.”

“... the first layer of the self-awareness onion is a simple understanding of one’s emotions. “This is when I feel happy.” “This makes me feel said.” “This gives me hope.” ... “

“We all have emotional blind spots. Often they have to do with emotions that we were taught were inappropriate growing up.”

“The second layer of the self-awareness onion is an ability to ask *why* we feel certain emotions... Such questions are important because they illuminate what we consider success and failure. Why do you feel angry? Is it because you failed to achieve some goal? Why do you feel lethargic and uninspired? Is it because you don’t think you’re good enough? ... This layer of questioning helps us understand the root cause of the emotions that overwhelm us. Once we understand that root cause, we can ideally do something to change it.”

“The third level is our personal values: *Why* do I consider this to be success/failure? How am I choosing to measure myself? By what standard am I judging myself and everyone around me?”

“...our values determine the nature of our problems, and the nature of our problems determines the quality of our lives.”

“Most people are horrible at answering these *why* questions accurately, and this prevents them from achieving a deeper knowledge of their own values.”

“Honest self-questioning is difficult. It requires asking yourself simple questions that are uncomfortable to answer. In fact, in my experience, the more uncomfortable the answer, the more likely it is to be true.”

Ask, “Why?” Ask, “Why does that seem true?”

“What else could be true that I’m not considering?”

“Problems may be inevitable, but the *meaning* of each problem is not. We get to control what our problems mean based on how we choose to think about them, the standard by which we choose to measure them.”

“Our values determine the metrics by which we measure ourselves and everyone else.”

“If you want to change how you see your problems, you have to change what you value and/or how you measure failure/success.”

Shitty Values

There are a handful of common values that create really poor problems for people – problems that can hardly be solved. So let’s go over some of the quickly:

1. *Pleasure*. Pleasure is great, but it’s a horrible value to prioritize your life around. Ask any drug addict how his pursuit of pleasure turned out. Ask an adulterer who shattered her family and lost her children whether pleasure ultimately made her happy. Ask a man who almost ate himself to death how pleasure helped him solve his problems... Research shows that people who focus their energy on superficial pleasures end up more anxious, more emotionally unstable, and more depressed. Pleasure is the most superficial form of life satisfaction and therefore the easiest to obtain and the easiest to lose... Pleasure is not the cause of happiness; rather, it is the effect.
2. *Material Success*. Research shows that once one is able to provide for basic physical needs (food, shelter, and so on), the correlation between happiness and worldly success quickly approaches zero. So if you’re starving and living on the street in the middle of India, and extra ten thousand dollars a year would affect your happiness a lot. But if you’re sitting pretty in the middle class in a developed country, an extra ten thousand dollars per year won’t affect anything much – meaning that you’re killing yourself working overtime and weekends for basically nothing... When people measure themselves not by their behavior, but by the status symbols they’re able to collect, then not only are they shallow, but they’re probably assholes as well.
3. *Always Being Right*. People who base their self-worth on being right about everything prevent themselves from learning from their mistakes.
4. *Staying Positive*. While there is something to be said for “staying on the sunny side of life,” the truth is, sometimes life sucks, and the healthiest thing you can do is admit it... Denying negative emotions leads to experiencing deeper

and more prolonged negative emotions and to emotional dysfunction. Constant positivity is a form of avoidance, not a valid solution to life's problems... Things go wrong, people upset us, accidents happen. These things make us feel like shit. And that's fine. Negative emotions are a necessary component of emotional health. To deny that negativity is to *perpetuate* problems rather than solve them... The trick with negative emotions is to 1) express them in a socially acceptable and healthy manner and 2) express them in a way that aligns with your values... When we force ourselves to stay positive at all times, we deny the existence of our life's problems. And when we deny our problems, we rob ourselves of the chance to solve them and generate happiness. Problems add a sense of meaning and importance to our life.

"In the long run, completing a marathon makes us happier than eating a chocolate cake. Raising a child makes us happier than beating a video game. Starting a small business with friends while struggling to make ends meet makes us happier than buying a new computer. These activities are stressful, arduous, and often unpleasant. They also require withstanding problem after problem. Yet they are some of the most meaningful moments and joyous things we'll ever do. They involve pain, struggle, even anger and despair – yet once they're accomplished, we look back and get all misty-eyed telling our grandkids about them."

"One day, in retrospect, the years of struggle will strike you as the most beautiful." – Freud.

"This is why these values – pleasure, material success, always being right, staying positive – are poor ideals for a person's life. Some of the greatest moments of one's life are *not* pleasant, *not* successful, *not* known, and *not* positive."

Defining Good and Bad Values

"Good values are 1) reality-based, 2) socially constructive, and 3) immediate and controllable... Bad values are 1) superstitious, 2) socially destructive, and 3) not immediate or controllable."

"Honesty is a good value because it's something you have complete control over, it reflects reality, and it benefits others (even if it's sometimes unpleasant). Popularity, on the other hand, is a bad value. If that's your value, and if your metric is being the most popular guy/girl at the dance party, much of what happens will be out of your control: you don't know who else will be at the event, and you probably won't know who half those people are. Second, the value/metric isn't based on reality: you may *feel*

popular or unpopular, when in fact you have no fucking clue what anybody else really thinks about you. (Side Note: As a rule, people who are terrified of what others think about them are actually terrified of all the shitty things they think about themselves being reflected back at them.)”

“Some examples of good, healthy values: honest, innovation, vulnerability, standing up for oneself, standing up for others, self-respect, curiosity, charity, humility, creativity.”

“Some examples of bad, unhealthy values: dominance through manipulation or violence, indiscriminate fucking, feeling good all the time, always being the center of attention, not being alone, being liked by everybody, being rich for the sake of being rich, sacrificing small animals to the pagan gods.”

“... good, healthy values are achieved internally.”

“Bad values are generally reliant on external events...”

“Bad values, while sometimes fun or pleasurable, lie outside your control and often require socially destructive or superstitious means to achieve.”

“When we have poor values – that is, poor standards we set for ourselves and others – we are essentially giving fucks about the things that don’t matter, things that in fact make our life worse.”

“... when you give better fucks, you get better problems. And when you get better problems, you get a better life.” ... Better values = better problems... Better problems = better life...

Five Counterintuitive Values That Are the Most Beneficial Values One Can Adopt

1. Responsibility: taking responsibility for everything that occurs in your life, regardless of who’s at fault.
2. Uncertainty: the acknowledgement of your own ignorance and the cultivation of constant doubt in your own beliefs.
3. Failure: the willingness to discover your own flaws and mistakes so that they may be improved upon.
4. Rejection: the ability to both say and hear no, thus clearly defining what you will and will not accept in your life.
5. Mortality: this one is crucial, because paying vigilant attention to one’s own death is perhaps the only thing capable of helping us keel all our other values in proper perspective.

CHAPTER 5 – YOU ARE ALWAYS CHOOSING

“Often the only difference between a problem being painful or being powerful is a sense that we *chose* it, and that we are responsible for it.”

“When we feel that we’re choosing our problems, we feel empowered. When we feel that our problems are being forced upon us against our will, we feel victimized and miserable.”

If you can’t overcome your own problems it’s going to be nearly impossible to have the energy to help others.

William James (father of American psychology) wrote in his diary that he would spend one year believing that he was 100 percent responsible for everything that occurred in his life, no matter what.

“There is a simple realization from which all personal improvement and growth emerges. This is the realization that we, individually, are responsible for everything in our lives, no matter the external circumstances... We don’t always control what happens to us. But we *always* control how we interpret what happens to us, as well as how to respond... Whether we consciously recognize it or not, we are always responsible for our experiences. It’s impossible not to be. Choosing to *not* consciously interpret events in our lives is still an interpretation of the events of our lives. Choosing to *not* respond to the events in our lives is still a response to the events in our lives... Even if you get run over by a clown car and pissed on by a busload of schoolchildren, it’s still *your responsibility* to interpret the meaning of the event and choose a response.”

“Whether we like it or not, we are *always* taking an active role in what’s occurring to and within us. We are always interpreting the meaning of every moment and every occurrence. We are always choosing the values by which we live and the metrics by which we measure everything that happens to us. Often the same event can be good or bad, depending on the metric we choose to use... The point is, we are *always* choosing, whether we recognize it or not. Always.”

“... there is no such thing as not giving a single fuck. It’s impossible. We must all give a fuck about something. To not give a fuck about *anything* is still to give a fuck about *something*.”

“The real question is, What are we choosing to give a fuck about? What values are we choosing to base our actions on? What metrics are we choosing to use to measure our life? And are those *good* choices – good values and good metrics?”

“It’s one of those perfect quotes that sound really intelligent, and yet it’s basically just telling you what you already know, even if you’ve never quite thought about the matter before... With great power comes great responsibility... It is true. But there’s a better version of this quote, a version that actually *is* profound, and all you have to do is switch the nouns around: “With great responsibility comes great power.” ... The more we choose to accept responsibility in our lives, the more power we will exercise over our lives. Accepting responsibility for our problems is thus the first step to solving them.”

“A lot of people hesitate to take responsibility for their problems because they believe that to be *responsible* for your problems is to also be *at fault* for your problems... Responsibility and fault often appear together in our culture. But they’re not the same thing. If I hit you with my car, I am both at fault and likely legally responsible to compensate you in some way. Even if hitting you with my car was an accident, I am still responsible. This is the way fault works in our society: if you fuck up, you’re on the hook for making it right. And it should be that way... But there are also problems that we *aren’t* at fault for, yet we are still responsible for them... For example, if you woke up one day and there was a newborn baby on your doorstep, it would not be your *fault* that the baby had been put there, but the baby would now be your *responsibility*. You would have to choose what to do. And whatever you ended up choosing (keeping it, getting rid of it, ignoring it, feeding it to a pit bull), there would be problems associated with your choice – and you would be responsible for those as well.”

“We are responsible for experiences that aren’t our fault all the time. This is part of life.”

“Here’s one way to think about the distinction between the two concepts. Fault is past tense. Responsibility is present tense. Fault results from choices that have already been made. Responsibility results from the choices you’re currently making, every second of every day. You are choosing to read this. You are choosing to think about the concepts. You are choosing to accept or reject the concepts. It may be *my* fault that you think my ideas are lame, but *you* are responsible for coming to your own conclusions. It’s not *your* fault that I chose to write this sentence, but you are still responsible for choosing to read it (or not).”

“There’s a difference between blaming someone else for your situation and that person’s actually being responsible for your situation. Nobody else is ever responsible

for your situation but you. Many people may be to blame for your unhappiness, but nobody is ever *responsible* for your unhappiness but you. This is because *you* always get to choose how you see things, how you react to things, how you value things. You always get to choose the metric by which to measure your experiences.”

People can do horrible things to you and can be blamed for those horrible things, but it’s *your* responsibility to deal with them. You are responsible to make yourself better. Nobody else is going to fix things for you. You must fix them yourself.

“... recognizing my mistakes helped me to realize that I perhaps hadn’t been the innocent victim I’d believed myself to be. That I had a role to play in enabling the shitty relationship to continue for as long as it did. After all, people who date each other tend to have similar values. And if I dated someone with shitty values for that long, what did that say about me and my values? I learned the hard way that if the people in your relationships are selfish and doing hurtful things, it’s likely you are too, you just don’t realize it.”

“We all love to take responsibility for success and happiness. Hell, we often *fight over* who gets to be responsible for success and happiness. But taking responsibility for our problems is far more important, because that’s where the real learning comes from. That’s where the real life-improvement comes from. To simply blame others is only to hurt yourself.”

Responding to Tragedy

“He didn’t choose for his son to die, nor was it his fault that his son had died. The responsibility for coping with that loss was given to him even though it was clearly and understandably unwanted. But despite all that, he was still responsible for his own emotions, beliefs, and actions. How he reacted to his son’s death was his own choice. Pain of one sort or another is inevitable for all of us, but we get to choose what it means to and for us.”

Choose your pain. Choose your problem.

Pain is inevitable for all of us, but we get to choose what it means.

“... my time playing poker had a surprisingly profound influence on the way I see life... The beauty of poker is that while luck is always involved, luck doesn’t dictate the long-term results of the game. A person can get dealt terrible cards and beat someone who was dealt great cards. Sure, the person who gets dealt great cards has a higher likelihood of winning the hand, but ultimately the winner is determined by – yup, you

guessed it – the *choices* each player makes throughout play... I see life in the same terms. We all get dealt cards. Some of us get better cards than others. And while it's easy to get hung up on our cards, and feel we got screwed over, the real game lies in the choices we make with those cards, the risks we decide to take, and the consequences we choose to live with. People who consistently make the best choices in the situations they're given are the ones who eventually come out ahead in poker, just as in life. And it's not necessarily the people with the best cards."

"There are those who suffer through bad childhoods. There are those who are abused and violated and screwed over, physically, emotionally, financially. They are not to blame for their problems and their hindrances, but they are still responsible – *always* responsible – to move on despite their problems and to make the best choices they can, given their circumstances."

Victimhood Chic

"This ability to alleviate responsibility through blame gives people a temporary high and a feeling of moral righteousness."

"The public sharing of "injustices" garners far more attention and emotional outpouring than most other events on social media, rewarding people who are able to perpetually feel victimized with ever-growing amounts of attention and sympathy."

"... this may be the first time in human history that every single demographic group has felt unfairly victimized simultaneously."

"Right now, *anyone* who is offended about *anything* – whether it's the fact that a nook about racism was assigned in a university class, or that Christmas trees were banned at the local mall, or the fact that taxes were raised half a percent on investment funds – feels as though they're being oppressed in some way and therefore deserve to be outraged and to have a certain amount of attention... The current media environment both encourages and perpetuates these reactions because, after all, it's good for business. The writer and media commentator Ryan Holiday refers to this as "outrage porn": rather than report on real stories and real issues, the media find it much easier (and more profitable) to find something mildly offensive, broadcast it to a wider audience, generate outrage, and then broadcast that outrage back across the population in a way that outrages yet another part of the population. This triggers a kind of echo of bullshit pinging back and forth between two imaginary sides, meanwhile distracting everyone from real societal problems. It's no wonder we're more politically polarized than ever before."

“The biggest problem with victimhood chic is that it sucks attention away from *actual* victims.”

“People get addicted to feeling offended all the time because it gives them a high; being self-righteous and morally superior feels *good*. As political cartoonist Tim Kreider put it in a *New York Times* op-ed: “Outrage is like a lot of other things that feel good but over time devour us from the inside out. And it’s even more insidious than most vices because we don’t even consciously acknowledge that it’s a pleasure.”

There Is No “How”

You are *already choosing*, in every moment of every day, what to give a fuck about, so change is as simple as choosing to give a fuck about something else... It really *is* that simple. It’s just not easy... It’s not easy because you’re going to feel like a loser, a fraud, a dumbass at first. You’re going to be nervous. You’re going to freak out. You may get pissed off at your wife or your friends or your father in the process. These are all side effects of changing your values, of changing the fucks you’re giving. But they are inevitable... It’s simple but really, really hard.”

CHAPTER 6 – YOU’RE WRONG ABOUT EVERYTHING (BUT SO AM I)

“We are always in the process of approaching truth and perfection without ever actually reaching truth and perfection.”

“Many people become so obsessed with being “right” about their life that they never end up actually *living* it.”

“That woman doesn’t get out there and date because she would be forced to confront her beliefs about her own desirability... It’s easier to sit in a painful certainty that nobody would find you attractive, that nobody appreciates your talents, than to actually *test* those beliefs and find out for sure.”

“Certainty is the enemy of growth.”

“Instead of looking to be right all the time, we should be looking for how we’re wrong all the time. Because we are.”

“... we don’t actually know what a positive or negative experience is. Some of the most difficult and stressful moments of our lives also end up being the most formative and motivating... Don’t trust your conception of positive/negative experiences. All that we know for certain is what hurts in the moment and what doesn’t. And that’s not worth much.”

“They will laugh at how our money and our jobs define our lives. They will laugh at how we were afraid to show appreciation for those who matter to us most, yet heaped praise on public figures who didn’t deserve anything.”

“... our brain is always biased toward what we feel to be true in that moment.”

“... not only is certainty unattainable, but the pursuit of certainty often breeds more (and worse) insecurity.”

“... behavior as simple as sneaking a peek at your boyfriend’s text messages or asking a friend what people are saying about you is driven by insecurity and that aching desire to be certain.”

“... the more you try to be certain about something, the more uncertain and insecure you will feel... the more you embrace being uncertain and not knowing, the more comfortable you will feel in knowing what you don't know.”

“Uncertainty is the root of all progress and growth. As the old adage goes, the man who believes he knows everything learns nothing. We cannot learn anything without first not knowing something. The more we admit we do not know, the more opportunities we gain to learn.”

“The openness to being wrong *must exist* for any real change or growth to take place.”

Parkinson's law: “Work expands so as to fill up the time available for its completion.”

Murphy's law: “Whatever can go wrong will go wrong.”

Manson's law (author of book): “The more something threatens your identity, the more you will avoid it.”

“There's a certain comfort that comes with knowing how you fit in the world. Anything that shakes up that comfort – even if it could potentially make your life better – is inherently scary... This is why people are often so afraid of success – for the exact same reason they're afraid of failure: it threatens who they believe themselves to be.”

“An Artist Nobody Likes was far, far scarier than remaining An Artist Nobody's Heard Of. At least he was comfortable with and used to being an Artist Nobody's Heard Of.”

“When someone admits to herself, “You know, maybe I'm not good at relationships,” she is suddenly free to act and end her bad marriage. She has no identity to protect by staying in a miserable, crappy marriage just to prove something to herself.”

“... *there is little that is unique or special about your problems*. That's why letting go is so liberating.”

“There's a kind of self-absorption that comes with fear based on an irrational certainty. When you assume that your plane is the one that's going to crash, or that your project idea is the stupid one everyone's going to laugh at, or that you're the one everyone is going to choose to mock or ignore, you're implicitly telling yourself, “I'm the exception; I'm unlike everybody else; I'm different and special... This is narcissism, pure and simple. You feel as though *your* problems deserve to be treated differently, that *your* problems have some unique math to them that doesn't obey the laws of the physical universe.”

“My recommendation: *don't* be special; *don't* be unique... Choose to measure yourself not as a rising star or an undiscovered genius. Choose to measure yourself not as some horrible victim or dismal failure. Instead, measure yourself by more mundane identities: a student, a partner, a friend, a creator... The narrower and rarer the identity you choose for yourself, the more everything will seem to threaten you. For that reason, define yourself in the simplest and most ordinary ways possible... This often means giving up some grandiose ideas about yourself: that you're uniquely intelligent, or spectacularly talented, or intimidatingly attractive, or especially victimized in ways other people could never imagine. This means giving up your sense of entitlement and your belief that you're somehow owed something by this world. This means giving up the supply of emotional highs that you've been sustaining yourself on for years. Like a junkie giving up the needle, you're going to go through withdrawal when you start giving these things up. But you'll come out the other side so much better.”

How to Be a Little Less Certain of Yourself

Questioning ourselves and doubting our own thoughts and beliefs is one of the hardest skills to develop. But it can be done. Here are some questions that will help you breed a little more uncertainty in your life.

Question #1: What if I'm wrong?

Some people are so caught up in their own victimhood that they don't know how to show happiness for others without trying to make them feel miserable first.

Ask yourself tough questions. Stay humble and compassionate.

“... for any change to happen in your life, *you must be wrong about something*. If you're sitting there, miserable day after day, then that means you're *already wrong* about something major in your life, and until you're able to question yourself to find it, nothing will change.”

Question #2: What would it mean if I were wrong?

“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” – Aristotle

Question #3: Would being wrong create a better or a worse problem than my current problem, for both myself and others?

Some people would rather fuck up their relationship with a loved one than consider that they might be wrong.

“... if it feels like it's you versus the world, chances are it's really just you versus yourself.”

CHAPTER 7 – FAILURE IS THE WAY FORWARD

“You could make plenty of money and be miserable, just as you could be broke and be pretty happy. Therefore, why use money as a means to measure my self-worth?”

“If I try this thing and fail in a few years and have to get a job anyway, will I really have lost anything? The answer was no. Instead of a broke and unemployed twenty-two-year-old with no experience, I’d be a broke and unemployed twenty-five-year-old with no experience. Who cares?”

“Improvement at anything is based on thousands of tiny failures, and the magnitude of your success is based on how many times you’ve failed at something. If someone is better at you than something, then it’s likely because she has failed at it more than you have. If someone is worse than you, it’s likely because he hasn’t been through all the painful learning experiences you have.”

“... we have all the mass media that constantly expose us to stellar success after success, while not showing us the thousands of hours of dull practice and tedium that were required to achieve that success.”

“We can be truly successful only at something we’re willing to fail at. If we’re unwilling to fail, then we’re unwilling to succeed.”

“A lot of this fear of failure comes from having chosen shitty values. For instance, if I measure myself by the standard “Make everyone I meet like me,” I will be anxious, because failure is 100 percent defined by the actions of others, not by my own actions. I am not in control; thus my self-worth is at the mercy of judgments by others.”

“... it’s growth that generates happiness, not a long list of arbitrary achievements.”

“... goals, as they are conventionally defined – graduate from college, buy a lake house, lose fifteen pounds – are limited in the amount of happiness they can produce in our lives.”

Pain is Part of the Process

“For many of us, our proudest achievements come in the face of the greatest adversity. Our pain often makes us stronger, more resilient, more grounded.”

“... fear and anxiety and sadness are not necessarily always undesirable or unhelpful states of mind; rather, they are often representative of the necessary pain of

psychological growth. And to deny that pain is to deny our own potential. Just as one must suffer physical pain to build stronger bone and muscle, one must suffer emotional pain to develop greater emotional resilience, a stronger sense of self, increased compassion, and a generally happier life.”

“It’s only when we feel intense pain that we’re willing to look at our values and question why they seem to be failing us. We *need* some sort of existential crisis to take an objective look at how we’ve been deriving meaning in our life, and then consider changing course... You could call it “hitting bottom” or “having an existential crisis.” I prefer to call it “weathering the shitstorm.” Choose what suits you.”

“... *pain is part of the process*. It’s important to feel it. Because if you just chase after highs to cover up the pain, if you continue to indulge in entitlement and delusional positive thinking, if you continue to overindulge in various substances or activities, then you’ll never generate the requisite motivation to actually change.”

Never forget to separate what you *feel* from what actually *is*. Step outside of yourself and see the world for what it is.

“Many people, when they feel some form of pain or anger or sadness, drop everything and attend to numbing out whatever they’re feeling. Their goal is to get back to “feeling good” again as quickly as possible, even if that means substances or deluding themselves or returning to their shitty values.”

“Life is about not knowing and then doing something anyway. *All* of life is like this. It never changes. Even when you’re happy. Even when you’re farting fairy dust. Even when you win the lottery and buy a small fleet of Jet Skis, you still won’t know what the hell you’re doing. Don’t ever forget that. And don’t ever be afraid of that.”

“If you’re stuck on a problem, don’t sit there and think about it; just start working on it. Even if you don’t know what you’re doing, the simple act of working on it will eventually cause the right ideas to show up in your head.”

“Action isn’t just the effect of motivation; it’s also the cause of it.”

ACTION -> INSPIRATION -> MOTIVATION

“The author Tim Ferriss relates a story he once heard about a novelist who had written over seventy novels. Someone asked the novelist how he was able to write so consistently and remain inspired and motivated. He replied, “Two hundred crappy words per day, that’s it.” The idea was that if he forced himself to write two hundred

crappy words, more often than not the act of writing would inspire him; and before he knew it, he'd have thousands of words down on the page."

"When the standard of success becomes merely acting – when *any* result is regarded as progress and important, when inspiration is seen as a reward rather than a prerequisite – we propel ourselves ahead. We feel free to fail, and that failure moves us forward."

"You can become your own source of inspiration. You can become your own source of motivation. Action is always within reach. And with simply *doing something* as your only metric for success – well, then even failure pushes you forward."

CHAPTER 8 – THE IMPORTANCE OF SAYING NO

“... absolute freedom, by itself, means nothing... Freedom grants the opportunity for greater meaning, but by itself there is nothing necessarily meaningful about it. Ultimately, the only way to achieve meaning and a sense of importance in one’s life is through a rejection of alternatives, a *narrowing* of freedom, a choice of commitment to one place, one belief, or (gulp) one person.”

“As with most excesses in life, you have to drown yourself in them to realize that they don’t make you happy.”

“Honesty in the truest sense of the word. Communication with no conditions, no strings attached, no ulterior motive, no sales job, no desperate attempt to be liked.”

“... the most valued currency is trust. And to build trust you have to be honest.”

Better to know a few people closely than to know a thousand people superficially.

Don’t be that guy who feels the need to change his entire personality based on the person you’re dealing with.

“... we *need* to reject something. Otherwise, we stand for nothing. If nothing is better or more desirable than anything else, then we are empty and our life is meaningless. We are without values and therefore live our life without any purpose.”

“The act of choosing a value for yourself requires rejecting alternative values.”

“The point is this: we must all give a fuck about *something*, in order to *value* something. And to value something, we must reject what is *not* that something. To value X, we must reject non-X.”

“We are defined by what we choose to reject ... if we reject nothing (perhaps in fear of being rejected by something ourselves), we essentially have no identity at all.”

“Honest is a natural human craving. But part of having honesty in our lives is becoming comfortable with saying and hearing the word no.”

“... there are healthy forms of love and unhealthy forms of love. Unhealthy love is based on two people trying to escape their problems through their emotions for each other –

in other words, they're using each other as an escape. Healthy love is based on two people acknowledging and addressing their own problems with each other's support."

"The difference between a healthy and unhealthy relationship comes down to two things: 1) how well each person in the relationship accepts responsibility, and 2) the willingness of each person to both reject and be rejected by their partner."

"Wherever there is a healthy and loving relationship, there will be clear boundaries between the two people and their values, and there will be an open avenue of giving and receiving rejection when necessary... By "boundaries" I mean the delineation between two people's responsibilities for their own problems. People in a healthy relationship with strong boundaries will take responsibility for their own values and problems and not take responsibility for their partner's values and problems. People in a toxic relationship with poor or no boundaries will regularly avoid responsibility for their own problems and/or take responsibility for their partner's problems."

What do poor boundaries look like? Here are some examples:

"You can't go out with your friends without me. You know how jealous I get. You have to stay home with me."

"My coworkers are idiots; they always make me late to meeting because I have to tell them how to do their jobs."

"I can't believe you made me feel so stupid in front of my own sister. Never disagree with me in front of her again!"

"I'd love to take that job in Milwaukee, but my mother would never forgive me for moving so far away."

"I can date you, but can you not tell my friend Cindy? She gets really insecure when I have a boyfriend and she doesn't."

In each scenario, the person is either taking responsibility for problems/emotions that are not theirs, or demanding that someone else take responsibility for their problems/emotions.

In general, entitled people fall into one of two traps in their relationships. Either they expect other people to take responsibility for *their* problems: *"I wanted a nice relaxing weekend at home. You should have known that and cancelled your plans."* Or they take on too much responsibility for other people's problems: *"She just lost her job again, but it's probably my fault because I wasn't as supportive of her as I could have been. I'm going to help her rewrite her resume tomorrow."*

Entitled people adopt these strategies in their relationships, as with everything, to help avoid accepting responsibility for their own problems. As a result, their

relationships are fragile and fake, products of avoiding inner pain rather than embracing a genuine appreciation and adoration of their partner.

“People can’t solve your problems for you. And they shouldn’t try, because that won’t make you happy. You can’t solve other people’s problems for them either, because that likewise won’t make them happy. The mark of an unhealthy relationship is two people who try to solve each other’s problems in order to feel good about themselves... A healthy relationship is when two people solve their own problems in order to feel good about each other.”

“The setting of proper boundaries doesn’t mean you can’t help or support your partner or be helped and supported yourself. You both should support each other. But only because you *choose* to support and be supported. Not because you feel obligated or entitled.”

Entitled people who blame others for their own emotions and actions do so because they believe that if they constantly paint themselves as victims, eventually someone will come along and save them, and they will receive the love they’ve always wanted.

Entitled people who take the blame for other people’s emotions and actions do so because they believe that if they “fix” their partner and save him or her, they will receive the love and appreciation they’ve always wanted.

These are the yin and yang of any toxic relationship: the victim and the saver, the person who starts fires because it makes her feel important and the person who puts out fires because it makes him feel important.

These two types of people are drawn strongly to one another, and they usually end up together. Their pathologies match one another perfectly. Often they’ve grown up with parents who each exhibit one of these traits well. So their model for a “happy” relationship is one based on entitlement and poor boundaries.

Sadly, they both fail in meeting the other’s actual needs. In fact, their pattern of overblaming and overaccepting blame perpetuates the entitlement and shitty self-worth that have been keeping them from getting their emotional needs met in the first place. The victim creates more and more problems to solve – not because additional real problems exist, but because it gets her the attention and affection she craves. The saver solves and solves – not because she actually cares about the problems, but because she believes she must fix others’ problems in order to deserve attention and affection for herself. In both cases, the intentions are selfish and conditional and therefore self-sabotaging, and genuine love is rarely experienced.

The victim, if he really loved the saver, would say, “Look, this is my problem; you don’t have to fix it for me. Just support me while I fix it myself.” That would

actually be a demonstration of love: taking responsibility for your own problems and not holding your partner responsible for them.

If the saver really wanted to save the victim, the saver would say, “Look, you’re blaming others for your own problems; deal with this yourself.” And in a sick way, that would *actually* be a demonstration of love: helping someone solve their own problems.

Instead, victims and savers both use each other to achieve emotional highs. It’s like an addiction they fulfill in one another. Ironically, when presented with emotionally healthy people to date, they usually feel bored or lack “chemistry” with them. They pass on emotionally healthy, secure individuals because the secure partner’s solid boundaries don’t feel “exciting” enough to stimulate the constant highs necessary in the entitled person.

For victims, the hardest thing to do in the world is to hold themselves accountable for their problems. They’ve spent their whole life believing that others are responsible for their fate. The first step of taking responsibility for themselves is often terrifying.

For savers, the hardest thing to do in the world is stop taking responsibility for other people’s problems. They’ve spent their whole life feeling valued and loved only when they’re saving somebody else – so letting go of this need is terrifying to them as well.

If you make a sacrifice for someone you care about, it needs to be because you want to, not because you feel obligated or because you fear the consequences of not doing so. If your partner is going to make a sacrifice for you, it needs to be because he or she genuinely wants to, not because you’ve manipulated the sacrifice through anger or guilt. Acts of love are valid only if they’re performed without conditions or expectations.

It can be difficult for people to recognize the difference between doing something out of obligation and doing it voluntarily. So here’s a litmus test: ask yourself, “If I refused, how would the relationship change?” Similarly, ask, “If my partner refused something I wanted, how would the relationship change?”

If the answer is that a refusal would cause a blowout of drama and broken china plates, then that’s a bad sign for your relationship. It suggests that your relationship is conditional – based on superficial benefits received from one another, rather than on unconditional acceptance of each other (along with each other’s problems).

People with strong boundaries are not afraid of a temper tantrum, an argument, or getting hurt. People with weak boundaries are terrified of those things and will constantly mold their own behavior to fit the highs and lows of their relational emotional roller coaster.

People with strong boundaries understand that it’s unreasonable to expect two people to accommodate each other 100 percent and fulfill every need the other has. People with strong boundaries understand that they may hurt someone’s feeling sometimes, but ultimately they can’t determine how other people feel. People with

strong boundaries understand that a healthy relationship is not about controlling one another's emotions, but rather about each partner supporting the other in their individual growth and in solving their own problems.

It's not about giving a fuck about everything your partner gives a fuck about; it's about giving a fuck about your partner regardless of the fucks he or she gives. That's unconditional love, baby.

How to Build Trust

"... honesty in my relationship is more important to me than feeling good all the time. The last person I should ever have to censor myself with is the woman I love."

"When our highest priority is to always make ourselves feel good, or to always make our partner feel good, then nobody ends up feeling good. And our relationship falls apart without our even knowing it."

"Without conflict, there can be no trust. Conflict exists to show us who is there for us unconditionally and who is just there for the benefits. No one trusts a yes-man."

For a relationship to be healthy, both people must be willing and able to both say no and hear no. Without that negation, without that occasional rejection, boundaries break down and one person's problems and values come to dominate the other's. Conflict is not only normal, then; it's *absolutely necessary* for the maintenance of a healthy relationship. If two people who are close are not able to hash out their differences openly and vocally, then the relationship is based on manipulation and misrepresentation, and it will slowly become toxic.

Trust is the most important ingredient in any relationship, for the simple reason that without trust, the relationship doesn't actually *mean* anything. A person could tell you that she loves you, wants to be with you, would give up everything for you, but if you don't trust her, you get no benefit from those statements. You don't feel loved until you trust that the love being expressed toward you comes without any special conditions or baggage attached to it.

Some people become so concerned with holding on to a relationship that they fail to realize it has become a black hole consuming their self-respect.

"...building a track record for trust takes time – certainly a lot more time than it takes to break trust."

"When trust is destroyed, it can be rebuilt only if the following two steps happen: 1) the trust-breaker admits the true values that caused the breach and owns up to them, and

2) the trust-breaker builds a solid track record of improved behavior over time. Without the first step, there should be no attempt at reconciliation in the first place.”

“Trust is like a china plate. If you break it once, with some care and attention you can put it back together again. But if you break it again, it splits into even more pieces and it takes far longer to piece together again. If you break it more and more times, eventually it shatters to the point where it’s impossible to restore. There are too many broken pieces, and too much dust.”

Freedom Through Commitment

“... more is not always better... We are actually often happier with less. When we’re overloaded with opportunities and options, we suffer from what psychologists refer to as the paradox of choice. Basically, the more options we’re given, the less satisfied we become with whatever we choose, because we’re aware of all the other options we’re potentially forfeiting.”

“... this anxiety, this desire for certainty and perfection and success, will make you unhappy.”

“... commitment, in its own way, offers a wealth of opportunity and experiences that would otherwise never be available to me, no matter where I went or what I did.”

“The older you get, the more experienced you get, the less significantly each new experience affects you.”

“... there is freedom and liberation in commitment. I’ve found *increased* opportunity and upside in rejecting alternatives and distractions in favor of what I’ve chosen to let truly matter to me... Commitment gives you freedom because you’re no longer distracted by the unimportant and frivolous. Commitment gives you freedom because it hones your attention and focus, directing them toward what is most efficient at making you healthy and happy. Commitment makes decision-making easier and removes any fear of missing out; knowing that what you already have is good enough, why would you ever stress about chasing more, more, more again? Commitment allows you to focus intently on a few highly important goals and achieve a greater degree of success than you otherwise would.”

“...depth is where the gold is buried. And you have to stay committed to something and go deep to dig it up. That’s true in relationships, in a career, in building a great lifestyle – in everything.”

CHAPTER 9 – ... AND THEN YOU DIE

“Why do you care that I’m dead when you’re still afraid to live?”

“... I came to the startling realization that if there really is no reason to do anything, then there is also no reason to *not* do anything; that in the face of the inevitability of death, there is no reason to ever give in to one’s fear or embarrassment or shame, since it’s all just a bunch of nothing anyway; and that by spending the majority of my short life avoiding what was painful and uncomfortable, I had essentially been avoiding being alive at all.”

“I still had my insecurities and my baggage – as we always do – but now I gave a fuck about something more important than my insecurities and my baggage.”

“... death is the light by which the shadow of all of life’s meaning is measured. Without death, everything would feel inconsequential, all experience arbitrary, all metrics and values suddenly zero.”

The Denial of Death by Ernest Becker – Check this out...

The Denial of Death essentially makes two points:

1. Humans are unique in that we’re the only animals that can conceptualize and think about ourselves abstractly. Dogs don’t sit around and worry about their career. Cats don’t think about their past mistakes and wonder what would have happened if they’d done something differently. Monkeys don’t argue over future possibilities, just as fish don’t sit around wondering if other fish would like them more if they had longer fins... As humans, we’re blessed with the ability to imagine ourselves in hypothetical situations, to contemplate both the past and the future, to imagine other realities or situations where things might be different. And it’s because of this unique mental ability, Becker says, that we all, at some point, become aware of the inevitability of our own death. Because we’re able to conceptualize alternate versions of reality, we are also the only animal capable of imagining a reality without ourselves in it... This realization causes what Becker calls “death terror,” a deep existential anxiety that underlies *everything* we think or do.
2. Becker’s second point starts with the premise that we essentially have two “selves.” The first self is the physical self – the one that eats, sleeps, snores, and poops. The second self is our conceptual self – our identity, or how we see ourselves... Becker’s argument is this: We are all aware on some level that our physical self will eventually die, that this death is inevitable, and that its

inevitability – on some unconscious level – scares the shit out of us. Therefore, in order to compensate for our fear of the inevitable loss of our physical self, we try to construct a conceptual self that will live forever. This is why people try so hard to put their names on buildings, on statues, on spines of books. It's why we feel compelled to spend so much time giving ourselves to others, especially to children, in the hopes that our influence – our conceptual self – will last way beyond our physical self. That we will be remembered and revered and idolized long after our physical self ceases to exist.

Becker called such efforts our “immortality projects,” projects that allow our conceptual self to live on way past the point of our physical death.

“Whether it be through mastering an art form, conquering a new land, gaining great riches, or simply having a large and loving family that will live on for generations, *all the meaning in our life is shaped by this innate desire to never truly die.*”

“But, when our immortality projects fail, when the meaning is lost, when the prospect of our physical self no longer seems possible or likely, death terror – that horrible, depressing anxiety – creeps back into our mind. Trauma can cause this, as can shame and social ridicule. As can, as Becker points out, mental illness.”

“If you haven't figured it out yet, our immortality projects are our values. They are the barometers of meaning and worth in our life. And when our values fail, so do we, psychologically speaking. What Becker is saying, in essence, is that we're all driven by fear to give way too many fucks about something, because giving a fuck about something is the only thing that distracts us from the reality and inevitability of our own death. And to truly not give a single fuck is to achieve a quasi-spiritual state of embracing the impermanence of one's own existence. In that state, one is far less likely to get caught up in various forms of entitlement.”

“Becker later came to a startling realization on his deathbed: that people's immortality projects were actually the problem, not the solution; that rather than attempting to implement, often through lethal force, their conceptual self across the world, people should question their conceptual self and become more comfortable with the reality of their own death. Becker called this “the bitter antidote,” and struggled with reconciling it himself as he started down his own demise. While death is bad, it is inevitable. Therefore, we should not avoid this realization, but rather come to terms with it as best we can. Because once we become comfortable with the fact of our own death – the root terror, the underlying anxiety motivating all of life's frivolous ambitions – we can then choose our values more freely, unrestrained by the illogical quest for immortality, and freed from dangerous dogmatic views.”

“The Stoics of ancient Greece and Rome implored people to keep death in mind at all times, in order to appreciate life more and remain humble in the face of its adversities.”

“The fear of death follows from the fear of life. A man who lives fully is prepared to die at any time.” – Mark Twain

Confronting the reality of our own mortality is important because it obliterates all the crappy, fragile, superficial values in life. While most people whittle their days chasing another buck, or a little bit more fame and attention, or a little bit more assurance that they’re right or loved, death confronts all of us with a far more painful and important question: What is your legacy?

How will the world be different and better when you’re gone? What mark will you have made? What influence will you have caused? They say that a butterfly flapping its wings in Africa can cause a hurricane in Florida; well, what hurricanes will you leave in your wake?

As Becker pointed out, this is arguably the *only* truly important question in our life. Yet we avoid thinking about it. One, because it’s hard. Two, because it’s scary. Three, because we have no fucking clue what we’re doing.

And when we avoid this question, we let trivial and hateful values hijack our brains and take control of our desires and ambitions. Without acknowledging the ever-present gaze of death, the superficial will appear important, and the important will appear superficial. Death is the only thing we can know with any certainty. And as such, it must be the compass by which we orient all of our other values and decisions. It is the correct answer to all of the questions we should ask but never do. The only way to be comfortable with death is to understand and see yourself as something bigger than yourself; to choose values that stretch beyond serving yourself, that are simple and immediate and controllable and tolerant of the chaotic world around you.

“... entitlement strips this away from us. The gravity of entitlement sucks all attention inward, toward ourselves, causing us to feel as though we are at the center of all the problems in the universe, that we are the one suffering all of the injustices, that we are the one who deserves greatness over all others.”

“The pampering of the modern mind has resulted in a population that feels deserving of something without earning that something, a population that feels they have a right to something without sacrificing for it. People declare themselves experts, entrepreneurs, inventors, innovators, mavericks, and coaches without any real-life experience. And they do this not because they actually think they *are* greater than everybody else; they do it because they feel that they *need to be great* to be accepted in a world that broadcasts only the extraordinary.”

“You too are going to die, and that’s because you too were fortunate to have lived.”