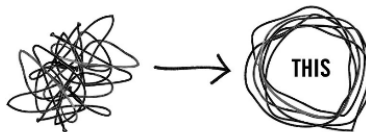


[Amazon Link](#)

Chapter 1 - The Essentialist

- When a request would come in he (Sam Elliott) would pause and evaluate the request against a tougher criteria: “Is this the very most important thing I should be doing with my time and resources right now?” (p.2)
- In this example is the basic value proposition of Essentialism: only once you give yourself permission to stop trying to do it all, to stop saying yes to everyone, can you make your highest contribution towards the things that really matter. (p.4)
- **The Way of the Essentialist** (p.4)
 - Dieter Rams’ (Braun) design criteria can be summarized by a characteristically succinct principle, captured in just three German words: *Weniger aber besser*. (p.4)
 - The English translation is: Less but better. (p.5)
 - It is about pausing constantly to ask, “Am I investing in the right activities?” (p.5)
 - Essentialism is not about how to get more things done; it’s about how to get the right things done. (p.5)
 - It doesn’t mean just doing less for the sake of less either. (p.5)
 - It is about making the wisest possible investment of your time and energy in order to operate at our highest point of contribution by doing only what is essential. (p.5)
 - The way of the Essentialist means living by design, not by default. (p.7)
 - Instead of making choices reactively, the Essentialist deliberately distinguishes the vital few from the trivial many, eliminates the nonessentials, and then removes obstacles so the essential things have clear, smooth passage. (p.7)
 - In other words, Essentialism is a disciplined, systematic approach for determining where our highest point of contribution lies, then making execution of those things almost effortless. (p.7)

The Model



Nonessentialist

Essentialist

Thinks

ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE

LESS BUT BETTER

“I have to.”

“I choose to.”

“It’s all important.”

“Only a few things
really matter.”

“How can I fit it all in?”

“What are the trade-offs?”

Does

THE UNDISCIPLINED PURSUIT OF MORE

Reacts to what's most pressing

Says "yes" to people without
really thinking

Tries to force execution at
the last moment

THE DISCIPLINED PURSUIT OF LESS

Pauses to discern what
really matters

Says "no" to everything
except the essential

Removes obstacles to
make execution easy

Gets

LIVES A LIFE THAT DOES NOT SATISFY

Takes on too much, and work suffers

Feels out of control

Is unsure of whether the
right things got done

Feels overwhelmed and exhausted

LIVES A LIFE THAT REALLY MATTERS

Chooses carefully in
order to do great work

Feels in control

Gets the right things done

Experiences joy in
the journey

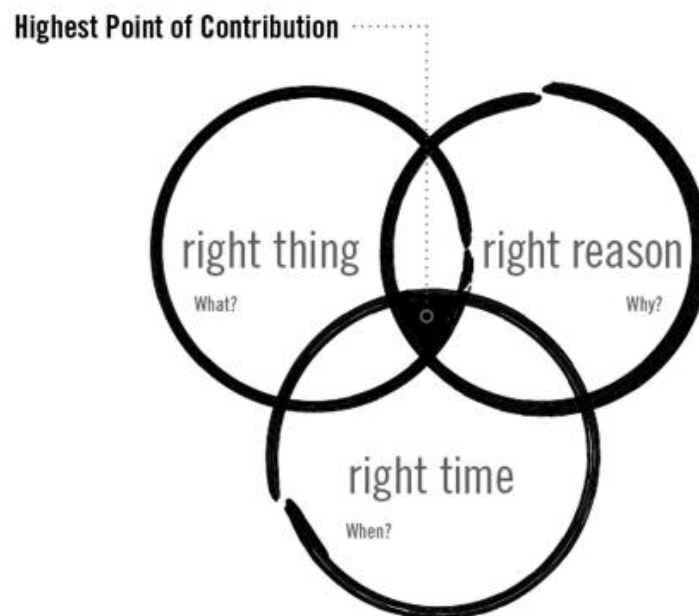
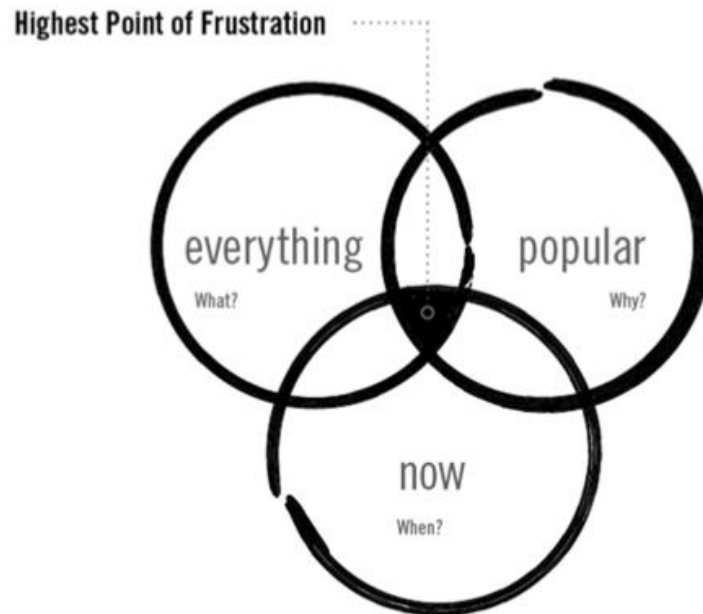
- **The Way of the Nonessentialist** (p.9)
 - If you don't prioritize your life, someone else will. (p.10)
 - And in the process, he (Silicon Valley executive) lost his ability to discern the vital few from the trivial many. Everything was important. (p.11-12)
 - It leads to what I call "the paradox of success," which can be summed up in four predictable phases: (p.12-13)
 - PHASE 1: When we really have clarity of purpose, it enables us to succeed at our endeavor. (p.12)
 - PHASE 2: When we have success, we gain a reputation as a "go to" person. (p.12)
 - We become "good old [insert name]," who is always there when you need him, and we are presented with increased options and opportunities. (p.12)
 - PHASE 3: When we have increased options and opportunities, which is actually code for demands upon our time and energies, it leads to diffused efforts. (p.12)

- We get spread thinner and thinner. (p.12)
 - PHASE 4: We become distracted from what would otherwise be our highest level of contribution. (p.13)
 - The effect of our success has been to undermine the very clarity that led to our success in the first place. (p.13)
 - He finds that for many, falling into “the undisciplined pursuit of more” was a key reason for failure. (p.13)
- **Why Nonessentialism Is Everywhere** (p.13)
 - TOO MANY CHOICES (p.13)
 - For the first time — literally — substantial and rapidly growing numbers of people have choices. For the first time, they will have to manage themselves. And society is totally unprepared for it. (p.13)
 - Psychologists call this “decision fatigue”: the more choices we are forced to make, the more the quality of our decisions deteriorates. (p.15)
 - TOO MUCH SOCIAL PRESSURE (p.15)
 - While much has been said and written about how hyperconnected we now are and how distracting this information overload can be, the larger issue is how our connectedness has increased the strength of social pressure. (p.15)
 - It is not just information overload; it is opinion overload. (p.15)
 - THE IDEA THAT “YOU CAN HAVE IT ALL” (p.15)
 - The word priority came into the English language in the 1400s. (p.16)
 - It was singular. - It meant the very first or prior thing.
 - It stayed singular for the next five hundred years.
 - Only in the 1900s did we pluralize the term and start talking about *priorities*. (p.16)
 - In the same way that our closets get cluttered as clothes we never wear accumulate, so do our lives get cluttered as well-intended commitments and activities we’ve said yes to pile up.
 - Most of these efforts didn’t come with an expiration date. (p.17)
 - Unless we have a system for purging them, once adopted, they live on in perpetuity. (p.17)
 - 1. EXPLORE AND EVALUATE (p.17)
 - 2. ELIMINATE (p.18)
 - After all, there is still a feeling of *sunk-cost bias*: studies have found that we tend to value things we already own more highly than they are worth and thus that we find them more difficult to get rid of. (p.18)
 - 3. EXECUTE (p.18)
- **Road Map** (p.20)
 - ESSENCE: WHAT IS THE CORE MIND-SET OF AN ESSENTIALIST? (p.20)
 - 1. Individual choice: We can choose how to spend our energy and time. (p.20)
 - Without choice, there is no point in talking about trade-offs. (p.20)
 - 2. The prevalence of noise: Almost everything is noise, and a very few things are exceptionally valuable. (p.20)
 - This is the justification for taking time to figure out what is most important. (p.20)
 - 3. The reality of trade-offs: We can’t have it all or do it all. (p.20)
 - If we could, there would be no reason to evaluate or eliminate options. (p.20)

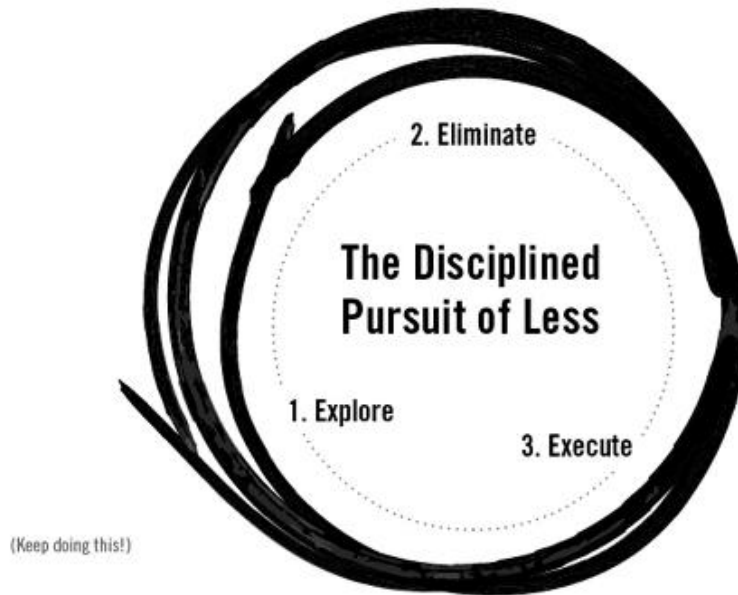
ESSENTIALISM

By Greg McKeown (2014)

- **STEP 1. EXPLORE: DISCERNING THE TRIVIAL MANY FROM THE VITAL FEW** (p.21)



- **STEP 2. ELIMINATE: CUTTING OUT THE TRIVIAL MANY** (p.23)
 - The real question is not how can we do it all, it is who will get to choose what we do and don't do. Remember, when we forfeit our right to choose, someone else will choose for us. (p.23)



- **STEP 3. EXECUTE: REMOVING OBSTACLES AND MAKING EXECUTION EFFORTLESS** (p.25)
 - Instead of forcing execution, Essentialists invest the time they have saved into creating a system for removing obstacles and making execution as easy as possible. (p.25)

PART I: ESSENCE -WHAT IS THE CORE LOGIC OF AN ESSENTIALIST?

Chapter 2 - Choose: The Invincible Power of Choice

- Our options may be things, but a choice — a choice is an action. (p.35)
- The Invincible Power of Choosing to Choose (p.35)
 - For too long, we have overemphasized the external aspect of choices (our options) and underemphasized our internal ability to choose (our actions). (p.35)
- How Do We Forget Our Ability to Choose? (p.36)
 - To become an Essentialist requires a heightened awareness of our ability to choose. (p.39)

Nonessentialist	Essentialist
"I have to."	"I choose to."
Forfeits the right to choose	Exercises the power of choice

- When we forget our ability to choose, we learn to be helpless. (p.39)
 - In turn, we surrender our power to choose. (p.39)
 - That is the path of the Nonessentialist. (p.39)
- The Essentialist knows that when we surrender our right to choose, we give others not just the power but also the explicit permission to choose for us. (p.39)

Chapter 3 - Discern: The Unimportance of Practically Everything

- The overwhelming reality is that we live in a world where almost everything is worthless, and very few things are exceptionally valuable. (p.45)
- An Essentialist, in other words, discerns more so he can do less. (p.48)

Nonessentialist	Essentialist
Thinks almost everything is essential	Thinks almost everything is nonessential
Views opportunities as basically equal	Distinguishes the vital few from the trivial many

Chapter 4 - Trade-off: Which Problem Do I Want?

- After all, by definition, a trade-off involves two things we want. (p.55)
- Obviously, when faced with the choice between two things we want, the preferred answer is yes to both.
 - But as much as we'd like to, we simply cannot have it all. (p.55)
- A Nonessentialist approaches every trade-off by asking, "How can I do both?"
 - Essentialists ask the tougher but ultimately more liberating question, "Which problem do I want?"
 - An Essentialist makes trade-offs deliberately. (p.55)

Nonessentialist	Essentialist
Thinks, "I can do both."	Asks, "What is the trade-off I want to make?"
Asks, "How can I do it all?"	Asks, "What can I go big on?"

PART II EXPLORE - HOW CAN WE DISCERN THE TRIVIAL MANY FROM THE VITAL FEW?

Chapter 5 - Escape: The Perks of Being Unavailable

- Furthermore, he (Frank O'Brien, founder of Conversations) uses the meeting as a litmus test to alert him if employees are spending too much time on the nonessential: (p.64)
- "If somebody can't make the meeting because of too much going on, that tells me either we're doing something inefficiently or we need to hire more people." (p.64)

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

Is too busy doing to think about life

Creates space to escape and explore life

- Space to Design (p.65)
 - Yes, focus is something we *have*. But focus is also something we *do*. (p.65)
- Space to Concentrate (p.67)
 - Here's another paradox for you: the faster and busier things get, the more we need to build thinking time into our schedule.
 - And the noisier things get, the more we need to build quiet reflection spaces in which we can truly focus. (p.68)
- Space to Read (p.70)
 - It broadens my perspective and reminds me of themes and ideas that are essential enough to have withstood the test of time. (p.70)

Chapter 6 - Look: See What Really Matters

- The Big Picture (p.75)
 - By training yourself to look for "the lead," you will suddenly find yourself able to see what you have missed. (p.76)
 - You'll be able to do more than simply see the dots of each day: you'll also connect them to see the trends.
 - Instead of just reacting to the facts, you'll be able to focus on the larger issues that really matter. (p.76)
- Filter for the Fascinating (p.76)

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

Pays attention to the loudest voice

Pays attention to the signal in the noise

Hears everything being said

Hears what is *not* being said

Is overwhelmed by all the information

Scans to find the essence of the information

- Keep a Journal (p.77)
 - So apply the principle of "less but better" to your journal. Restrain yourself from writing more until daily journaling has become a habit. (p.78)
 - I also suggest that once every ninety days or so you take an hour to read your journal entries from that period. (p.78)
 - Focus on the broader patterns or trends. (p.78)
 - Small, incremental changes are hard to see in the moment but over time can have a huge cumulative effect. (p.78)

- Get Out into the Field (p.78)
 - By getting out there and fully exploring the problem, they were able to better clarify the question and in turn to focus on the essential details that ultimately allowed them to make the highest contribution to the problem. (p.79)
- Keep your eyes peeled for abnormal or unusual details (p.79)
 - She (Mariam Semaan, journalist) said, you need knowledge. Getting to the essence of a story takes a deep understanding of the topic, its context, its fit into the bigger picture, and its relationship to different fields. (p.80)
- Clarify the Question (p.80)
 - Each proposed answer spawned still more opinions and comments, and soon what should have been a fairly straightforward problem-solving exercise had devolved into a sprawling, undisciplined debate. (p.81)
- “What question are you trying to answer?” (p.81)

Chapter 7 - Play:

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

Thinks play is trivial

Knows play is essential

Thinks play is an unproductive waste of time

Knows play sparks exploration

- Play doesn't just help us to explore what is essential. It is essential in and of itself. (p.89)

Chapter 8 - Sleep: Protect the Asset

- Protecting the Asset (p.94)
 - The best asset we have for making a contribution to the world is ourselves. (p.94)

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

THINKS:

One hour less of sleep equals one more hour of productivity.

Sleep is for failures.

Sleep is a luxury.

Sleep breeds laziness.

Sleep gets in the way of “doing it all.”

KNOWS:

One hour more of sleep equals several more hours of much higher productivity.

Sleep is for high performers.

Sleep is a priority.

Sleep breeds creativity.

Sleep enables the highest levels of mental contribution.

- Our highest priority is to protect our ability to prioritize. (p.101)

Chapter 9 - Select: The Power of Extreme Criteria

- The 90 Percent Rule (p.104)
 - Mastering this Essentialist skill, perhaps more than any other in this section, requires us to be vigilant about acknowledging the reality of trade-offs.
 - By definition, applying highly selective criteria is a trade-off; sometimes you will have to turn down a seemingly very good option and have faith that the perfect option will soon come along. (p.105)
 - Like any Essentialist skill, it forces you to make decisions by design, rather than default. (p.105)

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

Says yes to almost every request or opportunity

Says yes to only the top 10 percent of opportunities

Uses broad, implicit criteria like “If someone I know is doing it, I should do it.”

Uses narrow, explicit criteria like “Is this *exactly* what I am looking for?”

- Selective, Explicit, and Also Right (p.107)
 - If it isn't a clear yes, then it's a clear no. (p109)
 - The team also uses an explicit set of criteria in making their evaluation.
 - Their primary criterion is, “Will this person be an absolutely natural fit?”

- That is why they have designed the selection process to include multiple interviews.
- That is why they developed the workday trial run.
- It's why they send the questionnaire.
- Like any true Essentialist, they are trying to gather the relevant information so they can make an informed, calculated, deliberate decision. (p.109)
- Opportunity Knocks (p.110)
 - First, write down the opportunity.
 - Second, write down a list of three "minimum criteria" the options would need to "pass" in order to be considered.
 - Third, write down a list of three ideal or "extreme criteria" the options would need to "pass" in order to be considered.
 - By definition, if the opportunity doesn't pass the first set of criteria, the answer is obviously no.
 - But if it also doesn't pass two of your three extreme criteria, the answer is still no. (p.111)

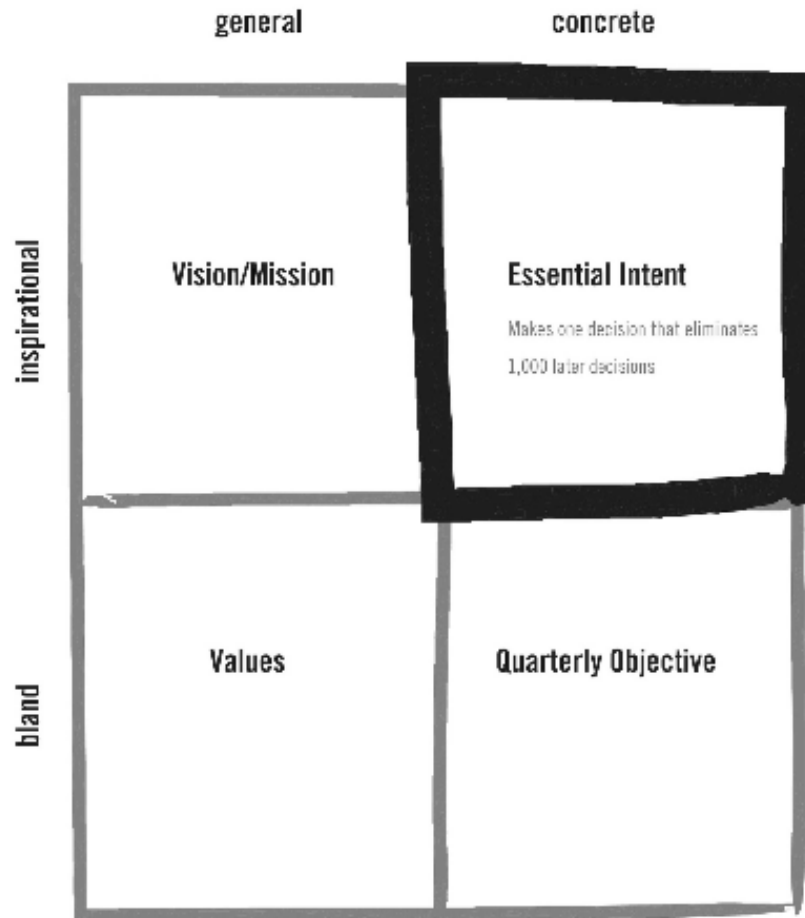
PART III ELIMINATE - HOW CAN WE CUT OUT THE TRIVIAL MANY?

Chapter 10 - Clarify: One Decision That Makes a Thousand

- From "Pretty Clear" to "Really Clear" (p.121)
 - The fact is, motivation and cooperation deteriorate when there is a lack of purpose. (p.121)
 - When there is a serious lack of clarity about what the team stands for and what their goals and roles are, people experience confusion, stress, and frustration. (p.121)
 - When there is a high level of clarity, on the other hand, people thrive. (p.121)
 - PATTERN 1: PLAYING POLITICS (p.122)
 - In the first pattern, the team becomes overly focused on winning the attention of the manager. (p.122)
 - PATTERN 2: IT'S ALL GOOD (WHICH IS BAD) (p.123)
 - In the second pattern, teams without purpose become leaderless. (p.123)
- Essential Intent (p.124)

ESSENTIALISM

By Greg McKeown (2014)



Nonessentialist

Has a vague, general vision or mission statement

Has concrete quarterly objectives but ones that fail to energize or inspire people to take their efforts to the next level

Has a value set but no guiding principles for implementing them

Essentialist

Has a strategy that is concrete *and* inspirational

Has an intent that is both meaningful and memorable

Makes one decision that eliminates one thousand later decisions

- STOP WORDSMITHING AND START DECIDING (p.127)
 - An essential intent doesn't have to be elegantly crafted; it's the substance, not the style that counts. (p.127)
- ASK, "HOW WILL WE KNOW WHEN WE'RE DONE?" (p.127)
 - A powerful essential intent inspires people partially because it is concrete enough to answer the question, "How will we know when we have succeeded?" (p.127)
- Living with Intent (p.128)
 - Yet it is worth the effort because only with real clarity of purpose can people, teams, and organizations fully mobilize and achieve something truly excellent. (p.129)

Chapter 11 - Dare: The Power of a Graceful "No"

- Without courage, the disciplined pursuit of less is just lip service. (p.132)
- Why is it so hard in the moment to dare to choose what is essential over what is nonessential?
 - One simple answer is we are unclear about what is essential. (p.134)
- Essentially Awkward (p.135)
 - A second reason why it is hard to choose what is essential in the moment is as simple as an innate fear of social awkwardness. (p.135)
 - We feel guilty. We don't want to let someone down. We are worried about damaging the relationship. But these emotions muddle our clarity. They distract us from the reality of the fact that either we can say no and regret it for a few minutes, or we can say yes and regret it for days, weeks, months, or even years. (p.135)

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

Avoids saying no to avoid feeling social awkwardness and pressure

Dares to say no firmly, resolutely, and gracefully

Says yes to everything

Says yes only to the things that really matter

- SEPARATE THE DECISION FROM THE RELATIONSHIP (p.137)
 - When people ask us to do something, we can confuse the request with our relationship with them. (p.137)
- SAYING "NO" GRACEFULLY DOESN'T HAVE TO MEAN USING THE WORD NO (p.137)
 - Essentialists choose "no" more often than they say no. (p.137)
- FOCUS ON THE TRADE-OFF (p.138)
 - The more we think about what we are giving up when we say yes to someone, the easier it is to say no. (p.138)
- REMIND YOURSELF THAT EVERYONE IS SELLING SOMETHING (p.138)
 - Simply being aware of what is being sold allows us to be more deliberate in deciding whether we want to buy it. (p.138)
- MAKE YOUR PEACE WITH THE FACT THAT SAYING "NO" OFTEN REQUIRES TRADING POPULARITY FOR RESPECT (p.138)
 - When you say no, there is usually a short-term impact on the relationship. (p.138)

- The potential upside, however, is less obvious: when the initial annoyance or disappointment or anger wears off, the respect kicks in. (p.138)
- Essentialists accept they cannot be popular with everyone all of the time. (p.139)
 - Yes, saying no respectfully, reasonably, and gracefully can come at a short-term social cost.
 - But part of living the way of the Essentialist is realizing respect is far more valuable than popularity in the long run. (p.139)
- REMEMBER THAT A CLEAR “NO” CAN BE MORE GRACEFUL THAN A VAGUE OR NONCOMMITTAL “YES” (p.139)
 - Being vague is not the same as being graceful, and delaying the eventual “no” will only make it that much harder — and the recipient that much more resentful. (p.139)
 - The “No” Repertoire (p.14)
 - 1. The awkward pause. (p.140)
 - 2. The soft “no” (or the “no but”). (p.140)
 - 3. “Let me check my calendar and get back to you.” (p.140)
 - 4. Use e-mail bounce backs. (p.140)
 - 5. Say, “Yes. What should I deprioritize?” (p.141)
 - 6. Say it with humor. (p.141)
 - 7. Use the words “You are welcome to X, I am willing to Y.” (p.142)
 - 8. “I can’t do it, but X might be interested.” (p.142)
 - Saying no is its own leadership capability. (p.143)
 - It is not just a peripheral skill. (p.143)
 - As with any ability, we start with limited experience. (p.143)

Chapter 12 - Uncommit: Win Big by Cutting Your Loses

- *Sunk-cost bias* is the tendency to continue to invest time, money, or energy into something we know is a losing proposition simply because we have already incurred, or sunk, a cost that cannot be recouped. (p.146)

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

Asks, “Why stop now when I’ve already invested so much in this project?”

Asks, “If I weren’t already invested in this project, how much would I invest in it now?”

Thinks, “If I just keep trying, I can make this work.”

Thinks, “What else could I do with this time or money if I pulled the plug now?”

Hates admitting to mistakes

Comfortable with cutting losses

- Avoiding Commitment Traps (p.148)
 - BEWARE OF THE ENDOWMENT EFFECT (p.148)

- “*The endowment effect*,” our tendency to undervalue things that aren’t ours and to overvalue things because we already own them. (p.148)
- PRETEND YOU DON’T OWN IT YET (p.149)
 - Don’t ask, “How will I feel if I miss out on this opportunity?” but rather, “If I did not have this opportunity, how much would I be willing to sacrifice in order to obtain it?” (p.149)
 - Similarly, we can ask, “If I wasn’t already involved in this project, how hard would I work to get on it?” (p.149)
- GET OVER THE FEAR OF WASTE (p.149)
 - It’s natural not to want to let go of what we wasted on a bad choice, but when we don’t, we doom ourselves to keep wasting even more. (p.150)
- INSTEAD, ADMIT FAILURE TO BEGIN SUCCESS (p.150)
 - Only when we admit we have made a mistake in committing to something can we make a mistake a part of our past. (p.150)
- STOP TRYING TO FORCE A FIT (p.150)
 - Whether in our personal or professional lives, it is all too tempting to force something that is simply a mismatch. (p.151)
- GET A NEUTRAL SECOND OPINION (p.151)
 - Someone who is not emotionally involved in the situation and unaffected by the choice we make can give us the permission to stop forcing something that is clearly not working out. (p.151)
- BE AWARE OF THE STATUS QUO BIAS (p.151)
 - The tendency to continue doing something simply because we have always done it is sometimes called the “*status quo bias*.” (p.151)
 - It’s all too easy to blindly accept and not bother to question commitments simply because they have already been established. (p.152)
- APPLY ZERO-BASED BUDGETING (p.152)
 - With zero-based budgeting, they use zero as the baseline. In other words, every item in the proposed budget must be justified from scratch. (p.152)
- STOP MAKING CASUAL COMMITMENTS (p.152)
- FROM NOW ON , PAUSE BEFORE YOU SPEAK (p.153)
 - pausing for just five seconds before offering your services can greatly reduce the possibility of making a commitment you’ll regret. (p.153)
- GET OVER THE FEAR OF MISSING OUT (p.153)
- TO FIGHT THIS FEAR, RUN A REVERSE PILOT (p.153)
 - In a reverse pilot you test whether removing an initiative or activity will have any negative consequences. (p.153)

Chapter 13 - Edit: The Invisible Art

- What I mean is that a good editor is someone who uses deliberate subtraction to actually add life to the ideas, setting, plot, and characters. (p.157)

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

Thinks that making things better means adding something

Thinks that making things better means subtracting something

Attached to every word, image, or detail

Eliminates the distracting words, images, and details

- Editing Life (p.158)
 - CUT OUT OPTIONS (p.158)
 - The Latin root of the word decision — *cis* or *cid* — literally means “to cut” or “to kill.” (p.159)
 - Since ultimately, having fewer options actually makes a decision “easier on the eye and the brain,” we must summon the discipline to get rid of options or activities that may be good, or even really good, but that get in the way. (p.159)
 - CONDENSE (p.160)
 - Are you saying what you want to say? and, Are you saying it as clearly and concisely as possible? (p.160)
 - CORRECT (p.161)
 - In our professional or private lives, we can make course corrections by returning to our core purpose. (p.161)
 - Having a clear overarching intent, as discussed in chapter 10, enables us to check ourselves—to regularly compare our activities or behaviors to our real intent. (p.161)
 - If they are incorrect, we can edit them (p.161).
 - EDIT LESS (p.161)
 - They know that sometimes having the discipline to leave certain things exactly as they are is the best use of their editorial judgment. (p.161-162)

Chapter 14 - Limit: The Freedom of Setting Boundaries

- If you don't set boundaries — there won't be any. Or even worse, there will be boundaries, but they'll be set by default — or by another person — instead of by design. (p.166)
- Nonessentialists tend to think of boundaries as constraints or limits, things that get in the way of their hyper-productive life. (p.166)
- Essentialists, on the other hand, see boundaries as empowering. (p.166)
 - They recognize that boundaries protect their time from being hijacked and often free them from the burden of having to say no to things that further others' objectives instead of their own. (p.166)

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

Thinks if you have limits you will be limited

Knows that if you have limits you will become limitless

Sees boundaries as constraining

Sees boundaries as liberating

Exerts effort attempting the direct “no”

Sets rules in advance that eliminate the need for the direct “no”

- Their Problem Is Not Your Problem (p.167)
 - DON'T ROB PEOPLE OF THEIR PROBLEMS (p.168)
 - BOUNDARIES ARE A SOURCE OF LIBERATION (p.169)
 - When we don't set clear boundaries in our lives we can end up imprisoned by the limits others have set for us. (p.169)
 - When we have clear boundaries, on the other hand, we are free to select from the whole area — or the whole range of options — that we have deliberately chosen to explore. (p.169)
 - FIND YOUR DEALBREAKERS (p.169)
 - Make a list of your dealbreakers — the types of requests or activities from that person that you simply refuse to say yes to unless they somehow overlap with your own priorities or agenda. (p.170)
 - CRAFT SOCIAL CONTRACTS (p.170)
 - Simply having an understanding up front about what we were really trying to achieve and what our boundaries were kept us from wasting each other's time, saddling each other with burdensome requests, and distracting each other from the things that were essential to us. (p.170)

PART IV EXECUTE - HOW CAN WE MAKE DOING THE VITAL FEW THINGS ALMOST EFFORTLESS?

Chapter 15 - Buffer: The Unfair Advantage

- GIVE ME SIX HOURS TO CHOP DOWN A TREE AND I WILL SPEND THE FIRST FOUR SHARPENING THE AXE .
— Attributed to Abraham Lincoln (p.175)

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

Assumes the best-case scenario will happen

Builds in a buffer for unexpected events

Forces execution at the last minute

Practices extreme and early preparation

- USE EXTREME PREPARATION (p.180)
- ADD 50 PERCENT TO YOUR TIME ESTIMATE (p.181)
 - The term for this very common phenomenon is the “planning fallacy.” This term, coined by Daniel Kahneman in 1979, refers to people’s tendency to underestimate how long a task will take, even when they have actually done the task before. (p.182)
 - One study found that if people estimated anonymously how long it would take to complete a task they were no longer guilty of the planning fallacy. This implies that often we actually know we can’t do things in a given time frame, but we don’t want to admit it to someone. (p.182)
 - One way to protect against this is simply to add a 50 percent buffer to the amount of time we estimate it will take to complete a task or project (if 50 percent seems overly generous, consider how frequently things actually do take us 50 percent longer than expected). (p.183)
- CONDUCT SCENARIO PLANNING (p.183)
 - Ask the following five questions: (p.184)
 - (1) What risks do you face on this project?
 - (2) What is the worst - case scenario?
 - (3) What would the social effects of this be?
 - (4) What would the financial impact of this be? and
 - (5) How can you invest to reduce risks or strengthen financial or social resilience?

Chapter 16 - Subtract: Bring Forth More by Removing Obstacles

- By systematically identifying and removing this “constraint” you’ll be able to significantly reduce the friction keeping you from executing what is essential. (p.187)
- But if you really want to improve the overall functioning of the system — whether that system is a manufacturing process, a procedure in your department, or some routine in your daily life — you need to identify the “slowest hiker.” (p.187)

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

Piles on quick-fix solutions

Removes obstacles to progress

Does more

Brings forth more

- Produce More by Removing More (p.188)
 - Aristotle talked about three kinds of work, whereas in our modern world we tend to emphasize only two.
 - The first is theoretical work, for which the end goal is truth.
 - The second is practical work, where the objective is action.
 - But there is a third: it is poetical work.
 - The philosopher Martin Heidegger described poiesis as a “bringing-forth.”
 - This third type of work is the Essentialist way of approaching execution. (p.188)
 - An Essentialist produces more — brings forth more — by removing more instead of doing more. (p.189)

- Instead of focusing on the efforts and resources we need to add, the Essentialist focuses on the constraints or obstacles we need to remove. (p.190)
 - 1. BE CLEAR ABOUT THE ESSENTIAL INTENT (p.190)
 - 2. IDENTIFY THE “SLOWEST HIKER” (p.190)
 - 3. REMOVE THE OBSTACLE (p.191)

Chapter 17 - Progress: The Power of Small Wins

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

Starts with a big goal and gets small results

Starts small and gets big results

Goes for the flashiest wins

Celebrates small acts of progress

- Frederick Herzberg reveals research showing that the two primary internal motivators for people are achievement and recognition for achievement. (p.196)
- FOCUS ON MINIMAL VIABLE PROGRESS (p.199)
 - Similarly, we can adopt a method of “minimal viable progress.” (p.199)
 - We can ask ourselves, “What is the smallest amount of progress that will be useful and valuable to the essential task we are trying to get done?” (p.199)
- DO THE MINIMAL VIABLE PREPARATION (p.200)
 - Take a goal or deadline you have coming up and ask yourself, “What is the minimal amount I could do right now to prepare?” (p.200)
- VISUALLY REWARD PROGRESS (p.201)
 - There is something powerful about visibly seeing progress toward a goal. (p.201)

Chapter 18 - Flow: The Genius of Routine

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

Tries to execute the essentials by force

Designs a routine that enshrines what is essential, making execution almost effortless

Allows nonessentials to be the default

Makes the essential the default position

- Making It Look Easy (p.206)
 - Routine is one of the most powerful tools for removing obstacles. (p.206)
- The Power of the Right Routine (p.209)

- According to researchers at Duke University, nearly 40 percent of our choices are deeply unconscious. (p.209)
 - We don't think about them in the usual sense. (p.209)
- OVERHAUL YOUR TRIGGERS (p.209-210)
 - In an interview about his book *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg said "in the last 15 years, as we've learned how habits work and how they can be changed, scientists have explained that every habit is made up of a cue, a routine, and a reward. (p.209)
 - The cue is a trigger that tells your brain to go into automatic mode and which habit to use. (p.209)
 - Then there is the routine — the behavior itself — which can be physical or mental or emotional. (p.209)
 - Finally, there is a reward, which helps your brain figure out if this particular habit is worth remembering for the future. (p.209-210)
- CREATE NEW TRIGGERS (p.210)
- DO THE MOST DIFFICULT THING FIRST (p.211)
- MIX UP YOUR ROUTINES (p.212)
 - There's no reason why you can't have different routines for different days of the week. (p.212)
- TACKLE YOUR ROUTINES ONE BY ONE (p.212)
 - So start with one change in your daily or weekly routine and then build on your progress from there. (p.213)

Chapter 19 - Focus: What's Important Now?

- By keeping his (Larry Gelwix, Highland Rigby) players fully present in the moment and fully focused on what is most important — not on next week's match, or tomorrow's practice, or the next play, but now — Gelwix helps make winning almost effortless. (p.215)
- There Is Only Now (p.216)
 - Yet every second spent worrying about a past or future moment distracts us from what is important in the here and now. (p.217)
 - The ancient Greeks had two words for time.
 - The first was *chronos*.
 - The second was *kairos*. (p.217)
 - The latter is experienced only when we are fully in the moment — when we exist in the now. (p.217)

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

Mind is spinning out about the past or the future

Mind is focused on the present

Thinks about what was important yesterday or tomorrow

Tunes in to what is important right now

Worries about the future or stresses about the past

Enjoys the moment

- Multitasking Versus Multifocusing (p.219)
 - What we can't do is concentrate on two things at the same time.
 - When I talk about being present, I'm not talking about doing only one thing at a time.
 - I'm talking about being focused on one thing at a time.
 - Multitasking itself is not the enemy of Essentialism; pretending we can "multifocus" is. (p.220)
- How to Be in the Now (p.220)
 - FIGURE OUT WHAT IS MOST IMPORTANT RIGHT NOW (p.220)
 - Get present in the moment and ask yourself what is most important this very second — not what's most important tomorrow or even an hour from now. (p.220)
 - If you're not sure, make a list of everything vying for your attention and cross off anything that is not important right now. (p.221)
 - GET THE FUTURE OUT OF YOUR HEAD (p.222)
 - "What might you want to do someday as a result of today?" (p.222)
 - This was not a list of firm commitments, just a way to get all of the ideas out of my head and on paper. This had two purposes. (p.222)
 - First, it ensured I wouldn't forget about those ideas, which might prove useful later.
 - Second, it alleviated that stressful and distracting feeling that I needed to act upon them right this second.
 - PRIORITIZE (p.222)
 - I worked on each item on the "what is essential now" list one at a time. (p.222)
- The Pause That Refreshes (p.222)
 - It supports the sentiment attributed to Lao Tzu: "In work, do what you enjoy. In family life, be completely present." (p.223)
 - Pay attention through the day for your own kairos moments. (p.223)
 - Write them down in your journal. (p.223)
 - Think about what triggered that moment and what brought you out of it. (p.223)
 - Now that you know what triggers the moment, try to re-create it. (p.223)
 - Training yourself to tune into kairos will not only enable you to achieve a higher level of contribution but also make you happier. (p.223)

Chapter 20 - Be: The Essentialist Life

- Living Essentially (p.226)
 - There are two ways of thinking about Essentialism. (p.226)

- The first is to think of it as something you do occasionally. (p.226)
- The second is to think of it as something you are. (p.226)
- It is easy to get caught up in the “paradox of success” we discussed in chapter 1. (p.230)
 - We have clarity of purpose, which leads us to success. (p.230)
 - But with our success we get new options and opportunities. (p.230)
 - This sounds like a good thing, but remember, these options unintentionally distract us, tempt us, lure us away. (p.230)
 - Our clarity becomes clouded, and soon we find ourselves spread too thin. (p.230)
 - Now, instead of being utilized at our highest level of contribution, we make only a millimeter of progress in a million directions. (p.230)
 - Ultimately, our success becomes a catalyst for our failure. The only way out of this cycle is the way of the Essentialist. (p.230)
- Becoming an Essentialist is a long process, but the benefits are endless. (p.235)
- MORE CLARITY (p.235)
- MORE CONTROL (p.235)
- MORE JOY IN THE JOURNEY (p.235)
- The Essential Life: Living a Life That Really Matters (p.236)
 - The life of an Essentialist is a life of meaning. (p.236)
 - It is a life that really matters. (p.236)
 - The life of an Essentialist is a life lived without regret. (p.237)

Appendix - Leadership Essentials

- He (Jeff Weiner, LinkedIn CEO) uses the acronym FCS (a.k.a. FOCUS) to teach his philosophy to his employees.
 - The letters stand for: (p.239)
 - “Fewer things done better,”
 - “Communicating the right information to the right people at the right time,” and
 - “Speed and quality of decision making.”
 - Indeed, this is what it means to lead essentially. (p.239)
- ESSENTIALIST TEAMS (p.240)
 - When there was a high level of clarity of purpose, the teams and the people on it overwhelmingly thrived.
 - When there was a serious lack of clarity about what the team stood for and what their goals and roles were, people experienced confusion, stress, frustration, and ultimately failure. (p.240)
 - “Clarity equals success.” (p.240)
- THE ELEMENTS OF LEADING AS AN ESSENTIALIST (p.241)

Nonessentialist

Essentialist

MIND-SET

Everything to everyone

Less but better

TALENT

Hires people frantically and creates a “Bozo explosion.”

Ridiculously selective on talent and removes people who hold the team back.

STRATEGY

Pursues a straddled strategy where everything is a priority.

Defines an essential intent by answering the question, “If we could only do one thing, what would it be?” Eliminates the nonessential distractions.

EMPOWERMENT

Allows ambiguity over who is doing what. Decisions are capricious.

Focuses on each team member’s highest role and goal of contribution.

COMMUNICATION

Talks in code.

Listens to get to what is essential.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Checks in too much or is so busy
he or she checks out altogether.
Sometimes does both: disrupting
the focus of the group and then
being absent to the group.

Checks in with people in a gentle
way to see how he or she can remove
obstacles and enable small wins.

RESULT

A fractured team that makes a millimeter
of progress in a million directions

A unified team that breaks through
to the next level of contribution

- BE RIDICULOUSLY SELECTIVE IN HIRING PEOPLE (p.243)
- DEBATE UNTIL YOU HAVE ESTABLISHED A REALLY CLEAR (NOT PRETTY CLEAR) ESSENTIAL INTENT (p.243)
 - Clear intent leads to alignment; vague direction produces misalignment every time. (p.244)
- GO FOR EXTREME EMPOWERMENT (p.244)
 - The Nonessentialist disempowers people by allowing ambiguity over who is doing what. (p.244)
 - Often this is justified in the name of wanting to be a flexible or agile team. (p.244)
 - But what is actually created is a counterfeit agility. (p.244)
 - An Essentialist understands that clarity is the key to empowerment. (p.244)
 - He doesn't allow roles to be general and vague. (p.244)
 - He ensures that everyone on the team is really clear about what they are expected to contribute and what everyone else is contributing. (p.244)
- COMMUNICATE THE RIGHT THINGS TO THE RIGHT PEOPLE AT THE RIGHT TIME (p.245)
 - The Indispensable leader communicates in code, and as a result, people aren't sure what anything really means. (p.245)
 - Nonessentialist communication is usually either too general to be actionable or changes so quickly that people are always caught off guard. (p.245)
 - Essentialist leaders, on the other hand, communicate the right things to the right people at the right time. (p.245)
- CHECK IN OFTEN TO ENSURE MEANINGFUL PROGRESS (p.245)
 - The Nonessentialist leader is not great on accountability. (p.245)

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HELMWISE

- In fact, a Nonessentialist leader may unintentionally train his people to expect no follow-up at all. (p.245)
- The Essentialist leader makes follow-up so easy and frictionless that it actually happens. (p.246)