

Essentialism

Essentialism by Greg McKeown discusses the way of life that frees oneself from “the trivial many” and allows for more focused energy and time pursuing what is truly essential. The book contains many examples of essentialist living as well as the core essentialist principles: explore, eliminate, execute. The three “e’s” if you will. I will expound more on what I personally got out of the book along with some goals I have made for my future essentialist self.

The biggest thing I learned from reading this book is that “less but better”. Instead of making an inch of progress in a million different directions, we can make a million inches of progress in one direction. For this to happen however, we need to be sold on the idea that “less”, meaning less commitments, less pursuits, less “yes’s” to whatever requests come our way, will result in better results. He gave the example of a man who for years had been striving to be the best at his job in a software company by pleasing everyone and being the first to volunteer for any sort of help that was needed. This resulted in him feeling overworked and underutilized, never really seeing significant progress in any one project. His managers came to him offering an early retirement package. Feeling flustered, a friend suggested he do only the work he would do if he were a consultant to the company, and nothing more, and to not tell anyone. At first saying “no” to meeting invites, or favors being asked of him was tough, but after focusing his time and energy on only those projects he was passionate about, he received the biggest bonus of his career and did the best work he had done his whole career.

Another big thing I learned was that the main difference between non-essentialists and essentialists is the understanding between “I have to” and “I choose to”. One thing that is very easy for us to get caught in is that we think we have to do everything that comes our way. An invite to a party, a favor for a co-worker, a new project from a senior manager, but McKeown explains that saying “yes” haphazardly is basically giving up our free agency. It’s important to choose and be deliberate about how we spend our time because, as McKeown says, if we don’t prioritize our lives, someone else will.

One other big thing I learned was the importance of separating time and space out for us to think and regroup our thoughts and goals. Many CEO’s do this like Jeff Weiner of LinkedIn or Bill Gates of Microsoft. They separate out parts of their days or weeks to be completely alone and distraction free. This allows them to have time to see the big picture of things and not get caught up in the little details. It helps them regain focus on their objectives and stay on the path they really want to be on. It helps them focus on the “essential” or “main” thing. As Franklin Covey, author of *7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, said, “The main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing.” Separating out time and space to do this everyday or every week allows for this to happen.

What I would say about this book to a friend or family member is that it is truly eye opening and relatable. It brings home the points it teaches by providing real world examples. *Essentialism* is a great book for anyone looking for more fulfillment in life, not only work life, but life in general. I would suggest writing down key quotes and sayings from the book as it helps remember them in times of need when confronted with new opportunities.

My goal is to decide what I want to do with my career and life, and put it down in writing, then be more deliberate about opportunities that come my way. This will mean saying no when it is uncomfortable, or even seems like a good opportunity. I also want to read *Essentialism* again just because it is so packed full of great advice and insight. That’s all I have decided to do for now because, as an essentialist would say, less but better.