

Insights from Essentialism by Greg McKeown

“Half of the troubles of this life can be traced to saying ‘yes’ too quickly and not saying no soon enough.” - Josh Billings

Warren Buffett became the most successful investor of all time by being hyper selective. He owes 90% of his wealth to just 10 investments. For every 100 opportunities that comes his way, he says no to 99 of them. Peter Drucker, the greatest management consultant in the last 100 years, once said, “People are effective because they say ‘no,’ because they say, ‘this isn’t for me.’”

We are all presented with ‘good opportunities’ during our lifetime, but which of those opportunities are truly essential to our lives?

“A non-essentialist thinks almost everything is essential. An essentialist thinks almost everything is non-essential.” - Greg McKeown

“You cannot overestimate the unimportance of practically everything.” - John Maxwell

Discern the essential from the non-essential (4 habits):



Evaluate the trade-offs

To be one of the best airlines, CEO Herb Kelleher made deliberate trade-offs that allowed him to strategically say ‘yes’ to things that would differentiate Southwest from other airlines and secure its position on top.

“We just say yes because it is an easy reward, we run the risk of having to later say no to a more meaningful one.” - Greg McKeown

Each choice has a trade-off. When we say yes to one thing, we are saying no to another. The next time you want to say yes to an opportunity just remember what other opportunities you are saying no to. **“We can try to avoid the reality of trade-offs, but we can’t escape them. Trade-offs are not something to be ignored or decried. They are something to be embraced and made deliberately, strategically, and thoughtfully.” - Greg McKeown**



Set boundaries

“Nonessentialists tend to think of boundaries as constraints or limits, things that get in the way of their hyperproductive life. To a Nonessentialist, setting boundaries is evidence of weakness. Essentialists, on the other hand, see boundaries as empowering. 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.” - Greg McKeown

Create black and white rules, like “I don’t take calls between 7-10am, sorry,” or “I don’t check email after 6pm. If it’s something urgent, you’ll need to call me.” People will initially challenge your boundaries, but overtime, people will respect your boundaries. With the right boundaries in place, you can prevent the non-essential from creeping into your life.



Dare to say ‘No’

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

Develop the courage to say ‘no’ by remembering what you are saying ‘yes’ to:

- *“No, I don’t want to take on another project because I want to ensure my current project is a huge success.”*
- *“No, I don’t want to go out for drinks because I want to spend time with my family.”*



Schedule time to journal

Rushing around all day trying to get things done causes us to lose perspective. The more stress we accumulate during the day, the more we mistake non-essential things as urgent and important. To prevent the non-essential from creeping into our lives, we need to schedule a time where we can disconnect and renew our outlook on life. A reliable way to regain perspective is journaling.

Journaling allows us to get the petty stuff down on paper so we can start focusing on the bigger picture. By spending a few minutes journal each day, we increase our introspection and start to question why we do what we do. **“Being a journalist of your own life will force you to stop hyper-focusing on all the minor details and see the bigger picture.” - Greg McKeown**

“Our highest priority is to protect our ability to prioritize.” - Greg McKeown