

SUMMARY

THE SUBTLE ART OF NOT GIVING A F*CK

MARK MANSON



Summary of “The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck” by Mark Manson

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Extolling the value of caring less, Mark Manson explains how we can live happier lives by not worrying about what people think of us.

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Introduction

What do you want out of life? Whether you're looking for a partner, a career, or the best way to get your daily news, we have a plethora of opportunities at our fingertips. And after centuries of dissatisfied people living with limited resources, you would think our generation would exist in a state of perpetual bliss. So, why are we all so stressed and dissatisfied? Mark Manson theorizes that it's because the freedom of choice has backfired; because we now have so many options, we're trying to have it all. And as you might expect, this quickly leads to an epidemic of burn-out and stress.

So, through the course of this summary, we're going to take a look at Manson's suggestions for improving our quality of life, starting with his number one tip: don't give a f*ck! Or at least, not about things that don't matter. And by following his suggestions, we'll discover the very short list of things we should give a f*ck about and learn some stress management strategies, including:

- Why we should stop comparing ourselves to Metallica
- The secret to embracing self-criticism, and
- Why we need to let it go

Find the Struggle That's Right for You

Wouldn't it be great if everything was easy? Unfortunately, however, if you've lived longer than two seconds, you've probably noticed that pretty much everything-- especially things that are worth trying for-- involve at least a little bit of a struggle. But instead of being discouraged by the daily grind, Manson suggests redirecting your stress into pursuing the struggle that works for you. One of the most helpful ways to do this is to begin by defining what you really want out of life. Or, put simply, what ultimate achievement would you want to be reflected on your tombstone?

And if you really stop to give it some thought, you'll notice that that's not such an easy question to answer! It gets even harder if you attempt to fill in that blank with vague things like, "happiness," a "loving family," or "a meaningful career." Because each of those options sound nice, but none of them come with a concrete solution for achieving them and they don't incentivize you to push yourself until you find success. That's why it's vital to identify a concrete goal from the get-go-- and understand that even your ideal future will bring you some struggles along the way. For example, let's say you want to be a CEO. That sounds great, right? CEOs are successful and they make a lot of money! But they also regularly put in 60-hour workweeks and are called upon to make unpopular decisions. And if you aren't absolutely fired up about being a CEO, it's easy to buckle under that strain.

So, as you seek to identify your ultimate goal, it's crucial that you ask yourself whether you want something badly enough to endure the future struggles. Asking yourself what you truly enjoy is one of the best ways to work that out. Because working on something that makes you happy, that truly embodies the old cliché, "Do what you love and you'll never work a day in your life" is the only thing that can fortify you against the stress and strain of your daily grind. In fact, the more passionate you are about your goal, the more you might actually grow to love the struggle!

For example, just take a look at the author's story. Manson discovered that he really loved writing about dating so he decided he'd start a dating advice blog. And even though it was a challenge at first, he enjoyed the struggle because he was genuinely passionate about what he was doing. And eventually, his struggle was rewarded because his blog gained hundreds of thousands of subscribers and soon garnered more than enough money for Manson to make the blog his full-time job. These examples just go to show that there is no point looking for an easy life; instead, your best option is to find a goal that makes you want to fight for it. But saying no to the wrong struggles is every bit as important as saying yes to the right ones. So, remember to be ruthless in chasing the things you want and cutting out the toxic influencers which steal your joy.

Suffering Can Lead to Happiness

If you're looking for good examples of success being achieved through struggle, you don't have to look much farther than the art world. Because we often imagine artists as tenacious and underappreciated, willing to fight for her talent to be recognized, you might be gratified to learn that that stereotype is frequently more accurate than we'd imagine. For example, just take the story of guitarist Dave Mustaine who, in 1983, was kicked out of the band he'd formed with his friends-- Metallica-- right as they were about to get their big break.

Fuming, Dave decided that the best way to get revenge would be to perfect his own skills and show them what a mistake they made. So, for two years, he threw himself into improving his performance and finding talented musicians who could help him form an even better band. The results of his passion-- a little band called Megadeth-- later went on to sell more than 25 million records. Yet, despite the success of his own venture, Dave couldn't let go of the sense of inadequacy he associated with Metallica. And because Metallica became one of the world's most successful bands, Dave felt even more like a failure when he measured his success against theirs.

And even though Dave clearly wasn't a failure, his struggle highlights one of the most common human pitfalls: our temptation to measure our success against that of others. This often occurs because we set unhealthy or unattainable benchmarks for ourselves which means that we'll always be doomed to disappointment. But how do we find healthier standards for measuring our achievements? One way is to learn from Pete Best's example. Like Dave Mustaine, Pete was also kicked out of a band that was deeply important to him and this band was also destined for success. Pete's experience also held even more potential for disappointment because his former band happened to be none other than The Beatles. (No big deal, of course, only the biggest band of all time!)

Watching their success was perhaps even harder for Pete than it was for Dave and, understandably, Pete became very depressed for awhile. But after awhile, he sort of snapped out of it when he realized that music-- rather than fame or success-- was his biggest priority in life. And if he wanted to truly enjoy his passion, then he had to stop letting success define his life. Even though he went on to play with less successful bands, realigning his priorities lead to Pete becoming a happier, healthier, and more well-adjusted person. So, the moral of this story is that whatever your "Metallica" is, stop comparing your success to theirs.

Stop Focusing on Shitty Values!

Now that we've looked at some examples of what not to do, let's take a look at some extra examples of shitty values and how to avoid them. Because, unfortunately, comparing yourself to others is only one of many pitfalls that can entrap you and destroy your potential happiness. One of those traps is pleasure. You might think that-- by definition-- this would be the biggest source of happiness around, but have you ever heard of too much of a good thing? This occurs when people prioritize pleasure over everything else in their lives and it often happens when we're seeking an escape. And as a result of our unhealthy relationships with pleasure, we can form toxic and destructive habits like drug addictions, gluttony, or cheating on our partners. To add insult to injury, instead of increasing your happiness, statistics show that people who list pleasure as the highest priority in their lives are most likely to become anxious, depressed, or fall victim to substance abuse.

Another shitty value is using material success as a benchmark for our lives. Whether you feel the need to flash a fancier car than your neighbor's or constantly show off your style on Instagram, we've all fallen prey to this line of thinking at one time or another. But, just like the pursuit of pleasure, this doesn't make us happy and it definitely doesn't help us grow or mature. In fact, studies actually show that once we reach a certain point of financial security-- basically, a point where all our needs are met and we're comfortable-- wealth really doesn't increase our happiness. And the pursuit of material goods can even have a negative effect if we start prioritizing it ahead of our family, friends, or the development of our moral character.

So, now that we've taken a look at some more shitty values, let's talk about how to avoid them and replace them with the right values. For starters, it might be helpful to learn that our tendency to gravitate towards shitty values usually comes from a lack of having solid, worthwhile values in place. Put simply, if we don't have some good core beliefs to live by, we're going to drift toward whatever makes us feel good, even if it's not truly good

for us in the long run. So, a good way to identify and formulate worthwhile values is to consider these three standards. Are they:

- Based in reality?
- Helpful to society?
- Immediate and controllable?

For example, think of honesty. Honesty is a great value because it meets all three standards described above. You can control it-- by determining if you're going to be honest or not (and obviously, you should choose to do so)-- and it's based in reality. It also provides truthful feedback to others and strengthens the formation of healthy relationships, so it's also helpful in society. And if you want some examples of other values that meet these standards, you can consider creativity, generosity, and humility!

Take Full Responsibility for Your Life

If you've ever felt forced to do the dishes or be part of an experience you hated, you know firsthand that feeling compelled to do something robs any experience of its joy. And sadly, many of us spend a significant portion of our lives feeling as though our experiences have been forced upon us. And whether we're in our current job because we failed the interview for a job we really wanted or because we've been devastated by a break-up, we often see ourselves as the victims of one life circumstance or another.

And while it's true that some circumstances are unfortunate and do have a negative impact on our lives, if we're not careful, it's all too easy to drift into a permanent victim mentality which prevents us from taking responsibility for our own lives. To take an extreme example of this attitude in practice, let's look at the life of William James. Although he had the good fortune to be born to a prominent nineteenth-century family, he was also very ill and struggled with severe bouts of vomiting and back spasms which, understandably, had a negative impact on his life and prevented him from pursuing a number of opportunities. His seeming stroke of bad luck continued when he failed at his dream of becoming a painter-- and then at his back-up dream of becoming a doctor.

Feeling lost and purposeless, James began contemplating suicide. But everything changed when he encountered the work of French philosopher Charles Pierce. Pierce posited that everyone should take full responsibility for every aspect of their lives and this really resonated with James. Realizing that his misery stemmed from the feeling that he was a victim of external circumstances, James understood that he felt powerless because he was constantly blaming his situation on factors he couldn't control. The realization that he could and should take control of his life gave him a new sense of purpose and vigor and, empowered, he decided to turn over a new leaf. So, after years of perseverance and dedication, James went on to become one of the pioneers of American psychology. So, the next time you

feel like a victim, remember James' story and try to channel your energy into thinking about the factors you can change for the better.

When we Feel We've Lost our Identities, Faith Can Help

Let's imagine for a moment that you're a senior manager at a large, prestigious company. And you love everything about your job! From the respect of your colleagues to your company car to the snazzy clothes you can afford, you love every part of your life as a senior manager. In fact, you've been in this role for so long that being a senior manager has become an integral part of your identity; it's one of the key ways you define who you are. But let's say you have an opportunity to go for a big promotion. You could transcend the role of senior manager, maybe even by becoming the CEO. Those perks sound pretty great, but they don't come without substantial risk. Because if you don't perform a test flawlessly, you'll lose everything-- your car, your job, the respect you've earned, and most of all, your identity.

Would you risk it? Do you think it would be worth it? Most people wouldn't, due to what the author calls "Manson's Law of Avoidance" or the tendency to run away from anything that might challenge our sense of identity. And while that might seem wise, it can sometimes be more of a hindrance than a help. For example, amateur artists, authors, and actors often refuse to present their work because they fear rejection. If they've invested their lives and identities in a creative project only to be told it's not valid, they're terrified that this would destroy their sense of self. So, even though they might find success and positive reinforcement instead, they hesitate to try.

Fortunately, however, Manson has a solution for combating the Law of Avoidance: Buddhism! It helps because Buddhism teaches that our sense of self is an illusion; the labels we use to form our identities-- whether they're positive (successful, happy, etc.) or negative (ugly, unlucky, and so on)-- are merely constructs. So, because they aren't real, we shouldn't let them dictate our lives or the expectations we set for ourselves. That's why, as weird as it sounds, it's important to let go of your identity. Now, that doesn't mean that the author is advocating floating aimlessly through life

with no sense of direction or purpose. But it does mean that we should release ourselves from the power of harmful labels.

For example, if you've always considered yourself to be a career-minded person, this has probably influenced a number of your life decisions. In high school and college, you likely focused on opportunities which were designed to propel you towards professional success. And in adult life, you might tend to prioritize your career over your family and relationships. But when you free yourself from this restrictive self-image, you might find that you can redefine your goals and pursue whatever makes you genuinely happy. Whether that's spending more time with your children or baking cupcakes, you'll be able to let go of constricting expectations and discover a more developed version of yourself.

Achieve Positive Change by Accepting Your Mistakes

We all know those annoying people who always think they're right. Whether it's the product of complete delusion or because they once called the outcome of a basketball game sixteen years ago, they're convinced their "thing" is always being right. And they're almost always unpleasant to be around! Good thing you're not like that, right? Except, of course, when you are. Because sometimes we all are. And we're most susceptible to this delusion when it comes to ourselves. Whether it's because we think we're in the right when we're not or because we can't see an obvious flaw, we all have blind spots from time to time and we're often resistant to being shown that we're wrong.

But if you want to break this cycle and become more self-aware, you have to start by (frequently) taking a deliberate moment to ask yourself if you're in the wrong. And you can't just do it once or without really thinking through it. You have to approach this question with the cold, harsh light of objective reality and be prepared to confront those blind spots where you wrongly think you're right. It may not be pleasant; questioning our decisions and confronting our weaknesses means we'll often discover some unpleasant truths about ourselves. But it's worth it because it means we'll be stronger, better people in the long run.

Final Summary

In an age of opportunity, you'd think we would feel as though we're living in utopia. But unfortunately, our access to innumerable options means that we often have just enough rope to hang ourselves; we misuse our opportunities by stretching ourselves too thin in an effort to have it all. And because this leads to stress and unhappiness, Manson argues that we need to learn to stop "giving a f*ck" about 99% of the things which make us unhappy. So, start by choosing a life goal that's worth struggling for, learn to stop having shitty values (and cultivate better ones), and develop a more constructive approach to life by losing your identity and embracing the freedom that comes with cultivating your sense of self-awareness. You can also find health and hope by pursuing faith and a set of values that are realistic, controllable, and beneficial to society.



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