

SUMMARY

DON'T SWEAT

THE

SMALL STUFF

RICHARD CARLSON

Summary of “Don’t Sweat the Small Stuff” by Richard Carlson

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Learn the simple ways to keep little things from taking over your entire life.

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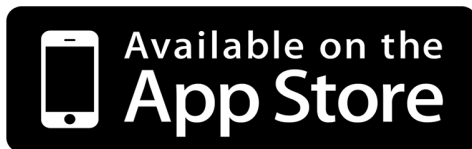


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Introduction

Think back to those moments in which you dealt with bad news, a difficult person, or a disappointment of some kind. How did you react? Many times, we react in unhealthy ways. We blow things out of proportion, we hold on too tightly, or we focus on the negative aspects. These reactions then cause us to become irritated, annoyed and easily bothered. When we allow these negative emotions to overcome us, we begin to lose sight of the bigger picture of life. These emotions begin to consume us and, after a while, we begin to believe that everything is a really big deal. Luckily, there's a better way to approach life and difficult situations. We can choose a softer, more graceful path that makes life easier and more satisfying. Author Richard Carlson learned this lesson a few years ago when something happened that planted the seed of this book, *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*. The story begins with a foreign publisher who requested that Carlson get an endorsement from author Dr. Wayne Dyer for a foreign edition of his book, *You Can Feel Good Again*. Carlson had been endorsed by Dr. Dyer in the past, so he sent out his request, and six months later, he heard nothing. Carlson simply let the publisher know that they could not use Dyer's name to promote his book, case closed. Unfortunately, this was not the case and the publisher used an earlier quote from Dr. Dyer and simply transferred it to the new book. Upset and worried about the implications of using a false endorsement, Carlson quickly took action. He demanded the books be taken off the shelves and wrote an apology to Dr. Dyer explaining the situation and that they were taking action to rectify the situation.

A few weeks later, Carlson received a letter stating, "Richard. There are two rules for living in harmony. #1) Don't sweat the small stuff and #2) It's all small stuff. Let the quote stand. Love, Wayne." That was it! Wayne responded with grace and humility, he demonstrated how to simply "go with the flow" of life. Now, Carlson aims to teach others how to approach life in a more accepting way. You see, when you "don't sweat the small stuff," you will begin to accept what life has to offer and let go of problems instead of resisting them. Your life will begin to flow. As the serenity prayer

suggests, “Change the things that can be changed, accept those that cannot, and have the wisdom to know the difference.”

Striving For Perfection is Harmful

Too often we allow ourselves to get worked up about the small stuff, the situations that aren't a big deal. Oftentimes we focus on little problems and blow them out of proportion. For example, imagine your commute to work. Do you get angry as a stranger cuts you off in traffic? Why? Instead of just letting it go, you hold on to this confrontation throughout the day. You may even play out the imaginary confrontations in your mind and share the incident with someone else.

Imagine instead turning towards compassion for the person and remembering the stress and pain of being late for something important. You see, we sweat small occurrences like this every day. We get angry over things like waiting in line, listening to unfair criticism, and even traffic. Unfortunately, when we "sweat the small stuff" we begin to lose touch with how beautiful and magical life can truly be. That beauty and magic are pushed back even further when we rely on perfection. Perfectionism is steeped in our brains as we try to organize our lives and become the best. This focus on perfection causes us to stress about the "imperfections" in our lives: a disorganized closet, a few pounds we'd like to lose, a scratch on our car.

Even worse, we focus on other's imperfections as well, the way they look, behave, or the way they live their life. However, focusing on these imperfections pulls us further away from our goal of being kind and gentle. Instead, when you find that you're thoughts are turning negative, gently remind yourself that life is just fine the way it is. Of course, this doesn't mean that you shouldn't strive to do your very best; instead, it's simply realizing that while there may be a better way to do something, you can still enjoy and appreciate the way things already are.

In fact, being relaxed and gentle doesn't mean that you can't be a superachiever. You see, one of the main reasons we continue to live busy, competitive lives is because we live as if life is one giant emergency! We fear

that if we become peaceful and loving then we suddenly lose our aspirations and become apathetic and lazy. Carlson proves the opposite is true. When we become fearful and frantic, we use energy that drains our creativity and motivation. In other words, living a busy and fearful life literally immobilizes you from reaching your full potential.

Carlson surrounds himself with peaceful, loving people. These people are also best-selling authors, loving parents, computer experts, and chief executive officers. Each of them is fulfilled in what they do and they continue to improve themselves by going after their needs, wants, and desires. When you let go of fear and the desire for perfection, it becomes easier for you to focus and concentrate on achieving your goals.

Find Peace By Being Present in Your Thoughts

So how can you begin to start living a more peaceful and kind life? One powerful technique is to be aware of how quickly your negative thinking spirals out of control. Often we find ourselves caught up in a negative thought and then we become absorbed as we start to think about the details of whatever is upsetting us. Soon, we begin to feel worse and we become even more agitated than before.

For example, let's say you wake up in the middle of the night and remember a phone call that you need to make the following day. Then, instead of simply going back to sleep, you begin to think about all the other things that need to get done that day. Perhaps you even begin to engage in a probable conversation with your boss which makes you even more upset! Even worse, you begin to feel sorry for yourself as you think about how busy you are and how much work you have to do. These "thought attacks" can go on for hours, even all night for some people. At the end of the day, it's impossible to feel at peace when your head becomes full of these concerns and stresses. So what should you do?

Take note of what's happening in your head before they have the chance to spiral. So if you find you wake up in the middle of the night thinking about that important phone call you have to make, simply say to yourself, "Whew, there I go again," and consciously stop your train of thought before it has a chance to keep chugging along. Become grateful for remembering the important phone call, write it down on a piece of paper and go back to sleep. If you find this happens often, keep a pen and paper by the bed for these moments.

Unfortunately, many of us lead busy lives. Our thoughts run constantly in our heads, filling us with reminders of what we need to do and when we need to get them done. We stay up late, get up early, and avoid having fun so that we can get it all done. Even worse, we put off those who love us

most. We create a cycle of thinking that once we get everything on our to-do list done, then we'll be calm and relaxed. We'll have time to spend with our loved ones. The reality is that this never happens. We check off items while simultaneously replacing them with even more.

Nothing is more important than you and your loved one's happiness and inner peace. It's time to stop obsessing with getting everything done and start reminding ourselves that everything can wait. In fact, the purpose of life isn't to just get everything done, right? It's to enjoy each step along the way and live a life filled with love and peace. "Remember, when you die, there will still be unfinished business to take care of. And you know what? Someone else will do it for you! Don't waste any more precious moments of your life regretting the inevitable."

Avoid Interrupting Others and Learn to Listen

Think about the conversations you have with colleagues, employees, and even friends and family. Do you simply stay quiet when others are talking? Or do you try to finish their sentences and hurry them along to complete their thought? When we interrupt other people or finish their sentences, we are forming a destructive habit that strips away the respect you give and receive from others. Not only that, but it takes an incredible amount of energy to try and be in two heads at once! If you think about it, when you hurry someone or finish their sentence, you have to keep track of both your thoughts and the thoughts of the person you are interrupting. This habit then causes you both to speed up your speech and thinking, causing you both to become irritated and annoyed.

Instead, let go of your ego, be patient, and truly listen to what the other person is saying. While this may be difficult at times, you'll find that the interactions you have with others will immensely improve. If you aren't sure where to begin, remind yourself before a conversation even begins to be patient and wait. Tell yourself to allow the other person to finish speaking before you take your turn. When this happens, the people you communicate with will feel more relaxed, heard, and listened to. You'll even find yourself more relaxed, your heart rate and pulse rates will slow down, and you can even begin to enjoy conversations rather than rush through them!

If you want to experience an even more intense calming effect, you should try to direct attention away from you and let others experience glory. You see, it's human nature to want to feel special. Our ego-centered part wants to say, "Look at me. I'm special. My story is more interesting than yours." We want to feel seen, heard, and respected even if it's at the expense of someone else. This is why when we have conversations with others, we tend to divert the conversation back to ourselves. For instance, the next time

someone tells you a story or shares an accomplishment with you, notice your tendency to say something about yourself in response.

So while this habit is hard to break, the next time someone shares a story or an accomplishment, try saying something like “That’s wonderful,” or “Please tell me more,” and simply leave it at that. When you practice this habit, the person you are speaking to will further enjoy the conversation, they’ll feel more relaxed, and they’ll feel more interesting. You too will feel more relaxed as you won’t feel anxious waiting for your turn to speak. Of course, there are many times when sharing a similar story or having an exchange in experience is appropriate. In these times, focus on sharing the glory rather than attempting to take it. “When you surrender your need to hog the glory, the attention you used to need from other people is replaced by a quiet inner confidence that is derived from letting others have it.”

Let Go of Being “Right”

Now that you know the importance of listening to others, it's time to let others be 'right' most of the time. Think about the times in which you've needed to prove that you were 'right,' oftentimes you sacrifice your happiness in these situations. When we defend our positions, we use a tremendous amount of energy and we eventually alienate the people in our lives. You see, as you defend your position, you encourage others to become defensive in return. This vicious cycle only leads to anger and resentment as neither party successfully changes the opinion of the other.

I mean, have you ever been corrected by someone and responded with “Thank you so much for showing me that I'm wrong and you're right.” On the other hand, has anyone you've corrected thanked you in return? Most likely not. The truth is, no one likes to be corrected, we hate it! Instead, we want our positions to be respected and understood by others. Being listened to and heard is one of our greatest desires, and those who learn to listen, are the ones who are the most loved and respected. Meanwhile, those who continue to correct others are often the most resented.

There may be times when correcting is necessary, for instance, you may hear a racist comment and feel the need to speak your mind. In this case, it's important to speak out. Most of the time, however, our need to correct comes from our ego and selfish need to be right. So how can you silence your ego and allow others to be right? Carlson suggests practicing by allowing others the joy of being right, giving them the glory and stopping your corrections. As hard as this may be, it is worth the practice and effort it takes. For example, when someone says, “I really feel it's important to...” rather than immediately contradicting them by responding, “No, it's more important to...” simply let it go and let their opinion or comment stand.

When you begin to step back and allow others to be right, the people in your life will become less defensive. Additionally, they'll begin to appreciate you more and you'll start to feel joy yourself as you witness other's

happiness around you. Of course, letting others be right doesn't mean you have to sacrifice your deepest philosophical truths or most heartfelt opinions, but starting today, let others be 'right,' *most* of the time!

Practice Kindness

When traveling to the San Francisco Bay Area, you'll likely hit one of the five toll bridges in which you'll have to pay a fee to cross. A while back, some people began paying for the tolls of the cars immediately behind them. Those drivers would then pull up to the toll booth to pay the fee, only to find out that the car in front of them had paid for them! You can imagine the impact this tiny gift had on the driver of that car. Perhaps it encouraged them to do something kind in return that day or simply improved their mood for the rest of the day. This is an example of a random act of kindness, a spontaneous gift that we should begin doing without expecting anything in return.

Your random act of kindness can be anything, as long as it comes from the heart. Perhaps you choose to pick up the litter in the neighborhood, make an anonymous contribution to a charity, send some cash to someone in need, save an abandoned animal, or volunteer to feed the hungry at a local shelter. No matter your act of kindness, the point is to have fun! It doesn't matter how much money you spend as long as you feel good doing it. As you practice kindness, you begin to fill yourself up with positive feelings and constant reminders on the important aspects of life.

Practicing kindness means more than just random gifts and acts of service, you can continue being kind by practicing forgiveness. For example, have you ever heard someone say, "Don't mind John, he didn't know what he was doing"? If so, this means you've seen someone look beyond behavior. Looking beyond behavior means forgiving people for their actions, something we do every day if we have kids of our own, right? We're constantly loving our children no matter how they upset us that day. Love isn't purely based on behavior, if it was, then perhaps no one would experience love as a teenager!

Maybe we should practice the same forgiveness and kindness toward strangers. What if we could see the disapproving actions of others in a

similar light as our teenagers' behavior? The world might be a much more loving place. However, this doesn't mean that you should ignore negative behavior and pretend that everything is always great and wonderful. There is no excuse for some negative behaviors and we should certainly speak up to defend issues in which we are passionate about. Instead, practicing forgiveness means putting yourself in another's shoes and changing your perspective to give others the benefit of the doubt.

For example, when the postal clerk is moving slowly, you might understand that he's simply having a bad day, or perhaps all of his days are bad. When someone close to you lashes out at you, try to understand that all your loved one really wants is to love you and feel loved by you. So look beyond the isolated incidents, look past the behavior and you'll begin to feel more at peace in your relationships with others and with yourself.

Practice Meditation and Yoga to Find Inner Peace

Pascal once said, “All of humanity’s problems stem from man’s inability to sit quietly in a room alone.” While this may be a bit extreme, your quest for inner peace certainly begins with a quiet mind. This doesn’t mean you have to begin practicing Buddhism, you can begin quieting your mind with many techniques, including reflection, deep breathing, contemplation, visualization, and of course, meditation.

Even in your busy life, you can take as little as five to ten minutes a day to train your mind to be still and quiet. This stillness can then be translated into your everyday life making you less reactive and irritable. Meditation can even help give you a greater perspective to see the stresses in your life as small things, not emergencies. If you’re looking to begin practicing meditation, begin by finding a quiet place where you can be alone. Close your eyes. Focus your attention on your breathing as you take deep breaths in and out. As your thoughts enter your mind, let them go and bring your attention back on your breath. Do this over and over again, and you’ll soon train yourself to push out all the thoughts that try to enter your mind.

Your meditation practice won’t be perfect at first, but you’ll get better over time. In fact, it’s rare for a beginner to focus their attention for more than a few seconds. The trick is to be consistent. If you struggle at first, don’t get discouraged, simply show up every day and practice your meditation for a few minutes. Soon, you’ll begin to feel the benefits of quieting your mind and finding inner peace. Like meditation, many people take up yoga to become a more relaxed, easygoing person. The best part is that yoga can be completed at any age and fitness level. It’s non-competitive and you can work and progress at your own speed.

While yoga can be quite physical, the benefits go beyond the physical body. Yoga certainly strengthens the muscles and the spine, creating flexibility and ease of motion. On the other hand, yoga also is a powerful stress

reducer that balances the body-mind-spirit connection. The stretches are designed to open the body and lengthen the spine. Additionally, they focus on areas that are typically tight like the neck, back, hips, legs, and spine. And while you're stretching, you are simultaneously concentrating on what you're doing and focusing on your breathing.

So if you think you don't have enough time to practice yoga, you'll soon find the opposite is true when you begin to feel the benefits. You'll find you don't have time to *not* practice yoga! For Carlson, it makes him feel young, energized, and close to his family. You see, rather than watching television together, Carlson will flip on a yoga video with his two daughters and spend a few minutes stretching together!

Think of What Your Problems Can Teach You

In today's world, we are constantly bombarded with everyday stresses which cause some of the greatest problems in our lives. While problems come in all shapes, sizes, and degrees of seriousness, how we view our problems will ultimately decide how much or little stress we allow into our lives. In other words, do you view your problems as emergencies, or as potential teachers? You see, the more we struggle with our problems and want them to go away, the worse they become. On the other hand, if we accept our problems as inevitable parts of life, then we can view them as potential teachers, ultimately lifting a giant weight off our shoulders.

For example, think about a problem that you've dealt with for quite some time. How do you deal with it? Most people have struggled with it, they've mentally rehearsed it, analyzed it time and time again, only to find that they can never come up with a solution. Where does this thinking lead to? Even more stress. However, if you begin to approach your problems with a new perspective, you can begin to embrace them. Think instead about the potential lesson you can learn from your problem. Perhaps it's teaching you to be more careful or more patient.

When it comes to the problems in our lives, our problems are the best places to practice keeping our hearts open. In other words, think about your problems as a potential source of awakening and opportunity. Many of our problems today are created by ourselves because we are constantly struggling to make our life different than it is. Instead, we need to find inner peace to understand and accept the inevitable contradictions that life brings at us: pain and pleasure, success and failure, joy and sorrow, births and deaths. At the end of the day, problems can teach us to be humble and patient.

In fact, Buddhist tradition believes that life's struggles are so important for growth and peace that they actually ask and pray for them. They pray, "Grant that I may be given appropriate difficulties and sufferings on this

journey so that my heart may be truly awakened and my practice of liberation and universal compassion may be truly filled.” When life is too easy, there are fewer opportunities for growth and peace. So while you shouldn’t seek out problems that will force you to grow, perhaps you should begin accepting problems as inevitable, natural, important parts of life. Accepting this philosophy is the key to “going with the flow” and finding inner peace.

Final Summary

Don't sweat the small stuff. At the end of the day, you are in control of your thoughts and feelings. So if you're looking for a more peaceful, easygoing life, it's time to direct your focus on your thoughts. Become present and train your thinking to become positive, kind, and humble. The first step is to notice the times that you feel stress or begin to blame others for your problems. Next, you need to change your perspective and discover what you can learn from that person or that problem. Then, it's time to put your ego aside and avoid petty arguments in which you have to be right or prove a point. Finally, find joy in allowing others to be right and allow them to state their thoughts and opinions without contradiction. On the other hand, when you engage in arguments, you're sweating the small stuff. When you stress about circumstances outside your control, you're sweating the small stuff. Learn to live in the moment, accept life's inevitable hardships, and focus on the important things in life: love, kindness, and service. Once you change your perspective, you'll begin to experience genuine happiness and discover your inner peace.



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