

SUMMARY

BY ALYSSA BURNETTE

YOU

DO

YOU

BY SARAH KNIGHT



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Summary of You Do You by Sarah Knight

Written by Alyssa Burnette

Learn how to live your most authentic life.

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Introduction

“Today you are you, that is truer than true, there is no one alive who is you-er than you!” These words of wisdom from Dr. Seuss might be some of the most encouraging words you ever hear. But that’s only if you feel confident about who you are. The same goes for well-intentioned motivational slogans like, “Be yourself-- everyone else is already taken!” Because, let’s be honest, figuring out who you are is a pretty tall order. That’s partly because humans are intensely social creatures. We’re driven to seek out the company and acceptance of others. We also take our cues about acceptable behavior from the behavior of other people. Unsurprisingly, these cues also have a powerful impact on our fashion sense, our sense of humor, and many other interests.

Some of these influences are innocent. For example, maybe you’re scrolling through Instagram and you see your friend wearing a cute hat. That hat is just your style too and you’re inspired by her pretty picture so you decide to get one as well. This example is harmless because your purchase of the hat is dictated by your own sense of style; you’ve simply been inspired by someone else. And that’s okay because that’s how people get a lot of ideas! We see things we like on someone else and think, “Hey, that would look great on me too!” But it’s different when you feel pressured to engage with things you don’t like so you can fit in with everybody else. To put this example in context, let’s say that all your friends are wearing their hair straight. They spend hours each morning straightening it until it’s as smooth as blown glass. And because they all do this, all your friends look the same. Your hair, however, is naturally curly. And you like it that way! But because all your friends are embracing the smooth, straight style, you feel like you have to do it too. So, you straighten your hair even though it isn’t what you want and it isn’t an authentic representation of yourself.

This is exactly what Sarah Knight is talking about. Because we fall into those traps of performative conformity all the time! And before we know it, we’re not even sure who we are or what our sense of style really is. And that’s why the author wants to help you rediscover your sense of self and reclaim your

originality through the power of one simple life philosophy: you do you! Over the course of this summary, we'll explore her top tips for doing exactly that.



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The List of Unspoken Rules

Would you consider yourself to be a rule follower? Many people proudly embrace this identity and with good reason! At an early age, we learn that life operates according to a specific set of rules. As a result, we internalize the belief that if we follow the rules and do the right thing, life will go well for us. So, as kids, we put this into practice by sharing and turning our homework in on time. We listen to our parents and teachers and we practice academic honesty instead of cheating on our tests. But when we become adults, the rules get a little more tricky. And it doesn't help that many of these rules are unspoken; we learn them only by watching the behavior of those around us and interpreting their cues. For example, let's imagine that you know the answer in your college class and proudly raise your hand to demonstrate your knowledge. But when everybody laughs at you or calls you a nerd, you quickly realize that knowing things is not cool. As a result, you might pretend to be less intelligent than you are or you might decline to answer questions even if you know the answer.

In this case, "don't answer questions" isn't a rule in the same way that "don't kill somebody" is absolutely a law, but they're pretty similar in that we tend to follow them religiously. Breaking one law might put us in prison, but breaking the other might make us social outcasts. And for many people, the latter option appears worse. That's because human beings are often desperate to fit in and be accepted. So, just like the example we considered earlier-- the one where you straighten your hair-- in this scenario, you might be tempted to rebel against your own identity in favor of conformity. Put simply, sometimes we follow society's unspoken rules because they will help us to fit in. That's because we think fitting in or being accepted will make us happy. But the author affirms that, actually, nothing could be further from the truth!

Although conformity might temporarily save us from some awkward or uncomfortable situations, the truth is that ultimately requires us to live a lie. And when we reject our authentic selves, it's impossible for us to be happy. That's because true happiness can only be achieved when you embrace

yourself for who you are and learn to truly “do you.” So, let’s take a closer look at what that really means.



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Self Care is Not Selfish

Remember those rules and social norms we discussed in the previous chapter? As you probably noticed, many of those rules-- like sharing with others, waiting your turn, or fitting in-- are community-centric. In short, they all involve putting others above yourself. And in many cases, that's a great thing! We should be kind and generous. We should be willing to act in the best interests of others. But we often forget that that doesn't mean becoming a doormat for everyone around you. Sadly, we fall into this trap all the time when it comes to setting personal boundaries. We agree to things that make us uncomfortable because we don't want to disappoint someone else. We prioritize another person's feelings even when it causes us significant pain. And often, we erase our boundaries altogether, putting ourselves permanently at everyone else's beck and call.

But that's taking kindness to the extreme! The author observes that we are taught to be unselfish and we internalize this as a deeply important value. As kids, we quickly learn to dislike people who take the last cookie for themselves, who cut in line, or who refuse to share. And on an adult scale, we learn that no one likes to work with people who are selfish, greedy, or self-aggrandizing. So, we go in the opposite direction, often becoming unselfish in the extreme. We don't want to hurt others or be unkind so we prioritize the needs of others until we neglect our own self-care completely. And that's why Knight wants to affirm that self-care isn't selfish. But in order to get the full benefit of her point, we first need to unpack her definition of self-care. When we hear the term "self-care," we often think of relaxing with a face mask or a bubble bath. These small, simple acts of kindness towards ourselves can reduce a significant amount of stress.

But sometimes self-care is neither relaxing nor simple. Sometimes, self-care is intense and introspective work and it involves actions that others may interpret as selfish. However, the author attempts to re-define these actions with a new term that she calls "self-ish." And although it might seem like it, being "self-ish" and selfish are not the same thing! (Even though the verbiage is confusing!) That's because being self-ish is about knowing and taking care

of yourself. It's about setting boundaries and being authentically you. To put this practice into context, let's consider a couple of examples. For starters, let's imagine that you're in a toxic friendship with someone who is a serious drain on your time, energy, and emotional resources. We can think of this friend as an "energy vampire": someone who sucks all the life and energy out of you while offering you nothing in return.

Every time your friend calls, she keeps you on the phone for two or three hours, ranting about everything that's wrong in her life. She gives you exact transcripts of her arguments with her husband and children. She tells you how many times she's been to the bathroom today. She tells you she's felt sick today and she gives you precise details about what color her vomit was. And to top it all off, during that three hour conversation, she never once asks how you're doing! So, we can all agree that this friend is gross and inconsiderate to say the very least! And by the time you get off the phone with her, you feel completely drained-- even though it's only 11:00 am. (And who could blame you!) It's also no surprise that, after years of friendship with her, you start to dread her calls.

So, why would you continue to keep this friend in your life? Why, when her negative impact on you is so apparent? One reason might be because you feel sorry for her. You know her life is stressful and, as a compassionate person, you feel bad. You also feel selfish if you tell her that you can't handle her problems or that you don't want to stay on the phone for three hours hearing about her upset stomach. So, even though her presence in your life drains your energy and stresses you out, you continue to take her calls. You also refuse to set boundaries, even when her constant calls make you late for things or causes significant stress in your life. You do so because you think you're doing the right thing. But this is where being self-ish comes in! If you're being self-ish, then you know that you can't afford to give away your energy to an energy vampire. You also understand that this person isn't a true friend; she's just using you as an emotional sponge so you can soak up all her problems. And you know that your time and energy are worth more than that.

So, if you're being self-ish, then you have a couple of options. If you want to purge your life of negative energy (and you definitely should!) then you can communicate to her that this friendship isn't working for you. Or, if you want to keep her in your life at an arms-length distance, you can practice setting some healthy boundaries. If you're opting for the latter, then the next time she calls, you will gently and kindly explain to her that you don't have the time or emotional energy to stay on the phone for three hours. Tell her that you can chat for 15-30 minutes at the absolute most. You might also point out that you'd like to talk about yourself a bit more and that you find it hurtful that she doesn't ask about you. Although this is certainly not true in all cases, you might sometimes find that your energy vampire is totally unaware of what they were doing to you! That's because they are selfish, not self-ish. But if you can bring their behavior to their attention in a tactful way, they might decide to change!

So, from this example, we can see that being self-ish with a toxic friend has a number of benefits. In addition to preserving your own time and energy, you can also establish healthy boundaries and cultivate a better relationship with your friend (or remove an energy vampire from your life!) But those benefits don't necessarily mean it's easy. Earlier in this chapter, we considered the fact that people don't set boundaries because they're afraid of seeming selfish. That's why it's helpful to contextualize the difference between being selfish and being self-ish with a contrasting example. So, for the purposes of this scenario, let's say that you really don't like your mother-in-law. (And I mean you really, really don't like her!) She's snobby, she's critical, and she's definitely not your favorite person to be around. But despite all of those negative factors, she has one redeeming quality: she really loves your kids and she desperately wants to be part of their lives. And even though she's not awesome to you, she's never been anything but loving towards them.

So, when your daughter's 6th birthday party comes around, you have a choice: invite your mother-in-law or not? If you don't invite her, there's about a 90% chance she'll hear about it from someone else and realize you excluded her. There's an even higher chance that she'll be deeply hurt and offended and that this will cause a permanent rift in your family, making

things difficult for your partner and your kids. Knowing that, you could suck it up, be nice, and endure her presence for an afternoon. But because you really, really don't like her, you decide to hurt everyone's feelings, cause lasting damage, and avoid inviting her to her own granddaughter's birthday party. I think pretty much everyone could look at this example and conclude that this is nothing but selfish. Unlike the first example-- which involves setting personal boundaries in a toxic, high-stress situation-- this example involves needlessly hurting others to avoid someone you dislike for a couple of hours.

When you analyze these two examples, it's pretty obvious which one is wrong. So, don't be fooled into thinking that self-care is selfish! And don't think that being self-ish is the same thing as being selfish. The author's "you do you" philosophy is about protecting your emotional energy and recognizing that you can't help others unless you also take care of yourself. However, it does not mean that you have the right to harm or neglect others in favor of your own personal interests. So, if you keep that guiding principle in place, you can learn to be the right kind of self-ish and live into the philosophy of "you do you."



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Final Summary

Life puts us under a variety of conflicting pressures. But the author observes that many of them are unnecessary! We might have to go to work, pay the rent, and occasionally be gracious to people we dislike because these things are necessary. But you were not put on this earth to fit in, conform to social norms, or embrace toxic relationships. Instead, you were put on this earth to be you. And that means living into the best and most authentic version of yourself.

So, if you don't want to have kids-- don't! If going to college isn't the right fit for you-- don't! But if you're a nerd, be a proud nerd! Keep answering questions and keep being proud that you know stuff. Because that's an example of you doing you. Being yourself may not be easy but it will make you happy in the long run. So, even if that means ending toxic friendships, standing out from the crowd, or feeling a little awkward every now and then, don't be afraid to do that! You. Do. You.



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