

The Subtle Art Of Not Giving A Fuck - A Counterintuitive Approach To Living A Good Life by Mark Manson Book Summary

Be completely, unflinchingly honest with yourself—especially the worst parts of yourself.

Share your failings without hesitation or doubt.

Be comfortable with yourself as a failure. Don't give a fuck about success.

Self-improvement and success often occur together. But that doesn't necessarily mean they're the same thing.

Our culture today is obsessively focused on unrealistically positive expectations: Be happier. Be healthier. Be the best, better than the rest. Be smarter, faster, richer, sexier, more popular, more productive, more envied, and more admired.

Be perfect and amazing and crap out twelve-karat-gold nuggets before breakfast each morning while kissing your selfie-ready spouse and two and a half kids goodbye. Then fly your helicopter to your wonderfully fulfilling job, where you spend your days doing incredibly meaningful work that's likely to save the planet one day.

But when you stop and think about it, conventional life advice—all the positive and happy self-help stuff we hear all the time—is fixating on what you lack. It lasers in on what you perceive your shortcomings and failures to already be and then emphasizes them for you.

You learn about the best ways to make money because you feel you don't have enough money already. You stand in front of the mirror and repeat affirmations saying that you're beautiful because you feel as though you're not beautiful already.

You follow dating and relationship advice because you feel that you're unlovable already. You try goofy visualization exercises about being more successful because you feel as though you aren't successful enough already.

Ironically, this fixation on the positive—on what's better, what's superior—only serves to remind us over and over again of what we are not, of what we lack, of what we should have been but failed to be. After all, no truly happy person feels the need to stand in front of a mirror and recite that she's happy. She just is.

There's a saying in Texas: "The smallest dog barks the loudest." A confident man doesn't feel a need to prove that he's confident. A rich woman doesn't feel a need to convince anybody that she's rich. Either you are or you are not. And if you're dreaming of something all the time, then you're reinforcing the same unconscious reality over and over: that you are not that.

Everyone and their TV commercial want you to believe that the key to a good life is a nicer job, a more rugged car, a prettier girlfriend, or a hot tub with an inflatable pool for the kids. The world is constantly telling you that the path to a better life is more, more, more—buy more, own more, make more, fuck more, be more. You are constantly bombarded with messages to give a fuck about everything, all the time.

Give a fuck about a new TV. Give a fuck about having a better vacation than your coworkers. Give a fuck about buying that new lawn ornament. Give a fuck about having the right kind of selfie stick. Why? My guess: because giving a fuck about more stuff is good for business.

And while there's nothing wrong with good business, the problem is that giving too many fucks is bad for your mental health. It causes you to become overly attached to the superficial and fake, to dedicate your life to chasing a mirage of happiness and satisfaction.

The key to a good life is not giving a fuck about more; it's giving a fuck about less, giving a fuck about only what is true and immediate and important.

Our society today, through the wonders of consumer culture and hey-look-my-life-is-cooler-than-yours social media, has bred a whole generation of people who believe that having these negative experiences— anxiety, fear, guilt, etc.—is not okay.

If you look at your Facebook feed, everybody there is having a fucking grand old time. Look, eight people got married this week! And some sixteen-year-old on TV got a Ferrari for her birthday. And another kid just made two billion dollars inventing an app that automatically delivers you more toilet paper when you run out.

Meanwhile, you're stuck at home flossing your cat. And you can't help but think your life sucks even more than you thought. The Feedback Loop from Hell has become a borderline epidemic, making many of us are overly stressed, overly neurotic, and overly self-loathing.

Back in Grandpa's day, he would feel like shit and think to himself, "Gee whiz, I sure do feel like a cow turd today. But hey, I guess that's just life. Back to shoveling hay."

But now? Now if you feel like shit for even five minutes, you're bombarded with 350 images of people totally happy and having amazing fucking lives, and it's impossible to not feel like there's something wrong with you.

It's this last part that gets us into trouble. We feel bad about feeling bad. We feel guilty for feeling guilty. We get angry about getting angry. We get anxious about feeling anxious. What is wrong with me? This is why not giving a fuck is so key. This is why it's going to save the world. And it's going to save it by

accepting that the world is fucked and that's all right, because it's always been that way, and always will be.

By not giving a fuck that you feel bad, you short-circuit the Feedback Loop from Hell; you say to yourself, "I feel like shit, but who gives a fuck?" And then, as if sprinkled by magic fuck-giving fairy dust, you stop hating yourself for feeling so bad.

To see what's in front of one's nose requires a constant struggle. Well, the solution to our stress and anxiety is right there in front of our noses, and we're too busy watching porn and advertisements for ab machines that don't work, wondering why we're not banging a hot blonde with a rocking six-pack, to notice.

We joke online about "first-world problems," but we have become victims of our success. Stress-related health issues, anxiety disorders, and cases of depression have skyrocketed over the past thirty years, even though everyone has a flat-screen TV and can have their groceries delivered.

Our crisis is no longer material; it's existential, it's spiritual. We have so much fucking stuff and so many opportunities that we don't even know what to give a fuck about anymore.

Because there's an infinite amount of things we can now see or know, there are also an infinite number of ways we can discover that we don't measure up, that we're not good enough, that things aren't as great as they could be. And this rips us apart inside.

Because here's the thing that's wrong with all of the "How to Be Happy" shit that's been shared eight million times on Facebook in the past few years—here's what nobody realizes about all of this crap:

The desire for a more positive experience is itself a negative experience. And, paradoxically, the acceptance of one's negative experience is itself a positive experience.

Wanting a positive experience is a negative experience; accepting a negative experience is a positive experience. the more you pursue feeling better all the time, the less satisfied you become, as pursuing something only reinforces the fact that you lack it in the first place. The more you desperately want to be rich, the more poor and unworthy you feel, regardless of how much money you make. The more you desperately want to be sexy and desired, the uglier you come to see yourself, regardless of your actual physical appearance.

The more you desperately want to be happy and loved, the lonelier and more afraid you become, regardless of those who surround you. The more you want to be spiritually enlightened, the more self-centered and shallow you become in trying to get there.

"You will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of. You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life." Or put more simply: Don't try.

It's often the person who is the least invested in the success of something that ends up achieving it. Notice how sometimes when you stop giving a fuck, everything seems to fall into place? What's with that? What's interesting about the backward law is that it's called backward for a reason: not giving a fuck works in reverse. If pursuing the positive is negative, then pursuing the negative generates the positive.

The pain you pursue in the gym results in better all-around health and energy. The failures in business are what lead to a better understanding of what's necessary to be successful. Being open with your insecurities paradoxically makes you more confident and charismatic around others. The pain of honest confrontation is what generates the greatest trust and respect in your relationships. Suffering through your fears and anxieties is what allows you to build courage and perseverance.

Everything worthwhile in life is won through surmounting the associated negative experience.

Any attempt to escape the negative, to avoid it or quash it or silence it, only backfires. The avoidance of suffering is a form of suffering. The avoidance of struggle is a struggle. The denial of failure is a failure. Hiding what is shameful is itself a form of shame.

Pain is an inextricable thread in the fabric of life, and to tear it out is not only impossible but destructive: attempting to tear it out unravels everything else with it. To try to avoid pain is to give too many fucks about pain. In contrast, if you're able to not give a fuck about the pain, you become unstoppable.

In my life, I have given a fuck about many things. I have also not given a fuck about many things. And like the road not taken, it was the fucks not given that made all the difference.

Chances are you know somebody in your life who, at one time or another, did not give a fuck and then went on to accomplish amazing feats. Perhaps there was a time in your life when you simply did not give a fuck and excelled to some extraordinary height.

For myself, quitting my day job in finance after only six weeks to start an Internet business ranks pretty high up there in my own "didn't give a fuck" hall of fame.

These moments of non-fuckery are the moments that most define our lives. The major switch in careers; the spontaneous choice to drop out of college and join a rock band; the decision to finally dump that deadbeat boyfriend whom you caught wearing your pantyhose a few too many times.

To not give a fuck is to stare down life's most terrifying and difficult challenges and still take action. While not giving a fuck may seem simple on the surface, it's a whole new bag of burritos under the hood. I don't even know what that sentence means, but I don't give a fuck. A bag of burritos sounds awesome, so let's just go with it.

Most of us struggle throughout our lives by giving too many fucks in situations where fucks do not deserve to be given. We give too many fucks about the rude gas station attendant who gave us our change in nickels. We give too many fucks when a show we liked was canceled on TV. We give too many fucks when our coworkers don't bother asking us about our awesome weekend.

Meanwhile, our credit cards are maxed out, our dog hates us, and Junior is snorting meth in the bathroom, yet we're getting pissed off about nickels and Everybody Loves Raymond.

Look, this is how it works. You're going to die one day. I know that's kind of obvious, but I just wanted to remind you in case you'd forgotten. You and everyone you know are going to be dead soon. And in the short amount of time between here and there, you have a limited amount of fucks to give. Very few. And if you go around giving a fuck about everything and everyone without conscious thought or choice—well, then you're going to get fucked.

There is a subtle art to not giving a fuck. And though the concept may sound ridiculous and I may sound like an asshole, what I'm talking about here is essentially learning how to focus and prioritize your thoughts effectively—how to pick and choose what matters to you and what does not matter to you based on finely honed personal values.

This is incredibly difficult. It takes a lifetime of practice and discipline to achieve. And you will regularly fail. But it is perhaps the most worthy struggle one can undertake in one's life. It is perhaps the only struggle in one's life.

Because when you give too many fucks—when you give a fuck about everyone and everything—you will feel that you're perpetually entitled to be comfortable and happy at all times, that everything is supposed to be just exactly the fucking way you want it to be. This is a sickness. And it will eat you alive.

You will see every adversity as an injustice, every challenge as a failure, every inconvenience as a personal slight, and every disagreement as a betrayal. You will be confined to your petty, skull-sized hell, burning with entitlement and bluster, running circles around your very own personal Feedback Loop from Hell, in constant motion yet arriving nowhere.

Not giving a fuck does not mean being indifferent; it means being comfortable with being different.

There's no such thing as not giving a fuck. You must give a fuck about something. It's part of our biology to always care about something and therefore to always give a fuck.

The question, then, is, What do we give a fuck about? What are we choosing to give a fuck about? And how can we not give a fuck about what ultimately does not matter? say, "Fuck it," not to everything in life, but rather to everything unimportant in life. They reserve their fucks for what truly matters. Friends. Family. Purpose. Burritos. And an occasional lawsuit or two. And because of that, because they reserve their fucks for only the big things that matter, people give a fuck about them in return.

There's no such thing as a lack of adversity. It doesn't exist. No matter where you go, there you are. Well, the same is true for adversity and failure. No matter where you go, there's a five-hundred-pound load of shit waiting for you. And that's perfectly fine. The point isn't to get away from the shit. The point is to find the shit you enjoy dealing with.

To not give a fuck about adversity, you must first give a fuck about something more important than adversity. The problem with people who hand out fucks like ice cream at a goddamn summer camp is that they don't have anything more fuck-worthy to dedicate their fucks to.

If you find yourself consistently giving too many fucks about trivial shit that bothers you—your ex-boyfriend's new Facebook picture, how quickly the batteries die in the TV remote, missing out on yet another two-for-one sale on hand sanitizer—chances are you don't have much going on in your life to give a legitimate fuck about. And that's your real problem. Not the hand sanitizer. Not the TV remote.

When a person has no problems, the mind automatically finds a way to invent something. I think what most people—especially educated, pampered middle-class white people—consider “life problems” are just side effects of not having anything more important to worry about.

It then follows that finding something important and meaningful in your life is perhaps the most productive use of your time and energy. Because if you don't find that meaningful something, your fucks will be given to meaningless and frivolous causes.

Whether you realize it or not, you are always choosing what to give a fuck about.

Maturity is what happens when one learns to only give a fuck about what's truly fuckworthy.

It's okay for things to suck sometimes.

When we believe that it's not okay for things to suck sometimes, then we unconsciously start blaming ourselves. We start to feel as though something is inherently wrong with us, which drives us to all sorts of overcompensation, practical enlightenment as becoming comfortable with the idea that some suffering is always inevitable—that no matter what you do, life is comprised of failures, loss, regrets, and even death.

Because once you become comfortable with all the shit that life throws at you (and it will throw a lot of shit, trust me), you become invincible in a sort of low-level spiritual way. After all, the only way to overcome pain is to first learn how to bear it.

Greatness is merely an illusion in our minds, a made-up destination that we obligate ourselves to pursue, our own psychological Atlantis.

Move lightly despite your heavy burdens, rest easier with your greatest fears, and laugh at your tears as you cry. Lose and let go.

Take inventory of your life and scrub out all but the most important items. Close your eyes and trust that you can fall backward and still be okay. Give fewer fucks. Do not try.

There is no value in suffering when it's done without purpose.

Life itself is a form of suffering. This isn't to say that all suffering is equal. Some suffering is certainly more painful than other types of suffering. But we all must suffer nonetheless.

Pain and loss are inevitable and we should let go of trying to resist them.

Happiness is not a solvable equation. Dissatisfaction and unease are inherent parts of human nature and, as we'll see, necessary components to creating consistent happiness.

The greatest truths in life are usually the most unpleasant to hear.

Suffering is biologically useful. It is nature's preferred agent for inspiring change.

We have evolved to always live with a certain degree of dissatisfaction and insecurity because it's the mildly dissatisfied and insecure creature that's going to do the most work to innovate and survive.

We are wired to become dissatisfied with whatever we have and satisfied by only what we do not have. This constant dissatisfaction has kept our species fighting and striving, building and conquering. So no—our pain and misery aren't a bug of human evolution; they're a feature.

Pain, in all of its forms, is our body's most effective means of spurring action.

Pain is what teaches us what to pay attention to when we're young or careless. It helps show us what's good for us versus what's bad for us. It helps us understand and adhere to our limitations. It teaches us to not fuck around near hot stoves or stick metal objects into electrical sockets.

Therefore, it's not always beneficial to avoid pain and seek pleasure, since pain can, at times, be life-or-death important to our well-being.

But pain is not merely physical. We, humans, are capable of experiencing acute psychological pain as well.

Our brains don't register much difference between physical pain and psychological pain.

Like physical pain, our psychological pain is an indication of something out of equilibrium, some limitation that has been exceeded. And like our physical pain, our psychological pain is not necessarily always bad or even undesirable.

In some cases, experiencing emotional or psychological pain can be healthy or necessary. Just like stubbing our toe teaches us to bump into fewer tables, the emotional pain of rejection or failure teaches us how to avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

And this is what's so dangerous about a society that coddles itself more and more from the inevitable discomforts of life: we lose the benefits of experiencing healthy doses of pain, a loss that disconnects us from the reality of the world around us.

You may salivate at the thought of a problem-free life full of everlasting happiness and eternal compassion, but back here on earth the problems never cease. Seriously, problems don't end.

Problems never fucking go away, they just improve.

Life is essentially an endless series of problems. The solution to one problem is merely the creation of the next one.

Don't hope for a life without problems. Instead, hope for a life full of good problems.

Happiness Comes from Solving Problems.

If you're avoiding your problems or feel like you don't have any problems, then you're going to make yourself miserable. If you feel like you have problems that you can't solve, you will likewise make yourself miserable.

To be happy we need something to solve. Happiness is, therefore, a form of action; it's an activity, not something that is passively bestowed upon you, not something that you magically discover.

Happiness is a constant work-in-progress because solving problems is a constant work-in-progress—the solutions to today's problems will lay the foundation for tomorrow's problems, and so on. True happiness occurs only when you find the problems you enjoy having and enjoy solving.

Sometimes those problems are simple: eating good food, traveling to some new place, winning at the new video game you just bought. Other times those problems are abstract and complicated: fixing your relationship with your mother, finding a career you can feel good about, and developing better friendships.

Whatever your problems are, the concept is the same: solve problems; be happy. Unfortunately, for many people, life doesn't feel that simple. That's because they fuck things up in at least one of two ways:

Denial & Victim Mentality.

People deny and blame others for their problems for the simple reason that it's easy and feels good while solving problems is hard and often feels bad.

Forms of blame and denial give us a quick high. They are a way to temporarily escape our problems, and that escape can provide us with a quick rush that makes us feel better.

Highs come in many forms. Whether it's a substance like alcohol, the moral righteousness that comes from blaming others, or the thrill of some new risky adventure, highs are shallow and unproductive ways to go about one's life.

Much of the self-help world is predicated on peddling highs to people rather than solving legitimate problems.

Many self-help gurus teach you new forms of denial and pump you up with exercises that feel good in the short term while ignoring the underlying issue.

Remember, nobody who is happy has to stand in front of a mirror and tell himself that he's happy.

Highs also generate addiction. The more you rely on them to feel better about your underlying problems, the more you will seek them out. In this sense, almost anything can become addictive, depending on the motivation behind using it.

We all have our chosen methods to numb the pain of our problems, and in moderate doses, there is nothing wrong with this. But the longer we avoid and the longer we numb, the more painful it will be when we finally do confront our issues.

Emotions Are Overrated

Emotions evolved for one specific purpose: to help us live and reproduce a little bit better. That's it. They're feedback mechanisms telling us that something is either likely right or likely wrong for us—nothing more, nothing less.

Emotions are simply biological signals designed to nudge you in the direction of beneficial change.

Negative emotions are a call to action. When you feel them, it's because you're supposed to do something. Positive emotions, on the other hand, are rewards for taking the proper action. When you feel them, life seems simple and there is nothing else to do but enjoy it. Then, like everything else, the positive emotions go away, because more problems inevitably emerge.

Emotions are part of the equation of our lives, but not the entire equation.

Just because something feels good doesn't mean it is good. Just because something feels bad doesn't mean it is bad.

Emotions are merely signposts, suggestions that our neurobiology gives us, not commandments.

Therefore, we shouldn't always trust our own emotions. In fact. We should make a habit of questioning them.

Many people are taught to repress their emotions for various personal, social, or cultural reasons, particularly negative emotions. Sadly, to deny one's negative emotions is to deny many of the feedback mechanisms that help a person solve problems. As a result, many of these repressed individuals struggle to deal with problems throughout their lives. And if they can't solve problems, then they can't be happy. Remember, pain serves a purpose.

But then there are those people who over-identify with their emotions. Everything is justified for no other reason than they felt it. "Oh, I broke your windshield, but I was mad; I couldn't help it." Or "I dropped out of school and moved to Alaska just because it felt right."

Decision-making based on emotional intuition, without the aid of reason to keep it in line, pretty much always sucks. Do you know who bases their entire lives on their emotions? Three-year-old kids. And dogs. Do you know what else three-year-olds and dogs do? Shit on the carpet.

An obsession and overinvestment in emotion fail us for the simple reason that emotions never last. Whatever makes us happy today will no longer make us happy tomorrow, because our biology always needs something more.

A fixation on happiness inevitably amounts to a never-ending pursuit of "something else"—a new house, a new relationship, another child, another pay raise. And despite all of our sweat and strain, we end up feeling eerily similar to how we started: inadequate.

Psychologists sometimes refer to this concept as the "hedonic treadmill": the idea that we're always working hard to change our life situation, but we never feel very different.

This is why our problems are recursive and unavoidable.

Everything comes with an inherent sacrifice—whatever makes us feel good will also inevitably make us feel bad. What we gain is also what we lose.

What creates our positive experiences will define our negative experiences.

We like the idea that we can feel fulfilled and satisfied with our lives forever. But we cannot.

Choose Your Struggle

“What pain do you want in your life? What are you willing to struggle for?” Because that seems to be a greater determinant of how our lives turn out.

Happiness requires struggle. It grows from problems. Joy doesn't just sprout out of the ground like daisies and rainbows. Real, serious, lifelong fulfillment and meaning have to be earned through the choosing and managing of our struggles.

Who you are is defined by what you're willing to struggle for.

This is not about willpower or grit. This is not another admonishment of “no pain, no gain.” This is the most simple and basic component of life: our struggles determine our successes.

Our problems birth our happiness, along with slightly better, slightly upgraded problems.

See: it's a never-ending upward spiral. And if you think at any point you're allowed to stop climbing, I'm afraid you're missing the point. Because the joy is in the climb itself.

Feeling good about yourself doesn't mean anything unless you have a good reason to feel good about yourself. It turns out that adversity and failure are useful and even necessary for developing strong-minded and successful adults.

It turns out that teaching people to believe they're exceptional and to feel good about themselves no matter what doesn't lead to a population full of Bill Gateses and Martin Luther King. It leads to a population full of Jimmys. Jimmy, the delusional start-up founder. Jimmy, smoked pot every day and had no real marketable skills other than talking himself up and believing it.

The problem with the self-esteem movement is that it measured self-esteem by how positively people felt about themselves. But a true and accurate measurement of one's self-worth is how people feel about the negative aspects of themselves.

Entitled people exude a delusional degree of self-confidence. This confidence can be alluring to others, at least for a little while. In some instances, the entitled person's delusional level of confidence can become contagious and help the people around the entitled person the problem with entitlement is that it makes people need to feel good about themselves all the time, even at the expense of those around them. And because entitled people always need to feel good about themselves, they end up spending most of their time thinking about themselves.

Entitlement closes in upon itself in a kind of narcissistic bubble, distorting anything and everything in such a way as to reinforce itself. People who feel entitled view every occurrence in their life as either an affirmation of or a threat to, their greatness. If something good happens to them, it's because of some

amazing feat they accomplished. If something bad happens to them, it's because somebody is jealous and trying to bring them down a notch.

Entitlement is impervious. People who are entitled delude themselves into whatever feeds their sense of superiority. They keep their mental facade standing at all costs, even if it sometimes requires being physically or emotionally abusive to those around them.

But entitlement is a failed strategy. It's just another high. It's not happiness.

The true measurement of self-worth is not how a person feels about her positive experiences, but rather how she feels about her negative experiences.

A person who has high self-worth can look at the negative parts of his character frankly—"Yes, sometimes I'm irresponsible with money," "Yes, sometimes I exaggerate my successes," "Yes, I rely too much on others to support me and should be more self-reliant"—and then acts to improve upon them.

But entitled people, because they are incapable of acknowledging their problems openly and honestly, are incapable of improving their lives in any lasting or meaningful way. They are left chasing high after high and accumulate greater and greater levels of denial.

But eventually, reality must hit, and the underlying problems will once again make themselves clear. It's just a question of when, and how painful it will be.

The assumed inability to solve our problems causes us to feel miserable and helpless.

The deeper the pain, the more helpless we feel against our problems, and the more entitlement we adopt to compensate for those problems. This entitlement plays out in one of two ways:

1. I'm awesome and the rest of you all suck, so I deserve special treatment.
2. I suck and the rest of you are all awesome, so I deserve special treatment.

Opposite mindset on the outside, but the same selfish creamy core in the middle. You will often see entitled people flip back and forth between the two. Either they're on top of the world or the world is on top of them, depending on the day of the week, or how well they're doing with their particular addiction at that moment.

Most people correctly identify a person like Jimmy as a raging narcissistic ass-hat. That's because he's pretty blatant in his delusionally high self-regard. What most people don't correctly identify as entitled are those people who perpetually feel as though they're inferior and unworthy of the world.

Because construing everything in life to make yourself out to be constantly victimized requires just as much selfishness as the opposite. It takes just as much energy and delusional self-aggrandizement to maintain the belief that one has insurmountable problems as that one has no problems at all.

The truth is that there's no such thing as a personal problem. If you've got a problem, chances are millions of other people have had it in the past, have it now, and are going to have it in the future. Likely people you know too. That doesn't minimize the problem or mean that it shouldn't hurt. It doesn't mean you aren't legitimately a victim in some circumstances. It just means that you're not special.

Often, it's this realization—that you and your problems are not privileged in their severity or pain—that is the first and most important step toward solving them.

To become truly great at something, you have to dedicate shit-tons of time and energy to it. And because we all have limited time and energy, few of us ever become truly exceptional at more than one thing, if anything at all.

We can then say that it's a statistical improbability that any single person will be an extraordinary performer in all areas of life, or even in many areas of their life. Brilliant businesspeople are often fuckups in their personal lives. Extraordinary athletes are often shallow and as dumb as a lobotomized rock. Many celebrities are probably just as clueless about life as the people who gawk at them and follow their every move.

We're all, for the most part, pretty average people. But it's the extremes that get all of the publicity.

Having the Internet, Google, Facebook, YouTube, and access to five hundred-plus channels of television is amazing. But our attention is limited. There's no way we can process the tidal waves of information flowing past us constantly. Therefore, the only zeroes and ones that break through and catch our attention are the truly exceptional pieces of information—those in the 99.999th percentile.

All day, every day, we are flooded with the truly extraordinary. The best of the best. The worst of the worst. The greatest physical feats. The funniest jokes. The most upsetting news. The scariest threats. Nonstop. Our lives today are filled with information from the extremes of the bell curve of human experience, because in the media business that's what gets eyeballs, and eyeballs bring dollars.

That's the bottom line. Yet the vast majority of life resides in the humdrum middle. The vast majority of life is unextraordinary, indeed quite average.

This flood of extreme information has conditioned us to believe that exceptionalism is the new normal. And because we're all quite average most of the time, the deluge of exceptional information drives us to feel pretty damn insecure and desperate, because clearly, we are somehow not good enough. So more and more we feel the need to compensate through entitlement and addiction.

We cope the only way we know how: either through self-aggrandizing or through other aggrandizing.

Some of us do this by cooking up get-rich-quick schemes. Others do it by taking off across the world to save starving babies in Africa. Others do it by excelling in school and winning every award. Others do it by shooting up a school. Others do it by trying to have sex with anything that talks and breathes. This ties into the growing culture of entitlement.

Millennials often get blamed for this cultural shift, but that's likely because millennials are the most plugged-in and visible generation. The tendency toward entitlement is apparent across all of society. And I believe it's linked to mass-media-driven exceptionalism.

The problem is that the pervasiveness of technology and mass marketing is screwing up a lot of people's expectations of themselves. The inundation of the exceptional makes people feel worse about themselves and makes them feel that they need to be more extreme, more radical, and more self-assured to get noticed or even matter.

This constant stream of unrealistic media dogpiles onto our existing feelings of insecurity, by overexposing us to the unrealistic standards we fail to live up to. Not only do we feel subjected to unsolvable problems, but we feel like losers because a simple Google search shows us thousands of people without those same problems.

Technology has solved old economic problems by giving us new psychological problems. The Internet has not just open-sourced information; it has also open-sourced insecurity, self-doubt, and shame.

If everyone were extraordinary, then by definition no one would be extraordinary—is missed by most people. And instead of questioning what we deserve or don't deserve, we eat the message up and ask for more.

Being "average" has become the new standard of failure. The worst thing you can be is in the middle of the pack, the middle of the bell curve. When a culture's standard of success is to "be extraordinary," it then becomes better to be at the extreme low end of the bell curve than to be in the middle, because at least there you're still special and deserve attention. Many people choose this strategy: to prove to everyone that they are the most miserable, the most oppressed, or the most victimized.

A lot of people are afraid to accept mediocrity because they believe that if they accept it, they'll never achieve anything, never improve, and that their life won't matter. This sort of thinking is dangerous.

Once you accept the premise that life is worthwhile only if it is truly notable and great, then you accept the fact that most of the human population (including yourself) sucks and is worthless. And this mindset can quickly turn dangerous, to both yourself and others.

The rare people who do become truly exceptional at something do so not because they believe they're exceptional. On the contrary, they become amazing because they're obsessed with improvement. And that obsession with improvement stems from an unerring belief that they are, in fact, not that great at all. It's anti-entitlement.

People who become great at something become great because they understand that they're not already great—they are mediocre, they are average—and that they could be so much better.

All of this “every person can be extraordinary and achieve greatness” stuff is just jerking off your ego. It's a message that tastes good going down, but in reality is nothing more than empty calories that make you emotionally fat and bloated, the proverbial Big Mac for your heart and your brain.

The ticket to emotional health, like that to physical health, comes from eating your veggies—that is, accepting the bland and mundane truths of life: truths such as “Your actions don't matter that much in the grand scheme of things” and “The vast majority of your life will be boring and not noteworthy, and that's okay.” This vegetable course will taste bad at first. Very bad. You will avoid accepting it.

But once ingested, your body will wake up feeling more potent and more alive. After all, that constant pressure to be something amazing, to be the next big thing, will be lifted off your back. The stress and anxiety of always feeling inadequate and constantly needing to prove yourself will dissipate. And the knowledge and acceptance of your mundane existence will free you to accomplish what you truly wish to accomplish, without judgment or lofty expectations.

You will have a growing appreciation for life's basic experiences: the pleasures of simple friendship, creating something, helping a person in need, reading a good book, laughing with someone you care about. Sounds boring, doesn't it? That's because these things are ordinary. But maybe they're ordinary for a reason: because they are what matters.

Humans often choose to dedicate large portions of their lives to seemingly useless or destructive causes. On the surface, these causes make no sense.

Choose how you wish to suffer.

Suffering has meaning as long as it's the form of suffering you chose.

If suffering is inevitable, if our problems in life are unavoidable, then the question we should be asking is not “How do I stop suffering?” but “Why am I suffering—for what purpose?”

Self-awareness is like an onion. There are multiple layers to it, and the more you peel them back, the more likely you're going to start crying at inappropriate times.

The first layer of the self-awareness onion is a simple understanding of one's emotions.

We all have emotional blind spots. Often they have to do with the emotions that we were taught were inappropriate growing up. It takes years of practice and effort to get good at identifying blind spots in ourselves and then expressing the affected emotions appropriately. But this task is hugely important and worth the effort.

The second layer of the self-awareness onion is the ability to ask why we feel certain emotions. This layer of questioning helps us understand the root cause of the emotions that overwhelm us. Once we understand the root cause, we can ideally do something to change it.

The third level is our values: Values underlie everything we are and do. If what we value is unhelpful, if what we consider success/failure is poorly chosen, then everything based upon those values—the thoughts, the emotions, the day-to-day feelings—will all be out of whack. Everything we think and feel about a situation ultimately comes back to how valuable we perceive it to be.

Most self-help gurus ignore this deeper level of self-awareness as well. They take people who are miserable because they want to be rich, and then give them all sorts of advice on how to make more money, all the while ignoring important values-based questions: Why do they feel such a need to be rich in the first place? How are they choosing to measure success/failure for themselves?

Is it not perhaps some particular value that's the root cause of their unhappiness, and not the fact that they don't drive a Bentley yet?

Much of the advice out there operates at a shallow level of simply trying to make people feel good in the short term, while the real long-term problems never get solved. People's perceptions and feelings may change, but the underlying values, and the metrics by which those values are assessed, stay the same.

This is not real progress. This is just another way to achieve more highs. Honest self-questioning is difficult. It requires asking yourself simple questions that are uncomfortable to answer. In fact, in my experience, the more uncomfortable the answer, the more likely it is to be true.

Take a moment and think of something that's bugging you. Now ask yourself why it bugs you. Chances are the answer will involve a failure of some sort. Then take that failure and ask why it seems "true" to you. What if that failure wasn't a failure? What if you've been looking at it the wrong way by using a bad or inaccurate metric.

We get to control what our problems mean based on how we choose to think about them, and the standard by which we choose to measure them.

The question is not whether we evaluate ourselves against others; rather, the question is by what standard do we measure ourselves?

Our values determine the metrics by which we measure ourselves and everyone else.

If you want to change how you see your problems, you have to change what you value and/or how you measure failure/success.

Some values and metrics are better than others. Some lead to good problems that are easily and regularly solved. Others lead to bad problems that are not easily and regularly solved.

Pleasure is great, but it's a horrible value to prioritize your life around. Ask any drug addict how his pursuit of pleasure turned out.

Pleasure is a false god.

Research shows that people who focus their energy on superficial pleasures end up more anxious, more emotionally unstable, and more depressed. Pleasure is the most superficial form of life satisfaction and therefore the easiest to obtain and the easiest to lose. And yet, pleasure is what's marketed to us, twenty-four/seven. It's what we fixate on.

Pleasure is what we use to numb and distract ourselves. But pleasure, while necessary in life (in certain doses), isn't, by itself, sufficient.

Pleasure is not the cause of happiness; rather, it is the effect. If you get the other stuff right (the other values and metrics), then pleasure will naturally occur as a by-product.

You're overvaluing material success when you start prioritizing it over other values, such as honesty, nonviolence, and compassion.

Our brains are inefficient machines. We consistently make poor assumptions, misjudge probabilities, misremember facts, give in to cognitive biases, and make decisions based on our emotional whims. As humans, we're wrong pretty much constantly, so if your metric for life success is to be right —well, you're going to have a difficult time rationalizing all of the bullshit to yourself.

The fact is, people who base their self-worth on being right about everything prevent themselves from learning from their mistakes. They cannot take on new perspectives and empathize with others. They close themselves off to new and important information.

It's far more helpful to assume that you're ignorant and don't know a whole lot. This keeps you unattached to superstitious or poorly informed beliefs and promotes a constant state of learning and growth.

Sometimes life sucks, and the healthiest thing you can do is admit it. Denying negative emotions leads to experiencing deeper and more prolonged negative emotions and to emotional dysfunction. Constant positivity is a form of avoidance, not a valid solution to life's problems— problems which, by the way, if you're choosing the right values and metrics should be invigorating you and motivating you.

It's simple, really: things go wrong, people upset us, accidents happen. These things make us feel like shit. And that's fine. Negative emotions are a necessary component of emotional health. To deny that negativity is to perpetuate problems rather than solve them.

The trick with negative emotions is to 1) express them in a socially acceptable and healthy manner and 2) express them in a way that aligns with your values.

Anger is natural. Anger is a part of life. Anger is arguably quite healthy in many situations. (Remember, emotions are just feedback.) See, it's the punching people in the face that's the problem.

When we force ourselves to stay positive at all times, we deny the existence of our life's problems. And when we deny our problems, we rob ourselves of the chance to solve them and generate happiness.

Problems add a sense of meaning and importance to our life. Thus to duck, our problems lead to a meaningless (even if supposedly pleasant) existence.

In retrospect, the years of struggle will strike you as the most beautiful."

Values like pleasure, material success, always being right, and staying positive—are poor ideals for a person's life because Some of the greatest moments of one's life are not pleasant, not successful, not known, and not positive.

The point is to nail down some good values and metrics, and pleasure and success will naturally emerge as a result. These things are side effects of good values. By themselves, they are empty highs.

Good values are 1) reality-based, 2) socially constructive, and 3) immediate and controllable. Bad values are 1) superstitious, 2) socially destructive, and 3) not immediate or controllable.

Honesty is a good value because it's something you have complete control over, it reflects reality, and it benefits others (even if it's sometimes unpleasant).

Popularity, on the other hand, is a bad value. If that's your value, and if your metric is being the most popular guy/girl at the dance party, much of what happens will be out of your control: you don't know who else will be at the event, and you probably won't know who half those people are.

Second, the value/metric isn't based on reality: you may feel popular or unpopular, when in fact you have no fucking clue what anybody else thinks about you. (Side Note: As a rule, people who are terrified of what others think about them are terrified of all the shitty things they think about themselves being reflected at them.)

Some examples of good, healthy values: are honesty, innovation, vulnerability, standing up for oneself, standing up for others, self-respect, curiosity, charity, humility, and creativity.

Some examples of bad, unhealthy values: dominance through manipulation or violence, indiscriminate fucking, feeling good all the time, always being the center of attention, not being alone, being liked by everybody, being rich for the sake of being rich, sacrificing small animals to the pagan gods.

You'll notice that good, healthy values are achieved internally.

Something like creativity or humility can be experienced right now. You simply have to orient your mind in a certain way to experience it. These values are immediate and controllable and engage you with the world as it is rather than how you wish it were.

Bad values are generally reliant on external events—flying in a private jet, being told you're right all the time, owning a house in the Bahamas, eating a cannoli while getting blown by three strippers.

Bad values, while sometimes fun or pleasurable, lie outside of your control and often require socially destructive or superstitious means to achieve.

Values are about prioritization. Everybody would love a good cannoli or a house in the Bahamas. The question is your priorities. What are the values that you prioritize above everything else, and that therefore influence your decision-making more than anything else?

When we have poor values—that is, poor standards we set for ourselves and others—we are essentially giving fucks about the things that don't matter, things that make our life worse. But when we choose better values, we can divert our fucks to something better—toward things that matter, things that improve the state of our well-being and that generate happiness, pleasure, and success as side effects.

This, in a nutshell, is what “self-improvement” is about: prioritizing better values, choosing better things to give a fuck about.

Because when you give better fucks, you get better problems. And when you get better problems, you get a better life.

Confronting deeper problems is better than avoiding them through highs.

Take responsibility for everything that occurs in your life, regardless of who's at fault.

Value uncertainty: the acknowledgment of your ignorance and the cultivation of constant doubt in your beliefs.

Value failure: the willingness to discover your flaws and mistakes so that they may be improved upon.

Value rejection: the ability to both say and hear no, thus clearly defining what you will and will not accept in your life.

Contemplation of one's mortality is crucial because paying vigilant attention to one's death is perhaps the only thing capable of helping us keep all our other values in proper perspective.

Often the only difference between a problem being painful or being powerful is a sense that we chose it, and that we are responsible for it.

If you're miserable in your current situation, chances are it's because you feel like some part of it is outside your control—that there's a problem you cannot solve, a problem that was somehow thrust upon you without your choosing.

When we feel that we're choosing our problems, we feel empowered. When we feel that our problems are being forced upon us against our will, we feel victimized and miserable.

We, individually, are responsible for everything in our lives, no matter the external circumstances.

We don't always control what happens to us. But we always control how we interpret what happens to us, as well as how we respond.

Whether we consciously recognize it or not, we are always responsible for our experiences. It's impossible not to be.

Choosing to not consciously interpret events in our lives is still an interpretation of the events of our lives. Choosing to not respond to the events in our lives is still a response to the events in our lives. Even if you get run over by a clown car and pissed on by a busload of schoolchildren, it's still your responsibility to interpret the meaning of the event and choose a response.

Whether we like it or not, we are always taking an active role in what's occurring to and within us. We are always interpreting the meaning of every moment and every occurrence. We are always choosing the values by which we live and the metrics by which we measure everything that happens to us.

Often the same event can be good or bad, depending on the metric we choose to use.

The point is, we are always choosing, whether we recognize it or not. Always. It comes back to how, in reality, there is no such thing as not giving a single fuck. It's impossible. We must all give a fuck about something. To not give a fuck about anything is still to give a fuck about something.

The real question is, What are we choosing to give a fuck about? What values are we choosing to base our actions on? What metrics are we choosing to use to measure our life? And are those good choices—good values and good metrics?

“With great responsibility comes great power.”

The more we choose to accept responsibility in our lives, the more power we will exercise over our lives.

Accepting responsibility for our problems is thus the first step to solving them.

There are problems that we aren't at fault for, yet we are still responsible for them.

A fault is past tense. Responsibility is present tense. Fault results from choices that have already been made.

Responsibility results from the choices you're currently making, every second of every day.

The pain of one sort or another is inevitable for all of us, but we get to choose what it means to and for us. Even in claiming that he had no choice in the matter and simply wanted his son back, he was making a choice—one of many ways he could have chosen to use that pain.

Managing the disorder comes down to managing one's values.

The beauty of poker is that while luck is always involved, luck doesn't dictate the long-term results of the game.

It's easy to get hung up on our cards and feel we got screwed over, the real game lies in the choices we make with those cards, the risks we decide to take, and the consequences we choose to live with.

People who consistently make the best choices in the situations they're given are the ones who eventually come out ahead in poker, just as in life. And it's not necessarily the people with the best cards.

Some suffer through bad childhoods. Some are abused and violated and screwed over, physically, emotionally, and financially. They are not to blame for their problems and their hindrances, but they are still responsible—always responsible—to move on despite their problems and to make the best choices they can, given their circumstances.

Nobody makes it through life without collecting a few scars on the way out.

Some people get saddled with worse problems than others. And some people are legitimately victimized in horrible ways. But as much as this may upset us or disturb us, it ultimately changes nothing about the responsibility equation of our situation.

The more people there are who proclaim themselves victims over tiny infractions, the harder it becomes to see who the real victims are.

Outrage is more insidious than most vices because we don't even consciously acknowledge that it's a pleasure."

Part of living in a democracy and a free society is that we all have to deal with views and people we don't necessarily like. That's simply the price we pay—you could even say it's the whole point of the system. And it seems more and more people are forgetting that.

We should pick our battles carefully, while simultaneously attempting to empathize a bit with the so-called enemy. We should approach the news and media with a healthy dose of skepticism and avoid painting those who disagree with us with a broad brush.

We should prioritize the values of being honest, fostering transparency, and welcoming doubt over the values of being right, feeling good, and getting revenge. These "democratic" values are harder to maintain amidst the constant noise of a networked world. But we must accept the responsibility and nurture them regardless. The future stability of our political systems may depend on it.

"Do, or do not; there is no 'how.'"

You are already choosing, in every moment of every day, what to give a fuck about, so change is as simple as choosing to give a fuck about something else. It is that simple. It's just not easy.

Many of the relationships in your life were built around the values you've been keeping, so the moment you change those values—the moment you decide that studying is more important than partying, that getting married and having a family is more important than rampant sex, that working a job you believe in is more important than money —your turnaround will reverberate out through your relationships, and many of them will blow up in your face. This too is normal and this too will be uncomfortable.

These are necessary, though painful, side effects of choosing to place your fucks elsewhere, in a place far more important and more worthy of your energies. As you reassess your values, you will be met with internal and external resistance along the way. More than anything, you will feel uncertain; you will wonder if what you're doing is wrong. But as we'll see, this is a good thing.

Growth is an endlessly iterative process. When we learn something new, we don't go from "wrong" to "right." Rather, we go from wrong to slightly less wrong. And when we learn something additional, we go from slightly less wrong to slightly less wrong than that, and then to even less wrong than that, and so on. We are always in the process of approaching truth and perfection without actually ever reaching truth or perfection.

We shouldn't seek to find the ultimate "right" answer for ourselves, but rather, we should seek to chip away at the ways that we're wrong today so that we can be a little less wrong tomorrow.

There is no correct dogma or perfect ideology. There is only what your experience has shown you to be right for you—and even then, that experience is probably somewhat wrong too. And because you and I and everybody else all have differing needs and personal histories and life circumstances, we will all inevitably come to differing “correct” answers about what our lives mean and how they should be lived.

Many people become so obsessed with being “right” about their life that they never end up living it.

Certainty is the enemy of growth.

Nothing is for certain until it has already happened—and even then, it’s still debatable. That’s why accepting the inevitable imperfections of our values is necessary for any growth to take place.

Instead of striving for certainty, we should be in constant search of doubt: doubt about our own beliefs, doubt about our feelings, doubt about what the future may hold for us unless we get out there and create it for ourselves.

Instead of looking to be right all the time, we should be looking for how we’re wrong all the time. Because we are.

Being wrong opens us up to the possibility of change. Being wrong brings the opportunity for growth.

We don’t know what a positive or negative experience is. Some of the most difficult and stressful moments of our lives also end up being the most formative and motivating. Some of the best and most gratifying experiences of our lives are also the most distracting and demotivating. Don’t trust your conception of positive/negative experiences. All that we know for certain is what hurts at the moment and what doesn’t. And that’s not worth much.

The brain is imperfect. We mistake things we see and hear. We forget things or misinterpret events quite easily.

Once we create meaning for ourselves, our brains are designed to hold on to that meaning. We are biased toward the meaning our mind has made, and we don’t want to let go of it. Even if we see evidence that contradicts the meaning we created, we often ignore it and keep on believing anyway.

Most of what we come to “know” and believe is the product of the innate inaccuracies and biases present in our brains. Many or even most of our values are products of events that are not representative of the world at large or are the result of a misconceived past. The result of all this? Most of our beliefs are wrong. Or, to be more exact, all beliefs are wrong—some are just less wrong than others.

The human mind is a jumble of inaccuracy.

We experience something. Then we remember it slightly differently a few days later as if it had been whispered and misheard. Then we tell somebody about it and have to fill in a couple of the plot holes with our embellishments to make sure everything makes sense and we're not crazy. And then we come to believe those little filled-in mental gaps, and so we tell those the next time too.

Except they're not real, so we get them a little bit wrong. And we're drunk one night a year later when we tell the story, so we embellish it a little bit more—okay, let's be honest, we completely make up about one-third of it. But when we're sober the next week, we don't want to admit that we're a big fat liar, so we go along with the revised and newly expanded drunkard version of our story.

And five years later, our absolutely, swear to god, swear-on-my-mother's-grave, truer than a true story is at most 50 percent true. We all do this. You do. I do. No matter how honest and well-intentioned we are, we're in a perpetual state of misleading ourselves and others for no other reason than that our brain is designed to be efficient, not accurate.

Not only does our memory suck to the point that eyewitness testimony isn't necessarily taken seriously in court cases—but our brain functions in a biased way.

Our brain is always trying to make sense of our current situation based on what we already believe and have already experienced. Every new piece of information is measured against the values and conclusions we already have. As a result, our brain is always biased toward what we feel to be true at that moment.

Our mind's biggest priority when processing experiences is to interpret them in such a way that they will cohere with all of our previous experiences, feelings, and beliefs. But often we run into life situations where past and present don't cohere: on such occasions, what we're experiencing at the moment flies in the face of everything we've accepted as true and reasonable about our past.

To achieve coherence, our mind will sometimes, in cases like that, invent false memories.

By linking our present experiences with that imagined past, our mind allows us to maintain whatever meaning we already established.

Our beliefs are malleable, and our memories are unreliable.

Trust yourself less. After all, if our hearts and minds are so unreliable, maybe we should be questioning our intentions and motivations more.

Some of the worst criminals felt pretty damn good about themselves. And it was this feeling good about themselves despite the reality around them that gave them a sense of justification for hurting and disrespecting others.

For individuals to feel justified in doing horrible things to other people, they must feel an unwavering certainty in their righteousness, their own beliefs, and deservedness. Racists do racist things because they're certain about their genetic superiority. Religious fanatics blow themselves up and murder dozens of people because they're certain of their place in heaven as martyrs. Men rape and abuse women out of their certainty that they're entitled to women's bodies.

Evil people never believe that they are evil; rather, they believe that everyone else is evil. Self-skepticism and the rigorous challenging of our own beliefs and assumptions is the only logical route to progress?

This may sound scary and self-destructive. But it's quite the opposite. It's not only the safer option, but it's liberating as well.

The problem here is that not only is certainty unattainable, but the pursuit of certainty often breeds more (and worse) insecurity.

The more you try to be certain about something, the more uncertain and insecure you will feel.

But the converse is true as well: the more you embrace being uncertain and not knowing, the more comfortable you will feel in knowing what you don't know.

Uncertainty removes our judgments of others; it preempts the unnecessary stereotyping and biases that we otherwise feel when we see somebody on TV, in the office, or on the street.

Uncertainty also relieves us of our judgment of ourselves. We don't know if we're lovable or not; we don't know how attractive we are; we don't know how successful we could potentially become. The only way to achieve these things is to remain uncertain of them and be open to finding them out through experience.

Uncertainty is the root of all progress and all growth. As the adage goes, the man who believes he knows everything learns nothing. We cannot learn anything without first not knowing something. The more we admit we do not know, the more opportunities we gain to learn.

Our values are imperfect and incomplete, and to assume that they are perfect and complete is to put us in a dangerously dogmatic mindset that breeds entitlement and avoids responsibility. The only way to solve our problems is to first admit that our actions and beliefs up to this point have been wrong and are not working.

Openness to being wrong must exist for any real change or growth to take place.

Before we can look at our values and prioritizations and change them into better, healthier ones, we must first become uncertain of our current values.

We must intellectually strip them away, see their faults and biases, see how they don't fit in with much of the rest of the world, stare our ignorance in the face, and concede because our ignorance is greater than us all.

The more something threatens your identity, the more you will avoid it. the more something threatens to change how you view yourself, how successful/unsuccessful you believe yourself to be, and how well you see yourself living up to your values, the more you will avoid ever getting around to doing it.

There's a certain comfort that comes with knowing how you fit in the world.

Anything that shakes up that comfort even if it could potentially make your life better—is inherently scary. This applies to both good and bad things in life. Making a million dollars could threaten your identity just as much as losing all your money;

This is why people are often so afraid of success for the same reason they're afraid of failure: it threatens who they believe themselves to be.

We all have values for ourselves. We protect these values. We try to live up to them and we justify them and maintain them. Even if we don't mean to, that's how our brain is wired.

Until we change how we view ourselves, and what we believe we are and are not, we cannot overcome our avoidance and anxiety. We cannot change.

In this way, “knowing yourself” or “finding yourself” can be dangerous. It can cement you into a strict role and saddle you with unnecessary expectations. It can close you off to inner potential and outer opportunities.

I say don't find yourself. I say never know who you are. Because that's what keeps you striving and discovering. And it forces you to remain humble in your judgments and accepting of the differences in others.

The arbitrary metrics by which you define yourself actually trap you, and thus you're better off letting go of everything.

When we let go of the stories we tell about ourselves, to ourselves, we free ourselves up to act (and fail) and grow.

There is little that is unique or special about your problems. That's why letting goes is so liberating.

There's a kind of self-absorption that comes with fear based on an irrational certainty. When you assume that your plane is the one that's going to crash, or that your project idea is the stupid one everyone is

going to laugh at, or that you're the one everyone is going to choose to mock or ignore, you're implicitly telling yourself, "I'm the exception; I'm unlike everybody else; I'm different and special."

This is narcissism, pure and simple. You feel as though your problems deserve to be treated differently, that your problems have some unique math to them that doesn't obey the laws of the physical universe.

My recommendation: don't be special; don't be unique. Redefine your metrics in mundane and broad ways.

Choose to measure yourself not as a rising star or an undiscovered genius.

Choose to measure yourself not as some horrible victim or dismal failure.

Instead, measure yourself by more mundane identities: a student, a partner, a friend, a creator.

The narrower and rarer the identity you choose for yourself, the more everything will seem to threaten you. For that reason, define yourself in the simplest and most ordinary ways possible.

This often means giving up some grandiose ideas about yourself: that you're uniquely intelligent, spectacularly talented, intimidatingly attractive, or especially victimized in ways other people could never imagine.

This means giving up your sense of entitlement and your belief that you're somehow owed something by this world.

This means giving up the supply of emotional highs that you've been sustaining yourself on for years. Like a junkie giving up the needle, you're going to go through withdrawal when you start giving these things up. But you'll come out the other side so much better. We're all the world's worst observers of ourselves.

Question yourself and ask yourself if you're wrong. Asking ourselves such questions generates the humility and compassion needed to resolve a lot of our issues.

But it's important to note that just because you ask yourself if you have the wrong idea doesn't necessarily mean that you do.

The goal is merely to ask the question and entertain the thought at the moment, not to hate yourself.

It's worth remembering that for any change to happen in your life, you must be wrong about something. If you're sitting there, miserable day after day, then that means you're already wrong about something major in your life, and until you're able to question yourself to find it, nothing will change.

Ask yourself what would it mean if you were wrong.

“It is the mark of an educated mind to be able to entertain a thought without accepting it.” Being able to look at and evaluate different values without necessarily adopting them is perhaps the central skill required in changing one’s own life in a meaningful way.

Probing questions are necessary to get at the core problems that are motivating dickish behavior

Would being wrong; create a better or a worse problem than my current problem, for both myself and others?

This is the litmus test for determining whether we’ve got some pretty solid values going on, or we’re neurotic fuckwads taking our fucks out on everyone, including ourselves.

The goal here is to look at which problem is better. Because life’s problems are endless.

Beliefs are arbitrary; worse yet, they’re often made up after the fact to justify whatever values and metrics we’ve chosen for ourselves.

if it’s down to me being screwed up, or others being screwed up, it is far, far, far more likely that I’m the one who’s screwed up. That’s not to say there aren’t certain ways in which most people are screwed up. And that’s not to say that there aren’t times when you’ll be more right than most other people.

If it feels like it’s you versus the world, chances are it’s just you versus yourself.

Improvement at anything is based on thousands of tiny failures, and the magnitude of your success is based on how many times you’ve failed at something.

If someone is better than you at something, then it’s likely because she has failed at it more than you have.

If someone is worse than you, it’s likely because he hasn’t been through all of the painful learning experiences you have.

At some point, most of us reach a place where we’re afraid to fail, where we instinctively avoid failure and stick only to what is placed in front of us or only what we’re already good at. This confines us and stifles us. We can be truly successful only at something we’re willing to fail at. If we’re unwilling to fail, then we’re unwilling to succeed.

A lot of this fear of failure comes from having chosen shitty values. For instance, if I measure myself by the standard “Make everyone I meet like me,” I will be anxious because failure is 100 percent defined by

the actions of others, not by my actions. I am not in control; thus my self-worth is at the mercy of judgments by others.

Whereas if I instead adopt the metric “Improve my social life,” I can live up to my value of “good relations with others” regardless of how other people respond to me. My self-worth is based on my behaviors and happiness.

Better values, as we saw, are process-oriented. Something like “Be honest,” a metric for the value “honesty,” is never finished; it’s a problem that must continuously be reengaged. Every new conversation, every new relationship, brings new challenges and opportunities for honest expression. The value is an ongoing, lifelong process that defies completion.

If your metric for the value of “worldly success” is “Buy a house and a nice car,” and you spend twenty years working your ass off to achieve it, once it’s achieved the metric has nothing left to give you. Then say hello to your midlife crisis, because the problem that drove you your entire adult life was just taken away from you. There are no other opportunities to keep growing and improving, and yet it’s growth that generates happiness, not a long list of arbitrary achievements.

In this sense, goals, as they are conventionally defined—graduate from college, buy a lake house, lose fifteen pounds—are limited in the amount of happiness they can produce in our lives.

They may be helpful when pursuing quick, short-term benefits, but as guides for the overall trajectory of our life, they suck.

Pain Is Part of the Process

Fear and anxiety and sadness are not necessarily always undesirable or unhelpful states of mind; rather, they are often representative of the necessary pain of psychological growth. And to deny that pain is to deny our potential.

Just as one must suffer physical pain to build stronger bones and muscles, one must suffer emotional pain to develop greater emotional resilience, a stronger sense of self, increased compassion, and generally happier life.

Our most radical changes in perspective often happen at the tail end of our worst moments. It’s only when we feel intense pain that we’re willing to look at our values and question why they seem to be failing us.

We need some sort of existential crisis to take an objective look at how we’ve been deriving meaning in our life, and then consider changing course.

We sit and stare and shake our heads and say, “But how?” When really, it’s as simple as just doing it.

Learn to sustain the pain you've chosen. When you choose a new value, you are choosing to introduce a new form of pain into your life. Relish it. Savor it. Welcome it with open arms. Then act despite it.

You don't know anything. Even when you think you do, you don't know what the fuck you're doing. So really, what is there to lose?

Life is about not knowing and then doing something anyway. All of life is like this. It never changes. Don't ever forget that. And don't ever be afraid of that.

If you're stuck on a problem, don't sit there and think about it; just start working on it. Even if you don't know what you're doing, the simple act of working on it will eventually cause the right ideas to show up in your head.

Action isn't just the effect of motivation; it's also the cause of it.

Most of us commit to action only if we feel a certain level of motivation. And we feel motivation only when we feel enough emotional inspiration. We assume that these steps occur in a sort of chain reaction, like this: Emotional inspiration → Motivation → Desirable action

The thing about motivation is that it's not only a three-part chain but an endless loop: Inspiration → Motivation → Action → Inspiration → Motivation → Action → Etc.

Your actions create further emotional reactions and inspirations and move on to motivate your future actions. Taking advantage of this knowledge, we can reorient our mindset in the following way:
Action → Inspiration → Motivation

If you lack the motivation to make an important change in your life, do something—anything, really and then harness the reaction to that action as a way to begin motivating yourself.

If we follow the “do something” principle, failure feels unimportant. When the standard of success becomes merely acting when any result is regarded as progress and important, when inspiration is seen as a reward rather than a prerequisite—we propel ourselves ahead. We feel free to fail, and that failure moves us forward.

The “do something” principle not only helps us overcome procrastination, but it's also the process by which we adopt new values. Do something. That “something” can be the smallest viable action toward something else. It can be anything.

You can become your source of inspiration. You can become your source of motivation. Action is always within reach. And with simply doing something as your only metric for success—well, then even failure pushes you forward.

Travel is a fantastic self-development tool because it extricates you from the values of your culture and shows you that another society can live with entirely different values and still function and not hate themselves.

This exposure to different cultural values and metrics then forces you to reexamine what seems obvious in your own life and to consider that perhaps it's not necessarily the best way to live.

To build trust you have to be honest. That means when things suck, you say so openly and without apology.

Rejection Makes Your Life Better.

We need to reject something. Otherwise, we stand for nothing. If nothing is better or more desirable than anything else, then we are empty and our life is meaningless. We are without values and therefore live our life without any purpose.

The avoidance of rejection (both giving and receiving it) is often sold to us as a way to make ourselves feel better. But avoiding rejection gives us short-term pleasure by making us rudderless and directionless in the long term.

To truly appreciate something, you must confine yourself to it. There's a certain level of joy and meaning that you reach in life only when you've spent decades investing in a single relationship, a single craft, a single career. And you cannot achieve those decades of investment without rejecting the alternatives.

The act of choosing a value for yourself requires rejecting alternative values.

We all must give a fuck about something, to value something. And to value something, we must reject what is not that something.

To value X, we must reject non-X.

That rejection is an inherent and necessary part of maintaining our values, and therefore our identity. We are defined by what we choose to reject.

And if we reject nothing (perhaps in fear of being rejected by something ourselves), we essentially have no identity at all.

The desire to avoid rejection at all costs, to avoid confrontation and conflict, the desire to attempt to accept everything equally and to make everything cohere and harmonize, is a deep and subtle form of entitlement.

Entitled people, because they feel as though they deserve to feel great all the time, avoid rejecting anything because doing so might make them or someone else feel bad. And because they refuse to reject anything, they live a valueless, pleasure-driven, and self-absorbed life.

All they give a fuck about is sustaining the high a little bit longer, to avoid the inevitable failures of their life, to pretend the suffering away.

Rejection is a crucial life skill. Nobody wants to be stuck in a relationship that isn't making them happy. Nobody wants to be stuck in a business doing work they hate and don't believe in. Nobody wants to feel that they can't say what they mean.

Yet people choose these things. All the time. Honesty is a natural human craving. But part of having honesty in our lives is becoming comfortable with saying and hearing the word "no." In this way, rejection makes our relationships better and our emotional lives healthier.

Anywhere there is an unhealthy or toxic relationship, there will be a poor and porous sense of responsibility on both sides, and there will be an inability to give and/or receive a rejection.

Wherever there is a healthy and loving relationship, there will be clear boundaries between the two people and their values, and there will be an open avenue of giving and receiving rejection when necessary.

People can't solve your problems for you. And they shouldn't try, because that won't make you happy. You can't solve other people's problems for them either, because that likewise won't make them happy.

The mark of an unhealthy relationship is two people who try to solve each other's problems to feel good about themselves. Rather, a healthy relationship is when two people solve their problems to feel good about each other.

The setting of proper boundaries doesn't mean you can't help or support your partner or be helped and supported yourself. You both should support each other. But only because you choose to support and be supported. Not because you feel obligated or entitled.

Entitled people who blame others for their own emotions and actions do so because they believe that if they constantly paint themselves as victims, eventually someone will come along and save them, and they will receive the love they've always wanted.

Entitled people who take the blame for other people's emotions and actions do so because they believe that if they "fix" their partner and save him or her, they will receive the love and appreciation they've always wanted.

These are the yin and yang of any toxic relationship: the victim and the saver, the person who starts fires because it makes her feel important and the person who puts out fires because it makes him feel important.

These two types of people are drawn strongly to one another, and they usually end up together. Their pathologies match one another perfectly.

Instead, victims and savers both use each other to achieve emotional highs. It's like an addiction they fulfill in one another. Ironically, when presented with emotionally healthy people to date, they usually feel bored or lack "chemistry" with them.

They pass on emotionally healthy, secure individuals because the secure partner's solid boundaries don't feel "exciting" enough to stimulate the constant highs necessary in the entitled person.

For victims, the hardest thing to do in the world is to hold themselves accountable for their problems. They've spent their whole life believing that others are responsible for their fate. That first step of taking responsibility for themselves is often terrifying.

For savers, the hardest thing to do in the world is to stop taking responsibility for other people's problems. They've spent their whole life feeling valued and loved only when they're saving somebody else so letting go of this need is terrifying to them as well.

If you make a sacrifice for someone you care about, it needs to be because you want to, not because you feel obligated or because you fear the consequences of not doing so. If your partner is going to make a sacrifice for you, it needs to be because he or she genuinely wants to, not because you've manipulated the sacrifice through anger or guilt.

Acts of love are valid only if they're performed without conditions or expectations. It can be difficult for people to recognize the difference between doing something out of obligation and doing it voluntarily.

So here's a litmus test: ask yourself, "If I refused, how would the relationship change?" Similarly, ask, "If my partner refused something I wanted, how would the relationship change?" If the answer is that a refusal would cause a blowout of drama and broken china plates, then that's a bad sign for your relationship.

It suggests that your relationship is conditional—based on superficial benefits received from one another, rather than on unconditional acceptance of each other (along with each other's problems).

People with strong boundaries are not afraid of a temper tantrum, an argument, or getting hurt. People with weak boundaries are terrified of those things and will constantly mold their behavior to fit the highs and lows of their relational emotional roller coaster.

People with strong boundaries understand that it's unreasonable to expect two people to accommodate each other 100 percent and fulfill every need the other has. People with strong boundaries understand that they may hurt someone's feelings sometimes, but ultimately they can't determine how other people feel.

When our highest priority is to always make ourselves feel good or to always make our partner feel good, then nobody ends up feeling good. And our relationship falls apart without our even knowing it.

Without conflict, there can be no trust. Conflict exists to show us who is there for us unconditionally and who is just there for the benefit. No one trusts a yes-man.

Trust is the most important ingredient in any relationship, for the simple reason that without trust, the relationship doesn't mean anything. A person could tell you that she loves you, wants to be with you, and would give up everything for you, but if you don't trust her, you get no benefit from those statements.

You don't feel loved until you trust that the love being expressed toward you comes without any special conditions or baggage attached to it.

Pursuing a breadth of experience denies us the opportunity to experience the rewards of the depth of experience.

Commitment gives you freedom because you're no longer distracted by the unimportant and frivolous.

Commitment gives you freedom because it hones your attention and focus, directing them toward what is most efficient at making you healthy and happy. Commitment makes decision-making easier and removes any fear of missing out; knowing that what you already have is good enough, why would you ever stress about chasing more, more, more again?

Commitment allows you to focus intently on a few highly important goals and achieve a greater degree of success than you otherwise would.

In this way, the rejection of alternatives liberates us—rejection of what does not align with our most important values, with our chosen metrics, rejection of the constant pursuit of breadth without depth.

Yes, breadth of experience is likely necessary and desirable when you're young—after all, you have to go out there and discover what seems worth investing yourself in. But depth is where the gold is buried. And you have to stay committed to something and go deep to dig it up. That's true in relationships, in a career, in building a great lifestyle, in everything.

If there is no reason to do anything, then there is also no reason to not do anything; in the face of the inevitability of death, there is no reason to ever give in to one's fear of embarrassment or shame, since

it's all just a bunch of nothing anyway; and that by spending the majority of my short life avoiding what was painful and uncomfortable, I had essentially been avoiding being alive at all.

Humans are unique in that we're the only animals that can conceptualize and think about ourselves abstractly.

As humans, we're blessed with the ability to imagine ourselves in hypothetical situations, contemplate both the past and the future, and imagine other realities or situations where things might be different.

It's because of this unique mental ability, that we all, at some point, become aware of the inevitability of our death. Because we're able to conceptualize alternate versions of reality, we are also the only animal capable of imagining a reality without ourselves in it. This realization causes "death terror," deep existential anxiety that underlies everything we think or do.

We have two selves. The first self is the physical self, the one that eats, sleep, snores, and poops. The second self is our conceptual self our identity, or how we see ourselves.

We are all aware on some level that our physical self will eventually die, that this death is inevitable and that its inevitability on some unconscious level—scares the shit out of us.

Therefore, to compensate for our fear of the inevitable loss of our physical self, we try to construct a conceptual self that will live forever.

This is why people try so hard to put their names on buildings, statues, and the spines of books. It's why we feel compelled to spend so much time giving ourselves to others, especially to children, in the hopes that our influence on our conceptual self will last way beyond our physical self.

That we will be remembered and revered and idolized long after our physical self ceases to exist.

"Immortality projects," projects that allow our conceptual self to live way past the point of our physical death.

All of human civilization is a result of immortality projects: the cities and governments and structures and authorities in place today were all immortality projects of men and women who came before us. They are the remnants of conceptual selves that ceased to die.

Names like Jesus, Muhammad, Napoleon, and Shakespeare are just as powerful today as when those men lived, if not more so. And that's the whole point. Whether it be through mastering an art form, conquering a new land, gaining great riches, or simply having a large and loving family that will live on for generations, all the meaning in our life is shaped by this innate desire to never truly die.

Religion, politics, sports, art, and technological innovation are the result of people's immortality projects.

Wars and revolutions and mass murder occur when one group of people's immortality projects rub up against another group's. Centuries of oppression and the bloodshed of millions have been justified as the defense of one group's immortality project against another's.

But, when our immortality projects fail, when the meaning is lost, when the prospect of our conceptual self outliving our physical self no longer seems possible or likely, death terror—that horrible, depressing anxiety—creeps back into our mind. Trauma can cause this, as can shame and social ridicule.

Our immortality projects are our values. They are the barometers of meaning and worth in our life. And when our values fail, so do we, psychologically speaking.

We're all driven by fear to give way too many fucks about something because giving a fuck about something is the only thing that distracts us from the reality and inevitability of our death.

To not give a single fuck is to achieve a quasi-spiritual state of embracing the impermanence of one's existence. One is far less likely to get caught up in various forms of entitlement.

People's immortality projects were the problem, not the solution; rather than attempting to implement, often through lethal force, their conceptual self across the world, people should question their conceptual self and become more comfortable with the reality of their death.

While death is bad, it is inevitable. Therefore we should not avoid this realization, but rather come to terms with it as best we can.

Once we become comfortable with the fact of our death, the root terror, the underlying anxiety motivating all of life's frivolous ambitions, we can then choose our values more freely, unrestrained by the illogical quest for immortality, and freed from dangerous dogmatic views.

"The fear of death follows from the fear of life. A man who lives fully is prepared to die at any time."

Without acknowledging the ever-present gaze of death, the superficial will appear important, and the important will appear superficial.

Death is the only thing we can know with any certainty. And as such, it must be the compass by which we orient all of our other values and decisions. It is the correct answer to all of the questions we should ask but never do.

People declare themselves experts, entrepreneurs, inventors, innovators, mavericks, and coaches without any real-life experience. And they do this not because they actually think they are greater than everybody else; they do it because they feel that they need to be great to be accepted in a world that broadcasts only the extraordinary.

Our culture today confuses great attention and great success, assuming them to be the same thing. But they are not.

You are great. Already. Whether you realize it or not. Whether anybody else realizes it or not. And it's not because you launched an iPhone app, or finished school a year early, or bought yourself a sweet-ass boat. These things do not define greatness.

You are already great because in the face of endless confusion and certain death, you continue to choose what to give a fuck about and what not to. This mere fact, this simple optioning for your own values in life, already makes you beautiful, already makes you successful, and already makes you loved. Even if you don't realize it. Even if you're sleeping in a gutter and starving.

You too are going to die, and that's because you too were fortunate enough to have lived.

"We're all going to die, all of us. What a circus! That alone should make us love each other, but it doesn't. We are terrorized and flattened by life's trivialities; we are eaten up by nothing."

There is nothing to be afraid of. Ever.