

## NOTES FROM: *Effortless*, by Greg McKeown

**SUMMARY:** This is the follow-up to McKeown's excellent book, *Essentialism*, which breaks down the art of stripping down your activities and efforts to what is, well, essential, and leaving it at that. We live in an age of limitless possibility and opportunity, but the price we pay for that is full consciousness of everything that we *could* do but don't have time for. *Essentialism* was about simplifying our schedules and strategies, and *Effortless* is about reducing complexity and hardship.

Some things work the best and can help you attain the best results *because* they are hard, such as, say, doing squats, as opposed to leg extensions at the gym. There's no question that squats deliver the most impressive gains in muscle mass as opposed to leg extensions, but squats are also really, really *hard*, which is why most people don't do them. However, equating difficulty with effectiveness is a dangerous error, says McKeown. Just because something is hard, doesn't mean that it's the best way to do things. What if our most challenging tasks could be made easier? That's what *Effortless* is about.

The hero is not the person who stayed at the office until midnight, slaving away at an impossible task; the hero is the person who left early because they found an easier way to achieve the same results. Discern the difference between laziness and effectiveness, and effortless results become possible for you.

Another major theme here in this book is recovery and burnout prevention, and I would say that it's certainly the part of the book that has the potential to improve many people's quality of life the most. Stress is literally killing the modern workforce, but *Effortless* is the antidote. Inside its pages, you will learn about the Effortless State, Effortless Actions, and Effortless Results, and also about how to leverage your assets to bring more of what matters to you into your life and eliminate the excess.

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"There are periods in our lives when every day can be hard. To try to pretend that a book can eliminate these hardships would be fanciful. I didn't write this book to downplay these burdens; I wrote it to help you lighten them. This book may not make every hard thing easy to approach and carry, but I believe it can make many hard things easier."

**Effortless State:** When you've put yourself in the optimal headspace and physical state to take on whatever it is that you have to do. When you've "sharpened the saw." Now you can do some chopping.

**Effortless Action:** When you stop working past the point of diminishing returns, and instead maintain a system for doing high-quality work, consistently over time, without burning out.

**Effortless Results:** When the results of the work you put in now have beneficial and asymmetrical results down the line, such as when exercising now makes every consequent activity more enjoyable because you're able fully to participate in it.

George Eliot: “What do we live for, if not to make life less difficult for each other?”

“The problem is that the complexity of modern life has created a false dichotomy between things that are ‘essential and hard’ and things that are ‘easy and trivial.’ It’s almost like a natural law for some people: Trivial things are easy. Important things are hard.”

“It’s like we all automatically accept that the ‘right’ way is, inevitably, the harder one. In my experience this is hardly ever questioned. Indeed, if you do challenge this sacred cow, it can be uncomfortable. We don’t even pause to consider that something important and valuable could be made easy. What if the biggest thing keeping us from doing what matters is the false assumption that it has to take tremendous effort? What if, instead, we considered the possibility that the reason something feels hard is that we haven’t yet found the easier way to do it?”

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“What if we considered the possibility that the reason something feels hard is that we haven’t yet found the easier way to do it?”

“Relaxing is a responsibility.”

“Do not do more today than you can completely recover from today. Do not do more this week than you can completely recover from this week.”

“No matter how simple the step, it’s still easier to take no step.”

“What are the minimum number of steps required for completion?”

“In order to succeed at something, you have to get it done.”

MK: Set upper and lower bounds for daily productivity, rather than some definite point that you have to hit every single day. So, for example, having a goal of writing between 500-2,000 words per day means that you write at least 500 words every day and no more than 2,000, even if you feel as though you could do more. Reading at least 10 pages a day and no more than 100 in a single day can help you maintain a reading habit better than aiming to read 100 pages every single day.

MK: Once you know how to make decisions effectively, the quality of every subsequent decision you make goes up.

“Reading a book is among the most high-leverage activities on earth.”

MK: Trust is high-leverage as well. When we trust who we’re working or dealing with, we don’t have to expend so much energy tracking their activities or following up with them. We know that they’re going to hold up their end of the agreement, and that frees us to do more of the work that really matters.

Thoreau: “There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root.”