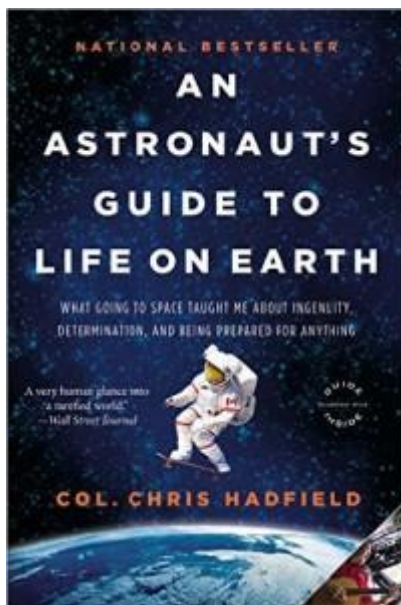




An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth by Chris Hadfield

[Print](#) | [Kindle](#) | [Audiobook](#)



The Book in Three Sentences

1. Things are never as bad (or as good) as they seem at the time.
2. Success is feeling good about the work you do throughout the long, unheralded journey.
3. Fear comes from not knowing what to expect and not feeling you have any control over what's about to happen. When you feel helpless, you're far more afraid than you would be if you knew the facts. If you're not sure what to be alarmed about, everything is alarming.

The Five Big Ideas

1. In order to stay calm in a high-stress, high-stakes situation, all you really need is knowledge.
2. Feeling ready to do something doesn't mean feeling certain you'll succeed. Truly being ready means understanding what could go wrong—and having a plan to deal with it.
3. Anticipating problems and figuring out how to solve them is actually the opposite of worrying: it's productive.

4. Optimism and confidence comes not from visualizing victory, but from visualizing defeat and figuring out how to prevent it.
5. If you're striving for excellence—whether it's in playing the guitar or flying a jet—there's no such thing as over-preparation. It's your best chance of improving your odds.

An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth Summary

- “What I do each day determines the kind of person I'll become”.
- “My attitude was more, ‘It's probably not going to happen, but I should do things that keep me moving in the right direction, just in case—and I should be sure those things interest me, so that whatever happens, I'm happy’.”
- “As I have discovered again and again, things are never as bad (or as good) as they seem at the time”.
- “An astronaut is someone who's able to make good decisions quickly, with incomplete information, when the consequences really matter”.
- “It sounds strange, probably, but having a pessimistic view of my own prospects helped me love my job”.

- “However, success, to me, never was and still isn’t about lifting off in a rocket (though that sure felt like a great achievement). Success is feeling good about the work you do throughout the long, unheralded journey that may or may not wind up at the launch pad”.
- “Ultimately, I don’t determine whether I arrive at the desired professional destination. Too many variables are out of my control. There’s really just one thing I can control: my attitude during the journey, which is what keeps me feeling steady and stable, and what keeps me headed in the right direction. So I consciously monitor and correct, if necessary, because losing attitude would be far worse than not achieving my goal”.
- “‘Be ready. Work. Hard. Enjoy it!’ It fits every situation”.
- “I never stopped getting ready. Just in case”.
- “In my experience, fear comes from not knowing what to expect and not feeling you have any control over what’s about to happen. When you feel helpless, you’re far more afraid than you would be if you knew the facts. If you’re not sure what to be alarmed about, everything is alarming”.
- “Knowledge and experience have made it possible for me to be relatively comfortable with heights, whether I’m flying a biplane or doing a spacewalk or jumping into a mountain of corn. In each case, I fully understand the challenge, the physics, the mechanics, and I know from personal experience that I’m not helpless. I do have some control”.
- “But in order to stay calm in a high-stress, high-stakes situation, all you really need is knowledge”.
- “Feeling ready to do something doesn’t mean feeling certain you’ll succeed, though of course that’s what you’re hoping to do. Truly being ready means understanding what could go wrong—and having a plan to deal with it”.
- “‘Working the problem’ is NASA-speak for descending one decision tree after another, methodically looking for a solution until you run out of oxygen”.

- “No one was moving in a leisurely fashion, but the response was one of focused curiosity, as though we were dealing with an abstract puzzle rather than an imminent threat to our survival”.
- “Each time you manage to do that your comfort zone expands a little, so if you ever face that particular problem in real life, you’re able to think clearly”.
- “To drive that message home, we have what we euphemistically refer to as “contingency sims”—death sims, actually—which force us to think through our own demise in granular detail: not only how we’d die, but what would happen afterward to our families, colleagues and the space program itself”.
- “Rehearsing for catastrophe has made me positive that I have the problem-solving skills to deal with tough situations and come out the other side smiling”.
- “Anticipating problems and figuring out how to solve them is actually the opposite of worrying: it’s productive”.
- “My optimism and confidence come not from feeling I’m luckier than other mortals, and they sure don’t come from visualizing victory. They’re the result of a lifetime spent visualizing defeat and figuring out how to prevent it”.
- “Like most astronauts, I’m pretty sure that I can deal with what life throws at me because I’ve thought about what to do if things go wrong, as well as right. That’s the power of negative thinking”.
- “I couldn’t afford to be unprepared in any situation where I was going to be evaluated, formally or not. I had to be ready, always”.
- “But if you’re striving for excellence—whether it’s in playing the guitar or flying a jet—there’s no such thing as over-preparation. It’s your best chance of improving your odds”.

- “In any field, it’s a plus if you view criticism as potentially helpful advice rather than as a personal attack”.
- “During a sim, the flight director or lead astronaut makes notes on major events, and afterward, kicks off the debrief by reviewing the highlights: what went well, what new things were learned, what was already known but needs to be re-emphasized. Then it’s a free-for-all. Everyone else dives right in, system by system, to dissect what went wrong or was handled poorly”.
- “It’s not a public flogging: the goal is to build up collective wisdom”.
- “That’s one good thing about habitually sweating the small stuff: you learn to be very, very patient”.
- “This is why, individually and organizationally, we have the patience to sweat the small stuff even when—actually, especially when—pursuing major goals. We’ve learned the hardest way possible just how much little things matter”.
- “Good leadership means leading the way, not hectoring other people to do things your way”.
- “Whining is the antithesis of expeditionary behavior, which is all about rallying the troops around a common goal”.
- “When you have some skills but don’t fully understand your environment, there is no way you can be a plus one”.
- “If you start thinking that only your biggest and shiniest moments count, you’re setting yourself up to feel like a failure most of the time”.
- “Life is just a lot better if you feel you’re having 10 wins a day rather than a win every 10 years or so”.

Buy The Book: An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth

[Print](#) | [Kindle](#) | [Audiobook](#)

Give Me One Week In Your Inbox...

...and I'll show you how to **live better** and **work smarter**—faster than you ever thought possible.

LET'S DO THIS

ABOUT

ARTICLES

BOOK SUMMARIES

READING LIST

CONTACT

TERMS

PRIVACY POLICY

