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## Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less - Book by Greg McKeown

We need to do it all. We can have it all. It's just wishful thinking. The reality always hits us at the end of the day. Exhaustion and setbacks are some of the side-effects of going in a million directions at the speed of a snail. Never accomplishing something palpable, being in the middle of something for all eternity.

Greg McKeown is an acclaimed public speaker. The subjects that McKeown touches on are leadership, execution, simplicity, innovation, focus, discipline, and essentialism. Personal experiences lead him on the road to rediscovery, becoming an essentialist. He's the CEO of THIS Inc., a leadership training company founded in 2011, where leaders reinvent themselves and their conceptions about team management. McKeown graduated from Stanford with an MBA in Business Management. He resides in Silicon Valley with his wife and their four children.

In *Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less*, we get advice about how we can design this new lifestyle more effectively.

The book suggests us to focus on 4 areas

Essence, Explore,  
Eliminate, Execute

# 1. Essence – What does it mean to be an essentialist

The author in the first part of the book focuses on explaining us the difference between an essentialism mindset and a non-essentialist mindset

"I choose to [do something].", while a nonessentialist thinks, "I have to [do something]." (On and on with contrasting back and forth with definitions like this).

## **THE NONESSENTIALIST**

Thinks:

- I have to.
- It's all important.
- How can I fit it all in?

Does:

- Reacts to what's most pressing
- Says yes to people without thinking

Gets:

- Takes on too much , and work suffers
- Feels out of control

## **THE ESSENTIALIST**

Thinks:

- I choose to.
- Only a few things really matter.
- What are the trade offs?

Does:

- Pauses to discern what really matters
- Says "no" to everything except the essential

Gets:

- Chooses carefully in order to do great work
- Feels in control

## 2. Explore – Tips and inspiration on how to find the most essential parts of your life

The recommendations we get in this part of the book helps us to discern what it's truly important. Here it's important the concept of **Escape: The perks of being unavailable** We need space to escape in order to discern the essential few from the trivial many. Unfortunately, in our time-starved era, we don't get that space by default—only by design. What's the meaning of *space by design*?

**Space to design** – it means where can we go to escape from distractions so we can create the space we need to think?

**Space to concentrate** – when can we schedule time into our calendar for thinking about big picture stuff and all the things going on inside our head? Taking time out to do nothing but think can be extremely beneficial.

**Space to read** – when can we schedule time for reading classical literature (not blogs, modern books or the latest news).

Another part that I found interesting in the book is the concept of “**Hell Yeah**”

**No More Yes. It's Either HELL YEAH! Or No.**

We can think of this as the 90 Percent Rule, and it's one that we can apply to just about every decision or dilemma. As we evaluate an option, think about the single most important criterion for that decision, and then simply give the option a score between 0 and 100. If you rate it any lower than 90 percent, then automatically change the rating to 0 and simply reject it. This way we avoid getting caught up in indecision, or worse, getting stuck with the 60s or 70s.

Here's a simple, systematic process we can use to apply selective criteria to opportunities that come our way. First, we write down the opportunity. Second, write down a list of three “minimum criteria” the options would need to “pass” in order to be considered. Third, write down a list of three ideal or “extreme criteria” the options would need to “pass” in order to be considered.

By definition, if the opportunity doesn't pass the first set of criteria, the answer is obviously no. But if it also doesn't pass two of your three extreme criteria, the answer is still no.

### 3. Eliminate –the book gives tips and inspiration on how to say “no”, how to uncommit, and the art of editing

This part of the book explores the idea of “Just because you are asked something you don’t have to do it” or another example that maybe it might resonate with many of us ... just because we are invited to a meeting it does not mean we need to attend. In the book, we get some tips on saying “no”

*The right no spoken at the right time can change the course of history. [131]*

1. The awkward pause - when a request comes to you (in person), just pause for a moment. Count to three before deciding. If you’re bold, just wait for the other person to fill the void.
2. The soft “no” (or the “no but”) - Imagine someone asks you for coffee (but you don’t want to go). Here’s an example reply, “I am consumed with writing my book right now ❓❓ But I would love to get together once the book is finished. Let me know if we can get together towards the end of the summer.”
3. “Let me check my calendar and get back to you.”
4. Use e-mail bouncebacks - set an out of office message, eg. “Subject line: In Monk Mode. Dear Friends, I am currently working on a new book which has put enormous burdens on my time. Unfortunately, I am unable to respond in the manner I would like. For this, I apologize. - Greg.”
5. Say, “Yes. What should I de-prioritize?” - or “I would want to do a great job, and given my other commitments I wouldn’t be able to do a job I was proud of if I took this on.”
6. Say it with humor - eg. “Nope!”
7. Use the words “You are welcome to X. I am willing to Y” - If someone asks you for a ride (but you don’t want to give them a ride.) You could say, “You are welcome to borrow my car. I am willing to make sure the keys are here for you.” This is a good way to navigate a request you somewhat would like to support but not fully.
8. “I can’t do it, but X might be interested.” [143]

## 4. Execute – Tips and inspiration to help us progress and focus on the things you choose to do.

I especially loved the concept of the “slowest hiker”

The question is this: What is the “slowest hiker” in your job or your life? What is the obstacle that is keeping you back from achieving what really matters to you? By systematically identifying and removing this “constraint” we’ll be able to significantly reduce the friction keeping you from executing what is essential.