essentialism

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The Disciplined Pursuit of Less

Greg McKeown

The Book in Two Sentences

1. "Essentialism is a disciplined, systematic approach for determining where our highest point of contribution lies, then making execution of those things almost effortless".
2. "The way of the Essentialist rejects the idea that we can fit it all in".

The Big Ideas

1. "Only once you give yourself permission to stop trying to do it all, to stop saying yes to everyone, can you make your highest contribution towards the things that really matter".
2. "Essentialists invest the time they have saved into creating a system for removing obstacles and making execution as easy as possible".
3. "Essentialism is not a way to do one more thing; it is a different way of doing everything. It is a way of thinking".
4. "To embrace the essence of Essentialism requires we replace false assumptions with three core truths: 'I choose to', **'Only a few things really matter'**, and 'I can do anything but not everything'."
5. **"Essentialism distinguishes the vital few from the trivial many".**

Essentialism Summary

- In his book How the Mighty Fall, Jim Collins explores how **"the undisciplined pursuit of more"** was a key reason for failure.
- "The way of the Essentialist rejects the idea that we can fit it all in. Instead it requires us to **grapple with real trade-offs and make tough decisions**. In many cases we can learn to make one-time decisions that make a thousand future decisions so we don't exhaust ourselves asking the same questions again and again".
- "The overwhelming reality is: we live in a world where almost everything is worthless and a very few things are exceptionally valuable. As John Maxwell has written, " **You cannot overestimate the unimportance of practically everything.**'"
- Question: "Will this activity or effort make the highest possible contribution towards my goal?"
- "Studies have found that we tend to value things we already own more highly than they are worth and thus that we find them more difficult to get rid of."
- Question: "If I didn't already own this, how much would I spend to buy it?"
- "Half of the troubles of this life can be traced to **saying yes too quickly** and not saying no soon enough" Josh Billings

The three realities of the Essentialist:

1. Individual choice: We can choose how to spend our energy and time.
2. The prevalence of noise: **Almost everything is noise**, and a very few things are exceptionally valuable.
3. **The reality of trade-offs**: We can't have it all or do it all.

We can ask three questions:

1. "What do I feel deeply inspired by?"
2. "What am I particularly talented at?"
3. "What meets a significant need in the world?"

- "LinkedIn CEO Jeff Weiner sees '**fewer things done better**' as the most powerful mechanism for leadership"
- "There are three deeply entrenched assumptions we must conquer to live the way of the Essentialist: 'I have to', 'It's all important', and 'I can do both'. Like mythological sirens, these assumptions are as dangerous as they are seductive. They draw us in and drown us in shallow waters".
- "To embrace the essence of Essentialism requires we replace false assumptions with three core truths: 'I choose to', 'Only a few things really matter', and 'I can do anything but not everything'.
- "These simple truths awaken us from our non-essential stupor. They free us to pursue what really matters. They enable us to live at our highest level of contribution".
- Question: "If you could do only one thing with your life right now, what would you do?"
- "To become an Essentialist requires a heightened awareness of our ability to choose".
- "When we forget our ability to choose, we learn to be helpless. Drip by drip we allow our power to be taken away until we end up becoming a function of other people's choices – or even a function of our own past choices".
- "Instead of asking, 'What do I have to give up?' [Essentialists] ask, 'What do I want to go big on?'"
- "In your life, the killer question when deciding what activities to eliminate is: 'If I didn't have this opportunity, what would I be willing to do to acquire it?'"
- "And while conforming to what people in a group expect of us – what psychologists call normative conformity – is no longer a matter of life and death, the desire is still deeply ingrained in us".
- "Essentialists accept the reality that we can never fully anticipate or prepare for every scenario or eventuality; the future is simply too unpredictable. Instead, they build in buffers to reduce the friction caused by the unexpected".
- "When faced with so many tasks and obligations that you can't figure out which to tackle first, stop. Take a deep breath. Get present in the moment and ask yourself what is most important this very second – not what's most important tomorrow

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or even an hour from now".

OPPM™ and essentialism

OPPMs communicate project plans, then their performance, deliberately distinguishing the vital few from the distracting many; so essential things are clear and concise.

OPPMTM is a disciplined systematic communication process, which provides:

- Context for **thinking**
- Focused **execution**
- Accelerated **results**

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