

I was doing all the right things for the right reasons. But I was doing them in the wrong way. Essentialism is doing the right things; Effortless is doing them the right way. Motivation is not enough—it is a limited resource. Make the most essential activities the easiest ones. Puritanism went beyond embracing the hard—to distrusting the easy. But achieving our goals efficiently isn't unambitious. It's smart.

What could happen in your life if the easy but pointless things became harder and the essential things became easier? Achieve more because you are at ease. Effortless State. Effortless Action. Effortless Results. Perfectionism makes projects hard to start, self-doubt makes them hard to finish, and trying to do too much, too fast, makes it hard to sustain momentum. Whenever your efforts yield a 1-time benefit, you get a linear result. Linear results are limited: they never exceed the effort exerted. With residual results you reap the benefits again and again—a student learns first principles; a decision to exercise every day. Effortless Action alone produces linear results. But when we apply Effortless Action to high-leverage activities, the return on our effort compounds.

The best free throw shooter ever was Elena Delle Donne. Her success rate at the free throw line across her career was 93.4% “If you keep it simple, less can go wrong,” she says. When you remove the burdens in your heart and the distractions in your mind, you see more clearly. In the Effortless State you are physically rested, emotionally unburdened, and mentally energized. You are completely present, attentive, and focused on what's important in the moment.

Behind almost every failure of my life I had made the same error-- I'd been trying too hard. What if the opposite were true? Part of doing strategy is to solve the easiest problem.

“I want to do right but not right now.” If you exercise and eat better, you will eventually be healthier and lose weight. If you read every day, you will eventually develop expertise. If you meditate regularly, you will eventually develop a greater sense of calm in your life. You experience the reward after the action has taken place. We reduce lag time between action and satisfaction by pairing an essential activity with a reward.

Many experiences in our work and personal life are boring, mundane, or stressful. But if we break down the processes into steps, we may find ways to make the steps more bearable, or better yet, fun. One man now gets to listen to a podcast only if he is walking or running on the treadmill. his workout. He rewards himself during. Work and play co-exist; they complement each other. Together they make it easier to tap into creativity and come up with novel ideas and solutions. **Habits explain “what” you do, but rituals are about “how” you do it.** Rituals make essential habits easier to sustain by infusing them with meaning. **Our rituals are habits with a soul.**

Many forms of outdated goals are regrets that continue to haunt us, grudges we can't seem to let go of, expectations that were realistic at some point but now get in our way. We live in a complaint culture that gets high on expressing outrage. With enough secondhand griping, we get emotional cancer. Toxic thoughts quickly accumulate. When you focus on something you are thankful for, the effect is instant. It

shifts you from a *lack* state (regrets, worries about the future, the feeling of being behind) into a *have* state. **Gratitude is a powerful catalytic.** It starves negative emotions of oxygen they and generates a positive, self-sustaining system wherever and whenever applied.

A system is self-sustaining if it requires less and less investment of energy over time. Once in motion, maintaining it becomes easier, then easy, then eventually effortless. Peak physical and mental performance requires a rhythm of exerting and renewing energy. People who sleep less than 7 hours a night are more likely to suffer from cardiovascular disease, heart attack, stroke, asthma, arthritis, depression, and diabetes and are almost 8 times more likely to be overweight. Routine nightly sleep for fewer than 6 hours results in cognitive performance deficits, even if we feel we have adapted to it. In the deep sleep stage, your body and brain waves slow down. This is the stage where information is stored in long-term memory, learning and emotions are processed, the immune system is energized, and the body recovers. Naps can counter sleep debt. In fact, naps can improve performance even in well-rested people. A nap is as beneficial for some types of memory as a full night's sleep.

By training our attentional muscles we can improve our processing of complex information moving at great speed. Professional athletes were better this than the other groups. All groups improved very quickly with practice. There are ways we can make it easier to keep a relationship strong. We must be present with them, really notice them, give them our full attention. When people fear being judged, it drowns out their inner voice.

The Effortless State is an experience many of us have had when we are physically rested, emotionally unburdened, and mentally energized. You are completely aware, alert, present, attentive, and focused on what's important in the moment. You are able to focus on what matters most with ease.

“Swedish Death Cleaning” means getting rid of the clutter accumulated through your life while you are still alive. The “now” we experience lasts only 2.5 seconds—enough time to shift our focus: to put the phone down, close the browser, take a deep breath. Tech companies are constantly testing new ways to offer us smaller units of information to shift our focus: 280 characters on Twitter, “likes” on Facebook and Instagram, newsfeeds we can scroll through and absorb at a glance.

Simplicity—the art of maximizing the steps not taken—is essential. I took a quiz without any preparation, knowing I would get roughly 50% of the answers wrong. That was in fact my goal: to get them wrong as quickly as possible so I could see the correct answers. I'd look at what I got wrong and take more practice tests. Find ways to experience—and learn from—failure as cheaply as possible. We gave our kids 3 glass jars: 1 for charity, 1 for saving, and 1 for spending. When they received their allowance, it was up to them to divide up the money. They learned the value of different uses of money by experience.

Slow Is Smooth, Smooth Is Fast--when you go slow, things are smoother, and when things are smooth, you can move faster. Never less than X, never more than Y. Holding

back when you still have steam in you might seem counterintuitive to getting things done, but it is key to breakthrough productivity. Whether it's "miles per day" or "words per day" or "hours per day," there are few better ways to achieve effortless pace than to set an upper bound. All progress is not created equal. Our global environment is VUCA : volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous. Essential Project: Complete the first draft of a book. Lower Bound: Never less than 500 words a day. Upper Bound: Never more than 1000.

Archimedes said that if he had a long enough lever and the right place to stand, he could move the world. I am fascinated by how we can apply the principle of leverage in other areas. Here are a few examples: Learning, Teaching Modest Input, Residual Results Sharing. Teach others to teach, and you get exponential impact. You craft the right story once, and it can live on for millennia. The more we teach, the more we learn. When you reduce friction on or across teams up front, collaboration flows smoothly on project after project. When you build a unified team where everybody knows who is doing what, it becomes easier to stay aligned on roles, responsibilities, regulations, rewards, and desired results.

A method may be useful once, to solve 1 specific type of problem. Principles, however, can be applied broadly and repeatedly. At their best, they are universal and timeless. If it's residual results we're after, we must look to principles. **First principles are like the building blocks of knowledge: once you understand them correctly you can apply them hundreds of times.** There may be a million methods but principles are few. When we have the solid fundamentals of knowledge, we have somewhere to hang additional information we learn.

Neuroplasticity is our brain's ability to change, both at the individual neuron level and at the very complex level of learning a new skill. Neural connections that result in success are reinforced and grow stronger. Unproductive connections eventually become weaker and, like dead branches, break off. The exchange of ideas across disciplines breeds novelty--often the key to effortless creativity. **Reading a book is among the most high-leverage activities on earth.** You can gain access to what the smartest people have already figured out. The Lindy Effect: The older a book is, the higher the likelihood it will survive into the future: the classics and the ancients. The process of summarizing, of distilling ideas to their essential essence, helps us turn information into understanding, and understanding into unique knowledge.

Before Dick Fosbury, no Olympic jumper had faced skyward (Fosbury Flop). After him, all world record holders did. Being good at what nobody is doing is better than being great at what everyone is doing. But being an expert in something nobody is doing is exponentially more valuable. The first step is to leverage what others know. Is there something that seems hard for others but easy for you? Once you develop a reputation for knowing what no one else knows, opportunities flow to you for years.

Stories have the power to turn an audience into a roomful of teachers. Clearly identify—then simplify—the most important messages you want to teach others to teach. These **messages should be not just easy to understand but hard to misunderstand.** Make the most essential things the easiest ones to teach and learn.

Civilization advances by extending the number of important operations we can perform without thinking about them. Humans have a tremendous capacity for the storage of memories. But the RAM (random access memory) for information we can call up on demand, our working memory, is far more limited. The beauty of a checklist is that it has been baked into an equation: an agenda for your weekly meeting; a list of writing tips to make it easy to write a great essay. You do them automatically, without having to rely on memory. To automate the process of choosing a destination and planning a new trip every year, one family invested in a small lodge in Montana. Automation is anything that performs a function with minimal human assistance or effort. Some are so normal we don't really think of it as automation: the washing machine, dishwasher, refrigerator.

Warren Buffett knew everything would be exactly as Wal-Mart said it would be—and it was. He closed the McLane deal to invest in Wal-Mart over a single 2-hour meal and a handshake. Trust can be a lever to turn modest effort into residual results. When you have trust in your relationships, they take less effort to maintain and manage. The speed and quality of decisions go up. You may even enjoy the experience of working together. Trust is like the engine oil for a team--the lubricant that keeps them working together smoothly. The best way to leverage trust to get residual results is to select trustworthy people. Buffett looks for people with integrity, intelligence, and initiative, though he adds that without the first, the other 2 can backfire. It's like magic. Team members feel empowered. They take a risk. They grow. Trust is strengthened. And then it spreads.

Every relationship has a structure, A low-trust structure is one where expectations are unclear, A high-trust structure is one where expectations are clear. Low-trust relationship structures generally happen by default rather than design. A good business contract ties each participant's compensation to the outcome of the whole project rather than the work that individual contributed. High-Trust Agreement: Roles: Who is doing what? Rules: What minimum viable standards must be kept? Resources: What resources (people, money, tools) are available and needed? Rewards: How will progress be evaluated and rewarded? Start noticing the small actions you can take to make your life easier in the future.

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