

THE SUBTLE ART OF NOT GIVING A F*CK BY MARK MANSON

The Subtle Art of not Giving a F*ck by Mark Manson is a guide on how to let go a little bit and enjoy life more. To realise that we will suffer in life, not everything is always great, and this book will show you how to suffer better, more meaningfully and with more compassion. Mark Manson is straight-up with his advice but when you have finished reading it, you will have a new lease of life. Most importantly, Mark Manson will help you pick meaningful values for your life and teach you that you don't have to try anymore.

DON'T TRY

This fixation on the positive—on what's better, what's superior—only serves to remind us over and over again of what we are not, of what we lack, of what we should have been but failed to be. After all, no truly happy person feels the need to stand in front of a mirror and recite that she's happy. She just is.

If you're dreaming of something all the time, then you're reinforcing the same unconscious reality over and over: that you are not that.

The key to a good life is not giving a fuck about more; it's giving a fuck about less, giving a fuck about only what is true and immediate and important.

The feedback loop from hell

Our society today, through the wonders of consumer culture and hey-look-my-life-is-cooler-than-yours social media, has bred a whole generation of people who believe that having these negative experiences—anxiety, fear, guilt, etc.—is totally not okay. I mean, if you look at your Facebook feed, everybody there is having a fucking grand old time. And you can't help but think your life sucks even more than you thought.

Our crisis is no longer material; it's existential, it's spiritual. We have so much fucking stuff and so many opportunities that we don't even know what to give a fuck about anymore.

Because there's an infinite amount of things we can now see or know, there are also an infinite number of ways we can discover that we don't measure up, that we're not good enough, that things aren't as great as they could be. And this rips us apart inside.

"The desire for more positive experience is itself a negative experience. And, paradoxically, the acceptance of one's negative experience is itself a positive experience."

The subtle art of not giving a fuck

1. Not giving a fuck does not mean being indifferent, it means being comfortable with being different.
2. To not give a fuck about adversity, you must first give a fuck about something more important than adversity.
3. Whether you realise it or not, you are always choosing what to give a fuck about.

HAPPINESS IS A PROBLEM

There is a premise that underlies a lot of our assumptions and beliefs. The premise is that happiness is algorithmic: if I achieve X, then I can be happy. If I look like Y, then I can be happy.

This premise, though, is the problem. Happiness is not a solvable equation. Dissatisfaction and unease are inherent parts of human nature and, as we'll see, necessary components to creating consistent happiness.

Suffering

We suffer for the simple reason that suffering is biologically useful. It is nature's preferred agent for inspiring change. We have evolved to always live with a certain degree of dissatisfaction and insecurity, because it's the mildly dissatisfied and insecure creature that's going to do the most work to innovate and survive.

We are wired to become dissatisfied with whatever we have and satisfied by only what we do not have. This constant dissatisfaction has kept our species fighting and striving, building and conquering.

"Life is essentially an endless series of problems. The solution to one problem is merely the creation of the next one. Don't hope for

a life without problems. There's no such thing. Instead, hope for a life full of good problems."

Happiness comes from solving problems

Problems never stop; they merely get exchanged and/or upgraded. Happiness comes from solving problems. The keyword here is "solving." If you're avoiding your problems or feel like you don't have any problems, then you're going to make yourself miserable. If you feel like you have problems that you can't solve, you will likewise make yourself miserable. The secret sauce is in the solving of the problems, not in not having problems in the first place.

Happiness is a constant work-in-progress, because solving problems is a constant work-in-progress—the solutions to today's problems will lay the foundation for tomorrow's problems, and so on. True happiness occurs only when you find the problems you enjoy having and enjoy solving.

Choose your struggle

What determines your success isn't, "What do you want to enjoy?" The relevant question is, "What pain do you want to sustain?" The path to happiness is a path full of shiteaps and shame. "You have to choose something. You can't have a pain-free life.

The more interesting question is the pain. What is the pain that you want to sustain? That's the question that will actually get you somewhere, that can change a perspective, a life. It's what makes me, me, and you, you. It's what defines us and separates us and ultimately brings us together.

See: it's a never-ending upward spiral. And if you think at any point you're allowed to stop climbing, I'm afraid you're missing the point. Because the joy is in the climb itself.

YOU ARE NOT SPECIAL

Entitled people, because they are incapable of acknowledging their own problems openly and honestly, are incapable of improving their lives in any lasting or meaningful way. They are left chasing high after high and accumulate greater and greater levels of denial. A person who actually has a high self-worth is able to look at the negative parts of his character frankly—"Yes, sometimes I'm irresponsible

with money,” “Yes, sometimes I exaggerate my own successes,” “Yes, I rely too much on others to support me and should be more self-reliant”—and then acts to improve upon them.

The Tyranny of Exceptionalism

Most of us are pretty average at most things we do. Even if you’re exceptional at one thing, chances are you’re average or below average at most other things. That’s just the nature of life. We’re all, for the most part, pretty average people. But it’s the extremes that get all of the publicity.

Having the Internet, Google, Facebook, YouTube means that all day, every day, we are flooded with the truly extraordinary. The best of the best. Nonstop. Yet the vast majority of life is unextraordinary, indeed quite average.

This flood of extreme information has conditioned us to believe that exceptionalism is the new normal. And because we’re all quite average most of the time, we feel pretty damn insecure and desperate.

Technology has solved old economic problems by giving us new psychological problems. The Internet has not just open-sourced information; it has also open-sourced insecurity, self-doubt, and shame.

Whats that point?

It has become an accepted part of our culture today to believe that we are all destined to do something truly extraordinary. The fact that this statement is inherently contradictory—after all, if everyone were extraordinary, then by definition no one would be extraordinary—is missed by most people. Being “average” has become the new standard of failure.

The ticket to emotional health is accepting the bland and mundane truths of life: truths such as “Your actions actually don’t matter that much in the grand scheme of things” and “The vast majority of your life will be boring and not noteworthy, and that’s okay.”

But once ingested, your body will wake up feeling more potent and more alive. After all, that constant pressure to be something amazing, to be the next big thing, will be lifted off your back. You will have a growing appreciation for life’s basic experiences: the pleasures of simple friendship, creating something, helping a person in need, reading a good book, laughing with someone you care about. Sounds boring, doesn’t it? That’s because these things are ordinary. But maybe they’re ordinary for a reason: because they are what actually matters.

THE VALUE OF SUFFERING

What is objectively true about your situation is not as important as how you come to see the situation, how you choose to measure it and value it. Problems may be inevitable, but the meaning of each problem is not. We get to control what our problems mean based on how we choose to think about them, the standard by which we choose to measure them.

Shitty Values

1. Pleasure. Pleasure is great, but it's a horrible value to prioritise your life around. Ask any drug addict.
2. Material success. When people measure themselves by the status symbols they're able to collect, then not only are they shallow, but they're probably assholes as well.
3. Always being right. People who base their self-worth on being right about everything prevent themselves from learning from their mistakes.
4. Staying Positive. While there is something to be said for "staying on the sunny side of life," the truth is, sometimes life sucks, and the healthiest thing you can do is admit it.

Good values and bad values

Good values are: reality based, socially constructive, achieved internally & immediate and controllable. Bad values are: superstitious, socially destructive, not immediate or controllable & generally reliant on external events.

Honesty is a good value because it's something you have complete control over, it reflects reality, and it benefits others. Popularity, on the other hand, is a bad value. If that's your value, and if your metric is being the most popular guy/girl at the dance party, much of what happens will be out of your control.

YOU ARE ALWAYS CHOOSING

Often the only difference between a problem being painful or being powerful is a sense that we chose it, and that we are responsible for it.

Whether we like it or not, we are always taking an active role in what's occurring to and within us. We are always interpreting the meaning of every moment and every occurrence. Often the same event can be good or bad, depending on the metric we choose to use.

It comes back to how, in reality, there is no such thing as not giving a single fuck. It's impossible. We must all give a fuck about something. To not give a fuck about anything is still to give a fuck about something.

The real question is, What are we choosing to give a fuck about?

The responsibility/fault fallacy

Taking responsibility for our problems is far more important, because that's where the real learning comes from. That's where the real-life improvement comes from. To simply blame others is only to hurt yourself.

Victimhood

Unfortunately, one side effect of the Internet and social media is that it's become easier than ever to push responsibility—for even the tiniest of infractions—onto some other group or person.

The public sharing of “injustices” garners far more attention and emotional outpouring than most other events on social media, rewarding people who are able to perpetually feel victimized with ever-growing amounts of attention and sympathy.

The biggest problem with this is it takes attention away from actual victims. It's like the boy who cried wolf.

There is no how.

People ask, “Okay, but how do it change?” There is no how, you are already choosing, in every moment of every day, what to give a fuck about, so change is as simple as choosing to give a fuck about something else.

YOU'RE WRONG ABOUT EVERYTHING

Growth is an endlessly iterative process. When we learn something new, we don't go from “wrong” to “right.” Rather, we go from wrong to slightly less wrong. We are always in the process of approaching truth and perfection without actually ever reaching truth or perfection.

We shouldn't seek to find the ultimate “right” answer for ourselves, but rather, we should seek to chip away at the ways that we're wrong today so that we can be a little less wrong tomorrow.

Certainty is the enemy of growth. Nothing is for certain until it has already happened—and even then, it's still debatable. That's why accepting the inevitable imperfections of our values is necessary for any growth to take place.

Be careful what you believe

We experience something. Then we remember it slightly differently a few days later, as if it had been whispered and misheard. Then we tell somebody about it and have to fill in a couple of the plot holes with our own embellishments. And then we come to believe those little filled-in mental gaps, and so we tell those the next time too. Except they're not real, so we get them a little bit wrong.

Not only does our memory suck—suck to the point that eyewitness testimony isn't necessarily taken seriously in court cases—but our brain functions in a horribly biased way. Our mind's biggest priority when processing experiences is to interpret them in such a way that they will cohere with all of our previous experiences, feelings, and beliefs.

The dangers of pure certainty

Uncertainty is the root of all progress and all growth. A We cannot learn anything without first not knowing something.

Our values are imperfect and incomplete. The only way to solve our problems is to first admit that our actions and beliefs up to this point have been wrong and are not working.

This openness to being wrong must exist for any real change or growth to take place.

Before we can look at our values and prioritizations and change them into better, healthier ones, we must first become uncertain of our current values. See their faults and biases, see how they don't fit in with much of the rest of the world, to stare our own ignorance in the face and concede, because our own ignorance is greater than us all.

How to be a little less certain of yourself

Questioning ourselves and doubting our own thoughts and beliefs is one of the hardest skills to develop. But it can be done. Here are some questions that will help you breed a little more uncertainty in your life:

1. What if I'm wrong?
2. What would it mean if I were wrong?

3. Would being wrong create a better or a worse problem than my current problem, for both myself and others?

FAILURE IS THE WAY FORWARD

If you think about a young child trying to learn to walk, that child will fall down and hurt itself hundreds of times. But at no point does that child ever stop and think, “Oh, I guess walking just isn’t for me. I’m not good at it.”

Avoiding failure is something we learn at some later point in life. At some point, most of us reach a place where we're afraid to fail. This confines us and stifles us. We can be truly successful only at something we're willing to fail at.

A lot of this fear of failure comes from having chosen shitty values. Shitty values, involve tangible external goals outside of our control. The pursuit of these goals causes great anxiety.

Pain is part of the process

Our most radical changes in perspective often happen at the tail end of our worst moments. It's only when we feel intense pain that we're willing to look at our values and question why they seem to be failing us. We need some sort of existential crisis to take an objective look at how we've been deriving meaning in our life, and then consider changing course.

The 'do something' principle

Action isn't just the effect of motivation; it's also the cause of it.

Most of us commit to action only if we feel a certain level of motivation. And we feel motivation only when we feel enough emotional inspiration. We assume that these steps occur in a sort of chain reaction, like this:

Emotional inspiration → Motivation → Desirable action

If you want to accomplish something but don't feel motivated or inspired, then you assume you're just screwed. There's nothing you can do about it.

The thing about motivation is that it's not only a three-part chain, but an endless loop:

Inspiration → Motivation → Action → Inspiration → Motivation → Action → Etc.

Your actions create further emotional reactions and inspirations and move on to motivate your future actions. Taking advantage of this knowledge, we can actually reorient our mindset in the following way:

Action → Inspiration → Motivation If you lack the motivation to make an important change in your life, do something—anything, really—and then harness the reaction to that action as a way to begin motivating yourself.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SAYING NO

We need to reject something. Otherwise, we stand for nothing. If nothing is better or more desirable than anything else, then we are empty and our life is meaningless. We are without values and therefore live our life without any purpose.

The act of choosing a value for yourself requires rejecting alternative values. We all must give a fuck about something, in order to value something. And to value something, we must reject what is not that something. To value X, we must reject non-X.

Conflict

Without conflict, there can be no trust. Conflict exists to show us who is there for us unconditionally and who is just there for benefits. no one trusts a yes-man.

For a relationship to be healthy, both people must be willing and able to both say no and hear no. Without that, boundaries break down and one person's problems and values come to dominate the other's. Conflict is not only normal, then; it's absolutely necessary for the maintenance of a healthy relationship. If two people who are close are not able to hash out their differences openly and vocally, then the relationship is based on manipulation and misrepresentation, and it will slowly become toxic.

...AND THEN YOU DIE

Death scares us. And because it scares us, we avoid thinking about it, talking about it, sometimes even acknowledging it, even when it's happening to someone close to us. Yet, in a bizarre, backwards way, death is the light by which the shadow of all of life's meaning is measured. Without death, everything would feel inconsequential, all experience arbitrary, all metrics and values suddenly zero.

Something beyond our selves

While death is bad, it is inevitable. Therefore, we should not avoid this realization, but rather come to terms with it as best we can. Because once we become comfortable with the fact of our own death—the root terror, the underlying anxiety motivating all of life's frivolous ambitions—we can then choose our values more freely, unrestrained by the illogical quest for immortality, and freed from dangerous dogmatic views.

Confronting the reality of our own mortality is important because it obliterates all the crappy, fragile, superficial values in life. While most people whittle their days chasing another buck, or a little bit more fame and attention, or a little bit more assurance that they're right or loved, death confronts all of us with a far more painful and important question: What is your legacy?

How will the world be different and better when you're gone? What mark will you have made? What influence will you have caused? They say that a butterfly flapping its wings in Africa can cause a hurricane in Florida; well, what hurricanes will you leave in your wake?

The sunny side of death

You are great. Already. Whether you realize it or not. Whether anybody else realizes it or not. And it's not because you launched an iPhone app, or finished school a year early, or bought yourself a sweet-ass boat. These things do not define greatness.

You are already great because in the face of endless confusion and certain death, you continue to choose what to give a fuck about and what not to. This mere fact, this simple optioning for your own values in life, already makes you beautiful, already makes you successful, and already makes you loved. Even if you don't realize it. Even if you're sleeping in a gutter and starving.

You too are going to die, and that's because you too were fortunate enough to have lived. You may not feel this. But go stand on a cliff sometime, and maybe you will.