

McKeown, Greg

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When our brains are at full capacity, everything feels harder.

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Perfectionism makes essential 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.

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With residual results you put in the effort once and reap the benefits again and again.

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Anything Can Be Made Effortless, but Not Everything

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Of course, you can't make everything in your life effortless. But you can make more of the right things less impossible—then easier, then easy, and ultimately effortless.

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"If you keep it simple, less can go wrong," she says.

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The most important part of the process? "Not overthinking it. The biggest thing on the foul line is you can't let too much get inside your head."

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clutter—like outdated assumptions, negative emotions, and toxic thought patterns

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Our brain's processing capacity is large, but limited. It already processes over six thousand thoughts a day.

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brains are programmed to prioritize emotions with high “affective value”—like fear, resentment, or anger

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This bias is sometimes called the cognitive ease principle, or the principle of least effort.³ It's our tendency to take the path of least resistance to achieve what we want.

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Effortless Inversion means looking at problems from the opposite perspective. It means asking, “What if this could be easy?” It means learning to solve problems from a state of focus, clarity, and calm. It means getting good at getting things done by putting in less effort.

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When we feel overwhelmed, it may not be because the situation is inherently overwhelming. It may be because we are overcomplicating something in our own heads. Asking the question “What if this could be easy?” is a way to reset our thinking. It may seem almost impossibly simple. And that's exactly why it works.

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When a strategy is so complex that each step feels akin to pushing a boulder up a hill, you should pause. Invert the problem. Ask, “What's the simplest way to achieve this result?”

When it's time to clear the dinner table and clean up the kitchen it is amazing to see how quickly—and how stealthily—our children disappear. They are like ninjas: silently slipping away to their bedrooms without the slightest sound or disturbance. Then comes the unenviable job of calling them back, one by one, to do the cleanup work. It feels less like parenting and more like a game of cat and mouse. The excuses, "I need to go to the bathroom" or "I have homework," are frustratingly hard to argue with. It's exhausting, and our children obviously don't care for it either. They feel bossed around, and they're frustrated with the whole thing too.

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"The act of folding is far more than making clothes compact for storage.¹⁰ It is an act of caring, an expression of love and appreciation for the way these clothes support your lifestyle. Therefore, when we fold, we should put our heart into it, thanking our clothes for protecting our bodies."

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Stormtroopers take many forms: regrets that continue to haunt us, grudges we can't seem to let go of, expectations that were realistic at some point but are now getting in our way.

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When we fall victim to misfortune, it's hard not to obsess, lament, or complain about all that we have lost. In fact, complaining is one of the easiest things to do. It's so easy many of us do it incessantly: when someone is late to meet us, when our neighbors are too loud, when there are no parking spaces on the one day we are running late, when we watch the news, and so on.

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A good first step we can take is to ask this unusual question: What job have I hired this grudge to do?

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But as we conduct a performance review, we discover grudges perform poorly.

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Sometimes we hire a grudge to make us feel in control. We try to prove to ourselves and others that we are right and they are wrong.

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There are times we hire a grudge to give us attention. When people hear our story of victimhood, we get their support and sympathy.

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We can hire a grudge to get us off the hook. As long as we have someone to blame, we don't have to take responsibility for our anger.

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"the best thing one can do when it is raining, is to let it rain."

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Relaxing is a responsibility.

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"To maximize gains from long-term practice," the study's lead author, K. Anders Ericsson, concluded, "individuals must avoid exhaustion and must limit practice to an amount from which they can completely recover on a daily or weekly basis."

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Do not do more today than you can completely recover from today. Do not do more this week than you can completely recover from this week.

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When we are struggling, instead of doubling down on our efforts, we might consider pausing the

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action—even for one minute. We don't need to fight these natural rhythms. We can flow with them. We can use them to our advantage. We can alternate between periods of exertion and renewal.

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“Routine nightly sleep for fewer than six hours results in cognitive performance deficits, even if we feel we have adapted to it.”

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Getting more sleep may be the single greatest gift we can give our bodies, our minds, and even, it turns out, our bottom lines.

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Too often we are with people physically but are still not present with them mentally. We struggle to truly notice them, to see them clearly.

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They are not playing the same game, or even the same sport.

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When we're fully present with people, it has an impact.

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Not just in that moment either. The experience of feeling like the most important person in the world even for the briefest of moments can stay with us for a disproportionate time after the moment has passed. There is a curiously magical power of presence.

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You would think these people were describing someone who had moved mountains for them. But they weren't. They were describing a person who was fully present for them.

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when people fear being judged, it drowns out their inner voice.

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Clearness Committee.

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"Each time I complain I will say something I am thankful for."

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"What job have I hired this grudge to do?"

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the law of diminishing returns: after a certain point, each extra unit of input produces a decreasing rate of output.

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Getting clear on what "done" looks like doesn't just help you finish; it also helps you get started.

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It's surprising how much clarity on this you can achieve in a one-minute burst of concentration.

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"Swedish Death Cleaning" means getting rid of the clutter you have accumulated through your life

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| while you are still alive.

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| When you adopt this strategy, all you have to focus on is the very first step.

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| “Discard something right now.”

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| the “now” we experience lasts only 2.5 seconds.

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| I could get so busy going the second mile I wouldn’t get the first mile done.

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| Being asked to do X isn’t a good enough reason to do Y.

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| There is no mastery without mistakes. And there is no learning later without the courage to be rubbish.

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| learning-sized mistakes.

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| Setting a steady, consistent, sustainable pace was ultimately what allowed the party from Norway to reach their destination “without particular effort,” as Roland Hunford, the author of a fascinating

book on this race to the South Pole, explains.

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Since the end of the Cold War, the military has used the acronym VUCA to describe our global environment: one that is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous.

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“Slow is smooth. Smooth is fast”—meaning, when you go slow, things are smoother, and when things are smooth, you can move faster.⁶

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There’s an easier alternative. We can establish upper and lower bounds. Simply use the following rule: Never less than X, never more than Y.

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Linear results are limited: they can never exceed the amount of effort exerted.

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Residual results are completely different. With residual results you exert effort once and reap the benefits again and again. Results continue to flow to you, whether you put in additional effort or not. Results flow to you while you are sleeping. Results flow to you when you are taking the day off.

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Residual results are like compound interest.

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“Money makes money.² And the money that money makes, makes money.”

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There are two ways to approach getting things done: the hard way is with powerless effort, and the easy way is with effortless power.

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LEARN Leverage the Best of What Others Know

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Bucket 1 was the oldest and largest data set: the inorganic universe. It was physics and geology, covering the more than thirteen billion years since the dawn of the universe.

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Bucket 2 was biology, everything alive on planet Earth. That covered about three billion years.

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Bucket 3 was the whole of human history: the relatively short period we have been around as a species.

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“The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.”

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“believe in the discipline of mastering the best that other people have ever figured out.”

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turning the conventional into something novel is often the key to effortless creativity—not only in science but in areas ranging from investing, to music, to making movies.

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Use the Lindy Effect.¹⁵ This law states that the life expectancy of a book is proportional to its current age—meaning, the older a book is, the higher the likelihood that it will survive into the future. So prioritize reading books that have lasted a long time.

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Read to Absorb (Rather Than to Check a Box).

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absorbing yourself fully in a book changes who you are, just as if you had lived the experience yourself.

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Distill to Understand.

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take ten minutes to summarize what I learned from it on a single page in my own words.

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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.

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To reap the residual results of knowledge, the first step is to leverage what others know. But the ultimate goal is to identify knowledge that is unique to you, and build on it. Is there something that seems hard for other people but easy for you? Something that draws on what you already know, making it easier to continuously learn and grow your competence? That is an opportunity for you to create unique knowledge.

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Knowledge may open the door to an opportunity, but unique knowledge produces perpetual opportunities.

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once you develop a reputation for knowing what no one else knows, opportunities flow to you for years.

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Whenever we want a far-reaching impact, teaching others to teach can be a high-leverage strategy.

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When You Learn to Teach, You Teach Yourself to Learn Teaching others is also an accelerated way to learn. Even thinking we might be called upon to teach can increase our engagement. We focus more intently. We listen to understand. We think about the underlying logic so we can put the ideas into our own words.

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messages should be not just easy to understand but also hard to misunderstand

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The idea of a cheat sheet is simply to get things out of your brain so you can do them automatically, without having to rely on memory.

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Making decisions is mentally draining. Making decisions that will satisfy dozens of other people, each with different preferences, constraints, and priorities, is both mentally draining and close to impossible.

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Automation is anything that performs a function with minimal human assistance or effort.

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due diligence, or the process of confirming that what he had been told about the business was accurate,

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trust can be a lever for turning modest effort into residual results.

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When you have trust in your relationships, they take less effort to maintain and manage. You can quickly split work between team members. People can talk about problems when they come up, openly and honestly. Members share valuable information rather than hoard it. Nobody minds asking questions when they don't understand something. The speed and quality of decisions go up. Political infighting goes down. You may even enjoy the experience of working together. And you perform exponentially better, because you're able to focus all your energy and attention on getting important things done, rather than on simply getting along.

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When you have low trust on teams, everything is hard. Just sending a text or an email is exhausting as you weigh up every word for how it might be taken. When the response comes back you may experience a jolt of anxiety. Every conversation feels like it's a grind. When you don't trust that someone will deliver, you will feel you need to check up on them: remind them of deadlines, hover over them, review their work. Or you won't delegate anything at all, assuming you're better off just doing it yourself. The work can start to stall altogether. You can't have a high-performing team without high levels of trust.

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Inside every team are many people with interrelated roles and responsibilities, moving at high speeds. Without trust, conflicting goals, priorities, and agendas rub up against each other, creating friction and wearing everyone down. If the team runs out of trust, it is likely to stall or sputter out. Trust is like the engine oil for that team. It's the lubricant that keeps these people working together

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smoothly, so the team can continue to function.

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have systems in place to ensure that the engine is constantly well oiled.

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The best way to leverage trust to get residual results is simply to select trustworthy people to be around.

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making sure you are hiring someone honest and honorable, someone you can trust to uphold a high standard when nobody's looking.

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Warren Buffett uses three criteria for determining who is trustworthy enough to hire or to do business with.³ He looks for people with integrity, intelligence, and initiative, though he adds that without the first, the other two can backfire.

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When you can say these four little words, "I trust your judgment"—and mean them—it's like magic. Team members feel empowered. They take a risk. They grow. Trust is strengthened. And then it tends to spread.

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"When people trust you and believe you care about them, they are more likely to ... engage in this same behavior with one another, meaning less pushing the rock up the hill again and again."

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There are three parties to every relationship: Person A, Person B, and the structure that governs them. When trust becomes an issue, most people point at the other person. The manager blames the employee; the employee blames the manager.

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Every relationship has a structure, even if it's an unspoken, unclear one. A low-trust structure is one where expectations are unclear, where goals are incompatible or at odds, where people don't know who is doing what, where the rules are ambiguous and nobody knows what the standards for success are, and where the priorities are unclear and the incentives misaligned.

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A high-trust structure is one where expectations are clear. Goals are shared, roles are clearly delineated, the rules and standards are articulated, and the right results are prioritized, incentivized, and rewarded—consistently, not just sometimes.

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The problem is that low-trust relationship structures generally happen by default rather than by design.

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One solution is a unique business contract they refer to as “the Deal” that ties each participant's compensation to the outcome of the whole project rather than to the work that individual contributed. Aligning the incentives in this way encourages the different parties to act as one team and to make decisions that benefit the whole project rather than their own self-interest. They not only feel a sense of ownership but are motivated to take initiative to make the whole experience more efficient.

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High-Trust Agreement Results What results do we want? 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?

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Taking a little time to build a foundation of trust is a valuable investment in any relationship. It's a lever that turns a modest effort into residual results.

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Why do so many of us put up with problems—big and small—for so much longer than we have to? Because on any given day it usually takes less time to manage a problem than to solve it.

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But looking at the equation from a longer-term perspective changes our calculation. Once we add up the cumulative costs of the time and frustration from today, plus tomorrow, plus hundreds of tomorrows after that, suddenly it makes sense to invest in solving the problem once and for all. Using that time frame, fixing that drawer was an absolute bargain: two minutes' worth of effort to prevent hundreds of future frustrations, an impressive time rebate.

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This is what I call the long tail of time management. When we invest our time in actions with a long tail, we continue to reap the benefits over a long period.

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To break this habit, ask yourself: What is a problem that irritates me repeatedly? What is the total cost of managing that over several years? What is the next step I can take immediately, in a few minutes, to move toward solving it?

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you'll start noticing the small actions you can take to make your life easier in the future.

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"There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root."

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An educator signs a social contract with parents and students regarding expectations before the year begins.

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It's Never Too Early to Sound the Alarm

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Just as you can find small actions to make your life easier in the future, you can look for small actions that will prevent your life from becoming more complicated.

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"Each time I complain I will say something I am thankful for."

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Train your brain to focus on the important and ignore the irrelevant.

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Whatever has happened to you in life. Whatever hardship. Whatever pain. However significant those things are. They pale in comparison to the power you have to choose what to do now.

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Just think how the trajectory of a life can shift in the most fleeting of moments. The moments where we take control: "I choose," "I decide," "I promise," or "From now on" The moments we let go of emotional burdens: "I forgive you," "I am thankful," or "I'm willing to accept that." Or the moments when we make something right: "Please forgive me," "Let's start over," "I won't give up on you," or "I love you." In each new moment, we have the power to shape all subsequent moments.

| life doesn't have to be as hard and complicated as we make it.