

Essentialism

by: Greg McKeown

[MARK AS READ](#)[MARK AS FAVORITE](#)

7:58

Life is hard. There are endless demands on our time. There's a mountain of emails to respond to, a todo list that never seems to quit, social media accounts that need constant tending, and on top of that you need to actually get some work done.

It's a crazy world you and I live in, isn't it? How do YOU respond to the endless demands on your time? If we were to take everybody in the world and split them in two groups, we'd probably have the following:

In group #1, we have the people that try to do it all. Everything on their todo list is important, and they find ways to fit everything in. They say yes a lot, because successful people always find a way to get it all done. Sometimes they take on too much and tend to feel out of control, but who doesn't these days?

In group #2, we have the people who think that less is better. Only a few things on their todo list really matter, and everything else can wait, or maybe even never get done. They find themselves saying no a lot, which doesn't make them all that popular. But they feel in control, and seem to enjoy their work.

If you are like most people these days, you would probably identify the most with group #1 - which Greg McKeown (the author of Essentialism) would call the Non-Essentialists. This is where most people spend their time, and I can certainly relate.

The people who truly make a difference, McKeown argues, spend their time hanging out with group #2 - the Essentialists. These people believe that it's more important to make significant progress in a few things rather than making a millimetre of progress in a million directions.

Take inspiration from people who embody Essentialism

At the most basic level, an Essentialist gives themselves the permission to stop trying to do it all, so that they can focus all of their energy and time on the things that truly matter. In a world that demands more and more of you every day, this is a rallying call to learn how to start saying no.

Here are a few people you can take inspiration from...

Steve Jobs was an Essentialist

When Steve Jobs came back to rescue Apple from the clutches of bankruptcy, he ruthlessly reduced the number of products they produced from 350, to 10.

When asked about innovation and why Apple rose from the ashes to become the most valuable company of all time, here's what he said:

"People think focus means saying yes to the thing you've got to focus on. But that's not what it means at all. It means saying no to the hundred other good ideas that there are. You have to pick carefully. I'm actually as proud of the things we haven't done as the things I have done. Innovation is saying no to 1,000 things."

Dieter Rams is an Essentialist

Dieter Rams, the famous designer, had a design criteria that could be summarized by three German words: Weniger aber besser. In English this translates to "Less but better."

A lot is captured in those 3 words. It's not enough to just do less. Anybody could cross a bunch of things off their todo list and say "I'm not doing those." It's another thing completely to do less and actually make more progress.

Richard Koch, the guy who made the 80/20 rule popular in business circles by writing the book *The 80/20 Principle*, sums this up well:

"Most of what exists in the universe - our actions, and all other forces, resources, and ideas - has little value and yields little result; On the other hand, a few things work fantastically well and have tremendous impact."

So, it's not that the Essentialists work less than the Non-Essentialists, it's that they spend a disproportionate amount of their time on the things that really matter.

All good things come in threes, so here's one more example to inspire you.

Jim Collins is an essentialist

Jim Collins is the author of the business classic, *Good To Great*. One day, Collins was meeting with Peter Drucker, who told him that Collins could either build a great company, or build great ideas. In Drucker's opinion, he couldn't do both.

Collins chose the path of making great ideas, and continues to shape the discussion of business leaders around the world. To this day he employs only three people full-time, but their work together has inspired tens of millions of people around the world.

Essentialists are good at saying no

So here's the rub. If you want to become an Essentialist, you need to become good at saying no. And not only that, you need to realize that by saying no, you are making a trade-off. For everything that an Essentialist says yes to, there are many many things that they have to say no to.

Unfortunately, many of us end up stuck in the world of Non-Essentialists simply because we lack the skills to say no gracefully. It's funny to think of it that way, but it's true. There's no class in high-school or university that teaches you this skill, and it is literally preventing millions of people from reaching their potential in life.

Luckily for us, Mckeown gives us 8 responses we can use to say no to the unimportant, so that we can say yes to the vital.

1. **Use an awkward pause.** People hate silence, and if you pause long enough after somebody requests something of you, they'll eventually fill the void and find a reason to withdraw their request.
2. **Use a "no but".** Use this in situations where you don't want to take on a task now, but would consider it in the future. You can respond by saying "no, but I would love to help you a few months from now...can we connect on this then?" Most times you won't hear about this request again.
3. **Use the "let me check my calendar and get back to you" method.** This gets you off the hook for responding immediately, and if it's something that you ultimately don't want to do, you can simply say that unfortunately, you're not available.
4. **Use an email autoresponder.** If you are really courageous, you could set up an email autoresponder that replied to each of your emails letting people know that you aren't available to respond to email for a period of time.
5. **Use the "yes, what should I reprioritize" method.** This works especially well when receiving requests from superiors. By letting your boss or teammate know that you'll have to drop something else in order to get their request done, they'll frequently move on to somebody else who can squeeze the task into their schedule.
6. **Use a bit of humour.** This one is difficult to pull off well, but it's a good way to diffuse a potentially uncomfortable situation.
7. **Use the "you are welcome to X. I am willing to Y" response.** Mckeown gives the example in the book about his friend asking to borrow his car. His response would be "you are welcome to borrow my car, and I'm willing to make sure the keys are here for you." This way, he's let his friend know that he is able to take the car, if his friend is willing to pick it up. And it's clear that he's certainly not willing to take his friend himself.
8. **Suggest somebody else to do it.** It's much easier to say "I can't do it, but X might be interested" than it is to reject their request outright. You are able to come off as being helpful, without having to do the task for yourself.

So there you go - 8 new ways to say no to the unimportant, so that you can say yes to the vital.

A challenge

What you do with these newfound skills is up to you. But I want to give you a challenge. For the next week, whenever you are asked to do something for somebody else:

Respond with the "let me check my calendar" technique.

Then, take some time to reflect on whether or not the request is essential to your long-term success.

If it's not, respond to the person using one of the other techniques you just learned.

Continue working on the vital few things that will ensure you achieve everything you want to achieve in life.

Onwards and upwards!

110 East Houston Street, 7th Floor, San Antonio, TX 78205, United States
© 2018 Readitfor.me All Rights Reserved.