

EGO IS THE ENEMY

The Fight to Master Our Greatest Opponent

RYAN HOLIDAY



READINGGRAPHICS
Ideas Come Alive

The Big “So What”



Ego is a primary obstacle to success in any phase of life. Whether you are just setting out, sitting at the pinnacle of success, or reeling from a precipitous fall, you must subdue your ego if you wish to capitalize on your opportunities and gifts. In this book, Holiday shares how we can master our ego to achieve what truly matters to us.

Introduction



By 25 years of age, Holiday had achieved considerable career progress with all the trappings of success, from money to press coverage and influence. Then, things fell apart and he lost his reputation, businesses, wealth, promoters and admirers. As he struggled to reconcile who he was without those success symbols, he realized that his ego had been his undoing—it had deceived him, set him up to fall and kept him from rebounding from failure.

In this book, Holiday shares the deep insights about ego, which he has developed through his personal experience and extensive research. He hopes that the pearls of wisdom will help you to make the right decisions at the critical junctures of your life.

What is Ego?



In the context of this book, ego refers to the belief that we're special and better than we really are. It's an inflated sense of self that wraps us in fantasy and blinds us to the truth about ourselves.

- To attain true *excellence and mastery*, you need to face your inadequacies and fears. Ego makes you less receptive to

KEY QUOTES

“I wrote this book not because I have attained some wisdom I feel qualified to preach, but because it’s the book I wish existed at critical turning points in my own life.”

“I hope you will be less invested in the story you tell about your own specialness, and as a result, you will be liberated to accomplish the world-changing work you’ve set out to achieve.”

“We assume the symptoms of success are the same as success itself—and in our naiveté, confuse the byproduct with the cause.”



KEY QUOTES

*"If you start believing in your greatness, it is the death of your creativity."
—Marina Abramovic*

"Ego is the enemy of building, of maintaining, and of recovering."

"To whatever you aspire, Ego is your enemy."


"Though we think big, we must act and live small in order to accomplish what we seek."


"Ego is stolen; confidence is earned."

*"Facts are better than dreams."
— Winston Churchill*

feedback, miss out on learning opportunities, and lose touch with yourself and others around you. It creates a sense of entitlement, so you blame others when things don't go as expected.

- Modern culture promotes egotism. We're constantly surrounded by messages that tell us we're special and deserve success. We can use social media to self-advertise and be "liked", we can self-publish to make ourselves "authors" or even print business cards with fancy titles.


 Everyone goes through 3 experiences: aspiration, success and failure. The book shows how ego can get in the way at each phase, and what you can do about it.


 Mastering your ego doesn't mean denying your talents or individuality. It's about putting aside the sense of superiority so you become connected and grounded in reality, and can be confident without being arrogant. This frees you up to focus on your inspiration or mastery, so you'll achieve even more.

Part 1: Aspiration



When you're just starting out, your ego can be an obstacle if you think you already have what it takes and know exactly know what to do. You end up focusing on appearances instead of objectively examining the situation, addressing your shortfalls and doing the hard work with humility and patience.

 Big dreams alone won't deliver success in a new venture, and can even derail you if they're not grounded in reality. Success doesn't come from 1 big leap, but a series of small, iterative steps. It's ok to have a big vision so long as you take the small, concrete steps to move toward your goal.

 There's nothing wrong with talent and ambition. The problem is when they're not backed by real work and achievements. Build self-awareness, not self-esteem.

- Don't focus affirming how good you are; self-esteem, talent and potential are useless without realism, effort, and perseverance. It's more vital to develop self-awareness so you know where you stand and what you must learn/do.



KEY QUOTES

“Be natural and yourself and this glittering flattery will be as the passing breeze of the sea on a warm summer day.”
– General William Sherman

“Success requires a full 100 percent of our effort, and talk flitters part of that effort away before we can use it.”


“Those who know do not speak. Those who speak do not know.”
– Lao Tzu

“Silence is the respite of the confident and the strong.”


- Union General William Sherman, one of US’ greatest military general and strategic thinker, was someone who kept his ego in check in spite of real achievements. He accepted his promotion to brigadier general on the condition that he’d remain second-incommand until he gained the necessary experience. At the siege of Fort Donelson, he ceded command to General Ulysses Grant (whom he assessed to be more suited for the task) and happily played a supporting role. Despite his fame by the end of the war, Sherman chose to do his job humbly instead of seeking political office.

Talk is Cheap



 Big talk is no substitute for action and only hinders results.

- You can’t chatter and think deeply at the same time. Talking exhausts valuable time and energy which could’ve been better spent on brainstorming, planning, learning, or problem-solving. People also use talk to escape from the difficult tasks at hand—they spend so much time talking about something that they *think* they’ve done the work or put in their best effort when they haven’t done anything of value.
- In 1934, author Upton Sinclair was running for the governor of California. He wrote a book that detailed his political exploits as the governor as if they were already accomplished. Having exhausted his inspiration on the book, he lost the election by a huge margin.
- Social media only encourages us to “talk” more. It’s easier to post and tweet about how well we’re doing rather than actually do the work. We end up looking great but not getting any real results.

 Silence is a mark of strength, not weakness. People who need validation will keep talking about how great they are. People who’re strong and confident will quietly do the work and let the results speak for themselves.

Go for Substance over Image



To satisfy our ego (our pride, need for approval and desire for power/status), we often choose image over real accomplishment.

- Titles, accolades and fame do not equate greatness. Don't allow your desire to *appear* successful to overpower your ability to become *truly* successful.
- John Boyd was a brilliant fighter pilot and strategist whose biggest impact came from the people he mentored and inspired. He told his protégés that life is full of crossroads where you have to choose between *being* someone (with wealth, status, fame etc.) and *doing* what you truly believe in (even if it's unpopular or unseen). The choices you make will define your life. Be a doer, not a pretender.



Be guided by a purpose that's larger than you. Each time you're tempted by something, ask yourself if it *really* serves your wider purpose or if it's just your ego calling. Go for true accomplishments in line with your purpose, not the mirage of being accomplished.

Be a Lifelong Student



Learning is a process, not an event. Real success goes to those who keep learning in the University of Life. When guitarist Kirk Hammet was hired by Metallica, he didn't take it as a sign that he had "arrived". Instead, he sought an instructor (Joe Satriani) who challenged him to learn and improve. Hammet went on to become one of the greatest Metal guitarist of all time.



A great student is humble, curious, observant, eager to improve and open to feedback. Put aside your ego so you can acknowledge your learning gaps and address them.



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KEY QUOTES

"Appearances are deceiving. Having authority is not the same as being an authority. Having the right and being right are not the same either."

"To be somebody or to do something. In life there is often a roll call...To be, or to do? Which way will you go?"
— John Boyd

"The pretense of knowledge is our most dangerous vice, because it prevents us from getting any better."



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KEY QUOTES

“Great passions are maladies without hope.”
–Goethe

“Purpose, you could say, is like passion with boundaries.”

“Greatness comes from humble beginnings; it comes from grunt work.”

“Be lesser, do more.”

Focus on Purpose, not Passion



Passion (raw, uncontrolled enthusiasm) isn't enough for success and may even obstruct progress. Passion is often a cover for weakness, impatience or naiveté. When you're fueled only by passion, you may jump into something recklessly, or get so lost in daydreams that you neglect real action.



Focus on your purpose instead, i.e. passion tempered with direction, discipline and realism. You can stay in motion without being constantly excited or excitable.

- UCLA football coach, John Wooden, took his team to multiple victories by focusing on hard work and self-control, not the drama around football. Eleanor Roosevelt, one of the most influential female activists in history, was known for her purpose, direction and reason (not her passion).
- Purpose injects a dose of realism to shift the focus away from personal enthusiasm/glory to the often-unglamorous steps needed to deliver real results, including planning, hard work and self-assessment.

Be an Ace Apprentice



Today, many young people are unwilling to serve. They expect to start with a high position, set their terms of employment, and would rather stay unemployed than take a job that's "beneath" them. Many famous people (from Michaelangelo to Ben Franklin) started as apprentices and worked their way from bottom up.



If you're just starting out, you're not as great as you think and much of what you know isn't even relevant. Drop the sense of superiority and entitlement and adopt the "canvas strategy": be the canvas upon which others can display their work.

- Apprentice yourself to a great person/enterprise, and offer exemplary service in whatever capacity you find yourself. Devote yourself to your superior's success without seeking credit, e.g. share ideas freely, reduce waste, connect people, and do what nobody wants to do.

- When you clear the path for others, you're also creating a path for yourself since you'll learn, grow, and become valuable.



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Maintain Self-Control



➔ Regardless of who you are or what you've achieved, you will experience mistreatment, e.g. indifference, rejection or even sabotage. Your success will depend, at least in part, on how much nonsense you can bear.

🌸 Learn to stay calm and restrain yourself.

- When others treat you poorly, it reflects badly on them, not you. You're responsible only for *your* response. It takes more courage not to fight back to protect your pride/ego.
- Jackie Robinson suffered much racist opposition while attempting to break into baseball. It wasn't fair, yet he took it in his stride and focused on his goal, eventually becoming the first black player in the Major League Baseball.

Get Out of your Head...into the Real-World



☁ When you spend all the time in the egocentric world in your head, you can't make progress in the real world.

- Some people dwell so much on their dreams (as if they're already real) that they lose the ability to take concrete action. General George McClellan spent so much time imagining all the victories he accomplished that he failed to take action for months, leading to many lives lost in reality.
- Others waste all their efforts on polishing their personal brand instead of backing it up with actual outcomes.

⚓ Stop thinking that everyone is watching you—they're not. Stay anchored in reality and do the work.

KEY QUOTES

"It doesn't degrade you when others treat you poorly; it degrades them."

"You're not able to change the system until after you've made it."

"Don't live in the haze of the abstract, live with the tangible and real."

"There's no one to perform for. There is just work to be done and lessons to be learned, in all that is around us."



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KEY QUOTES

*"Whom the gods wish to destroy, they first call promising."
—Cyril Connolly*

*"Let's call [pride] what it is:
fraud."*

*"You can't build a reputation
on what you're going to do."
— Henry Ford*

*"There is no triumph without
toil."*

*"Make it so you don't have to
fake it."*

*"You thought it would get
easier when you arrived;
instead, it's even harder—a
different animal entirely."*

*"Can you handle success? Or
will it be the worst thing that
ever happened to you?"*

Pride Goes Before the Fall



! Regardless of whether you're a beginner or a veteran, pride is damaging because it deludes you into thinking you're better than you are. It distracts you from the practical tasks at hand. Even if you appear humble on the outside but *think* you're superior, it's still pride.

🗨️ Don't allow your self image to exceed reality. Seek advice and feedback (not affirmation) and stay focused on your goal (not how great you are). Genghis Khan's advice to his sons and generals was: "If you can't swallow your pride, you can't lead." Ask yourself: what could a humbler person see that you're currently missing?

Keep Doing the Work



⚙️ Dreams and ideas are worthless if you don't put in the work to bring them to fruition. You can't become a poet by experiencing the poetry in your mind; you must put it into words. And, since there's no end-point to mastery, your work never ends. Just keep going.

🏔️ Your ego doesn't want the hard work; it only wants to share big ideas, get affirmation and applause. Don't "fake it until you make it". Do the work and actually make it so you needn't fake it.

Part 2: Success



Once you've achieved some success, it's normal to feel a sense of pride and accomplishment. The danger comes when you start believing that you're special and above the rules. Ego can make you complacent (you think you've "arrived") or push you to blindly pursue more. You stop doing what brought you success in the first place. No matter how much you've achieved, stay anchored in your purpose, values and principles, and remain humble and disciplined.

Keep Learning



With each success (e.g. getting promoted to a bigger role or growing your business to a new level), you'll face new challenges. To stay successful, you must keep learning, improving and adjusting.

- The higher we rise, the more we see and realize how much we *don't* know. Yet, ego pushes us to pretend to know, or to confine ourselves to a niche where we won't be challenged.
- Gheghis Khan was one of the greatest conquerors and military minds in history because he was a lifelong student. With each culture he conquered, he broadened his knowledge of warfare and learned ideas and technologies from smart people like astrologers, doctors, and scribes.



Learn from everyone and everything. Read up on a totally new subject, learn from both your friends and foes, and sharpen how you learn.

Focus on Facts, not Stories



It's common for people to look back and tell stories about their success as if it was inevitable and they knew exactly how/when they'd get there. The ego filters out doubts, failures, lucky breaks and the fact that they never had complete foresight or control.



Such false expectations can cause you to lose what you've worked so hard to achieve. Focus on facts, not stories (be it others' stories, your stories or what others say about you). Coach Bill Walsh transformed the 49ers from worst team in football history to Super Bowl champions in 3 years. He refused to speculate when they'd win the Super Bowl; he simply focused improving the team's standards—from the cleanliness of the locker room to sportsmanship and precision in training/practices. The results spoke for themselves.



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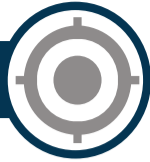
KEY QUOTES

*"As our island of knowledge grows, so does the shore of our ignorance."
—John Wheeler*

"We must be willing to lay down our trophies and pick up the resources for learning."

"Instead of pretending that we are living some great story, we must remain focused on the execution—and on executing with excellence."

Know What Truly Matters



Your ego has an insatiable appetite. Once you've tasted success, it'll keep telling you to push for more. It wants what others have and refuses to accept trade-offs. In reality, you can't have everything. You can't be a faithful husband *and* have many lovers. You can't concurrently be a sumo wrestler *and* a professional ballerina.



Say "yes" *only* if something is aligned with your goals/priorities, not for others' approval or for fear of losing out.

- After their Union victories, both Grant and Sherman were celebrities in the country. Grant's desire for fame and fortune led him to run for presidency and later invest in a brokerage house, neither of which were his areas of strength. His 2 terms as President were a political mess, and the brokerage firm left him in financial ruin. On the other hand, Sherman chose to focus on his strengths/interests before retiring in New York.
- Strive for *Euthymia*—a calm confidence in knowing and sticking to your own path.

Recognize the 3 Faces of Ego



Ego creates 3 fatal delusions that exhaust everyone around us, rob us of the joy of success and invite the exact outcomes that we fear.

- Entitlement: We feel that we've earned or deserve whatever rewards we want. We act as if the world is indebted to us.
- Control: We want everything to be done our way. We quibble over trivial details or things beyond our control.
- Paranoia: We think the world is out to get us or people around us are all fools.



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KEY QUOTES

"The more you have and do the harder maintaining fidelity to your purpose will be."

*"He who indulges empty fears earns real fears."
—Seneca, Roman advisor*



READINGGRAPHICS
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KEY QUOTES

Know What Truly Matters



With success, your roles and responsibilities will grow and change. You may have to delegate tasks that you enjoy doing, seek advice from others, and learn to make important decisions.

- Dwight Eisenhower could juggle the heavy responsibilities as the 34th US president and still have time for himself because he resolutely focused on the most critical matters. On the other hand, John Delorean (founder of DeLorean Motor Company) was brilliant as an inventor but terrible as a business owner because he lacked the discipline and focus for execution. To succeed, you must manage yourself and direct your resources in line with your goals/principles.

Don't Catch the "Disease of Me"



Championship coach Pat Riley said that there's a pattern among great teams. Before they taste victory, they're "innocent" and work in unity toward a common goal. Once they start winning and attracting media attention, personal egos take over. The "Disease of Me" sets in, unity crumbles and results dip. Early in our careers, we're usually more willing to make sacrifices or be looked over. Once we "get there", we feel entitled, start to glorify ourselves and lose sight of the bigger purpose.




General George Marshall's accomplishments eclipsed those of other WWII generals primarily because he stayed out of the politicking and limelight to focus on his priorities—his men and country. There's nothing wrong with wanting to excel and be recognized. The key is to temper ambition with humility, purpose and contribution.

Connect with the Big Picture




Self-centered achievements will always leave you feeling isolated and empty. The only way to derive true meaning is go beyond yourself. Stoics use *sympathica* to refer to this deep sense of connection to something bigger than yourself.


"Every man is a quotation
from all his ancestors."
—Emerson

 Whenever you think the world revolves around you, step out and remind yourself how immense the world really is. Spend time alone in the wilderness, or visit an important historical site/museum to sense the generations of people and living creatures that've walked the Earth before you (and will continue to do so after you). Yes, you have a role to play. But you're still just a grain in the sands of time.

Maintain Your Sobriety



 Our ego tells us we're invincible and can maintain our success with our zeal/enthusiasm alone. In reality, we don't have an infinite supply of energy. We need sobriety (a command of self) to restrain the ego and make sound judgment so we don't expend ourselves needlessly.

 Don't be deceived by the trappings of success around you. German Chancellor Angela Merkel is a modest, plain and reserved leader. Yet, she was re-elected time and again over her peers. It's possible for successful people to live modestly under the radar, and many do.


Part 3: Failure



Failure (big or small) happens to everyone. There's no point in lamenting how unfair it is. Your response to setbacks will decide your outcomes: stay strong and resilient so you can rebound and move ahead. The end goal is not just to achieve success; it's to know that we can handle whatever life throws at us. John Kennedy Toole took his life after his manuscript for "A Confederacy of Dunces" was repeatedly rejected. His mother eventually got the book published and it won the Pulitzer Prize. The material was the same; what differed was their response.

Exploit Your Downtime



 Failure can disrupt our lives and bring things to a standstill. You can use your downtime to wallow in self-pity or to improve yourself. After landing in prison at 21 years old, Malcolm X



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KEY QUOTES

"Yes, we are small. We are also a piece of this great universe and a process."


"We have to fight to stay sober, despite the many different forces swirling around our ego."

"Failure always arrives uninvited, but through our ego, far too many of us allow it to stick around."

"The only way out is through."





decided to use this time to self-study. His time in prison ended up paving the foundation for his future success. When Ian Fleming was put on bed rest, he wasn't allowed to use a typewriter. So, he started writing with a pen and produced his well-loved fantasy Chitty-Chitty Bang-Bang.

 When you're hit with failure, don't dwell on the problems, hide from them, or plot revenge. Reflect on how your choices have led to where you are, and use what you have to turn things around.

Do Your Best and Release the Rest





 No matter what you do or achieve, there'll always be people who react negatively. Don't let that stop you from doing what you believe in. Belisarius was Rome's top commander under emperor Justinian. Despite his victories and service to Rome, Justinian repaid him with jealousy and accusations. According to legend, he had Belisarius blinded and consigned to a life as a beggar. In spite of that, Belisarius retained his equanimity. Right till the end, he dedicated himself to his sacred duty and said "This, too, I can bear; I still Am Belisarius."

 Just do your best and leave the outcome in God's hands. Draw inner satisfaction from knowing you've done what you should, regardless of others' response.

Rebound from Rock Bottom



 At some point, everyone hits rock bottom, be it an illness, accident, bankruptcy or betrayal. Crises are actually opportunities to uncover deep insights that'd help us to leap forward. They force us to confront fallacies that we may have been avoiding.

 Transformation can only occur if we're willing to hear and accept the truth, even if it hurts. Unfortunately, ego tends to deny the truth and reinforce the lie. When Lance Armstrong's doping became public he could have owned up, faced the consequences and moved forward. Instead, he doubled down on his delusion only to do further damage to himself and others.

KEY QUOTES

"We don't need pity—our own or anyone else's—we need purpose, poise, and patience."

*"Success is peace of mind, which is a direct result of self satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to do your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming."
—John Wooden*

"Do your work. Do it well.... That's all there needs to be."

"There are many ways to hit bottom. Almost everyone does in their own way, at some point."

*"We cannot be humble except by enduring humiliations."
—Reverend William Sutton*



KEY QUOTES

"Most trouble is temporary... unless you make that not so."

"If your reputation can't absorb a few blows, it wasn't worth anything in the first place."

"Your potential, the absolute best you're capable of—that's the metric to measure yourself against. Your standards are. Winning is not enough."

"Attempting to destroy something out of hate or ego often ensures that it will be preserved and disseminated forever."

Don't Make it Worse



Our ego wants to hide our failures and protect our image at all cost. It leads us to take drastic steps that only make things worse. When John Delorean's business started to fail, he resorted to drug dealing to raise money, sealing his own ruin when he was arrested.



It's inevitable to mess up now and then. Don't let a loss or bad stretch ruin your whole life. Humble yourself, take ownership for your failure and move forward with fortitude/integrity. Steve Jobs' poor leadership and out-of-control ego caused him to be fired from Apple. After devoting himself to his new companies, learning and correcting his flaws in the process, he returned to Apple as a much better leader.

Establish your Own Standards



Successful people don't live by others' standards or try to work around the system. They hold themselves to an inner moral compass and their own exceptional standards. New England Patriots' quarterback Tom Brady was selected in the 6th round of their draft pick. When the Patriots realized how good Brady was, they didn't congratulate themselves. They set out to improve their scouting process and investigate how they'd missed such a talent in the first 5 rounds.



Seek to become the best possible version of yourself. Focus on staying true to yourself and beating your personal bests. That way, you won't be carried away with a win or feel degraded with a loss. It'll keep you steady and resilient.

Choose Love over Hate



When things go wrong, our ego focuses on hate and blame, which only wastes our precious time/energy and makes us feel miserable. Any retaliatory action may also backfire. When Barbara Streisand insisted on removing a picture of her home from the Internet, it only roused people's curiosity and generated *more* views of the photo.



It's much better to choose love: love the person who cuts in front of you in the queue or the colleague who “stole” the credit for your work. If you can't love them, at least forgive them. Let it go. Media magnate William Hearst believed that Orsen Welles' movie, Citizen Kane, was all about him. He poured his wealth and influence into a huge campaign to suppress the film, which succeeded only in putting himself in bad light and delaying the film's success. Welles, on the other hand, responded with restraint and humor. He soldiered on and eventually attained great success.



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KEY QUOTES

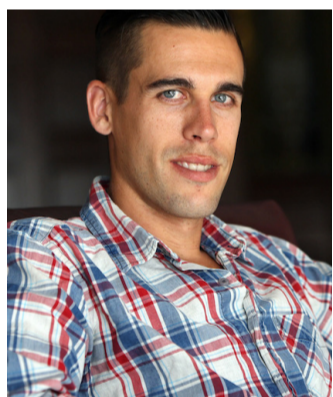
*“Why should we feel anger at the world? As if the world would notice.”
—Euripides*

Other Details in the Book to Look out For



This book is a compilation of Holidays' insights, with many stories and citations from famous people and philosophers to show how ego shows up in each of the 3 areas above. In this summary, we've only outlined the key ideas and selected examples. For more details, please visit <http://egoisttheenemy.com/>.

About the Authors



Ryan Holiday (born 1987) is an American author, marketer, entrepreneur and founder of Brass Check (a creative advisory firm). He began his professional career at the age of 19, and is a media strategist, a former director of marketing for American Apparel and a media columnist and editor-at-large for the New York Observer. Holiday has been credited by the New York Times with the increasing popularity of stoicism.

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