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Book Review: Essentialism

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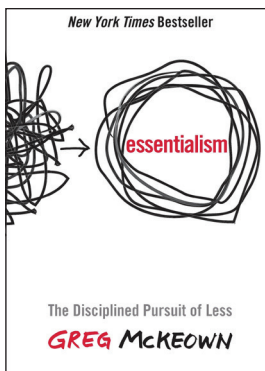
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Essentialism

By: Greg McKeown

Review by Victoria Beecroft

“What did you do as a child that excited you? How can you recreate that today?” Greg McKeown, author of *Essentialism*, asks readers to rediscover their child-like behaviors. Why? To help them eliminate frivolity. This may seem counter-intuitive. However, in McKeown’s compelling book, he provides readers with a number of strategies to recognize what promotes their success and what merely distracts them. Reserving time for youthful play is just one example of what it takes to become an essentialist.

An essentialist, as defined by McKeown, is someone who does *only* what is meaningful and works more effectively as a result. McKeown’s ideas have appeared in the Harvard Business Review, Forbes, and various organizations striving to maximize productivity among employees. Their popularity grows as the over-scheduled and under-productive realize what McKeown has been saying all along: “Less is better.”

McKeown makes essentialism an accessible lifestyle for everyone by describing its four key elements.

Essence: The core of essentialism is recognizing that there are trade-offs, that we must make choices, and that only a few things really matter. Businesses and employees are frequently burdened by unnecessary tasks that they mistake for required activities. When they realize that they cannot do everything, they reach a higher level of contribution.

Explore: While the non-essentialist accepts new opportunities frequently, an essentialist will explore and evaluate all options pertaining to an opportunity before committing. To do so, he must create space to think, but how? Sleep, play, and disconnect.

Eliminate: “Studies have found that we tend to value things we already own more highly than they are worth.” McKeown argues that despite attachment, or fear of offending others, the essentialist needs to not only recognize the non-essential, but also remove it from his life.

Execute: Most people dedicate the majority of their time on a project to its execution. However, by eliminating trivial activities, they could save time in the early stages of the project and design a system that makes execution “almost effortless.”

McKeown connects with readers by demonstrating how essentialism impacts his own life along with the lives of leaders in other fields. He starts by describing the moment that lead him to become an essentialist. Caught up in a series of commitments and a busy workweek, McKeown left his hours-old daughter in the hospital and rushed into a meeting. He recounts that the experience—and his ensuing regret—led him to prioritize. He then proceeds to invite all readers to prioritize alongside him.

Essentialism is a guide for anyone who fails to recall the last time he said, “No.” The book helps over-loaded students, business executives, and all other professionals to avoid missing opportunities by accepting too many. It teaches, “Our highest priority is to protect our ability to prioritize.”