



YOUR KINDLE NOTES FOR:

Effortless: Make It Easier to Do What Matters Most

by Greg McKeown

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92 Highlights | 1 Note

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 70

Introduction NOT EVERYTHING HAS TO BE SO HARD

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 102

What he learned from this experience was this: When you simply can't try any harder, it's time to find a different path.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 126

Burnout is not a badge of honor.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 185

I was doing all the right things for the right reasons. But I was doing them in the wrong way. I was like a weightlifter trying to lift using the muscles in my lower back. A swimmer who hadn't learned to breathe properly. A baker who was painstakingly kneading each loaf of bread by hand.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 212

What could happen in your life if the easy but pointless things became harder and the essential things became easier?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 247

With residual results you put in the effort once and reap the benefits again and again. Results flow to you while you are sleeping. Results flow to you when you are taking the day off. Residual results can be virtually infinite.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 249

Effortless Action alone produces linear results. But when we apply Effortless Action to high-leverage activities, the return on our effort compounds, like interest on a savings account. This is how we produce residual results.

Producing a great result is good. Producing a great result with ease is better. Producing a great result with ease again and again is best.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 317

Chapter 1 INVERT What If This Could Be Easy?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 340

The problem is that the complexity of modern life has created a false dichotomy between things that are “essential and hard” and things that are “easy and trivial.” It’s almost like a natural law for some people: Trivial things are easy. Important things are hard.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 386

Here is what I learned: trying too hard makes it harder to get the results you want. Here is what I realized: behind almost every failure of my whole life I had made the same error. When I’d failed, it was rarely because I hadn’t tried hard enough, it was because I’d been trying too hard.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 398

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. There are two ways to achieve all the things that really matter. We can (a) gain superhuman powers so we can do all the impossibly hard but worthwhile work or (b) get better at making the impossibly hard but worthwhile work easier.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 453

Marketing author Seth Godin once shared the following: “If you can think about how hard it is to push a business uphill, particularly when you’re just getting started, one answer is to say: ‘Why don’t you just start a different business you can push downhill?’ ”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 480

Chapter 2 ENJOY What If This Could Be Fun?

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But essential activities don’t have to be enjoyed only in retrospect. We can also experience joy in the activity itself. We simply reduce the lag time between the action and satisfaction by pairing the essential activity with a reward.

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One leader I have worked with sees running on a treadmill every day as an essential habit. Yet he was inconsistent about it until he paired it with an enjoyable daily practice he never missed: listening to his favorite daily podcast. Now he gets to listen to the podcast only if he is walking or running on the treadmill. He doesn't reward himself after he has finished his workout; he rewards himself during. Ever since he made this essential practice enjoyable, he has found it easy to continue doing it consistently.

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Rituals are similar to habits in the sense that "when I do X, I also do Y." But they are different from habits because of one key component: the psychological satisfaction you experience when you do them. Habits explain "what" you do, but rituals are about "how" you do it. Rituals make essential habits easier to sustain by infusing the habits with meaning. For example, think of Marie Kondo's approach to tidying up. She doesn't simply invite us to get rid of the things cluttering our closets, she suggests a ritual for letting go. We are to thank the item we are discarding. We are to think about the ways in which items create joy.

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Chapter 3 RELEASE The Power of Letting Go

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When I think of acting on some suggestion without giving it the proper consideration, she will ask me, "Is this a Stormtrooper?" 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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These intruders are like unnecessary applications running in the background of your computer, slowing down all its other functionality. At first they might not seem to affect your speed and agility. But as they keep accumulating, one after another, eventually your operating system starts to run slower.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 661

We live in a complaint culture that gets high on expressing outrage: especially on social media, which often seems like an endless stream of grumbling and whining about what is unsatisfactory or unacceptable.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 749

Grudges cost us resources but don't deliver a satisfying return on our investment. So we must relieve a grudge of its duties.

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Chapter 4 REST The Art of Doing Nothing

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Recent research in physiology supports Maddon’s counterintuitive response. Studies show that peak physical and mental performance requires a rhythm of exerting and renewing energy—and not just for athletes. In fact, one study found that the best-performing athletes, musicians, chess players, and writers all honed their skills in the same way: by practicing in the morning, in three sessions of sixty to ninety minutes, with breaks in between. Meanwhile, those who took fewer or shorter breaks performed less well.

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Dedicate mornings to essential work. Break down that work into three sessions of no more than ninety minutes each. Take a short break (ten to fifteen minutes) in between sessions to rest and recover.

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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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Recent sleep science found that participants who used water-based passive body heating—also known as a bath—before bed slept sooner, longer, and better. This seems counterintuitive considering that our sleep cycles are associated with a drop in core body temperature. But according to this research, the key is the timing of the bath or shower: ninety minutes before bedtime. The lead author explains that the warm water triggers our body’s cooling mechanism, sending warmer blood from our core outward and shedding heat through our hands and feet. This “efficient removal of body heat and decline in body temperature” speeds up the natural cooling that makes it easier to fall asleep.

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Chapter 5 NOTICE How to See Clearly

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 969

Many of us can easily relate to the distress Watson articulates in this story. After all, who among us hasn’t had the experience of someone pointing out something painfully obvious, ever-present, or easily observable in our environment that we have never noticed?

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 977

Listening isn't hard; it's stopping our mind from wandering that's hard. Being in the moment isn't hard; not thinking about the past and future all the time is hard. It's not the noticing itself that's hard. It's ignoring all the noise in our environment that is hard.

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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.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1086

The greatest gift we can offer to others is not our skill or our money or our effort. It is simply us. None of us have infinite reserves of focus and attention to give away. But in the Effortless State, it becomes far easier to give the gift of our intentional focus to the people and things we really care about.

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Past a certain point, more effort doesn't produce better performance. It sabotages our performance. Economists call this the law of diminishing returns: after a certain point, each extra unit of input produces a decreasing rate of output. For example, if I write for two hours I can produce two pages. But if I write for four hours I can produce three pages. The rate of output is slowing down. More effort at this point should be questioned. But sometimes overachievers double down on effort. They see the reduced output and mistakenly think the answer is to push even harder.

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Chapter 6 DEFINE What "Done" Looks Like

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But to get an important project done it's absolutely necessary to define what "done" looks like.

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A Done for the Day list is not a list of everything we theoretically could do today, or a list of everything we would love to get done. These things will inevitably extend far beyond the limited time available. Instead, this is a list of what will constitute meaningful and essential progress. As you write the list, one test is to imagine how you will feel once this work is completed. Ask yourself, "If I complete everything on this list, will it leave me feeling satisfied by the end of the day? Is there some other important task that will haunt me all night if I don't get to it?" If your answer to the second question is yes, that is a task that should go on the Done for the Day list.

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The Gift of Nothing Left Undone “Swedish Death Cleaning” means getting rid of the clutter you have accumulated through your life while you are still alive. It’s an alternative to the more typical practice of simply leaving this task for your loved ones to do for you later. It may sound morbid, but it can be a liberating process. You are getting your house in order. You are getting things done—the way you want them done—while you still can. And you are lifting a painful and inevitable burden for the people you care about.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1274

Chapter 7 START The First Obvious Action

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Take the Minimum Viable Action You don’t have to be overwhelmed by essential projects. Often, when you name the first obvious step, you avoid spending too much mental energy thinking about the fifth, seventh, or twenty-third steps. It doesn’t matter if your project involves ten steps or a thousand. When you adopt this strategy, all you have to focus on is the very first step.

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One key tenet of Silicon Valley thinking, and design thinking more generally, is the practice of building a minimum viable product. Eric Ries, author of *The Lean Startup*, defines a minimum viable product as “that version of a new product which allows a team to collect the maximum amount of validated learning about customers with the least amount of effort.” It’s an effortless way of testing an idea because it requires building only the simplest version of your product necessary to get reliable feedback about what your customers want.

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Chapter 8 SIMPLIFY Start with Zero

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1442

That’s what the goal for most presentations is supposed to be: to “just talk about your business.” So the next time you have to write a report, give a presentation, or make a sales pitch, resist the temptation to add unnecessary extras. They aren’t just a distraction for you; they’re also a distraction for your audience. That’s why, when I do presentations, I use six slides, with fewer than ten words total. There is rarely a need to go that second mile beyond what’s essential. It’s better to go just the first mile than to not go anywhere at all.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1491

As sportswriter Andy Benoit observes, most geniuses “prosper not by deconstructing intricate complexities but by exploiting unrecognized simplicities.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1494

Chapter 9 PROGRESS The Courage to Be Rubbish

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1588

The idea with the zero draft is to write anything. The more rubbish the better. It doesn't have to be seen by anyone. It never has to be judged. Don't even think of it as a draft; it's just words on a page.

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Chapter 10 PACE Slow Is Smooth, Smooth Is Fast

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1662

Holding back when you still have steam in you might seem like a counterintuitive approach to getting important things done, but in fact, this kind of restraint is key to breakthrough productivity. As Lisa Jewell, author of some eighteen bestselling novels, put it, "Pace yourself. If you write too much, too quickly, you'll go off at tangents and lose your way and if you write infrequently you'll lose your momentum. A thousand words a day is a good ticking over amount."

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1688

One is captured in the military mantra "Slow is smooth. Smooth is fast"—meaning, when you go slow, things are smoother, and when things are smooth, you can move faster.

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We can establish upper and lower bounds. Simply use the following rule: Never less than X, never more than Y.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1726

Finding the right range keeps us moving at a steady pace so we can make consistent progress. The lower bound should be high enough to keep us feeling motivated, and low enough that we can still achieve it even on days when we're dealing with unexpected chaos. The upper bound should be high enough to constitute good progress, but not so high as to leave us feeling exhausted.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1820

Linear results are limited: they can never exceed the amount of effort exerted. What many people don't realize, however, is that there exists a far better alternative.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1822

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. Residual results can be virtually infinite. For example: An author who writes a book and is paid royalties for years is getting residual income.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1860

Lever: Learning Modest Input, Residual Results Personal capability compounds over time. You develop a reputation once, but then opportunities flow to you for years. You understand first principles deeply and then can easily apply them again and again. You establish a habit once, but then it serves you for a lifetime.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1866

Lever: Teaching Modest Input, Residual Results Sharing knowledge is powerful. Teach others to teach, and you get exponential impact. You craft the right story once, and it can live on for millennia. The more we teach, the more we ourselves learn.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1900

Chapter 11 LEARN Leverage the Best of What Others Know

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1914

A method may be useful once, to solve one specific type of problem. Principles, however, can be applied broadly and repeatedly. At their best, they are universal and timeless.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 1996

As researchers from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management found in analyzing almost eighteen million scientific papers, the best new ideas usually come from combining existing knowledge in one field with an "intrusion of unusual combinations" from other disciplines.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2010

Reading a book is among the most high-leverage activities on earth. For an investment more or less equivalent to the length of a single workday (and a few dollars), you can gain access to what the smartest people have already figured out. Reading, that is, reading to really understand, delivers residual results by any estimate. Unfortunately, very few people take advantage of this. The typical American reads (or partially reads) only four books a year. More than a quarter of Americans don't read books at all. And this trend is worsening.

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earth.

Reread Ishmael

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2016

To get the most out of your reading I recommend the following principles:

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Use the Lindy Effect. 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. In other words, read the classics and the ancients.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2020

Read to Absorb (Rather Than to Check a Box). There are books I have technically read but I can't tell you anything about them. On the other hand, there are books I may not have read cover to cover, but I have returned to certain chapters or passages so often that they have become a part of me. Reading a book to earn the right of displaying it on your shelf misses the real point of the exercise. But 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. When I finish reading a book, I like to take ten minutes to summarize what I learned from it on a single page in my own words. If you summarize the key learnings from a book you just read, you absorb it more deeply. The process of summarizing, of distilling ideas to their essential essence, helps us turn information into understanding, and understanding into unique knowledge.

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Know What No One Else Knows

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2052

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.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2053

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.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2059

You gain credibility. People come to you. Opportunities come to you. You gain incredible leverage when you are among the only people with that precise expertise.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2070

Chapter 12 LIFT Harness the Strength of Ten

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2086

Use Stories to Turn Your Audience into Teachers

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2093

It amazes me how easy it is to forget previous generations. Most people cannot tell you the first and last names of their eight great-grandparents. Ponder that for a moment.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2101

There is no better way to teach than through the power of stories. Indeed, the right story can live on for millennia. Just think of Aesop's Fables.

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We love stories. We understand stories. We remember stories. And that means it's easier to share, or to teach, stories. Stories have the power to turn any audience into a roomful of teachers.

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When You Learn to Teach, You Teach Yourself to Learn

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2107

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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If you try to teach people everything about everything, you run the risk of teaching them nothing. You will achieve residual results faster if you clearly identify—then simplify—the most important messages you want to teach others to teach.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2131

These messages should be not just easy to understand but also hard to misunderstand. A. G. Lafley, the former CEO of Procter & Gamble, called this the “Sesame Street Simple” rule. Don’t go for the overly sophisticated message. Don’t go for the one that makes you sound smart. Go for the straightforward message that can be easily understood and repeated. Make the most essential things the easiest ones to teach and the easiest ones to learn.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2135

Chapter 13 AUTOMATE Do It Once and Never Again

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2172

Or as Gawande put it, we need a strategy “that builds on experience and takes advantage of the knowledge people have but somehow also makes up for our inevitable human tendencies. And there is such a strategy—though it will seem almost ridiculous in its simplicity, maybe even crazy to those of us who have spent years carefully developing ever more advanced skills and technologies.” What we need, Gawande argues, is a modest but marvelous tool: the checklist.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2276

Blocking off time for the things that matter may sound simple in theory. But in practice it can be difficult to do consistently, because reality gets in the way. Yet the effort we invest in automating our most mundane but essential tasks yields significant and repeated benefits later on.

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Consider taking the high-tech, low-effort path for the essential, and the low-tech, high-effort path for the nonessential.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2285

Chapter 14 TRUST The Engine of High-Leverage Teams

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2321

Trust Is the Engine Oil for High-Performing Teams

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2359

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. As executive coach Kim Scott writes in her bestselling book *Radical Candor*, “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.”

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2414

Chapter 15 PREVENT Solve the Problem Before It Happens

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The Long Tail of Time Management

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2434

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.

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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? The goal is to find the most annoying thing that can be solved in the least amount of time.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2460

If you’ve spent a lot of time hacking at the branches, you may have become good at it. But if that is all you are doing, the problem will keep coming back to haunt you. It is merely being managed, never solved.

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Measure Twice, Cut Once

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2632

Conclusion NOW What Happens Next Matters Most

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2694

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.

Highlight (Yellow) | Location 2707

If you take away just one message from this book, I hope it is this: life doesn't have to be as hard and complicated as we make it.
