

EGO IS THE ENEMY by Ryan Holiday

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Ego is the Enemy foregrounds the notion that our most insurmountable difficulties and greatest problems in life are due to our own attitude, selfishness, self-actualization and self-absorption rather than the external circumstances or other people. That is, ego often prevents humans from being objective, rational, clear headed, and focused.

Grounded in stoic philosophies, the book argues that antithesis of ego is humility, self-awareness, purposefulness, and realism. Ego is the Enemy cites numerous historical and contemporary figures to extrapolate how ego can cloud our self-worth and self-growth as humans.



ASPIRE

- ◇ Talk, talk, talk
- ◇ To be or to do?
- ◇ Become a student
- ◇ Don't be passionate
- ◇ Follow the canvas strategy
- ◇ Restrain yourself
- ◇ Get out of your own head
- ◇ Work, work, work

SUCCESS

- ◇ Always stay a student
- ◇ Don't tell yourself a story
- ◇ What's important to you
- ◇ Entitlement, control, and paranoia
- ◇ Managing yourself
- ◇ Beware the disease of me
- ◇ Meditate on the immensity
- ◇ Maintain your sobriety

FAILURE

- ◇ Alive time or dead time?
- ◇ The effort is enough
- ◇ Fight club moments
- ◇ Draw the line
- ◇ Maintain your own scorecard
- ◇ Always love

*Humble in our aspirations,
Gracious in our success, and
Resilient and humble in our failure*

Part 1: Aspire

He is a bold surgeon, they say, whose hand does not tremble when he performs an operation upon his own person; and he is often equally bold who does not hesitate to pull off the mysterious veil of self-delusion, which covers from his view the deformities of his own conduct.

—ADAM SMITH

TALK, TALK, TALK: Holiday discusses how big talk is often a substitute for action and stalls productivity and results. One cannot chatter and think deeply simultaneously. According to the book, talking drains our valuable time and energy that could be utilized in planning, learning, or problem-solving. To gain validation from people keep talking to show how significant their work is or how great they are. While strong and confident people quietly do their job and the results speak for themselves.

TO BE OR TO DO? The title of this chapter is inspired by John Boyd, an influential strategist in warfare, yet someone that most people have not heard of. Once Boyd asked the military professional the question, “to be or to do?”. Holiday believes that it is not important to ask yourself “Who do I want to

be in life?” but “What is it that I want to accomplish in life?”. Setting aside selfish interest, it asks: What calling does it serve? What principles govern my choices? Do I want to be like everyone else or do I want to do something different?

BECOME A STUDENT: In this chapter Holiday discusses that if you think you already know you cannot learn. If one is too conceited or self-assured, he/she cannot ask questions and hence cannot find answers to what he is looking for. Indeed, the feedback we get from others is vital for the next phase of growth and self-development.

“Let No Man’s Ghost Come Back to Say My Training Let Me Down.”

—SIGN IN THE NEW YORK FIRE DEPARTMENT TRAINING ACADEMY

“Those who know do not speak. Those who speak do not know”.

—LAO TZU

“In this formative period, the soul is unsoiled by warfare with the world. It lies, like a block of pure, uncut Parian marble, ready to be fashioned into—what?”

—ORISON SWETT MARDEN



Part 1: Aspire

DON'T BE PASSIONATE: Holiday goes on to emphasize that it is the purpose rather than the passion that helps along the way in achieving goals and satisfaction. Passionate person undergoes a task out of his ego while a purposeful person endeavors for something worthwhile after a thorough deliberation.

FOLLOW THE CANVAS STRATEGY: In this chapter, the author encourages the readers to help others to find a true version of oneself. Finding canvas for other people to paint on and clear their path eventually leads to one's own path. He gave the example of Bill Belichick, the four-time Super Bowl-winning

head coach of NFL, discussing how he took his first job without pay and analyzed film.

RESTRAIN YOURSELF: On the way to our success, at times we will confront some nonsense we will deal with. The author advises that although it will be tough to restrain yourself one should not take it and be humble. Those who have the power of subduing their ego understand that if others treat poorly, it degrades them. At such occasions ego demands indulgence; however, one should endure it, work hard, and play the game.

You seem to want that *vivida vis animi* which spurs and excites most young men to please, to shine, to excel. Without the desire and the pains necessary to be considerable, depend upon it, you never can be so.
—LORD CHES-

Great men have almost always shown themselves as ready to obey as they afterwards proved able to command.
—LORD MAHON

Ego is "an unhealthy belief in our own importance".
P.15

I have observed that those who have accomplished the greatest results are those who "keep under the body"; are those who never grow excited or lose self-control, but are always calm, self-possessed, patient, and polite.
—BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

Part 1: Aspire

GET OUT OF YOUR OWN HEAD: Holidays states that ego robs us of the ability to seek self-improvement, therefore stagnating our progress. He describes that when we are ambitious it is really easy to get excited to maintain a personal brand. Especially when the world encourages us to romanticize, we forget to focus on creating our own personal reality.

A person who thinks all the time has nothing to think about except thoughts, so he loses touch with reality and lives in a world of illusions.

—ALAN WATTS

A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you.

—C. S. LEWIS

WORK, WORK, WORK: The author reminds us that to achieve mastery, we need to work hard at all circumstances. It does not matter whether it is ten thousand hours or twenty thousand hours. Working hard is the trick for delaying gratification.

The best plan is only good intentions unless it degenerates into work.

—PETER DRUCKER



Part 2: Success

ALWAYS STAY A STUDENT: *Holiday believes that the pretense of having absolute knowledge about something is the echo of our ego and is the most dangerous vice, since it prevents us from becoming better. He explains this by an analogy of a true student being a sponge absorbing what is around him.*

DON'T TELL YOURSELF A STORY: *In this chapter, Holiday advises us to avoid crafting narratives of the past events as most telling our past stories is dangerous and most of the times untrue. Writing our own narrative leads to arrogance. These narratives do not change the past, but they do have the pow-*

er to negatively impact our future. Ego often tampers with the past events or achievements while we tell stories to ourselves.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU: *In this chapter, holiday discusses that one should focus on what really matters to have a fulfilling life. He cautions us that if we do not know what really important is to us, there is a danger of being swayed in life by shining things. In fact, this is especially true with money. Because if we do not know how much we need, the answer with money is always the same: we need more.*

Two different characters are presented to our emulation; the one, of proud ambition and ostentatious avidity. The other, of humble modesty and equitable justice. Two different models, two different pictures, are held out to us, according to which we may fashion our own character and behaviour; the one more gaudy and glittering in its coloring; the other more correct and more exquisitely beautiful in its outline.

—ADAM SMITH

Every man I meet is my master in some point, and in that I learn of him.

—RALPH WALDO EMERSON

Myth becomes myth not in the living but in the retelling.

—DAVID MARANISS

To know what you like is the beginning of wisdom and of old age.

—ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON

Part 2: Success

ENTITLEMENT, CONTROL, AND PARANOIA: Holiday warns us against self-aggrandizements and entitlement. Most of the time success brings the greatest delusions of a sense of false pride, control, and paranoia. Entitlement assumes that this is mine; I have achieved it. This behavior does not let us acknowledge others' contribution in the success. Control refers to a paralyzing perfectionism. As a result, a sense of entitlement and control leads to paranoia wherein we tend not trust others.

MANAGING YOURSELF: Holiday believes that as we grow in terms of our responsibilities what matters most is that we learn how to manage ourselves and others before our ambitions eats us alive. He states that some managers' egoism prevents them from managing others and they

quickly get overloaded. Responsibilities demand a readjustment and an increased clarity of purpose and direction.

BEWARE THE DISEASE OF ME: In this chapter, holiday makes us aware of the dangerous of me syndrome. It is the ego that needs honor to be validated. While true confidence is the ability to wait and focus on the task at hand regardless of external recognition. He opines that once we achieve a task there is always a tendency to switch to the mindset of "getting what's mine". Suddenly, awards and recognition take control- even though we did not really strive for the award. In fact, we never have the right to be greedy or to pursue our ulterior motives at the expense of others.

One of the symptoms of approaching nervous breakdown is the belief that one's work is terribly important.
—BERTRAND RUSSELL

It is not enough to have great qualities; we should also have the management of them.
—LA ROCHEFOUCAULD

If I am not for myself
who will be for me? If I
am only for myself, who
am I?
—HILLEL



Part 2: Success

MEDITATE ON THE IMMENSITY: *Our human self is part of a bigger whole and our ego tries to drift us from that oneness that makes a whole of us all. Selfishness always focusses on me and in this process, we ignore that me is not a stand-alone entity. When we lack connection to anything larger-tradition, family, values- we detach our soul from the one cosmological soul. Go put ourself in touch with the infinite we need to serve humanity and avoid the self-destructive drive of selfishness.*

MAINTAIN YOUR SOBRIETY: *In this chapter, Holiday states that there is a tendency that when we achieve something we stop learning, listening to others and hence lose control of what really matters. He points out that sobriety, organization, and purpose are great stabilizers to balance ego and pride that come after achievements. In this regard, he puts forward Aristotle's observations that "without virtue and training, it is hard to bear the fruits of good fortune suitably."*

A monk is a man who is separated from all and who is in harmony with all.
—EVAGRIUS PONTICUS

Sobriety is the counterweight that must balance out success. Especially if things keep getting better and better.

The height of cultivation runs to simplicity.
—BRUCE LEE

Holiday

Part 3: Failure

ALIVE TIME OR DEAD TIME? *In this chapter, Holiday argues that when we embark on an endeavor, we can be sure that there will be adversity wherein we will likely to be treated poorly. In such situations, two things to be remembered: it degrades others who inflicted adversity; and we have a choice to chose alive time or dead time. While in adversity alive time is to be active and look beyond the present while dead time is to be passive.*

THE EFFORT IS ENOUGH: *In this chapter, Holiday discusses that in life there are moments when we do all things right and perfect, yet the results are somehow negatives resulting in failure, disrespect, and even jealousy. He advises that if fulfilling*

our own standards fills us with joy and satisfaction the external standards do not matter. In other words, the less attached we are to outcomes the better it is for our self-respect.

FIGHT CLUB MOMENTS: *In this chapter, Holiday reminds us that in life there moments that tell us that we are wrong about what we thought of the reality and the world. Such moments are likened to fight club moments wherein our ego is shattered and afterwards we see things clearly. One hopes that this moment would never arrive but it is necessary to strip us off the delusions and false beliefs about ourselves and our abilities.*

Vivre sans temps mort. (Live without wasted time.)
—PARISIAN POLITICAL SLOGAN

What matters to an active man is to do the right thing; whether the right thing comes to pass should not bother him.
—GOETHE

If you shut up truth and bury it under the ground, it will but grow, and gather to itself such explosive power that the day it bursts through it will blow up everything in its way.
—EMILE ZOLA

Part 3: Failure

DRAW THE LINE: Here Holiday reminds us that at any given time in life's circle we may be failing. But wise people understand that these moments are transitory. At the face of failure, we should work ourself back to the aspirational phase. "If your reputation can't absorb a few blows, it wasn't worth anything in the first place" (p. 144). Here he quotes Seneca that "he who fears death will never do anything worthy of a living man."

MAINTAIN YOUR OWN SCORECARD: In this chapter, Holiday warns of abandoning our principles in the face of adversity. He further states that adversity is a transitory moment that does not asks for our true values to be sacrificed to get out of the seemingly impenetrable mess. We should not pity ourselves during the short-term setbacks rather should inch our way toward real improvement.

ALWAYS LOVE: Finally, holiday discusses that in failure or adversity one is tempted to hate others by making responsible for the mess. This hatred diverts focus from self-criticism to blaming others. However, this does not get us any closer to where we want to be; rather it keeps us where we are. Therefore, love is right there.

It can ruin your life only if it ruins your character.
—MARCUS AURELIUS

I never look back, except to find out about mistakes . . . I only see danger in thinking back about things you are proud of.

—ELISABETH NOELLE-NEUMANN

**And why should we feel anger at the world?
As if the world would notice!**
—EURIPIDES



Critical Evaluation of the Book

Ego is the Enemy by Ryan Holiday is filled with cautionary anecdotes of those who loose control of their ego eventually damaged their cause as, and the tales of those who practiced humility, sobriety, and restrain found success and self-actualization in their endeavors. When we let go of ego, we are humble and confident. To achieve this, we must practice seeing ourself with little distance by cultivating the ability to get out of our own head. When we aspire to success, we should subsume our identity into that of the organization and move both forward simultaneously. When we succeed, we must remain humble and share the rewards with others. Whereas when we fail, we should embrace the failure and

move on to start over again. In my organizational life, I have seen that very ambitious and talented people cannot achieve their goals despite of hard work. The reason is that they lack the spirit of cooperation and learning. I have also observed great educational leaders terribly fall from the zenith of their leadership when they take credit of their own success and do not feel that success is a result of team work. On the other hand, I have learnt from some educational leaders that failure is the way forward with the right attitude. To sum up, Ego is the Enemy is a perfect recipe for the success of educational leaders, employees as well as organizations.

About the Author

RYAN HOLIDAY is the bestselling author of ***Trust Me, I'm Lying***; ***The Obstacle Is the Way***; ***Ego Is the Enemy***; ***Conspiracy*** and other books about marketing, culture, and the human condition. His work has been translated into over 30 languages and has appeared everywhere from the New York Times to Fast Company.

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