

How to Get More From Life

by Scott H Young

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How to Get More From Life

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How to Get More From Life

Introduction

Introduction

Why I Wrote This Guide

I've written close to 800 articles at ScottHYoung.com. Even for the engaged reader, that's a lot of content to chew through (roughly 10 full-sized books worth). I made this guide to cohere many of those different ideas together in one, readable source.

The book is free, so I'm not making a lot of money. The book is geared at existing readers, so I'm not going to get a lot of traffic. Seeing as I don't expect to get a lot of direct benefit from writing this book, all I ask is this:

1. If you liked the book, I enjoy [getting thank-you emails](#).
2. And, if you really liked the book, please email it to your friends.

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How to Get More From Life

Introduction

Please share this book!

If you enjoy the book, email it to someone you know.

Heck, even if you **don't** enjoy the book, you can still email it to someone you know.

means you can share it, sell it or do whatever you want with it, so long as you don't change it and you let people know it was written by me. The biggest thanks I can get is to know someone liked the book enough to tell their friends about it.

What “Getting More From Life” Means

Yes, I know, it sounds a bit corny. It probably sounds exactly like all those cheesy platitudes I put great effort to distinguish my blog from. But, the tagline for this blog has remained consistent since I started it over 3 years ago. I'm a slave to branding.

Getting more from life, to me, isn't a specific action or a 12-step plan. It's a philosophy that is always geared towards improvement. It's about never being satisfied with the status quo, and having an insatiable hunger to improve the quality of your life and the quality of the things you achieve in it.

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Introduction

Getting more for life, for me, seems to be the only words that describe the **gut feeling** I get when I think about what I want to do on this earth.

No platitudes, no feel-good mantra. Getting more for life, for me, just seems to be the only words to describe that gut feeling I get when I think about what I want to do on this earth. And considering the roughly ten thousand readers following the blog, I don't think I'm the only person who shares this gut feeling.

This blog started as a 17-year old kid, bright-eyed with equal doses of enthusiasm and naivety wanting to share this gut feeling. Today, it's a 21-year old kid, with probably about the same amounts of enthusiasm and naivety.


No, I don't have all the answers.

No, I don't follow my life philosophy perfectly. I'm human and I make mistakes.

Yes, I'm 21. I'm not a guru. Just a person like you, often struggling to figure everything out.

How to Get More From Life

Introduction



This book covers the core ideas I've written about in the nearly 800 articles for ScottHYoung.com.

But it is by no means complete.

Occasionally, I'll add links to topics similar to the content of the book from articles in my archives:

Check out the archives [here](#).

I'd like to think that with what I lack in wisdom, I make up for in enthusiasm and prolificacy as a writer. I'm not here to hand you the wisdom of ages. I'm here to share that gut feeling, and the lessons I learn from pursuing it every day.

How to Get More From Life

Chapter One - Life is a Work in Progress

Life is a Work in Progress

My life philosophy is always a work in progress. Some people claim that the secret to life is finding a religion or philosophy and then disciplining yourself to stick to it. I disagree, I think the mere fact that you require so much discipline to adhere to your philosophy is that it is incomplete.

A complete strategy for life would not only include the values and principles you try to stick to, but also the tactics for sticking with them. That's why my strategy for life is constantly evolving.

I may believe, in bulk, the things I wrote about when I started the blog over three years ago. The difference is now my strategy is more nuanced. My ability to see the details and not just the big picture has greatly improved.

How to Get More From Life

Chapter One - Life is a Work in Progress



The people who never contradict themselves later, probably weren't correct to begin with.

If your ideas aren't evolving, you aren't evolving.

My goal is to share the journey with readers, not the destination. I'm not coming from the mountaintop to explain the mysteries of life. I'm just another person stumbling in the dark, letting you know when I bump into something.

If your ideas aren't evolving, you aren't evolving. This guide will be out of date as soon as you finish reading it. That doesn't mean it is incorrect, or that it can't help anyone. Simply that I'll already be hunting for ways to improve the ideas I wrote about here, right after it has been written.

How to Get More From Life

Chapter Two - Habits

Habits

Why Habits Matter

Self-improvement takes a lot of work. Exercising, writing, being productive, managing your finances, improving your social life, all of these pursuits take a great deal of energy. It can be a little overwhelming.

It was too much for me to start. Even today, pursuing my perfect lifestyle is impossible. I always fall a bit short of how I'd like to ideally run my life.

However, the breakthrough idea that helped me get a lot closer to that ideal was habits. If you could habituate a particular behavior (say running your finances or exercising), then you wouldn't need Herculean discipline to do it every day.

How to Get More From Life

Chapter Two - Habits

This doesn't mean running a habit requires zero effort. Just that the burden is a lot less. It's far easier to rise to the summit of your ideal lifestyle, if the baggage you're carrying weighs only a tenth as much. Habits lighten the load.

How to Change a Habit

You can change a habit in three simple (but certainly not effortless) steps:

1. **Define the behavior change** you want to make in precise detail.
2. Commit to performing the new habit for **30 days**, without exception.
3. After, if you still feel unsure, **commit for another 90 days** to follow the habit, skipping no less than a day or two.

Habit changing is a topic I have a lot of interest in, as I've done a lot of research and a ton of experimentation. Here are some of the resources available on the website to get started with changing habits:

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[How to Change a Habit](#) - My book on the subject. Includes a pdf report, detailing all of my methods and steps, and also an audio training guide that you can listen to.

[Habitual Mastery](#) - An initial, 5-part series looking into habits. It's less sophisticated than some of my later writing, but it is still a popular section of the website.

[One Month Isn't That Long...](#) - My argument that you should only pursue one change at a time.


[New to Exercise, Make Workouts Daily](#) - An article on the importance of consistency when changing habits.

Current Status on My Habits

Although it may seem like habits are a “set it and forget it” affair, I’m afraid that only works for infomercial rotisseries. Like everything in my life, my habits are constantly changing. I’ll add new ones as the situations arise and I’ll drop old ones that are getting too cumbersome.

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Chapter Two - Habits



If you want to know how I set up those habits, here are corresponding articles:

- [W/D Goals](#)
- [Budgeting](#)
- [Exercise](#)
- [Vegetarianism](#)
- [Television](#)
- [Internet](#)

Of course, the book [How to Change a Habit](#), details all of these habits and others in far more depth.

Here is a list of a few habits I have trained through 30-day trials that I'm currently using:

- Weekly/Daily Goals system
- Financial budgeting
- Exercise
- Vegetarianism
- No TV
- 2x per week writing schedule
- Checking internet once per day

Chances are, by the time you've read this, this list will have changed again. Here are a few habits that I'm not running at the moment, but are part of my toolkit I use depending on my current goals:

-**Early rising/morning ritual.** Fantastic for productivity, but harder to run with an active social life.

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Chapter Two - Habits

-Alcohol reduction/elimination. I often put a stricter limit on my alcohol intake when I have specific fitness goals I'm trying to reach. But I am a university student and being able to share a beer with friends is also important to me.

-Diet tracking. With tough fitness goals, I track my dietary intake.

-Brainstorming pad. Great when I'm doing more writing and need to capture every idea.

Often I'll receive emails from people congratulating me for waking up at 5:30am every day, even though I woke up at 9am that morning.

It's not because I don't believe waking up at 5:30am can have powerful productivity benefits, or that I'm too lazy. Simply that my habits are always adjusting, so any article I write is necessarily out of date.

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Chapter Two - Habits



Habits shouldn't make you a robot. Most of my life is unscheduled. Habits are just one tool to help in specific areas of your life.

Where Habits Don't Work

Habits are just one tool in the getting more from life toolbox. They work well, particularly for highly individual, vertical-growth oriented goals. But they're really lousy at helping you find new experiences, be spontaneous or grow laterally.

I really like using them, but that doesn't mean I'm a robot and run everything to a schedule. Most of my life is unstructured, and I am constantly adjusting the balance depending on whether I'm extremely busy and need to do a lot of work, or working less and trying to relax.

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Chapter Three - Learning

Learning

School ≠ Learning

Too many of my readers equate university (or high school, college, etc.) with learning. Somehow just showing up within the hallowed ivy halls of a prestigious institution is going to foster enlightenment.

It doesn't, and I'm highly suspicious of anyone who claims they're an expert because of a particular degree they have.

School is something you undertake, not only to learn, but for a whole host of non-learning related reasons:

- Accreditation
- To improve your resume
- To network with peers

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Chapter Three - Learning

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One professor ranting to students about a topic for two hours interrupted is probably one of the worst ways to learn.

- As a signal of status
- To party
- etc.

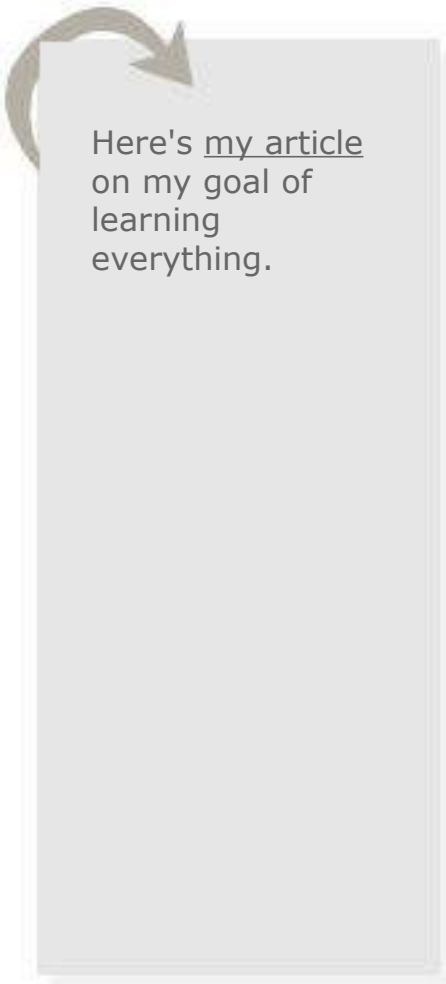
I'd argue that for most people, their top three reasons for going to school don't include genuine learning. Instead, they are there because they need it for their profession, they want to boost their resume, network or even have a good time.

Most people don't pursue school for learning directly, probably because schools aren't great at it. Typical academic institutions are aging behemoths, focused more on continuing the status-quo than offering the best tools for educating their students.

The standard lecture format where one professor (usually picked for his research, not his teaching, ability) rants to students about a topic for two hours uninterrupted is probably one of the worst ways to learn.

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Here's [my article](#) on my goal of learning everything.

That being said, this isn't an indictment of universities or pursuing education. Those things are great, often for the very reasons I described before (accreditation, networking, fun, etc.). And, if those are the reasons you're pursuing higher education, great for you.

School Isn't Enough

Self-education and the learning process need to go beyond where the textbooks leave off, and they need to continue far after you complete your degree. Unfortunately, because the equation between school and learning runs so deep, many people forget this.

My stated goal is **knowing everything**. Audacious and impossible? Definitely. But, it's the direction that matters, not the destination.

Having an insatiable lust for integrating new knowledge is one of the best ways to improve yourself. No, not just by reading self-help books and blogs. But by reading books on science, politics, history, classics, business and learning new skills.

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Chapter Three - Learning



If average were the benchmark we should compete against, then you should be happy if you're only overweight and not obese.

Most people read less than a few books per year. Some people go one step higher and read several books, but usually of a narrow genre. I think learning is a serious endeavor, and so you shouldn't stop at there, but aim at consuming a large amount of books on different topics, as well as practicing different skills.

Focused Mastery Versus Polyglottery


If you read 10 books per year, you're already well ahead of most of the human population. But, if average were the benchmark we should compete against, then you should also be happy if you're only overweight and not obese.

So whether you choose the road of focused mastery (reading exclusively about one subject) or become a polyglot (read about everything) isn't as important as reading. Learning itself has mental dividends that exceed the decision about which books to read.

My personal approach is the "T" model. You want deep focus in one area, with minor focus in other areas. So, while I might practice a new skill,

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Ben Casnocha's was the first person I saw writing about the T-Model for learning. He also runs an amazing blog.

[Check it out here!](#)

say, tango dancing or Ruby programming, if it isn't in my deep focus, I won't worry about mastering it. Having some basic competence will be enough to spur new creative connections.

How to Learn Without Studying

Beyond the hunger to learn more, the way you learn also matters. I'm not here to suggest that there is only one way to do it. I know many different styles that work for many different people. However, the approach I use has worked very well for me.

I call my learning style holistic learning, because it emphasizes learning through what you already know. The opposite being rote memorization, where you try to learn facts out of context, sequence or relation to other ideas. Everyone learns holistically to some degree, I just try to make a point of emphasizing it in my self-education.

Learning holistically means you try to learn new ideas by connecting them to things you already know, or already care about. Some of the

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techniques I use to achieve this:

Metaphors. Describe one idea within the context of another idea. Example: derivatives are like the speedometer/odometer relationship in a race car.

Visualization. Create a mental picture of an abstract object. Example: In programming, a “variable” is a strictly abstract idea. A cookie jar that holds data, isn’t. Connect the two.

Diagrams. Draw pictures showing the relationships between ideas.

Holistic learning is way beyond the scope of this guide. But, seeing as it is the most popular topic I write about, it deserved a mention. If you’re interested, here are some resources to read more:

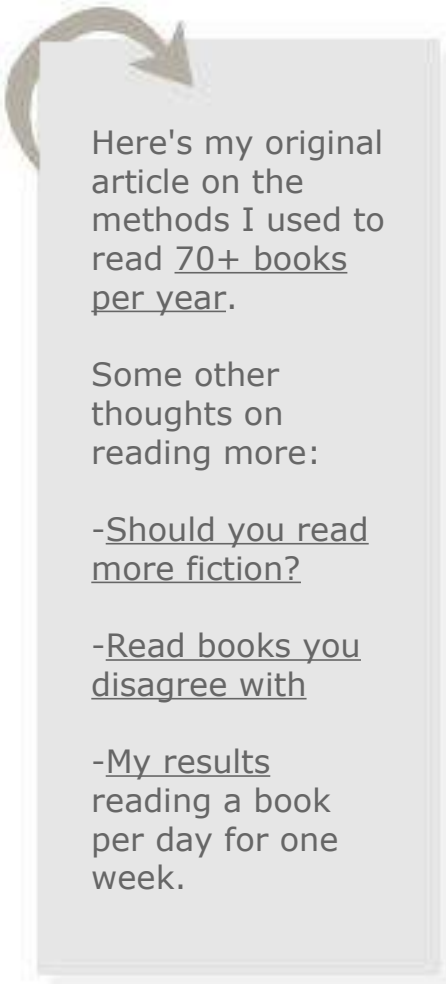
[Learn More, Study Less.](#) A comprehensive 200+ page report with bonus materials detailing exactly how I learn holistically, the strategy behind it and the techniques I use.

[Holistic Learning.](#) A short pdf, introducing the topic.

[How to Ace Your Finals Without Studying.](#) The first article.

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Chapter Three - Learning



Here's my original article on the methods I used to read 70+ books per year.

Some other thoughts on reading more:

-Should you read more fiction?

-Read books you disagree with

-My results reading a book per day for one week.

How to Read More Books

A big part of self-education is book reading. Book reading isn't complete (skill mastery is the other half of self-education), but I'd guess if you're reading 30-50 books per year, you're learning more than most people in full-time classes.

In the past, I wrote about how I read over 70 books per year, during a 2-year period. Today I probably read 30-50 books, per year, but the principles I used to reach that reading volume still hold today.

Speed Reading for Dummies

Speed reading is an important tool for increasing your reading volume. I think the term speed reading is a bit of a misnomer, because it makes people think only about reading faster.

The practice of speed reading, however, taught me a lot more about controlling my speed. Yes, it helped me increase the upper speed limit, but

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it also taught me how to understand better at lower speeds.

If you want speed reading tips, check out [Double Your Reading Rate](#), the most-viewed article on the website. Here's my quick summary:

1. **Use a pointer**, such as your finger, to underline the words while reading. This reduces eye movements and distractions which force your eyes to relocate your position on the page.
2. **Practice reading**. Practice reading isn't actually reading, it means taking an unfamiliar book and skimming it faster than you can read. Your goal is to train yourself to understand more at higher speeds, not so you'll always use those speeds but so you have the ability.
3. **Identify your goals before reading**. Get an idea of what you're trying to get out of a book before picking it up.

Learning is a lifelong endeavor. Knowledge has unexpected payoffs. You never know when your knowledge of one topic will pay off in another area of your life. So don't just learn the ideas with immediate functionality.



You never know when your knowledge of one topic will pay off in another area of your life.

My early practice with game design gave me the skills to do the artwork for my later books.

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Chapter Four - Productivity

Productivity


Productivity is your ability to get more done with fewer inputs. If you're a productive worker, you should be able to get more accomplished with less stress, energy, time and money, than unproductive workers. This can happen in a few ways:

1. You can **work more efficiently**, getting work done faster.
2. You can **be more efficient**, procrastinating less in between work.
3. You can **work more effectively**, choosing the right work which has the biggest impact.
4. You can **be more effective**, organizing your life so the right work happens naturally.

Some writers try to emphasize the importance of one type of productivity over another. I think they're all important.

How to Get More From Life

Chapter Four - Productivity



Do you find your productivity skills interfere with your social life or ability to relax?

Here's an article I wrote about how to prevent that.

1. I try to improve my writing and creative skills to write more in less time.
2. I try to set up my daily life to avoid excessive procrastination, burnout and fatigue.
3. I try to pick the correct writing projects and endeavors that have a maximal impact.
4. I try to organize my life so the maximum work is accomplished with less strain.

So my productivity advice isn't geared towards just becoming more organized, more motivated or making better decisions, I try to tackle ideas on all levels of productivity.

Why Does Productivity Matter?

No, productivity **doesn't make me a robot**. As of this moment, I'm living in France. In addition to enjoy the acts of cooking food from scratch, drinking wine, traveling and meeting up with friends a few nights per week, I try to relax as much as I can.

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Chapter Four - Productivity



Effectiveness comes from simplicity.

Having too many gadgets, tools or systems probably means that none of them function particularly well.

Productivity, for me, is the opposite of becoming a robot. It's about become so insanely good at your work and how you do it, that you don't need to sweat the hundreds of man-hours into projects and agonizingly push yourself to do more work.

Productivity doesn't eliminate my relaxation, fun and being able to have a glass of wine. Productivity enables it.

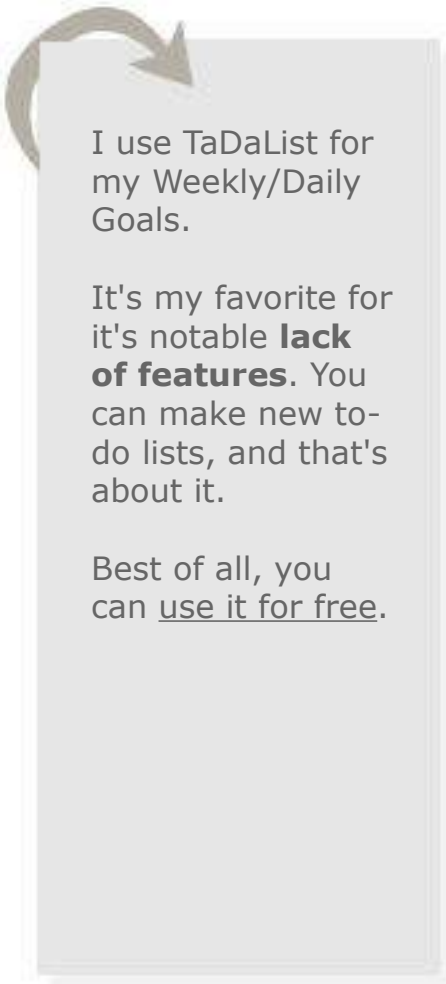
My Productivity Toolbox

Here, briefly, are a few of the tools I use to stay productive:

1. **Weekly/daily goals.** This is the cornerstone of my system. One list for the day's goals. Another for the week. No additions once the list is made, work until it's finished. Simple, beautiful, effective.
2. **Calendar.** For tracking scheduled events ([Google Calendar](#) works great.)

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Chapter Four - Productivity



I use TaDaList for my Weekly/Daily Goals.

It's my favorite for it's notable **lack of features**. You can make new to-do lists, and that's about it.

Best of all, you can use it for free.

3. **Timelogging.** Every 6-12 months I like to run a timelog, recording everything I spend time on. The results often help me eliminate the biggest drains on my time that don't pay themselves back.
4. **Weekly review.** Once a week, I write not only my goals for the next week, but also my thoughts on how to overcome problems I'm facing in work and live. Solution brainstorming can make even terrifying problems feel actionable.

Note that this is a short list. You don't need a lot of tools to be effective, you just need to find the right tools and make them work for you. I do use other techniques not listed here, but this forms the bulk of my productivity maintenance.

Also, note which tools I don't use. You won't see any automatic computer trackers, gizmos for organizing your iPhone to iPod notes, gadgets that upload my heart rate and brain waves to an organized spreadsheet.

How to Get More From Life

Chapter Four - Productivity

“
Some people mistake my fascination with productivity with perfect adherence.

I'm human. If I didn't make mistakes, I doubt my readers would trust (or be able to use) any of my advice.

My solutions are all extremely low-tech. Each could be easily implemented before the age of computers. As much as I love technology, I believe, for personal organization, technophilia is a big problem and simplicity should always come first.

Am I Productive?

Some people mistake my fascination with productivity (and therefore hundreds of articles on the topic) with perfect adherence to productivity techniques. I'm happy with the success I've achieved in personal organization. But does that mean I never procrastinate or waste time?

Of course not. **I make mistakes all the time.** If I didn't, I wouldn't have invested so much time trying to become better.

Two recent examples:

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Chapter Four - Productivity

Just because you're interested in productivity doesn't mean you can't take breaks, relax or just give up on a day and rest.

Finding your **natural working rhythms** is more important than any system.

1. I **procrastinated for two weeks** getting the final documents ready for my visa processing in France. I placed it into my to-do list each week, but because I never sat down and drilled out exactly what I needed to do to take action, I span my wheels until finally moving on it.
2. Last month, I was spending a **large amount of time on email/Facebook/etc.** I had relaxed my normally tight restrictions on internet checking, and now I was wasting a lot of time. So, two weeks ago I fixed the problem by starting a 30-day trial to check my internet feeds once per day.

The problem isn't making mistakes. It's in not recognizing those mistakes and coming up with an action plan to fix them.

You'll always procrastinate, waste time and squander effort. The key is to be able to detect those leaks when they happen and make an effort to correct them (or just enjoy their leakiness!).

How to Get More From Life

Chapter Five - Social Success

Social Success

Around the time I started the blog, four years ago, I was the last person you'd want to talk to about social success. It's probably a good thing I didn't write articles on the subject.

While I had been actively setting goals, changing habits, reading and becoming productive for a few years before starting the blog, social success has been a more recent accomplishment. When I started writing, my social life was a mess. I had almost no close friends and a dead social life.

I certainly wasn't unhappy with my life, but with such a dramatic weakness, I needed to take efforts to repair it.

So, I spent a good 2-3 years becoming great with my social skills. I joined Toastmasters to work on my public speaking. I went to parties and

How to Get More From Life

Chapter Five - Social Success



Hope, and a **non-stop** *hustle-your-ass-off* attitude are the two things I'd like to emphasize most in this book.

met thousands of people. I practiced every branch of communication I could think of (negotiating, sales, dancing, flirting, etc.)

I don't do things half-assed.

Now, I've made considerable improvement. I've had a couple of great relationships, I have extremely close friends I would consider akin to family, and I've had people comment on my overall lack of shyness and apparent confidence.

I say this not to brag, but to try to point out that, no matter how alone and dismal your social life may feel at times, there is always hope. Hope, and a non-stop, hustle-your-ass-off attitude are probably the two things I'd like to emphasize in this book.

How to Become More Social

So what did I learn in 2-3 years of moving my life from a 1-3 on a ten point scale, up to an 8 or 9?

How to Get More From Life

Chapter Five - Social Success



Your social life cannot improve without practice, practice, and practice.

Exhilarating and frustrating practice.

First, social skills are skills. I know, it's kind of a "duh" point, but it's all too easy to sit at home reading dating articles or spending time in forums thinking you're improving your social skills. You aren't. The only way they improve is with practice. Exhilarating and often frustrating practice.

Second, most of social skills break down to two ideas:


1. **Empathizing.** (Understanding what other people are thinking, and why they're thinking it.)
2. **Communicating yourself.**

Relatively easy to understand, extremely difficult in practice. It takes enormous practice to understand what people are thinking. Not only because the other person often won't tell you what they're thinking, but because sometimes they don't even know the underlying reasons.

Communicating yourself is also very difficult. As a writer, I can definitely say it's difficult to strike a balance between being motivating, realistic, confident, humble and authentic. As a person it's even more

How to Get More From Life

Chapter Five - Social Success



Here's my favorite article from the archives on this subject:

[How to Be Social](#)

difficult, because you need to make sure every element of your behavior (body language, words, attitude) are projecting who you are.

I think if most people invested their effort onto trying to do these two things: genuinely empathizing and communicating themselves effectively, they would have a much easier time reaching their goals for social success.

Productivity and Social Success, Can You Be Both?

Productivity and social success ideally work together. Knowing people can help you make connections that can make you more effective in your work. Being more effective in your work can give you more time to spend with friends, or just make you more valuable to other people in your network.

Ninety-five percent of the time, the actions that make you productive can also help your social life. The problem is the other five percent. Particularly, when you've invested in becoming highly productive but the rest of the world hasn't.

How to Get More From Life

Chapter Five - Social Success

Early rising was definitely an example of this for me. I loved the habit when I wanted to work, work, work. But add some social goals into the mix, and suddenly waking up at 5:30 put me out of phase with the rest of university life. Now I tend to use early rising intermittently, or only when my work-related goals take a precedence.

I'm not claiming you can't wake up early and still have a good time at university. I've done so myself. I'm simply claiming that some habits are trickier to integrate into society as a whole. I know Steve Pavlina claimed that this was the same reasoning he used when he discontinued his [otherwise successful polyphasic sleep experiment](#).

Try as much as possible to focus on the 95% overlap between productivity and social success. But, where you notice friction, either decide which area is more important to you at the moment, or aim for a compromise between the two.

How to Get More From Life

Chapter Six - Fitness

Fitness

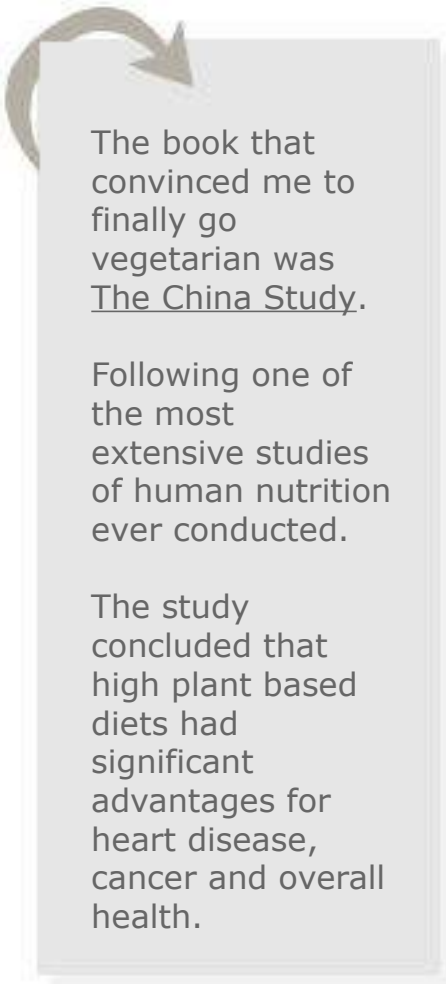
Physical fitness is, for me, one of the cornerstones for getting more out of life. If your body is out of shape, unhealthy and fat, it's going to be a lot harder to achieve success in the other areas. **Without fitness:**

- Work is harder** because you have less energy.
- Social skills are harder** because you're often less attractive (both physically and in attitude) when you're less healthy.
- Learning is harder.** Your brain is an organ too, so the principles of health for the body apply for the brain.
- Even **financial success isn't as satisfying** if your body is trashed.

Beyond the external benefits, fitness has an intrinsic goodness to it. Although, if you don't exercise regularly, it can be difficult to feel that way. But I guarantee if you spent a year training to run, being able to easily run 10km would be its own reward.

How to Get More From Life

Chapter Six - Fitness



The book that convinced me to finally go vegetarian was The China Study.

Following one of the most extensive studies of human nutrition ever conducted.

The study concluded that high plant based diets had significant advantages for heart disease, cancer and overall health.

Why I'm a Vegetarian

A big part of my healthy lifestyle is a vegetarian diet. Do you have to be a vegetarian to be healthy? **No**. Are all vegetarians healthy? **Certainly not**. Is a vegetarian diet necessarily better than all diets that include meat? **Nope**.

Then **why give up delicious meat**, you may ask?

First, I believe vegetarianism (along with other dietary constraints) is **one of the healthiest diets** in the world. There is ample scientific evidence that shows people who consume a low-meat diet tend to be healthier than people eating an average diet.

Second, when I experimented with veganism initially, I was impressed with the results. I **felt physically better**. This, by no means, should be taken as solid evidence of the diet's efficacy (the placebo effect is strong). But, it is more compelling than if I told you I was sick for two weeks after dropping meat from my diet.

How to Get More From Life

Chapter Six - Fitness

Third, vegetarianism can force you to eat better. Not always, but when you eliminate meat, you're also (by necessity) eliminating a lot of fast food and similar junk. This is even more true if you switch completely to a vegan diet. While there is plenty of vegetarian junk food, switching to a minority diet makes it easier to eat less stuff science has tampered with.

There are, of course, ethical and environmental implications to eating meat. If you want to learn more, read my article, [Why Vegetarian](#).

My Exercise Routine

Currently, my formal exercise routine consists of:

3-4x per week of weight training.

3-4x per week of practicing bodyweight skills
(handstand pushups are my current goal)

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Chapter Six - Fitness

However, due to my lifestyle, I'm also biking an average of 30-60 minutes and walking roughly 3-5km per day at the moment, so I'm not as concerned about missing aerobic fitness.

In the past, I've also included daily running, or weight/bodyweight training for up to 5-6x per week without injury. I recommend doing some form of exercise on a daily basis when getting started, just to make the habit stick.

Some physical stats on me, for those who are interested, I am 5'11" and I weight approximately 155lbs. My maximum benchpress is 175lbs. Maximum squat 205lbs. My maximum continuous push-ups are around 70-80, chin-ups around 13-16 and pull-ups around 10-12. My running fitness isn't as high, but I can run 10km in roughly 50 minutes without significant difficulty.

My fitness level improved rapidly my first two years of exercising, now after 6 years of consistent exercise, it takes much longer to make significant improvements.

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How I Got Started, and How You Can Too

If I told you I immediately started exercising one day, I'd be lying. The truth is it took me four serious attempts at adding regular exercise and failing before it stuck.

Part of the difficulty in getting started is that exercise hasn't become a habit. But the main difficulty has nothing to do with habits. It has to do with your self-esteem and experience with exercising. When you start getting in better shape, and see positive results in your fitness and body, you want to exercise.

If you want to get started, set a 30-day trial (like the chapter on habits) and commit to exercising for 30-45 minutes every single day for a month. Going every day can be difficult, but it makes the process of forming a habit way easier.

The second step is to constantly experiment with different forms of exercise to find the type you like best. I've tried swimming, running,

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Fitness should come first.

You don't need to be rich, smart or well-connected to begin. You just need to show up.

dancing, soccer, karate and weights. Eventually I found weight lifting and bodyweight exercises suited my personality best. There are so many different ways to stay in shape, it's stupid to force yourself into a gym if you don't enjoy it.

The final step is to get a partner. Ideally, find someone who already exercises consistently and commit to going with them. I became extremely consistent exercising when I began working out with my friend Justin, who has, for some two-month periods, not missed a single day exercising. (Whether that in itself is entirely healthy is another matter)

Fitness should come first. Unlike business, social skills or even academics (which often require skills in other life areas first) productivity and fitness can be tackled head on. You don't need money, friends, skills or a fancy education to get started.

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There are still a few people who feel getting paid to do something you love is selling out, or unethical.

Often the same people end up working 9-5 jobs for questionable corporations.

Ignore them.

Entrepreneurship and Finding Your Passion

One of my major goals in starting this blog was to turn it into a business and make an income. I'm guessing there are still a few immature readers who think earning money doing what you love is somehow a bad thing, or an ignoble motive. It's not.

Which is better for society?

That I earn a healthy income, doing something I love, that thousands of people get benefit from, that I can control and make sure stays true to my principles?

Or that I have only a few hours to pursue my passion in the evenings while I spend my day time getting paid by a corporation that may be pursuing motives of questionable ethics?

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Owning a business may not be for everyone.

But, deep down, **everyone is an entrepreneur.**

The start-up is your life.

Whether you (or I) can make such a business viable is a completely different question. But for now, let's just say that doing stuff you love and getting paid for it is generally a good thing. And provided you set yourself to a high standard making sure you earn that income honestly, I would argue it's a fantastic thing.

Life's Too Short to Do Shit You Hate

Entrepreneurship isn't for everyone. Particularly the online business style of entrepreneurship I'm engaged in. But that being said, too many people are stuck in jobs and careers not of their choosing because they were told everyone hates work and finding a career that inspires you is the domain of a select few.

For most of the western world, we surpassed our material needs a few decades ago, we just haven't realized it yet. Most of us aren't for want of food (obesity is rising). Most of us aren't for want of shelter, clothes, clean water or any of the other core necessities for human survival.

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“
We've found material wealth (studies show a nation's happiness decouples from money at around \$10,000/year).

Now *meaning* poverty is the struggle for most westerners.

But people are want for meaning. So if most of us are fat from food, have houses that are too big and stack up debt buying crap we don't need, why are we chasing careers that provide us with more money instead of what we really want: **lives with more meaning?**

I'm realistic. People need to work, and not everyone can run off and start a charity. But that doesn't mean you can't set finding a meaningful career as a goal. Even if it takes you 5 years to get your business off the ground. Or you spend 10 years studying a subject until you have the skills to get the job you want, you can still get started today.

We have enough money. You might not think you have enough. But if you personally haven't known wretchedness, hunger, homelessness, thirst or disability from lack of medical care, then your pursuit of material possessions isn't out of necessity but because you feel they are important for a comfortable or successful lifestyle.

My question is: isn't temporarily **sacrificing a little comfort** worth **adding meaningful work** (perhaps the missing human necessity)?

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Know Your Poverty Threshold


For career decisions, I think it's especially important to know your poverty threshold. This is the dollar amount you need to live on. Obviously, I could tell you a number that a human being needs to live on, but depending on your country, city, family and expectations, your threshold will vary.

The threshold is an important number to keep in mind because you can use it for concrete decisions. As long as a career choice won't put you under your poverty threshold, then it is viable. Particularly if that career choice has potential for growth, lifestyle flexibility or added personal significance.

My threshold is between \$1500-\$2000 per month. Less than this amount, and I'd find it difficult to live. In a pinch, I may be able to push this number down further, but at the moment, I'd wager that's the lowest I'd be willing to limbo in terms of personal finances.

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Here is the initial article discussing the idea of a poverty threshold.

Should you try to decide what to do with your life?

As I explain here, my answer is **no**.

By knowing this threshold I can make planning decisions. I can know exactly at what point I'll need to get a part-time job to support myself, or whether a certain plan isn't viable based on my living expectations.

If you have a high threshold, that will limit you. But have a high threshold, on its own, isn't the problem. The problem is not knowing what your minimum standards are.

Why Passion is Overrated

The way people talk about passion, you'd think people were having orgasms every time they went to work. I believe passion is more subtle. If you don't know your passion or grand life purpose don't worry about it.

Passion to me simply means things like: having a lot of ideas about my work, the desire improve at it, enjoying the act of tinkering with my work. It's not mindblowing, so if you don't get those vibes, that doesn't mean you don't have a passion or can't find one. Just work on skills you're interested in.

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My Business

I've run this blog as a business for the last few years. I'm definitely not at the point where I can sit back, relax and watch the money roll in. But I have been able to make better income than most of my university peers also working part time.

In 2008, this business had a net profit of roughly \$18,000. My goal for the next two years is to move that to \$40,000.

The interesting thing for any would-be entrepreneurs about my income is not what I earned. Instead, I'd like to focus on *how* the money was earned. Especially since every gain in income I made came from pursuing outside my current experiences.

I didn't go from \$200 per month to \$2000 per month by selling ads 10x as effectively. I got there by giving up ads altogether.

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I'm often asked whether this business supports all my financial needs.

The honest answer is **yes** and **no**.

In the last 2 years, I've averaged enough income to cover my expenses.

Getting the business to do this **reliably**, is my main challenge going further.

I know that in order to reach my \$40,000 goal, I won't get there by using the same methods I'm using to earn \$20,000. That may sound obvious, but I spent a good deal of time trapped in the mindset that I would improve my business just by increasing raw numbers.

The Glories (and Pitfalls) of Part-Time Entrepreneurship

I run this business part-time. That means part-time work and, at times, part-time pay. Running this business full-time has long been a dream, but I'm also realistic. In order to do that, it also has to support full-time pay reliably.

Part-time entrepreneurship is heavily underrated. Mostly because the money is often initially unglamorous. But people forget that running a part-time business can have many non-monetary benefits. From running this blog I've been able to:

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- Chat with best-selling authors**, radio hosts and people that a normal 21 year-old university student normally wouldn't be able to contact with.
- Improve my writing abilities** (enough to get decent paying freelance writing gigs)
- Learn about business**, which is still important even if you aren't running your own.
- Interact with thousands of people** across the world.
- Get paid for what would otherwise be an enjoyable hobby.**

If you evaluate starting your own business around a private passion simply on monetary terms, you'll probably fall short. The chance of failure and hours of sweat just don't deserve the pay.

But, as I said in the beginning, people aren't in want of material needs. People are in want of meaning. And the meaning dividends for starting a part-time business far exceed any paycheck.

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Why Most Blogs Don't Make Money (and How to Ensure Yours Does)

Bloggging is not a business. If you want to make more than a few dollars on AdSense, you need a business, not a blog. Blogging is an excellent tool in running a business (it's the main tool I use) but a blog, by itself, is not a business.

I personally know only a handful of people that make good money from bloggging with a few ads on their website. Those people also happen to be Top 500 bloggers, which means that they have millions of page views per month and hundreds of thousands of readers.

For the rest of us, bloggging is not, and will never be, a business. Just a tool your business uses to gain customers, readers or brand yourself. It's a powerful tool, but a hammer on its own can't build a house.

My business isn't in my blog. Currently, I make the vast majority of my income from selling information products. This is the freemium

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business model, where the majority don't pay but the few who do ensure the business keeps going.

This model works far better for me than advertising, which requires huge volumes of traffic, but doesn't differentiate whether readers really care about what you write or are just on your website to waste time.

In the future, I'll probably move away from static information products as well. Web seminars, membership programs, hands-on training have more value to customers and often require less effort to create.

Blogging can also help your offline business as well. I have a good friend who makes all his income without selling anything from his blog or having any ads. He uses his blog and network to make himself an authority in a niche. This allows him to command top speaking fees for international conferences.

If you want to make money blogging, you need to have a business model. Don't worry if you aren't sure which one will work yet (why not try

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If you're in your 20s, interested in entrepreneurship and **aren't** running a part-time business, please slap yourself now.

them all?). Just realize that problogging isn't just about getting eyeballs to your website. It's about delivering enough value to people that they are willing to pay for it.

Why Your Twenties are the Time to Start a Business

If you're in your twenties, are interested in entrepreneurship, and **aren't** running a part-time business, please proceed to slap yourself.

Although there will be exceptions, your twenties are the perfect time to start a business. You have youth and energy. You likely don't have spousal, family or mortgage commitments.

Even if your part-time business never leaves the garage, now is the time.

Too much student debt? No problem, I started this business with less than \$100. There are many business models with similarly low start-up costs.

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“**Everyone has time.** Just stop watching *fucking Lost.*”

-Gary Vaynerchuck

Don't have a perfect idea? Then start with a mediocre idea. Perfect ideas usually suck. I started this business with the idea of creating goal-setting games software. What was I thinking?

Don't have enough time? Gary Vaynerchuck said it best: “Work your 9-5. Get home, spend 2 hours with the kids and then work on your business from 7-2. ... Everyone has time, just stop watching fucking Lost.”

Even if you aren't in your twenties, if you want to start a business, make it happen. The only thing you actually have to risk is your time. And if you enjoy working on a business, then your time won't be wasted even if it eventually fails.

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Chapter Eight - Motivation, Confidence and Happiness

Motivation, Confidence and Happiness

Motivating yourself is easy.

It's actually ridiculously easy. If you want to motivate yourself, spend 30-60 minutes brainstorming what you want from life and the action steps you need to take immediately to get there. If you aren't motivated after a half-hour, you've done it wrong.

Patience, persistence and sweating out the work in soul-crushing moments of doubt and fatigue are the difficult part. I don't admire the person who got started. I admire the person who showed up, every day, for years, without fail.

Confidence comes from experience.

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Chapter Eight - Motivation, Confidence and Happiness



Confidence comes from **experience**.

Not from beating your chest like a gorilla.

No, it doesn't come from beating your chest like a gorilla. It doesn't come from telling yourself you'll do well. Phony confidence is one of the worst self-help clichés floating around.

I feel confident when I'm giving a presentation. Not because I told myself I'd do well. Or because I triggered an emotional state. But because I've given hundreds of presentations, been the president of a Toastmasters club, pitched to venture capitalists.

You can overcome your fears and flaws by gaining experience. Figure out what the next step outside your comfort zone is and take it. Then take the next one, and the one following that. Be terrified enough to take action, but not so much that you never leave the couch.

Happiness means savoring the good, withstanding the bad.

If phony confidence is a mistake, phony happiness should be a sin. Don't fall under the assumption that if you aren't happy all the time something is wrong with you. People weren't designed to be gleeful all the

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time, and that's probably a good thing.

I'm certainly not happy all the time. When I think about my life, what I want to do and where I've come, I have a lot of gratitude and joy. But, that doesn't mean I don't ever feel bad about things that don't work.

My life philosophy doesn't center on avoiding that internal angst. My goal is not to be happy all the time. Rather I focus on only two things:

1. Savoring happiness when it comes.
2. Endure moments of discontent.

Savor happiness when it comes. Don't be the person to point out the one flaw in an otherwise brilliant success. Be grateful when you're happy, don't forecast doom. It's too easy to squander perfect harmony by playing an off note.

During moments of discontent, my goal is to channel that negative emotion into something constructive. If a product launch fails miserably, I

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could focus that disappointment into an action plan for doing better next time. If I get rejected by someone, I can focus that energy back into my self improvement or appreciating my independence.

Channeling negative emotions does two things. First, it puts a positive spin on an otherwise negative occurrence. Second, it prevents negative emotions from spiraling downwards. Even when I'm very stressed or disappointed, the feeling never penetrates too deeply, because I've learned how to channel it.

My approach to happiness is about **increasing the upside when I rise**, and **limiting the downside when I fall**.

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Chapter Nine - The Meaning of Life

The Meaning of Life

No, I don't have a final answer for the meaning of life. I doubt I ever will. Part of my meaning for life is evolving and improving my meaning for life. (My self-improvement has a recursive aspect to it)

But, even if I don't have the final answer, I do have a work in progress.

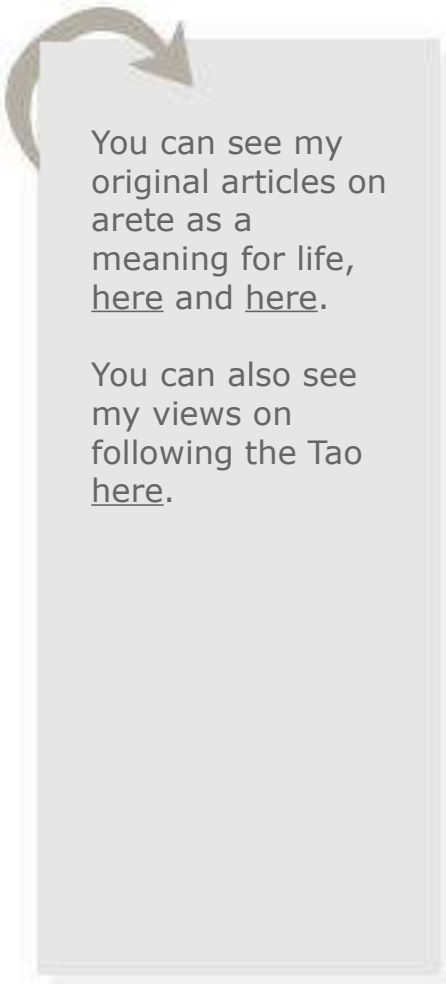
The Way of Arete: My Meaning for Life

After exploring a lot of different life philosophies, the meaning central to my life is a fusion of two ideas, from the Stoics and Taoists.

The Stoics believed the meaning of life was derived from **arete**, a word roughly describing virtue and excellence. If you lived virtuously, the meaning of your life was fulfilled, even if you ended up as a beggar.

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You can see my original articles on arete as a meaning for life, [here](#) and [here](#).

You can also see my views on following the Tao [here](#).

The Taoists believed the meaning of life was drawn from adhering to the Tao, or Way. The Way was an unknowable underlying path of the world. Your purpose was to flow without resistance in this deeper current in nature.

Although these ideas initially appeared very different, I feel they both describe the gut feeling I mentioned, way back in the introduction. That, the meaning I draw from life is to pursue my sense of arete along an ineffable, but powerful path that underlies my life.

Arete and Logic

The arete component of this meaning of life appeals to my left-brain, rational, science-oriented view of the world. Virtuous living, and becoming excellent not only in the narrow sense of a particular skill, but excellent with how you live and what you achieve, appeals to this logic-based side of my personality.

But I don't believe that is enough. Because with such an approach, it's

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Chapter Nine - The Meaning of Life

easy to waste my time philosophizing about whether a particular approach has arete, and arriving at no answers. Logic is good at distinguishing between alternatives, but it rarely provides a direction on its own.

Tao and Intuition

For that reason, I love the Taoist component of the Way. In this sense, not only is the meaning of life derived from the pursuit of arete. But also, there is an intuitive sense of which path has arete. I may be unable to ever truly know the Tao, but I can use intuitions to provide me a direction from which to go.

Is this philosophy irrational or unscientific? I don't believe so. The pursuit of quality as a meaning for life doesn't strike me as violating any scientific or rational philosophical viewpoints I've encountered.

Similarly, following an unseen Tao might sound like mysticism, but I feel there's a perfectly rational explanation. Humans have a deep running nature, both shaped by evolutionary preference and by the unseen laws of

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the universe. That nature gives us a deep intuition that I think can often act as a compass for higher-level rational thought.

What's the Result of Following This Philosophy?

Very good.

Unlike many religions which tell believers that a certain set of incredibly specific facts about the universe must be true for the religion to be true, my philosophy posits little about the world.

As a result, I can freely interpret most new findings on their merits, and not on whether it destroys the meaning I find in life.

In addition, this approach to life works well from almost any circumstances. Both the Taoist and Stoic philosophers offer some of my favorite answers to explaining why life can still be worthwhile and meaningful even in the most horrible circumstances.

This philosophy is also helps me make important life decisions, by

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Chapter Nine - The Meaning of Life

helping me decide what is truly important to me and helping me to ignore the things that are irrelevant distractions. Admittedly, one simple concept isn't enough, but it does help organize my other thoughts on life.

I'm not trying to convert anyone. If you're happy with your religion or philosophy, I don't care at all whether you choose to follow mine. I'm simply sharing this for people who are interested in what a [self-proclaimed atheist](#) subscribes to.

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Conclusion

Conclusion

The main reason I continue to write is because, if I stopped, I think my head would explode. I only get to write a tiny fraction of the ideas that are constantly bumping around in my head about how to get more from life.

I'm happy a few other people benefit from them, but I write at least as much to articulate my own thoughts as I do to provide advice.

I also don't want to leave the impression that I'm a guru or expert. I'm not. As anyone who knows me personally will attest to, I have many, many failings. Even the words I write I don't follow perfectly. I strive to, but I make mistakes.

The way I hope to communicate myself, although sometimes I fail at this too, is that I'm just another person trying to figure out this thing we call life. No answers from the mountaintop. Just a fellow traveler.

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Conclusion

Once again, if you liked this book:

1. [let me know](#).
2. email it to someone you think might like it!

This book is dedicated to the 10,000 some people who check the blog regularly. I don't get a chance to express my gratitude for that often enough. Hopefully this book helps me say thanks.

Am I here to preach my philosophy to the world, hoping to change everyone? No, I'm not trying to do that either. My hopes isn't to convert anyone who disagrees with me. If you disagree with me, you probably have some good reasons to, and I could probably learn from them.

My hope is to collect like-minded people, with the same gut-feeling I had that drove me to start this website, and write over a million words of ideas for it. Because, if we share the same gut feeling, then there is probably a lot I could learn from you.

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Thanks for reading!