

THE SUBTLE ART OF NOT GIVING A F*UCK- MARK MANSON

This book abstract is intended to provide just a glimpse of this wonderful book with the hope that you may like to read the original book at leisure and enjoy its real beauty.

CHAPTER 1: DON'T TRY

Bukowski was a loser. His success stemmed not from some determination to be a winner, but from the fact that he knew he was a loser, accepted it, and then wrote honestly about it. He never tried to be anything other than what he was. The genius in Bukowski's work was not in overcoming unbelievable odds or developing himself into a shining literary light. It was the opposite. It was his simple ability to be completely, unflinchingly honest with himself-especially the worst parts of himself-and to share his failings without hesitation or doubt.

Our culture today is obsessively focussed on unrealistic positive expectations: Be happier, Be healthier. Be the best, better than the rest. Be smarter, faster, richer, sexier, more popular, more productive, more envied, and more admired.

But when you stop and really think about it, conventional life advice-all positive and happy self-help stuff we hear all the time-is actually fixating on what you lack. It lasers in on what you perceive your personal shortcomings and failures to already be, and then emphasizes them for you.

The key to good life is not giving fuck about more; it's giving fuck about less, giving a fuck about only what is true and immediate and important.

The Feedback Loop from Hell:

Sometimes you get anxious about confronting something in life. That anxiety cripples you and you start wondering why you are so anxious. Now you are becoming anxious about being anxious. Similarly you can get angry about getting angry, feel guilty about feeling guilty.

The problem is that the society makes us believe that feeling such things is not okay. The feedback loop has become a borderline epidemic, making us feel overly stressed.

Social media, news bombard you with images of hundreds of totally happy people.

Our crisis is no longer material, it's existential, it's spiritual.

We are shown infinite number of ways we can discover that we don't measure up, that we are not good enough. And this rips us apart inside.

Because here's what's wrong with all of the "How to Be Happy" shit shared millions of time on Facebook in the past few years.

The desire for more positive experience is in itself a negative experience. And, paradoxically, the acceptance of one's negative experience is itself a positive experience.

Alan Watt's The Backwards Law": the more you pursue feeling better all the time, the less satisfied you become, as pursuing something only reinforces the fact that you lack it in the first place. The more you want to be desperately rich, the more poor and unworthy you feel, regardless of how much money you make. The more you desperately want to be happy and loved, the lonelier and more afraid you become. The more you want to be spiritually enlightened, the more self-centred and shallow you become in trying to get there.

Albert Camus (Existential philosopher): “You will never be happy if you continue to search for what happiness consists of. You will never live if you are looking for the meaning of life.”

Ever notice that sometimes when you care less about something, you do better at it? Notice how it's often the person who is the least invested in the success of something that actually ends up achieving it?

If pursuing the positive is negative, then pursuing the negative generates the positive. The pain you pursue in the gym results in better all-round health and energy. The failures in business are what lead to a better understanding of what's necessary to be successful. Being open with your insecurities paradoxically makes you more confident and charismatic around others.

Everything worthwhile in life is won through surmounting the associated negative experience. Any attempt to escape the negative, to avoid it or quash it or silence it, only backfires. The avoidance of suffering is a form of suffering. The avoidance of a struggle is a struggle. The denial of a failure is a failure. Hiding what is shameful is itself a form of shame.

Pain is an inextricable thread in the fabric of life, and to tear it out is not only impossible, but destructive.

You have limited time in life in which you have only limited amount of fucks to give. Very few, in fact.

The subtle art of not giving a fuck is essentially learning how to focus and prioritize your thoughts effectively-how to pick and choose what matters to you and what does not matter to you based on finely honed personal values. This is incredibly difficult. It takes a lifetime of practice and discipline to achieve. And you will regularly fail. But it is perhaps the most worthy struggle one can undertake in one's life. It is perhaps the only struggle in one's life.

Subtlety 1: Not giving a fuck does not mean being indifferent; it means being comfortable with being different.

Reserve your fucks to everything important in life, what truly matters. Friends, family, purpose.

Because there is no such thing as a lack of adversity. It doesn't exist. The point is to find the shit you enjoy dealing with.

Subtlety 2: to not give a fuck about adversity, you must first give a fuck about something more important than adversity.

Subtlety 3: whether you realize it or not, you are always choosing what to give fuck about.

With maturity we know who we are and we accept ourselves, including some of the parts we aren't thrilled about.

This simplification actually makes us really fucking happy on a consistent basis.

This book doesn't give a fuck about alleviating your problems or your pain. Instead, it will turn your pain into a tool, your trauma into a power, and your problems into slightly better problems. That is real progress.

Chapter 2: Happiness Is a Problem

Happiness is not a solvable equation. Dissatisfaction and unease are inherent parts of human nature, and necessary components to creating consistent happiness.

We suffer for the simple reason that it is biologically useful. It's nature's preferred agent for inspiring change.

The mildly dissatisfied and insecure creature is going to do the most work to innovate and survive.

Pain, in all forms, is body's most effective means of spurring action. It teaches us what to pay attention to.

It's not always beneficial to avoid pain and seek pleasure, since pain can, at times, be life-or-death important to our well-being. This applies to psychological pain as well. It is an indication of something out of equilibrium, some limitation that has been exceeded. Both pains can be healthy and necessary. Emotional pain of rejection or failure teaches us how to avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

Don't hope for a life without problems. There's no such thing. Instead, hope for a life full of good problems.

Happiness Comes From Solving Problems

The keyword is "solving." If you're avoiding your problems or feel like you don't have any problems, then you're going to make yourself miserable. If you feel like you have problems that you can't solve, you will likewise make yourself miserable.

Happiness comes from action. It's a constant work-in-progress-the solutions to today's problems will lay foundation for tomorrow's problems, and so on. True happiness occurs only when you find problems you enjoy having and enjoy solving.

Emotions Are Overrated

Emotions evolved for one specific purpose: to help us live and reproduce a little bit better. They're feedback mechanisms telling us that something is either likely right or likely wrong for us-nothing more, nothing less.

Negative emotions are a call to action. Positive emotions are rewards for taking the proper action.

Emotions are merely signposts, suggestions our neurobiology gives us, not commandments. Therefore, we shouldn't always trust our own emotions. In fact, I believe we should make a habit of questioning them.

Decision making based on emotional intuition, without the aid of reason to keep it in line, pretty much always sucks.

An obsession and overinvestment in emotion fails us for the simple reason that emotions never last. Whatever makes us happy today will no longer make us happy tomorrow.

Everything comes with an inherent sacrifice-whatever makes us feel good will inevitably make us feel bad.

Choose Your Struggle

If I ask you, "What do you want out of life? And you say something like, "I want to be happy and have a great family and a job I like," your response is so common and expected that it doesn't really mean anything.

Everybody wants that. It is easy to want that.

A more interesting question, a question that most people never consider, is, "What pain do you want in your life? What are you willing to struggle for? Because that seems to be a greater determinant of how our lives turn out.

Happiness requires struggle. It grows from problems. Real, serious, lifelong fulfilment and meaning have to be earned through the choosing and managing of our struggles.

People want amazing physique. But it involves pain and physical stress in the gym, and careful and limited food.

People want to start their own business. But you don't end up becoming a successful entrepreneur unless you find a way to appreciate the risk, the uncertainty, the repeated failures, the insane hours devoted something that may earn absolutely nothing.

If you want a partner, you must be able to weather rejections. You can't win if you don't play.

What determines success isn't "What you want to enjoy?" the relevant question is, "What pain do you want to sustain?"

If you are in love with only the result, but not in love with the process, you will fail repeatedly. If you don't like the climb, and just imagine the summit, you will fail.

If you want reward and not the struggle, want the result and not the process, you will fail.

Who you are is defined by what you willing to struggle for. This is not about willpower or grit. This is the most simple and basic component of life: Our struggles determine our success. Our problems birth our happiness, along with slightly better, slightly upgraded problems.

See: it's a never-ending spiral. Because the joy is in the climb itself.

Chapter 3: You Re Not Special

We are not exceptional. It turns out that merely feeling good about yourself doesn't really mean anything unless you have a good reason to feel good about yourself. It turns out that adversity and failure are actually useful and even necessary for developing strong-minded and successful individuals.

The problem with the self-esteem movement is that it measured self-esteem by how positively people felt about themselves. But a true and accurate measurement of one's self-worth is how people feel about the negative aspects of themselves.

People become amazing because they're obsessed with improvement. People become great because they understand that they are not already great.

The ticket to emotional health lies in accepting the bland and mundane truths of life: truths such as "Your actions actually don't matter that much in the grand scheme of things" and "The vast majority of your life will be boring and not noteworthy, and that's okay."

You will have a growing appreciation for life's basic experiences: the pleasures of simple friendship, creating something, helping a person in need, reading a good book, laughing with someone you care about.

Chapter 4: The Value of Suffering

If suffering is inevitable, then the question we should be asking is not "How do I stop suffering? But "Why am I suffering-for what purpose?"

The Self Awareness Onion

There are multiple levels to self-awareness, and the more you peel them back, the more likely you're going to start crying at inappropriate times.

Let's say the 1st layer of self-awareness onion is a simple understanding of one's emotions. "This is when I feel happy." "This makes me feel sad." "This gives me hope."

It takes years of practice and effort to get good at identifying blind spots in ourselves and then expressing the affected emotions appropriately. But this task is hugely important, and worth the effort.

The second layer of the self-awareness onion is an ability to ask why we feel certain emotions. These questions are difficult and often take months or even years to answer consistently and accurately. Such questions are important because they illuminate what we consider success or failure. Why do you feel angry? Is it because you failed to achieve some goal? Why do you feel lethargic and uninspired? Is it because you don't think you are good enough?

This helps us understand the root cause of our emotions that overwhelm us. Then we can do something to change it.

The third layer of onion is our personal values: Why do I consider this to be success/failure? How am I choosing to measure myself? By what standard am I judging myself and everyone around me? This level, which takes constant questioning and effort, is incredibly difficult to reach. But it's the most important, because our values determine the nature of our problems, and the nature of our problems determines the quality of our lives.

Values underline everything we are and do. If what we value is unhelpful, if what we consider success/failure is poorly chosen, then everything based upon those values—the thoughts, the emotions, the day-to-day feelings—will be out of whack. Everything we think and feel about a situation ultimately comes back to how valuable we perceive it to be.

Most people are horrible at answering these why questions accurately, and this prevents them from achieving a deeper knowledge of their own values.

For many people, this passes as self-awareness. And yet, if they were able to go deeper and look at their underlying values, they would see that their original analysis was based on avoiding responsibility for their own problem, rather than accurately identifying the problem. They would see that their decisions were based on chasing highs, not generating true happiness.

Many self-help gurus ignore this deeper level of self-awareness as well. They ignore important value based questions: Why do they feel such a need to be rich in the first place? How are they choosing to measure success/failure for themselves?

Much of the advice operates at a shallow level of simply trying to make people feel good in the short term, while the real long-term problems never get solved. People's perceptions and feelings may change, but the underlying values, and metrics by which those values are assessed, stay the same. This is not real progress. This is just another way to achieve more highs.

Honest self-questioning is difficult. It requires asking yourself simple questions that are uncomfortable to answer. In fact, in my experience, the more uncomfortable the answer, the more likely it is to be true.

Take a moment and think of something that's really bugging you. Now ask yourself why it bugs you. Chances are the answer will involve a failure of some sort. Then take that failure and ask why it seems "true" to you. What if that failure wasn't really a failure? What if you've been looking at it the wrong way?

What is objectively true about your situation is not as important as how you come to see the situation, how you choose to measure it and value it. Problems may be inevitable, but meaning of each problem is not. We get to control what our problems mean based on how we choose to think about them, the standard by which we choose to measure them.

The question is not whether we evaluate ourselves against others; rather, the question is by what standard do we measure ourselves?

For Dave Mustaine the experience of getting thrown from his former band was so painful for him that he adopted “success relative to Metallica” as the metric by which to measure himself and his music career.

Our values determine the metrics by which we measure ourselves and everyone else.

If you want to change how you see your problems, you have to change what you value and/or how you measure failure/success.

These stories suggest that some values and metrics are better than others. Some lead to good problems that are easily and regularly solved. Others lead to bad problems that are not easily and regularly solved.

Shitty Values

1. **Pleasure:** It is great, but it’s horrible value to prioritize your life around. Research shows that people who focus their energy on superficial pleasures end up more anxious, more emotionally unstable, and more depressed. Pleasure is necessary in life (in certain doses), but not sufficient.
Pleasure is not the cause of happiness; rather, it is the effect. If you get the other stuff right, then pleasure will naturally occur as a by-product.
2. **Material Success:** research shows that once one is able to provide for basic physical needs (food, shelter, and so on), the correlation between happiness and worldly success quickly approaches zero.
By overvaluing material success is the danger of prioritizing it over other values, such as honesty, nonviolence, and compassion.
3. **Always Being Right:** Our brains are inefficient machines. We consistently make poor assumptions, misjudge probabilities, misremember facts, give in to cognitive biases, and make decisions based on our emotional whims.
This attitude prevents people from learning from mistakes. It’s far more helpful to assume that you are ignorant and don’t know a whole lot.
4. **Staying Positive:** the truth is, sometimes life sucks, and the healthiest thing you can do is admit it. Denying negative emotions leads to experiencing deeper and more prolonged negative emotions and to emotional dysfunction. Constant positivity is a form of avoidance, not a valid solution to life’s problems.
It’s simple. Things go wrong, people hurt us, accidents happen. These things make us feel like shit. And that’s fine.
The trick with negative emotions is to 1. Express them in a socially acceptable and healthy manner and 2. Express them in a way that aligns with your values.

The point is to nail down some good values and metrics, and pleasure and success will naturally emerge as a result. These things are side effects of good values. By themselves, they are empty highs.

Defining Good and Bad Values

Good Values are 1. Reality based, 2. Socially constructive, and 3. Immediate and controllable.

Bad Values are 1. Superstitious, 2. Socially destructive, and 3. Not immediate or controllable.

Honesty is a good value because it’s something you have complete control over, it reflects reality, and it benefits others. Popularity, on the other hand is a bad value. It is out of your control. It isn’t based on reality because you don’t know what others think about you.

Some examples of good, healthy values: honesty, innovation, vulnerability, standing up for oneself, standing up for others, self-respect, curiosity, clarity, charity, humility, creativity.

Some examples of bad, unhealthy values: dominance through manipulation and violence, feeling good all the time, always being the centre of attention, not being alone, being liked by everybody, being rich for the sake of being rich.

You will notice that good, healthy values are achieved internally. Bad values are generally reliant on external factors.

Values are about prioritization. This influences your decision making. This in a nutshell is self-improvement.

Radical form of responsibility: Taking responsibility for everything that occurs in your life, regardless of who's at fault. The second is uncertainty: the acknowledgement of your own ignorance and the cultivation of constant doubt in your own beliefs. The next is failure: the willingness to discover your own flaws and mistakes so that these can be improved upon. The fourth is rejection: the ability to both hear and say no. The final one contemplation of one's own mortality. This keeps all values in proper perspective.

Chapter 5: You Are Always Choosing

When you chose to run marathon and are prepared for it, it is an important milestone in your life. When it is forced on you against your will, it is a terrifying and painful experience of your life.

Often the only difference between a problem being painful or being powerful is a sense that we chose it, and are responsible for it.

The Choice

William James really had bad problems. Although born into a wealthy and rich family, he had from birth life threatening issues (eye problem-temporarily blinded, terrible stomach, trouble in hearing; back spasms so bad that many time he couldn't sit or stand upright). He spent most of the time alone, at home and was not good at school.

His father ridiculed him for his laziness and lack of talent. His brother became a world-renowned novelist, his sister also was a writer. He was the family black sheep.

He was admitted in Harvard Medical School with influence, but dropped out. He fell into deep depression and began plans to take his own life.

But one night, while reading lectures by the philosopher Charles Peirce, James decided to conduct an experiment. In his diary, he wrote that he would spend one year believing that he was 100 % responsible for everything that occurred in his life, no matter what. During this period, he would do everything in his power to change his circumstances, no matter the likelihood of failure. If nothing improved in that year, then it would be apparent that he was truly powerless to the circumstances around him, and then he would take his own life.

He went to become the father of American psychology. He became world famous. He would later refer to his little experiment as rebirth and would credit it with everything that he later accomplished in his life.

We don't always control what happens to us. But we always control how we interpret what happens to us, as well as how we respond. Whether we realize it or not, we are always responsible for our experiences.

We are always choosing the values by which we live and the metrics by which we measure everything that happens to us. Often the same event can be good or bad, depending on the metric we choose.

The Responsibility/Fault Fallacy

There is a well-known saying: "With great power comes great responsibility." However, "With great responsibility comes great power." Accepting responsibility for our problems is thus the first step in solving them.

A person felt he was too short to attract women and gave up trying. The value he had chosen (height) was hurting him. Instead if he would have said "I want to date only women who like me for who I am" might have been nice. A metric that assesses the value of honesty and acceptance.

A lot of people hesitate to take responsibility for their problems because they believe that to be responsible for your problems is to also be at fault for your problems.

Responsibility and fault often appear together in our culture. We are responsible for experiences that aren't our fault all the time. That is also part of our life. Fault is a past tense. Responsibility is a present tense. Fault results from choices that have already been made. Responsibility results from the choices you're currently making, every second of the day.

Many people may be to blame for your unhappiness, but nobody is ever responsible for your unhappiness but you. This is because you always get to choose how you see things, how you react to things, how you value things.

Sometimes, the tragic incidents in your life inspire a significant amount of personal growth.

When there is death of a near one in the family, you are still responsible for your emotions, beliefs, and actions. Pain of one sort or another is inevitable for all of us, but we get to choose what it means for us. Even saying you have no choice, you are making a choice.

OCD is a terrible neurological and genetic disorder that can't be cured. At best, it can be managed. And, as we'll see, managing the disorder comes down to managing one's values.

The first thing the psychiatrists on this project do is to tell the kids that they're to accept the imperfections of their compulsive desires.

The goal is to get the kids to recognize that their values are not rational-that in fact their values are not even theirs, but rather are the disorder's-and that by fulfilling these irrational values they are actually harming their ability to function in life.

The next step is to encourage the kids to choose a value that is more important than their OCD value and to focus on that.

You didn't choose this horrible, horrible condition. But you get to choose how to live with it; you have to choose how to live with it."

We all get dealt cards. Some of us get better cards than others. And while it is easy to get hung up on our cards, and feel screwed over, the real game lies in the choices we make with those cards, the risks we decide to take, the consequences we choose to live with. People who consistently make the best choices in the situations they are given are the ones who eventually come ahead in poker, just as in life. And it's not necessarily the people with the best cards.

Victimhood Chic

The responsibility/fault fallacy allows people to pass off the responsibility for solving their problems to others. This ability to alleviate responsibility through blame gives people a temporary high and a feeling of moral righteousness.

People get addicted to feeling offended all the time because it gives them a high; being self-righteous and morally superior feels good.

There is No “How”

Do or do not; there is no how. You are already choosing, in every moment of every day, what to give fuck about, so change is as simple as choosing to give a fuck about something else. It's really that simple. It's just not that easy.

You're going to feel uncertain; I guarantee it. “Should I really give this up? Is this the right thing to do?” This is hard, but it's normal.

Next, you'll feel like a failure. This is also normal and also uncomfortable.

And certainly you will weather rejections.