

Essentialism in Life

How to create focused and better life habits

OVERVIEW

Economists have defined most people as Consumers in the global economy, and by that definition, it's an individual's job to make choices on what they consume to live a fulfilling life. But do they know how to make those choices? Without an explicit strategy, the individual becomes another cog in the economic machine swayed by others who use them to earn themselves money or gain power.

How does someone get from being pushed by momentum and others to actively making choices that benefit them? Start by clearing life's overfull plate and begin refilling it with only what really truly matters. This course starts with the building block theories behind this process and introduces the techniques used to put each person back into the driver's seat again in their lives.

Unlike more traditional learning materials such as a book or a recorded classroom lecture, this course is structured in 5 to 20-minute videos paired with an accompanying exercise for the learner to perform over the course of a week. Recognizing a shift in our modern-day ability to focus and learn, this structure has the advantages of:

- Videos lengths that don't require large blocks of time or are too long that the viewer's attention span drifts away ([Time Magazine, 2015](#)).
- Content within each video is straight to the point without filler normally associated with long lectures or books to reach a word count and include animations, bold colors, and professional voiceovers to keep the viewer engaged and not lose their attention.
- Exercises to practice and the space to practice in between each video to form habits through repetition over weeks or months.
- Exercises designed to be cumulative in nature to build momentum and not have difficulty spikes.
- The ability to quickly go back to specific exercises and lectures to refresh their memory.

This course extracts many of the key points and exercises from its source books, whom by nature don't have a structure that lends itself to the reader practicing the knowledge within them. They may include history, stories, and the rationale of why a reader should believe their positions and build excitement. However, summaries of next steps or directions that translate to readers lives are few and far between.

This course is an attempt to make a "cliff notes" for a portfolio of books and their concepts, but also tied together in a cohesive whole and in a specific order that builds on each prior concept. There are also natural points of integration for technology to augment the success rate of each reader to absorb and act on what they are learning.

TARGET MARKET

Primary market: Self-Help Readers

This course is in the self-help category and appeals to learners who feel that they overwhelmed by the number of things they "must do" in life and that their lives are no longer under their control. They have been trying to work faster, harder, and smarter but nothing seems to be improving.

This learner is well-educated and has done their own research to try to get out of the never-ending cycle. They have already read other self-help books that claim “one trick” will change things, or that this “popular habit is the key to success” but have trouble making it a routine part of their daily lives. They subscribe to articles or podcasts that are written or produced by others who have gone down the same journey and come out the other end somehow as free in the hope that they might glean some critical nugget to implement in their own lives. Despite all this effort, they are stuck in the same motions.

- **Age group:** 25-65 years old with some work experience and still with active careers
- **Income bracket:** likely to be middle to higher income individuals and are mildly successful in their careers. This gives them an abundance of choices for their short and long-term, and this leads them to feel overwhelmed, overworked, and decision fatigued.
- **Demographic info:** English-speaking, had formal education at the college level, the majority of will be women. (The course will be closed-caption for those where English is a second-language).

Possible market size from [Self Improvement Industry Statistics](#):

- An overall value of \$11 billion, growing 5.5% each year
- Books sales of \$776 million or ~35 million copies
- Audiobook sales of \$455 million delivered to 24 million Americans
- 18,000 life coaches in America, globally \$2.4 billion each year

Other statistics about products in the Self-Help category related to the topics covered in this book:

- The most popular self-help podcast on [Player.FM](#) has 200,000 subscribers which are 1/5th of the most popular podcast of all or ranked #26
- The [most popular self-help books](#) ever:
 1. **Think and Grow Rich (1937)** – personal finance: 70 million copies
 2. **Rich Dad, Poor Dad (1997)** – personal finance: 26 million copies
 3. **The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (1989)**– routine: 20 million copies
 4. **The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up (2015)** – decluttering: 10 million copies
 5. [4 Hour Work Week \(2007\)](#) – routine: 1.3 million copies

Secondary market: Professionals in Mental Health

This course also targets therapists, coaches, or counselors who want their clients to be able to self-pace learn and build critical skills such as awareness, mental and physical resilience, and other supporting processes that accrue to a more grounded person. This allows the professionals to have more effective one-on-one sessions and work through more root cause problems, making greater progress in a shorter period of time and increasing their success rate. They may seek out this course themselves or their institution may recommend it to them to enhance their work.

There are estimated to be around 468,000 professionals in this audience:

- 18,000 life coaches in America (above)
- BLS.gov 260,000 substance abuse, behavior disorder, and mental health counselors
- BLS.gov 42,000 marriage and family therapists
- BLS.gov 148,000 clinical, counseling, and school psychologists

AUTHOR BIO

Eugene has been researching the necessary individual habit changes required to create system-level life changes in people to boost productivity and self-actualization in individuals as part of his MBA program at Presidio Graduate School. In his project, he has been exploring pedagogy, habit development and retention, mindfulness techniques, and frameworks for prioritizing life and organizational decisions. He believes that to achieve changes in a person, foundational habits must be developed through small and cumulative steps. Only by developing these foundational habits can sustainable lifestyles become automatic let alone self-actualization or impact outside of career progression be achieved.

Eugene has experience in creating onboarding materials, training, and facilitating groups of high-performing and globally-diverse finance professionals at Microsoft. He has seen the increasing level of distraction from technology and decline of willpower to learn new things even if advantageous to the longer-term performance or career success of the individual. Eugene has also been following the literature on habits since 2013, and he hopes to shift the baseline from always-distracted and stressed to clear, calm, and resilient.

MARKETING PLAN

Udemy Mini-Course

Eugene expects to launch this course on Udemy in smaller-format as a teaser to the full course, focused mainly on the introduction module and the first modules in the Focusing Your Mind section. This will allow learners to get a sense of the content and its format before diving head-first into the remaining seven modules. This will also allow for user feedback on what works and doesn't work well so the final course can be adjusted for any best practices or blockers.

Association with Presidio Graduate School

Eugene graduated from Presidio Graduate School in 2019 and maintains close ties with the school's administration. Again, there are opportunities for co-marketing as both the course and the school's class work have some overlap in the target audience:

- Have Presidio Graduate School use the course as material in its own classes, likewise, promote specific classes that they offer as extensions of the course.
- Have Presidio Graduate School spotlight the course as being created by one of their alumni in their alumni spotlight newsletter as well as their blog/social media activity.
- Offer to refer learners who take the course to apply to Presidio Graduate School for their MBA/MPA degree programs as an extension of the final module in the course.

Leverage Personal Network

Eugene has worked at Microsoft in their finance team for 13 years, and in his most recent role oversees designing curriculum and collaboration strategy for a globally-based group of 80 people. In this role, he supports the global sales CFO from a day-to-day basis and sees the need across the broader finance organization of over 3,000 people for concepts in this course. He will work with the learning and development lead for the broader team to recommend or implement this course for the broader organization as both development materials and an employee benefit (collaborating with HR).

Eugene also has several life coaches and executive coaches in his network and will work with them to offer this course to their clients and tap into broader influence on others in this secondary market. He will also

leverage them to provide feedback on the course and what can be improved to better suit their needs as coaches to create additional value (see the Length & Special Features section).

(Future) Tie-in with Ruminare Games

Eugene is also a co-founder of Ruminare Games, whose mission is to create games that through play teach concepts such as decluttering, nutrition, etc. Some of these topics have overlap or synergy with the course and will naturally lend themselves to co-marketing.

Examples include partnering to promote the course in materials that Ruminare Games distributes with its games either directly in the box or on their website. Likewise, allowing Ruminare Games to reference some of the course materials directly in their game design and pamphlets, creating a teaser for players to taking the full course.

COMPETITION

Essentialism in Life is a course that summarizes the key parts of many of these books, therefore isn't directly in competition with them.

Greg McKeown, [Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less](#), Currency, 2014, 272 pages, 1,497 reviews on Amazon.com

The book proposes the framework of Essentialism by providing many short stories around its key tenants and written in the style of other popular readers such as those by Malcolm Gladwell. While heavy on good stories and quotes, it is light on the actual tactics to implement its overarching principle on an aspect of day-to-day life. The closest it comes to this is during the chapter around how to say no eight different ways but doesn't run through more than one situation from beginning to end or offer a counter-example when saying yes was the right option. Readers need more examples or exercises in their own lives to really internalize the concepts evangelized in the book.

Chade-Meng Tan, [Search Inside Yourself: The Unexpected Path to Achieving Success, Happiness \(and World Peace\)](#), HarperOne, 2012, 288 pages, 352 reviews on Amazon.com

The book is a blend between storytelling the author's own journey and an instruction manual on how to mediate effectively. It tells the author's backstory of how he became convinced meditation was key to unlocking happiness and his mission to evangelism meditation within Google and more broadly. Throughout this greater narrative, it introduces meditation exercises that are well articulated and broken up into manageable pieces. While a good read, if the reader wants to go back and revisit the exercises, they need to navigate through the different portions of story and exercises that are interwoven (and nearly impossible to do in the audiobook version).

Marie Kondo, [The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing](#), Ten Speed Press, 2014, 224 pages, 14,213 reviews on Amazon.com, 10M copies sold

The book mainly focuses on how to declutter and keep tidy the home. It blends some backstory to how the author became fascinated with decluttering, and in detail describes her method of 1) envisioning success 2) discarding with a high-bar for keeping items 3) maintaining the decluttered state. The limitation with this book is that the project of decluttering is a huge time commitment that requires an intentional mindset and frequent referencing back to the book. Many readers will likely read the book in its entirety before starting their project, and without the instructions provided in chunks will end up being overwhelmed and give up part-way. The book also describes some stories of

people whose lives have been changed by decluttering but provides no follow-up instructions for the reader to further explore any insights they glean through the decluttering process.

Steven Pressfield, [The War of Art: Break Through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles](#), 2012, 192 pages, 3,291 reviews

The book is a collection of the author's point of view and personal stories on how he overcame his personal resistance and became a best-selling author. Typical of a semi-autobiography, there are a lot of personal backstories that tries to persuade the reader of the validity of his argument peppered with some core concepts and ways to apply them. There is no organized takeaway list of things readers can change in their lives to become more creative; instead, they need to reread the chapters of the book and find these tips buried within. Also, the author's writing style intentionally tries to be provocative which may turn off readers looking just for recommendations.

Steven R. Covey, [The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change](#), 1989, Free Press, 432 pages, 5,505 reviews

The book is one of the original self-help books discussing "Habits" which can also be considered attitudes. Its habits include: be proactive, begin with the end in mind, put first things first, think win-win, seek first to understand, synergize, and sharpen the saw. All of these are described with stories and each one ends with some ways to practice each of them. These include some envisioning exercises, journaling, and more. Its limitation is mainly on how generic its concepts are (similar but better than Essentialism) so may feel far away from the reader in their daily lives. Overall though, this book for its time is quite balanced for a popular self-help book.

OUTLINE

See Course Syllabus for more details on lectures and exercises.

Module 1: Introduction (5 lectures, four knowledge checks)

This module covers the four concepts that are key to understanding the overarching theme of the course. First, habit theory is covered including identifying habits, formation, substitution, and how the course is structured to take advantage of this science. Second, decluttering as broadly defined is covered as a counterbalance to feeling constantly overwhelmed by the volume of things/tasks/relationships/etc. in life. Next, mindfulness is introduced in with a short history lesson leading to the science of how it works and its benefits on the mind including building emotional resilience, enhancing creativity, and even preventing dementia. Finally, Essentialism is introduced as a framework for decision-making for all aspects of our lives, from how we treat our bodies, spend our resources, choose our careers, and become masters of our own talents. The module wraps up with an overview of the remaining modules in the course.

Focusing Your Mind

These next four modules are foundational for the rest of the course by building mental strength from within and removing any clutter that is within the learner's direct control, creating space for change.

Module 2: Mindfulness (13 lectures with 13 exercises)

This module guides the learner through the foundations of meditation. It begins by explaining how meditation is like going to the gym to strengthen the "muscle" in your mind and reviews some of the recent science of its benefits. Then, it explains step-by-step a basic sitting meditation and prompts the learner to slowly build in additional components (intention-setting, breathing, posture, longer

times) and eventually creating a robust 20 minute a day habit. It also introduces other meditations such as walking, conversation, body scan, and SBNRR that can be added to the learner's toolkit. Finally, it introduces journaling as a written form of mindfulness in both a short daily form and a longer self-assessment form that is leveraged later in Module 10.

Module 3: Decluttering Your Living Space (15 lectures with 15 exercises)

This module covers the decluttering and tidying of the learner's living space in two sections: a seven-lesson long project to step-by-step declutter followed by a seven-lesson section to build a tidying habit. It starts with a brief introduction on how living with clutter creates unconscious anxiety and how decluttering can help reduce the anxiety and be an opportunity for personal reflection on what mattered in the past/what matters in the present. Then, step-by-step the learner is guided on how to methodically declutter their home starting from easier-to-discard clothes, books, and more until finally finishing with the most difficult-to-do sentimental items resulting in a first pass cleaning of their home. Once this is complete, tidying is introduced as a series of habits that are designed to keep the living space clean without needing periodic large-scale cleaning. Four lessons explain the details for folding, filing, organizing, and more and each time asks the learner to practice. Finally, a lesson covers how to dispose of the items that were decluttered earlier and wraps with a lesson on how to buy things more intentionally, eventually creating a steady-state tidy home.

Module 4: Digital & Information Decluttering (11 lectures with 11 exercises)

This module covers the decluttering of the learner's digital things and social media presence and how to be intentional of what new information enters their lives through digital means. It starts with a brief introduction of the effects of digital clutter and information overload have on the brain including procrastination and distraction. Then like physical decluttering, the first lessons are in a project format going step-by-step to declutter digital files/locations, devices, task lists, and methods of intake (emails, social media accounts, news feeds, etc.) weighing factors such as importance to one's workflow/goals versus ability to provide a distraction. After this is complete, the next lessons cover methods for keeping the learner's digital life from re-developing clutter including archiving information periodically, assigning only specific times for certain digital tasks to batch process, creating digital/information-free time and space in life to give the mind time to rest. Finally, the last lesson covers how to intentionally introduce new information channels in without upsetting the balance. The end result is less but more relevant information around the learner while freeing up space for other activities.

Module 5: Daily Routine (12 lectures with 12 exercises)

This module covers how to examine one's daily routine and then adjust aspects to enhance the ability to rest & recover, be productive, and allow creativity to surface. It starts with a brief introduction to the power of routines as related to habits and the body's physical/mental cycles and how shifting where and when things are done can improve their effectiveness. Next, it guides the learner through self-assessing their current routines over the course of a week. Taking this as a basis, it then introduces the science and best practices around how to arrange key habits such as sleep, meal times, breaks, walking, information processing, leisure, meditation, strenuous exercise, chores, etc. Finally, it wraps up with some examples of complete routines of different categories and explains the benefits of each to help the learner make final tweaks to their own. The result is a mostly-tuned daily routine with some free space that the learner can leverage while integrating new tasks in the future modules as desired without overloading themselves.

Focusing Your Surroundings

These next four modules cover the learner's broader sphere of influence and similarly remove the clutter and focus each area to achieve

Module 6: Physical Health (15 lectures, 15 exercises)

This module covers the four aspects of maintaining good physical health: nutrition, physical movement, recovery time, and mental resilience. It starts with a brief introduction to these four areas and how they intersect in terms of energy levels, cognitive capacity, physical strength, and aging citing the latest science on these topics. Then, there are several lessons on nutrition including understanding the learner's current eating habits, highlighting what nutrients are key to add or reduce in the standard diet, and then adjusting over time the learner's eating plan to their personal desired levels. Next, there are several lessons on physical movement that profile the learner's current routine, introduces different low-intensity, high-intensity, and strength-building activities and explain how to balance between them and suggest how to integrate them into the daily routine previously created. Then, there are several lessons on recovery particularly sleep and different forms of leisure, giving tips for more effective relaxation and sorting through the benefits and limitations of different forms of rest. Finally, the module wraps with a few lessons on additional mental resilience practices on top of meditation including gratitude training, optimism training, and other situational exercises. These are all integrated into the previous module's daily routine to prevent overloading the learner with too many changes to track without structure.

Module 7: Personal Finances (11 lectures, 11 exercises)

This module covers how to think about personal finances to meet both short-term and long-term goals. It starts with a brief introduction to how wise management of finances can mitigate risks in life while also providing a boost for family, career, and retirement goals. The next lessons then take the learner through creating a profile of their current financial picture, sizing the potential risks in their life (job loss, health issues, etc.), and dreamlining the goals they may have (college education, retirement, starting a small business, vacation). After the overall picture is captured, the lessons begin to cover the fundamentals of personal financial management: how to create and stick to a budget, how to create an emergency fund, how to pay off debt, how to invest savings for the short-term, and how to plan for retirement. The final lessons cover future hypothetical situations paired with knowledge checks: what to consider when taking on new debt, how to reduce monthly spend, etc.

Module 8: Career (11 lectures, 11 exercises)

This module covers how to profile one's current situation and begin to plan a career over a lifetime and subdivide portions into distinct stages. It starts with a brief introduction to careers: separating the individual from the organization they work in, how this changes the usual priorities around career, and introduces the concept of "Tour of Duty" as popularized by LinkedIn. The next lessons guide the learner through profiling their strengths and gaps, creating a Win List, and effectively writing a resume. After the current state is captured, the focus switches to expanding the learner's network and career perspectives; lessons on how to join professional associations, choosing and setting up a mentor relationship, and becoming a mentor themselves (if applicable) are covered. Finally, the module wraps up with lessons on how to find and what to look for in a new job, how to set expectations with the boss on what each side expects during the "Tour of Duty", and how to appropriately move between jobs without burning bridges.

Module 9: Relationships (11 lectures, 11 exercises)

This module covers the variety of relationships each of us has in life and how to better manage them. It starts with a brief introduction to the types of relationships and common tensions. The next lesson then guides the learner through creating a relationship inventory, followed by a lesson on the different styles of support that relationships are founded on and profiling the inventory. After the baseline is established, there are a few lessons covering important relationship tools such as having a difficult conversation, negotiation, setting boundaries, deep listening, acceptance of flaws, and being supportive in the right way. The final lessons ask the learner to envision the type of relationship they want with each person and then covers when to end a relationship/strategy for doing so tactfully.

Focusing Your Intentions

The next four lessons aim to expand the learner's horizons to more self-actualization and freedom from normal boundaries of society's expectations.

Module 10: Values and Strengths (7 lectures, 7 exercises)

This module covers how to discover and articulate personal values, strengths, and sources of energy. It starts with a brief introduction to the Designing Your Life framework developed at Stanford. Then, the next few lessons guide the learner through creating a current report of themselves (life/work/play/love), understanding their view of what work means and life means, and journaling what activities in their life keep them engaged and gives them energy. Then, the lessons drill in deeper on developing a list of values and articulating the learner's strengths (via. Strengthsfinder) and wrap up by creating an integrated view of the learner's current life.

Module 11: Future-casting (8 lectures, 8 exercises)

This module covers how to leverage the previous module's deep-dive to create different scenarios for future lifestyles. It starts with a brief introduction to two tools used in design thinking: mind maps and prototyping. The next lesson then covers how to create mind maps from the journaled activities from the previous module, selecting the most interesting combinations as potential lifestyles to prototype. Then, several lessons cover building out five-year plans from each of these combinations, how to evaluate the plans using the values and strengths list developed earlier and figuring out opportunities for micro-testing each of these plans. Finally, the last lesson wraps up by connecting the plans back to previous modules that may be affected such as personal finances, career, and relationships.

Module 12: Creativity & Becoming A Professional (8 lectures, 8 exercises)

This module covers how to create routines and internal beliefs that amplify creativity. This follows the Future-casting module rather than being integrated into the Daily Routine module as it assumes time is needed for the initial changes in made in the learner's routine to sink in and that without a strong self-actualization goal formed there is less drive to take the risks associated with being more creative. The module starts with a brief introduction to what creativity is and isn't and what tends to get in the way. The next lesson is on resistance: identifying its many forms and having the learner go through an exercise to identify the forms of resistance in their life. The next few lessons cover strategies for breaking through resistance by having the mindset of a professional, including setting dedicated times and rules for work, creating habits to allow ideas to flow during the rest of the day, and setting milestones while not being overly concerned with success. The final lessons cover how to focus on

deeper on a territory to allow mastery to flourish, including what defines a territory and questions to determine if a particular territory is fit to pursue.

TIMETABLE

As of Spring 2019, most of the initial research for the course is complete. This includes both the topics that will be covered in the course as well as how it will be delivered so to be most effective for the learner.

The next steps are:

- **Summer 2019:** finish the Course Syllabus and initial lectures in the introductory module
- **Fall 2019:** finish the first group of 4 modules and associated worksheets
- **Winter 2020:** publish the first 4 modules as a Mini-Course on Udemy
- **Spring 2020:** finish the second group of 4 modules and associated worksheets
- **Summer 2020:** finish the final group of 3 modules and associated worksheets
- **Fall 2020:** based on initial feedback from Mini-Course, adjust exercises and lectures as necessary and apply final editing to smooth out content across modules
- **Winter 2021:** publish the full course across a broad range of platforms (Udemy, Coursera, etc.)
- **2021+:** begin work on expanded edition in web and mobile-based formats

LENGTH AND SPECIAL FEATURES

The course will consist of:

- One introductory module consisting of five lectures each 20 minutes (total of 100 minutes)
- Eleven learning modules consisting of 122 lectures each 5-20 minutes long
- Worksheets to accompany the learning modules as needed per lecture

The total recorded course time estimate is approximately 30 hours (assuming 15 minute average lecture time in the learning modules), and 22 worksheets (assuming 2 worksheets per module). On Udemy, this will show up in the form of three courses: introduction plus the first four modules, then the second four modules, and finally the last three modules.

A New Delivery Method

After the creation of the Udemy Mini-Course, a more robust website and companion mobile phone application will be created to house a more custom-version of the course that allows for higher success through gamification. This will include:

- A custom avatar and profile created by each learner accompanied by envisioning exercises for outcomes for completing the entire course.
- Ability to invite friends onto the platform to track their progress (with or without creating their own avatar) in a branching tree view, and allow for basic functions to cheer each other on when progress is made. Also the ability to create pairs to jointly go through a module together and prompts to discuss progress and challenges with each other.
- A mobile application that reminds learners to complete a new lesson after a certain amount of time, allows lessons to be viewed and tracking of exercise repetitions and progress on the go (removing the blocker for some people of returning to their computer or carrying paper worksheets).

- Online versions of all worksheets that keep a learner's information and allows them to recall at any time, kept private to the user unless explicitly shared with others.
- Translation into multiple languages not normally offered in the regular course to assist those where English is a second language and/or expand to new markets.
- Referrals to partner services around meditation, decluttering, etc. that go more in-depth than the course intends to offer but are not at all required to complete the course.
- Success and failure rates at each particular point of the course can be better monitored to improve overall course design that could not be seen on Udemy.
- Ability to continue reminding and tracking habits for completed courses (with decreasing check-in's over time) to assess if a previous module should be revisited as a refresher.

Premium features could include:

- Teacher-tools that allow them to manage multiple learners and track their progress; could be used in a classroom or a team setting.
- Extensions of modules into fully-fledged tools such as meditation timers, HIT and strength routines, nutrition tracking, etc.
- A virtual coach that helps with some modules such as career, values & strengths, future-casting.
- Mentor and network-related tools that leverage the career, values & strengths selections to filter a person's LinkedIn network for the appropriate people to connect with.
- Connection with a wearable device to gauge willpower and recommend certain activities or hold off on starting new ones to improve success rates.