

LAURA FALCES & ULI MORENO MONTANA

You're Going to Die and You Haven't Started Living Yet



Timeless Lessons to Build a Life That Matters

YOU'RE GOING TO DIE AND YOU HAVEN'T STARTED LIVING YET

Timeless Lessons to Build a Life That Matters.

Laura Falces
Uli Moreno Montana

Kairund Books

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Translated from Spanish by Matthew G. Hollander

Developmental editing by Maria D'Marco

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www.lauufaal.com / www.ulimorenomontana.com

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To our younger selves.

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When we come into this world, everyone looks at us with tender eyes,

trying to spot an obvious resemblance to our parents. It makes sense. We came from them.

As we grow up, our parental similarities begin to show up in other ways—not just in our features, but in our temperament, too. This is natural, since most of us are still living under their roof. We become a reflection of what we see and little by little take on traits from the people closest to us: friends, relatives, and teachers, as well as the lessons we're taught and the beliefs we absorb. Our personality becomes a blend of who we are, where we come from, and what we've lived through.

Over the course of our lives, we become the sum of so many things: a staggering accumulation of influences that shapes who we are. But what's truly striking is this: despite our constant interaction with everything around us, we come into this world looking like our parents, and we will leave it shaped by our decisions.

We tend to look at life through a narrow lens, convinced that a few isolated factors are responsible for who we are and for the life we've built. And while those factors do matter, we need to see them in proper perspective, so we don't fall into oversimplification.

Not everything is so black and white. We live amid countless shades of gray. It's not all about money, and it's not all about chance. Someone can be born into a wealthy family and still live with a mind wired for anxiety—or grow up in poverty and have the kind of mind that can shine.

Life is like poker: the winner isn't the one who gets the best hand, but the one who plays best with the hand they're dealt. If life were only about being dealt good cards, people who win the lottery wouldn't end up broke. And yet it's estimated that 75% of jackpot winners face serious financial

trouble—or even bankruptcy—within three to five years of receiving the prize.

So, becoming the person we want to be doesn't depend only on having good cards. It depends on our ability to play the ones we get. Does that mean the cards don't matter? Not at all. It means we focus on what depends on us: how we play them. Not on what we can't control, which is which cards we're dealt.

A man once interviewed twin brothers—one an alcoholic, the other a non-drinker. When he asked the first, "Why have you struggled with alcohol?" The brother replied, "Because my father was an alcoholic." He then asked the second brother: "Why haven't you struggled with alcohol?" And his answer was exactly the same: "Because my father was an alcoholic."

There will always be a reason to justify both success and failure. Clinging to a single belief will close more doors than recognizing that our compass to living a better, more meaningful life lies in our values and decisions.

And in the end, we'll end up looking like our decisions.

Some estimates suggest we make around 35,000 decisions a day. As surprising as that sounds, that number includes everything—from conscious decisions to unconscious ones, from the important to the trivial. From which socks we feel like wearing, what to study or who to share our time with to whether to put our last dollar toward a new home, stay in our current job or get divorced.

All of those decisions, taken together, have shaped the person we've become.

To know whether we're on the right path, we only need to imagine walking into a room and finding our younger self waiting for us. They know our story and they watch us come closer, little by little. What would they think the moment they saw us? What would their first impression be? Would they like what they see, knowing what they know? Not just our appearance, but the way we walk, the look in our eyes, our smile, our gestures.

Then, even though they already know it, we tell them our story: everything we've been through. Would they trust us if they needed help? Would we be the right person to offer advice? If they needed someone to spend a good day with, would we be a good choice?

When we're done, they decide to tag along and spend a day with us. But not a special day—just an ordinary one. Routine. Would they enjoy it? Would they think it's worth growing up and becoming us?

The art of making our younger selves feel proud of who we are now is a lifelong journey, one where each day gives us the chance to prove to ourselves that we're still moving forward, still growing, and, above all, still trying.

As we reflect on what we've built, we'll inevitably notice moments when we didn't make the best choices. Decisions that once felt right, we now see differently. Mistakes that weigh more than they should.

But we can't move forward if we stay anchored to what could have been. Looking back honestly and facing what didn't turn out the way we hoped takes courage, but it can also create a weight we can't carry forever. Acknowledging our mistakes doesn't mean living trapped inside them. It means turning them into lessons that light the way forward.

Forgiving ourselves for what didn't go as we hoped is part of the process: for the decisions we made with what we knew at the time, for the times we fell short of our own expectations, for the failed attempts, and for the wrong turns. Accepting that we did the best we could with the tools and perspective we had back then is the first step toward growing and learning.

Living better and building a life that matters begins with a clear commitment: letting go of what we can't change anymore and starting today to build what we hope to see the next time we look back.

The problem is that we often believe changing our lives requires us to set off on some grand journey, stumble into a revelation, or discover the secret somewhere out there. Meanwhile, life slips through our fingers. And the worst part isn't that, sooner or later, we're going to die—it's dying without ever having started living.

Waiting for our lives to change on their own is handing them over to a world we can't control, while ignoring everything that does depend on us.

If we don't decide what we believe, someone will decide for us. If we don't solve our own problems, we'll end up relying on others to solve them. If we aren't clear on who we are, we'll become whatever everyone else expects. When the path isn't ours, the destination we want won't be, either. The herd takes us where the herd wants to go—not where we want to go.

In this book, you'll discover 29 timeless lessons, each ending with a principle to help you live better and build a life that matters. They'll push you to make better decisions and grow as a person, so your future doesn't depend only on your circumstances.

Don't rush. This isn't a book you're meant to read quickly, or devour in a burst of anxious urgency. Read one or two chapters a day, and give yourself time to sit with them.

Each chapter has its own structure, so you could even read them out of order, though we recommend going one by one. It's a short book, but it's full of ideas that need time to settle and be reflected on. If you really want to get the most out of it, take your time.

This isn't a novel or an essay, but 29 chapters designed to bring awareness to the most important parts of your life: self-knowledge and mental health, purpose, relationships, the habits you build, your relationship with money, critical thinking, stress management, productivity, and fulfillment at work.

At the end of the book, you'll find out how to receive The Life That Matters Challenge—a tool we've prepared with guidance and practical exercises to help you make decisions that move you closer to a fulfilling life.

May this book become your closest ally in a world that seems to have lost its way. May it help you forge your compass. May it bring you light in the dark. So that, instead of being dragged along, you find your path and build the most valuable thing you have: your own life.

These pages won't change your life for you, but they will help you become the one who does.

LAURA & ULI, May 2025

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1.

The Only Place That Gives Our Lives Meaning

Human beings are the only species capable of a conscious relationship with themselves. We spend more time talking to ourselves than with anyone else. We're the one we need most, criticize the most, demand the most from, and avoid the most. So why don't we take better care of ourselves, if it's the only relationship we'll have every second of our lives?

We can change cities, jobs, even partners—but there's one place no one can escape: the inner world we live in every day. Ourselves.

If we don't learn to feel at home in our own skin, no environment, no relationship, no circumstance will ever give us the fulfillment we keep looking for in them. We're the only place our lives can find meaning. Without us, we wouldn't be here.

| *One* | Silence isn't something we need to run from—it's the best place to find ourselves.

In silence, when distractions fade and there are no excuses left to hide behind, we begin to hear what we need, what scares us, and what we truly want. Only then, when we give it time, do we start to understand why we feel the way we feel.

But sitting with silence isn't always easy. Connecting with the calm (or the fire) inside us can feel more uncomfortable than joining the chaos outside. We're so used to noise: endless to-do lists, the constant feeling of being busy. When everything stops, we feel exposed.

And to avoid that discomfort, we reach for a thousand little fixes: we chase distractions and make plans, constantly running away from ourselves.

It's our way of filling the emptiness, of drowning out what's screaming inside us, begging to be heard.

When an overload of outside stimulation becomes our identity, we lose touch with who we really are. To stop constantly running from ourselves, we have to allow ourselves time alone. If we can't stand those moments, if they unsettle us so much that we avoid them, we'll stay trapped, always searching for the next way out.

But where would we go? We're the one destination we can never escape, no matter how hard we try to fill our emptiness with distractions. Whatever we do, we always end up right back where we started.

***I Two* | To make other people our only anchor is to fear the open sea.**

Human beings are social by nature. We need one another for everything: to grow, to lean on each other, to learn, to give our lives meaning. In short, we need each other to survive.

But in that context, having and enjoying some independence doesn't mean isolating ourselves or cutting off the people around us. It means our well-being and our decisions don't always depend on them, exclusively.

It means learning to be our own foundation, our own leader: someone able to think and act for themselves. It's having extra room to grow, not a place from which we simply do what everyone else would do. It's space to strengthen our mental clarity and our decision-making.

When we find that balance between being with ourselves and being with others, our environment becomes a more conscious and less dependent choice.

***I Three* | Our relationship with ourselves is forged with tools.**

Learning to be okay with ourselves doesn't happen by accident. It takes effort, practice, and, above all, the right tools and resources to handle whatever comes. Without those tools, life becomes a ship without a compass, and any setback can leave us feeling lost.

To understand ourselves, we first have to learn to listen. Most of the time, asking the right questions isn't intuitive, and it doesn't come out of nowhere. It's a skill we build over time.

Reading, reflecting, walking in silence as we listen to our thoughts, getting lost in an ocean of music, or pouring our words onto the page are all ways of creating the kind of environment that helps us find the clarity to understand who we are and what we need in order to move forward.

And to move forward, we'll need to take care of the body that carries us. If it starts to fail, if the foundation it rests on begins to wobble, it becomes much harder to thrive.

| *Four* | Breaking the habit of sinking—so we can start rising.

It's almost automatic for us to criticize ourselves, to blame ourselves, to point out everything we think we lack.

But strangely, what we do so easily to sink ourselves is something we rarely do to lift ourselves up. Sometimes we're the ones who treat ourselves the worst—especially in times when we're not doing well.

Too often, we look at others with more compassion than we give ourselves. It's as if we hold ourselves to a harsher standard, as if we had no right to make mistakes.

We rarely know how to tell ourselves we're doing a good job, to acknowledge our small victories, or to notice when we look good. No one can fill that emptiness unless we start building the habit of treating ourselves with the same kindness we'd give to someone we love.

| *Five* | Choosing yourself feels uncomfortable, but it's necessary.

The person we want to become is a work in progress. And like any change, it involves leaving things behind. There will be people, relationships, places, and habits that no longer fit who we're starting to become, and letting go of them won't always be easy. Choosing yourself won't always feel comfortable, but it's necessary—it's the starting point for any real change. Every goodbye, every step we take that aligns with who we are, moves us closer to a more authentic life—one with less noise and more purpose.

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PRINCIPLE 1

No one can move forward if they forget themselves.

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2.

The Promise We Were Sold and We Bought Without a Second Thought

We live in the most comfortable era in human history: more progress, more resources, more convenience than anyone in the past could have imagined. What previous generations would have called a luxury is, for most of us, simply normal. And yet we've never felt so empty. The paradox is obvious: the more we have, the more we want.

We've forgotten how to live because we're too busy acting it out. Life slips away while we obsessively chase whatever we think will make us happy, without even knowing for sure what that is. In that endless race, we stop paying attention to the foundations of real well-being, because we've fallen into the trap of believing (wrongly) that happiness is a treasure we're meant to find.

***I One* | The endless pursuit of happiness.**

The pursuit of happiness is one of the most powerful stories human beings have ever told—especially today. We've come to believe it's waiting at a destination, like a prize you're handed once you cross a finish line. But in that tireless chase, we forget what matters.

We become almost desperate to find the one answer that explains everything, to discover the secret that finally gives us meaning, to locate that “something” that will fill us with constant joy—believing that only then will we feel whole. And while the desire itself is understandable (even seductive), it's also unrealistic because our nature isn't built for permanent happiness. It's built for survival.

Still, the messages we absorb every day keep feeding that fantasy: “You deserve to be happy. You have to be happy.” But happiness is a moment, not a permanent state. Chasing it obsessively pulls us away from what truly matters and sabotages our well-being. A steadier place of balance, satisfaction, and inner peace isn’t a destination, but a way we live.

| Two | We haven’t learned to be okay with who we are, because everything around us keeps telling us we’re not enough.

We’re always carrying the feeling that something is missing and then, right away, we’re shown the solution to fill that gap. That’s how consumer culture works: the same system that points out your flaws is the one that sells you the fix. All under the same roof. And there’s no better customer than a person who feels perpetually dissatisfied. Desperation creates very profitable opportunities.

Everything around us is built to tempt our brains with the promise of relief, even if it’s temporary. And when the brain keeps getting that promise of well-being from the outside, it stops working to create relief from within through everyday experiences or real changes in our lifestyle that help us reach it.

Over time, we grow numb to the small things that used to make us feel good and we lose the drive to pursue the kind of change that could bring it back. We start to believe the answer is out there, not in here.

The more attention we give to these messages, the harder it becomes to feel okay on our own, and the more dependent we become on the very things that are harming us. What promises to give us happiness slowly takes away our ability to feel it and pushes us to look for it in places where it isn’t.

The problem with this model is that it’s built on (and fueled by) offering so-called solutions outside of us, taking advantage of our first impulse to avoid the effort of changing a situation.

Why would someone fight for their marriage if they have pornography, sex toys, social media “likes”, or other things that promise to numb that void? And it’s the same with everything: we get used to it, we settle, because there’s always a quick fix—right now, instantly.

Nothing is more dangerous than a false sense of comfort.

Settling for what doesn't truly fill us—a job without purpose, a relationship without love, an environment that isn't good for us, even if it isn't crushing us, is slowly making us stop fighting for something better. We lose the autonomy needed to create well-being for ourselves. That's how complacency becomes a life sentence: the longer you stay in it, the harder it is to leave, and the more you try to cover it with things that, in the end, aren't really in your control.

If liposuction didn't exist, maybe we'd be more careful about what we eat. If smartphones didn't exist, maybe we'd spend more time talking to the person right next to us, to work through our differences. If anti-aging creams didn't exist, maybe we'd exercise more. Maybe if we didn't have so many quick fixes, we'd make different decisions, ones that could give us sustainable, long-term results that are, without a doubt, far more real and far more lasting.

| *Three* | The pressure to be okay all the time, and learning not to be.

With so many solutions offered for everything that seems “wrong” with us, we start to believe that life should feel good all the time. But our biology isn't designed for that—not even close. Our evolution demands that we stay alert, spot threats, and respond in ways that protect us. The ultimate purpose of our wiring is to keep us alive, not to make us feel good all the time.

That's why discomfort, restlessness, and even sadness are completely normal. They're how our biology pushes us to adapt and respond to the challenges around us. These feelings are our most basic form of inner communication. The problem begins when we interpret them as mistakes (something that must be fixed at any cost). That ideal is not only unreachable; it goes against our nature. Happiness, joy, and even well-being aren't permanent states—they're temporary outcomes of a period of successful adaptation. They show up when we adapt well and do what we need to improve our chances of survival.

Accepting that we can't (and don't have to) be happy all the time is learning to live with who we are. Instead of resisting discomfort, we can see it as a signal to check whether there's something we need to change—or as an invitation to slow down, reflect, and reconnect with what matters. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said: “To be yourself in a world that is constantly trying to make you something else is the greatest accomplishment.”

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PRINCIPLE 2

*Happiness isn't a destination you reach,
but a consequence of how you live*

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3.

The Nine Pillars to Avoid Your Collapse

The search for well-being through a model built on external solutions to our internal problems is appealing—of course it is.

Who wouldn't want to wipe out their suffering with a harmless pill and no side effects? Who wouldn't want to pull out their wallet, hand over a few bills, and buy a life of fulfillment? Or earn a little extra money by tapping a few buttons on their phone?

In reality, none of that exists. Anything that promises what we want without directly addressing the root is an illusion. No product can deliver perfect balance and fix everything a person hasn't resolved within themselves.

Instead of daydreaming and giving our attention to promises that claim results like that, or obsessively chasing an irrational happiness in places where it isn't, we can step back and reflect on nine core pillars of well-being—the essential areas of life that directly shape our mental health, inner balance, and sense of well-being—and look honestly at the role they play in our lives. Only when we see what isn't working (or what's just limping along) does change become possible. When we become aware of what isn't working and do the work to change, we stop looking outside for solutions to issues that need to be worked on from within.

Many of the principles in this book are directly connected to these nine pillars and will help you work on them one by one with greater clarity. To a large extent, their balance determines the quality of our mental health and our sense of well-being. For now, let's take a broad look.

| One | The habit of getting stuck in our heads.

Thinking, evaluating, imagining, creating, solving, reflecting, and rethinking (having a cognitive ability unlike any other living creature) comes with both advantages and downsides.

The upside is that we can hold a device in our hands that connects us with friends thousands of miles away, collapsing distance and even time.

The downside is that we can also anticipate terrible tragedies that will probably never happen, or loop the same negative, irrational thoughts over and over as our inner peace quietly slips away. We're remarkable animals who barely have the faintest idea how our own minds work—let alone how to handle them well. The very capacity that makes us extraordinary can also make us miserable if we keep defaulting to the worst-case scenario.

It's possible that part of that default tendency is written into our personality—simply part of who we are.

Even so, there are tools that can help us channel it in a useful direction, many of which we'll develop in later chapters focused on practical philosophy, behavioral psychology, and applied neuroscience.

And bringing the areas that follow into balance will also help keep this habit from turning again and again into a nightmare that's hard to unravel.

| Two | The relationships we have (and the ones we don't).

For most of our existence, human beings lived in small tribes and tiny settlements, constantly surrounded by others. Anyone who failed at forming connections was doomed—easy prey for any predator. Surviving alone simply wasn't an option. So, building strong social relationships was a fundamental, necessary skill.

In the twenty-first century, we can survive out in the mountains, working for a company based in another country, communicating through screens and meeting our basic needs without moving much at all. But that doesn't mean our human wiring, the same wiring we had fifty thousand years ago, still asks us to connect with other people for our mental health and well-being.

When our need for connection is well met (and we feel satisfied with our social life), our physical and mental health improve, we live longer, and we feel better. Extensive studies have established that people who maintain

strong social relationships and experience them as positive tend to live seven to fifteen years longer than those who feel isolated.

| *Three* | The new (and dangerous) way we live.

Life has changed more in the last two hundred years than it did in the five thousand years before that, which is as positive as it is dangerous. Positive because progress is obvious in almost every area of our existence, giving us lives that are more comfortable and more secure. Dangerous because we haven't adapted to changes this extreme, this fast. The result is a growing disconnect from what makes us human.

Living disconnected from the nature that shaped our evolution, and from the values that come with it (cooperation, love, friendship, the instinct to belong, curiosity, time in natural environments, play, frequent movement, exploration) becomes a problem the moment we pile on values that clash with them.

For example: living indoors in places with no natural light, spending too much of our lives working, or over-prioritizing material things with little real value (expensive clothes, luxury cars, pills, or unrealistic body ideals) while forgetting what matters pulls us away from the deeper values that should guide our lives.

When those deeper values no longer guide our lives, we end up living in a constant biological mismatch: between what our biology needs and what we, as humans in this new era, give it. That mismatch creates discomfort and frustration, which translates into suffering.

| *Four* | Work, where we spend nearly a third of our day.

When we lived in tribes (from hundreds of thousands of years ago until roughly twelve thousand years ago, when agriculture began), we worked for and with our community. The average workday consisted of four or five hours of hunting, gathering and tending the camp. Any remaining time was spent socializing with our tribe. Life came with dangers too, such as predators, infections, and injuries, and we were far more exposed to them.

But today, we don't just work twice as much, we often work three times as much. And the worst part isn't the number of hours, it's spending that time doing tasks we hate, carrying the worries into the other two-thirds of

the day, and living with a lack of purpose. That lack of purpose and satisfaction becomes a massive source of mental health problems. Since at least a third of our day evaporates inside our professional lives, it matters deeply that what we do gives something back to us.

When work becomes a source of problems, it's worth making this area a high priority and starting by identifying what parts of our work actually satisfy us and what parts don't. This way we can focus more on what's working and improve our situation. Learning new skills, fighting for a better role, or building a personal project can be steps that bring us closer to a more meaningful life. And if we fight to improve our professional lives and succeed, we improve overall and live better.

| Five | Status—and the need to feel respected.

Being respected and valued by the people around us (having real status in our community) has nothing to do with driving a Ferrari or living in a penthouse. In fact, chasing status through material things often says more about trying to cover up the absence of solid personal qualities.

Status and perceived respect come from what you contribute and the role you play in your circles: whether you're someone people count on, whether you've built real competence in something, whether people listen to you, seek your opinion, ask for your help, admire you, and value your presence. Feeling like you're at the bottom of the social ladder often breeds inferiority and hopelessness, which can take a real toll on mental health.

It's not about being the best at everything or the most admired person in every room, but about having a meaningful place in certain contexts that strengthens your sense of status and respect.

You can be a go-to person at work, play a role your family deeply respects, and be someone people look up to in a dance group, book club, or basketball team.

Wanting to feel well-positioned somewhere is universal in the animal world and humans are no exception. The logic is simple: those who are ignored and undervalued are more vulnerable. So, investing part of your life in earning respect and building status (whatever the arena) is a valid path to greater well-being. No one wants to be the last one picked. But to get there, you have to develop many sides of who you are.

| Six | Our most common comparisons.

Not long ago, we compared ourselves to what we actually knew—neighbors, friends, family. And in most cases, wanting what someone else had could even become a healthy reason to work for it. The logic was simple: “If this person I know has achieved this, then if I do enough, I can achieve it too.” A kind of admiration that became a spur to action.

But today, our closest comparison is one click away. And under the false feeling that, only a few taps away, there’s someone who has it all while we have nothing even close, we start making comparisons we were never meant to face. Statistics show we now have access to more than five billion people to compare ourselves to. And we do it with standards that are increasingly unusual, extravagant, and exceptional—lives full of masks that, far from giving us a rational picture of what a good life should look like, give us a distorted one that’s hard to measure, one that keeps us trapped and wears us down day after day.

We have to be extremely careful about who we compare ourselves to, what standards we’re using, where those people actually are, and whether they represent a tiny fraction of the population (if they even represent it at all, and aren’t just a complete lie). The harder, rarer, and more unrealistic the comparison, the more unhappy we become.

| Seven | The future—and uncertainty.

Even if our ancestors didn’t know whether a pride of lions would attack the next day or whether heavy rains would force them to migrate dozens of miles in a few months, they still understood that their lives were built around surviving in a world that felt relatively knowable.

Today, more and more people don’t know whether the work they do will last, whether it will stay useful, whether their friends will move to the other side of the globe, whether the studies they’ve poured years into will be obsolete within the next decade, whether their role will be replaced by a machine, whether they’ll be able to build new skills at the pace of modern change—or whether they’ll have to turn themselves into worn-out learning machines, because the moment they master something a massive update arrives.

Dealing with uncertainty (something we’ve always had to wrestle with) is becoming harder and harder, but is certainly not impossible.

In the end, in every era of humanity, the ones who survive are the ones who adapt best to change and adapting to change requires preparation. Wanting to adapt isn't enough. You have to build yourself up for it, which means making continuous personal development part of the living process, so you can handle the uncertainty of the future as one more tool in your belt.

| Eight | The body: the vehicle we live in.

What good is everything else we've discussed so far if the vehicle (our body) we move through life in doesn't work properly? If we don't make time to take care of ourselves, one day we'll be forced to make time to recover. This is where the habits that depend directly on us come in. They slowly wreck the only place we have to live in: drug use (yes, alcohol and tobacco count), overeating, and not moving.

And on that last point, the evidence is clear enough: inactivity and obesity drive a huge share of the health problems we face today—from heart disease and many forms of cancer to depression.

We're living in an era where we're heavier, more inflamed, and sicker than ever, even though we're surrounded by gyms, activities, tips, and "health" advice.

An inflamed body, among other things, can drag your mood down quickly. A worse mood is the perfect environment for the mind to spiral, to get tangled, and to lose the strength it needs to put everything else in order.

Reaching a healthy weight and building a healthy body composition is step one for improving physical health. When the body supports the mind, the road gets smoother for everything else.

Taking care of the vehicle you live in isn't just a nice idea though—it takes knowledge and judgment. And because this subject deserves a deeper, more technical approach, we explore it fully in our book [*Nacidos para estar fuertes*](#) (*Born to Be Strong*).

| Nine | The genes and biology operating inside us.

A lot of people believe they're unhappy because their biology has decided it for them. The reality is that genetic and biological factors interact in an incredibly complex way with a person's life experiences, and research still

debates how that translates into well-being. That's why a good starting point is to look at each of the areas we've discussed so far, one by one, and reflect honestly on them.

The easy move is to blame what's outside our control instead of taking things step by step and creating order where there's chaos. We can't change our genes, but our actions can influence how they're expressed. That's epigenetics.

If we want to suffer less and live better, we have to get to work and create the conditions for our choices to interact with our biology in a healthier direction.

When we go through a rough season, we can write down every area of life that's wobbling (and while we can influence our genes and biology, they work differently from the rest) and work on them one at a time. This takes effort, discipline, patience, and a dose of acceptance—the kind that remembers we might not get exactly what we want. And we can't forget the basics: treating ourselves well, trusting our decisions and staying committed to improving. There's a season for everything, but one thing is clear: if you don't fight, you can't win.

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PRINCIPLE 3

*If you don't build a solid foundation,
you'll end up lost in your own instability.*

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4.

Seemingly Committed, Always About to Start

We're experts at setting goals, defining targets, and naming what we want. We know that getting there requires doing something. We even know we have to start. But we don't. We don't start, and we don't do what we already know we need to do. And even if we can't see the whole path clearly, we still don't lean in the direction we believe could get us closer.

We wait. We wait. And we wait.

We let the days pass until we convince ourselves it's not for us. That we don't know how. That maybe it's better for other people. That the ones who made it were simply in the right place at the right time—and we weren't.

After all, who are we to think we deserve something like that? That even so, it's not easy. That it's better to leave things as they are. That maybe it's better to start some other time.

The reason we don't take action is often hazy and hard to pin down, but the truth is it's a mix of laziness, unease, fear of change, lack of know-how, misplaced priorities, not enough desire, comfort and, in the end, not enough pain.

Change, more often than not, kicks in when the pain of staying where we are becomes greater than the pain of changing. So, change has a lot to do with suffering.

Putting off our purpose only pushes it farther away, while we pour more time into less important things. Every time we postpone, we're casting a vote of confidence in a future that isn't coming. If we wait until we're ready, we'll spend our lives waiting. And when we finally realize it, all we'll have left is the regret of not having started sooner.

| One | We don't need the whole map to move forward—just the next step.

What if, when we're tempted to push to tomorrow what we could start today, we remembered our values and what we want to achieve in life? When the people who achieved what they set out to do began, did they know how to do it the way they do now? Most likely not.

We tend to compare ourselves to their current version, without considering who they were (and what they knew) when they were in our exact situation. The fact that they didn't know then what they know now doesn't mean knowledge isn't important. In many cases, doing matters more: taking the first step.

Starting is half the battle. It's fine to have goals, but to reach them you have to focus on the foundation: small actions. Think big, but start small.

Take the smallest step today, knowing that, even if it feels insignificant, it will point you in the right direction.

| Two | If we're not in the game, we can't win.

Nothing guarantees that our actions will get us to our goals. The only guarantee is that if you're not doing what needs to be done to reach them, you'll never reach them. You might write for years and still never make a living from it, but you definitely won't make a living from writing if you don't write. Our actions tip the scales toward where we want to be. They raise the odds.

Not acting because there are no guarantees is the same as quitting before you start. We can't control the outcome, but we can focus on what's within our control: our actions, the effort we invest, and the time we put in. Let fate handle the rest, even if it's not what we expected.

| Three | Lower our standards and accept failure.

We underestimate how normal it is for things to go wrong, which is why we react so dramatically when they do. We need to accept that no matter which path we take to fight for our goals, we're going to fail and stumble. Guaranteed. We'll never do it perfectly. In fact, that will be the usual outcome. Keeping that in mind helps us lower the standard we start from,

making it easier to take the daily action required to tip the scales toward the goal.

The Pareto Principle (80/20) has been widely studied across many areas of life. In most systems, effort and results follow similar patterns: 80% of results come from 20% of the effort. Which means that even if you give 100% effort, only a small portion will produce a positive or acceptable outcome. The rest will be marked by misses, mistakes, and failures. This isn't about being perfect—it's about making sure a small part of what we do is good enough to start giving us some of the results we want.

This is where we'll have to deal with the most emotion, where we'll understand the difference between wanting to see change and being willing to change (and to endure it).

Minimize perfection. Maximize action.

| *Four* | You don't need motivation.

If someone needs constant motivation to follow through on the actions they've planned, they're more likely to quit halfway because they become addicted to that feeling.

Relying on motivation, fueled by dopamine, comes with real risks. Like any car, it doesn't run without fuel. The difference is that you can't just pull into a gas station and refill whenever you feel like it. It refuels automatically whenever the car senses it needs a quick boost in a very specific situation. For short trips, it's fantastic. For long ones, its effectiveness drops off fast. When the tank runs dry and can't be refilled on demand, we tend to get out, turn back, and quit because walking feels like too much work.

Motivation clearly makes action easier, but we can't depend on it showing up all the time, even though popular culture tries to convince us otherwise. "You have to get motivated and act!" we hear. If that were true we'd be in serious trouble if a human life depended on only motivated doctors.

It's crucial to learn to do what needs to be done—motivated or not, in the mood or not—with discipline, because discipline is behavior that doesn't depend on your mood or what's happening around you. It's the behavior that pushes you to follow your plan of action no matter what, however you feel, like your best self would. Many times, action is the cause

of motivation: the thing that produces it. It's not its consequence. It's our actions that will change our lives, not our feelings or emotions. Do what you have to do, despite fear, sadness, or anxiety, even when resistance shows up.

| Five | Our worst enemy.

No matter where we are on our path, our worst enemy is often ourselves. The mind is an engine that never rests, often wonderful and useful, yet also ruthless. When it turns on us, it doesn't always show up in obvious ways. It can disguise itself as self-sabotage, creating insecurities or it can amplify our tendency to get tangled up in the very things that hurt us.

Current science suggests that we generate thoughts through a highly complex process (part voluntary, part involuntary) shaped by the interaction between our genetics, our life experience, our view of the future, and what we're experiencing in the present.

Most of the time, thoughts appear automatically. This is what's known as the default mode network, a process we have limited control over.

Our greatest power lies in the attention we give these automatic thoughts when they show up.

When our thoughts are useful and make sense, they lead us to take logical action. Like turning on the air conditioning when we think it's hot, because it actually is. Once the discomfort is resolved, we understand we don't need to keep reminding ourselves over and over, and we stop thinking about it.

But when a thought is useless and senseless (like believing we're genetically doomed), attention becomes a vehicle for ongoing harm, perpetuating a negative cycle, since we can't find a resolution that ends it. That's what happens when we treat thoughts that make no sense as if they deserve our attention, as if the problem they represent is real and could be solved.

The attention we give a thought strengthens the neural connections that support it (making it easier to think it again), so it's important to direct our attention in a way that retrains the mind and keeps it from becoming, again and again, our worst enemy. When our neural wiring becomes more efficient at producing a certain kind of thought, it doesn't distinguish

between what's useful and what's destructive. This process helps us learn an interesting skill, but it also strengthens our fears and obsessions.

Through the conscious choice of our behaviors and our thoughts, we gain the ability to change ourselves. It's a deeply human skill, but not an easy one, especially if we're too used to running on autopilot and we tend to get tangled.

Shifting our attention to something else in the middle of a knot of negative thoughts, changing the behaviors that feed these mental patterns, and cultivating a more constructive inner dialogue will, with practice, wear down the neural connections associated with those thoughts and make them appear less and less. Retraining the mind is the foundation that supports both cognitive behavioral therapy and meditation.

Good health also helps our worst enemy lose strength. Taking care of ourselves is key: let your health be water, not gasoline, in situations where a spark could become a fire.

| Six | It's important to keep moving forward—but looking back is how we measure how far we've come.

As we move along the path, it's easy to get lost in how long the journey still is. It's hard to notice our progress if we don't pay attention to it consistently. We tend to give more weight to the present and discount the past, which keeps us from seeing how far we've come. We adapt quickly to small changes: what once felt like an achievement becomes normal over time and stops feeling like a big deal. That's why, even though moving forward requires action and keeping what we want in mind, looking back and noticing our improvements (tracking progress, no matter how small) helps us appreciate the work we're doing so much more. It's not only important to act, but also to give ourselves credit and recognize each step we've taken, so we don't lose sight of the distance we've already covered. Sometimes, simply pausing to reflect on the ground we've already covered is the catalyst that gives us the strength to keep going.

Everyone who has achieved their goals has done it because of multiple factors. There isn't a single path to getting what we want, and if someone claims otherwise, it's wise to be skeptical. Talent, luck, where you were born, the era you live in, your financial situation, your connections, and

your culture all shape what we do. But the one thing everyone who makes it has in common is that they were there—doing the work.

You can't answer a call if your phone is off, and you can't catch a train if you're not at the station. Stop being "committed" on the surface. Always about to start.

Start today.

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PRINCIPLE 4

*The first step doesn't place anyone at their destination,
but it does move them out of where they are.*

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5.

The Routines That Move Us Toward (or Away From) Our Goals

It's happened to all of us: we finally start something that matters, and then, soon after, we quit.

We tend to underestimate the cumulative impact of small actions. It's hard to imagine what, over the long run, learning, training, eating well, investing our money, taking care of our relationships or building a project can actually do. It's far more tempting to see the before and after in two images, even if we know there's a ten-year gap between them. We tend to see life in twos: beginning and end.

We don't usually start something expecting it to improve little by little. We start it hoping that one day we'll finally reap the rewards: big, great-looking muscles, multiplied wealth, a solid company bringing in revenue, a skill executed well, a deep friendship, or hard-earned knowledge.

We didn't evolve thinking in terms of small actions or analyzing their daily impact, because we did them to meet short-term survival needs, not to secure a distant future.

"I'm hungry. I have to go hunt." "Winter's on the way. I need hides to keep warm." "I've spotted an unfamiliar tribe beyond the valley. I need to think about how to protect the camp." We acted on whatever life demanded. We were built for action. We lived in the present and, at most, in a not-so-distant future. We didn't project our actions to earn rewards five, ten, or twenty years from now.

Today, life works very differently. Most of us still haven't realized it. That's why we keep quitting, one after another, the activities we know are good for us but don't deliver results overnight.

We pay more attention to our instincts than to what we actually need now. Back then, we didn't need to train because our daily activity was enough.

We didn't need to lose weight because the environment naturally kept body fat low. We didn't need to invest money because our raw material for survival was food. We didn't even think about anything like what we now call retirement. We didn't need long-term goals because life was lived day to day.

Life was lived in the present.

Our biology still responds to immediate stimuli (something the consumer economy is very good at exploiting), while our needs have evolved toward goals that require patience, consistency, perspective, and an understanding of the long game.

Modern life demands something we've never needed before, a future-focused mindset and the ability to act in the present without expecting a quick payoff.

To do that, beyond understanding why it matters, our habits have to be solid so we don't quit midway, sensible strategies that are practical and built to last. If we want to build good habits and eliminate bad ones, we need a plan that's built to last, so the conscious effort to maintain them decreases over time.

What's most rewarding won't be the final result, not even the one we expected, because it often doesn't arrive the way we imagined.

What's most rewarding is turning our actions into a natural part of our lives and being able to enjoy them. That creates a sense of achievement and pride that goes far beyond any early reward, because we'll know we're on the path to becoming our best selves, fulfilling our purpose, and staying true to our principles. And that, inevitably, will make us feel capable.

| One | The power of visible cues to build good habits—and hidden ones to eliminate them (or at least reduce them).

If we want to establish a habit and it isn't visibly and repeatedly present in our lives, it's unlikely to last. We're visual creatures, guided by what's right in front of us, so the first step is to make our habits visible. If reading more is the goal, leaving a book on your nightstand will remind you every day. If the idea is to call your family more often, you can set reminders on your

phone so it doesn't slip your mind. A habit has to be part of your environment to stick.

To eliminate a habit, the approach is the opposite: keep it out of sight. For example, if the goal is to spend less time on social media, one option is to delete the app after you use it. The same goes for food: if the goal is to cut back on chocolate, a good alternative is to store it somewhere you won't see it.

The key to building good habits is designing an environment that works in your favor. What we see shapes what we do.

***I Two* | Make habits appealing to keep them—and off-putting to eliminate them (or at least reduce them).**

If something feels appealing, we'll do it more easily. If it feels like a constant sacrifice, we'll drop it before it ever becomes a habit. That's why, to keep a habit over time, it helps to make it attractive. How? By pairing it with an activity we already enjoy. Someone who loves coffee and wants more sun can enjoy their coffee outside in the sun. Someone who enjoys walking in nature and wants to learn more about health can walk while listening to an audiobook. The key is to create a positive association with the action we want to keep.

If we want to eliminate (or reduce) a habit, our goal is to make it off-putting. If someone wants to cut back on sugary drinks, it might help to smear something messy on the containers so every time they touch them, their hands get dirty. If they want to stop biting their nails, a good obstacle is to use gloves or bitter-tasting gels until they break the habit. It's essential to create a negative association (or a bit of resistance) with the action we want to minimize.

***I Three* | The easier it is, the more likely it gets done. The harder it is, the less likely you are to do it.**

When an action takes too much effort, we're unlikely to make it a recurring habit. Making a habit easier to do improves our chances of actually doing it. If we want to start training, choosing a gym that's already on our usual route is far easier than going out of our way. If our goal is to practice a language more, changing the settings on our devices can be a good start.

When the goal is to eliminate certain habits, it helps to add friction. If we want to stop checking our phone while studying, a good move is to turn it off, take it to another room, and put it in a drawer. To cut out sweets, for example, it's often enough not to buy them.

The key is to make what we want to do easier and what we want to avoid harder.

I *Four* I Use satisfaction as reinforcement—and embarrassment as a deterrent.

For a habit to last, it has to be rewarding—period. Sometimes the habit's own effects are enough, but adding an extra reward, especially early on, can help reinforce the behavior. Like treating yourself to an episode of your favorite show or a relaxing bath after you've done what you set out to do.

Embarrassment and discomfort work in the opposite direction: they make it harder to repeat an unwanted habit. For example, if you want to cut down on phone time, you could send your friends a weekly screenshot of your screen time. Or you could have someone hold onto part of your money and only give it back when you reach the goal. This isn't about punishing yourself—it's about creating a system that helps you make better decisions and, little by little, build the outcome you're after.

Applying these principles consciously will help us integrate them into everyday life, so they take less and less effort, until they're simply part of our lifestyle, without any extra strategies. The brain is simple: it seeks pleasure and avoids pain. When we understand the principles that drive our actions, we can design a system that helps us make better decisions.

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PRINCIPLE 5

*Life doesn't change through big decisions,
but through small actions repeated.*

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6.

The Chains That Keep Us Stuck in Dead Ends—and How to Break Them

How often do we feel trapped in a loop with no way out, stuck in repeating situations, on paths that lead nowhere, caught in bad breaks we blame on luck, tied to things that make us feel cursed, facing events we can't control (and shouldn't try to control, because that's where the trouble starts)?

No one on this planet is immune to bad luck, and we have every right to suffer—and to feel it. But the unpleasant circumstances we face usually aren't the real reason we don't move forward.

Storms that show up along the way may force us to take shelter for a while, but they're not what keeps us from walking. Complaining is born from resisting the inevitable, and a victim mindset is born from handing control of our lives over to circumstances. Those are the real chains that box us in and keep us from moving forward.

| *One* | The act of resisting the inevitable: complaining.

Complaining is human and understandable, but it's also the fastest way to stay stuck. It's a natural reaction when we run into a new setback. But what starts as a release to dull the pain, if we let it settle into our routine, can stop being a passing expression and turn into a destructive habit (and a highly addictive one).

The more we focus on what bothers us, the more we lose sight of what we can do to change. Complaining gives us an instant, false sense of control. It feels like we're taking action by saying what we're frustrated

about—when all we’re really doing is burning energy on words instead of putting it into the actions that can actually help us.

Complaining is passive resistance to what’s happening, a useless attempt to push back against the current instead of learning to swim with it. And if it offers us comfort at all, it does so at the cost of our peace of mind, and progress that never arrives.

| *Two* | The result of handing control of our lives over to circumstances: a victim mindset.

A victim mindset isn’t just recognizing that something is hard; it’s also a ready-made excuse not to act. It’s handing control of our lives over to circumstances. Think of it as complaining’s older sibling. First comes resistance, then comes surrender. Not “this shouldn’t be happening,” but “there’s nothing I can do,” as if everything were out of our hands.

The chains a victim mindset creates don’t just reinforce existing problems; they feed a sense of dependence, where the solution always seems to belong to someone else or to fate. Meanwhile, time passes and the bonds get tighter and tighter. It becomes a vicious cycle that’s hard to escape.

When we step into the role of the victim, we give up our responsibility to act. Breaking that cycle doesn’t mean denying difficulties. It means accepting that even if we can’t control everything that happens, we can still decide, at least in part, how we respond.

Resisting reality only prolongs the suffering and the emotional wear and tear, disconnecting us from our purpose, reinforcing inaction, and leaving behind the residue of a victim mindset that keeps us from moving forward.

Still, recognizing it isn’t enough to free ourselves. Even though it’s the first step, moving forward requires more: if we realize we’re fighting the current, the next step is to start swimming with it. So, let’s evaluate the different paths available to us in any circumstance, lay them out, and break the chains that keep us anchored.

| *Three* | Recognize what’s within our control.

Seneca reminds us that a wise person focuses on the intention behind their actions, not the results. The first step is within our control, but fortune

decides how it ends. The more we tie our well-being to things outside our control, the more dissatisfied we'll feel.

The first step is understanding the difference between what we can control and what we can't. It's about separating what comes from us (our actions, our decisions, and the attention we give certain thoughts) from what lies beyond us, like where we're born, the outcome of our efforts, or the external events that affect us.

It's easy to get lost in the frustration of not being able to change certain circumstances, let complaining creep in, and end up trapped in a victim mindset. Freedom begins when we accept that we can't control everything that happens.

But we can choose, at least in part, how we respond. Even if it's raining, the final call (stay home or step outside) is still ours.

Picture someone studying for a high-stakes exam. They can plan their schedule, study with discipline, and practice again and again. But they can't control whether there'll be a heat wave on test day, whether the neighbors keep them up the night before, or whether they sprain an ankle minutes beforehand. And still, what matters most is their preparation.

If that person goes through those setbacks and spends all their time complaining about what happened, about their bad luck, they'll lose sight of everything that truly was within their control. And if, on top of that, they stop studying in the future because they feel like a victim of what happened, they've fallen into the very chains that box a person in.

When life brings us face-to-face with what we can't control, how do we respond? Do we let it turn us into a victim—or do we choose to focus on what's still in our hands?

| Four | Reframing our circumstances.

The way we interpret what happens to us directly shapes how we face it. Seneca said fate guides the one who accepts it and drags the one who resists it.

If we lose our job out of the blue, it's normal for it to hurt. But how we frame the situation will determine whether we meet it with strength or with resignation. We can see it as a tragedy, a permanent blow to our self-worth, an unease we can't even name—or as an event that invites us to reflect on what we really want and how to begin again with more clarity.

Shifting our self-talk in the face of a situation is something we build with practice, even if it isn't easy. The more we get used to rejecting one circumstance, the more likely we are to reject the next. In the same way, the more we practice acceptance, the more likely we are to respond the next time by focusing on what we can do.

Remember: the brain strengthens the neural connections tied to whatever we give the most attention to. That's why it's essential first to notice what we're doing, and then to redirect our attention toward better choices.

This mindset of acceptance doesn't mean giving up. Surrender is closer to passivity and inaction. Acceptance means recognizing reality as it is, then acting from what's in our hands to change it—or adapt to it. Adversity is inevitable, but our actions are a choice.

| Five | The responsibility to act pushes us to grow.

Taking responsibility is empowerment, not guilt. If things go well and we acted well, great. If things go badly because of circumstances outside our control and we acted well, even if we would've preferred a different outcome, that's great too.

And if things go badly because we acted poorly, we don't beat ourselves up—but we do take responsibility, take action, learn from it, correct course, and do better next time. The key isn't avoiding mistakes or rejecting them. It's accepting them as part of the process and growing through them.

When we take responsibility, we put ourselves in the driver's seat, leaving behind the passivity of the passenger who just watches the trip unfold. From that position, we don't just take control. We maximize our chances of reaching the outcome we want; while minimizing the time we waste on unnecessary suffering.

When we accept that our choices belong to us, we realize there's always room to adjust course, even when we fail or when life's randomness shows up. We grow when we start acting and stop justifying ourselves.

This idea is captured brilliantly in the well-known Serenity Prayer, attributed to Reinhold Niebuhr: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”

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PRINCIPLE 6

*The strongest chains aren't the ones that bind the body,
but the ones that paralyze the will.*

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7.

The Tribe That Sets Our Course

If we want to know where our lives are headed, we can start by looking at the people we spend the most time with. They shape our decisions more than we realize. Being exposed to their attitudes, habits, and opinions slowly molds how we see the world—and how we move through it. It's often said that we're the sum of the five people we spend the most time with and it isn't a far-fetched idea.

It doesn't mean we'll think exactly the same, laugh the same way, or accept everything they normalize. But we do absorb part of their routines, their fears, their standards, and their desires—for better or worse. When we surround ourselves with people of character, we're far more likely to shine. In a toxic social environment, it's much harder not to drift.

Epictetus had a blunt warning: we end up resembling what we keep close. The environment we live in shapes our perception of the world and becoming the person we want to be doesn't depend only on intention. It also depends on the people who feed those aspirations or tear them down, and whether they align with them or not.

Building good habits becomes much easier when we see them woven into the routine of the people around us, and much harder in their absence. If our circle is made of kind people, those qualities will inevitably grow in us. If they prioritize their health, chances are we will as well. If they're curious (people who are always learning something new), curiosity starts to become part of who we are.

But do we choose people who are like us? Or do we become who we are by spending time with certain people? The answer is complex and is a

two-way street.

What's clear is this: if we aspire to a certain way of being and our environment doesn't encourage it, it's up to us to change it and seek out the kind of environment that does. It's about tilting the odds toward where we want to be, living with more awareness, and focusing on what truly is within our control.

That's why it's essential to examine whether the people around us reflect both who we are and who we want to become, or at least resonate with the essence of our values.

***I One* | Where do we find our tribe?**

It's easy to stick with the people we already know or to convince ourselves that luck just hasn't smiled on us when it comes to friends. But if we want something different, we can't keep waiting for life to bring us the people we wish we had. We have to go out and find them.

And to do that, we need to get clear on what we're looking for in the people we want close. It's not enough to name vague qualities like "I want them to be a good person" or "to treat me well" because that's the baseline we all expect.

We need something more specific, for example, how they live, how they think, what habits they have, what they do, when they do it, or what they do for a living. A good way to define it is to start with our own aspirations and ask what kind of people would naturally align with them.

If part of what we're looking for is someone who wakes up early, takes care of their health and enjoys nature, then maybe we should make a habit of being outside early, near trails and green spaces. Deeper traits (like kindness or warmth) are harder to spot at first. We discover them once the concrete qualities have done their job by putting us in the same place as the kind of person we're looking for.

What's clear is that if we're looking for someone intellectually curious, who doesn't drink alcohol, is slightly introverted yet entrepreneurial, tipping the odds in our favor probably doesn't look like a Tuesday at 2 a.m. in a nightclub in an industrial park. That doesn't mean it can't happen. But if you expect to find rabbits, it makes more sense to walk through the countryside than to look for them in Times Square, even if (oddly enough) one might appear.

So, if we want to meet particular types of people, we must spend time in the places where they're most likely to be. There are probably countless people in the world who could fit us perfectly and we'll never meet them; however, the more often we are in the right environments, the better our chances will be of building the tribe we want.

| Two | Some people don't have to be physically present.

Face-to-face contact matters for building relationships, but it isn't always easy to make it happen.

In the past, reaching people beyond where we lived was a real barrier.

Today, we have many ways to stay connected—even with someone on the other side of the world. It's not the same, but it's a powerful advantage. And they don't even have to be people we interact with in real time.

We can feel accompanied and even shaped by voices that inspire us through books, podcasts, and other media, even though we've never met the people behind those voices.

Their impact, repeated over time, leaves a mark on how we think and how we act. When those voices are part of our daily life, the compound effect of their influence starts working in our favor.

It's about balancing what's truly within our reach with what isn't and learning to be nourished by both.

Se trata de equilibrar lo que realmente está a nuestro alcance con aquello que no lo está, y aprender a nutrirnos de ambas influencias.

| Three | It's not all or nothing.

Wanting to surround ourselves with people who shape who we are (people whose virtues rub off on us and who push us toward where we're headed) can make us believe every relationship should do that. But not every bond has to serve our life goals and not every conversation has to be deep or transformative. We can't expect everyone who crosses our path to match the full list of traits in our ideal tribe. If we become too demanding, our circle can shrink so much that we end up feeling alone. There has to be a balance between relationships that help us grow and relationships that simply help us share everyday life.

This other kind of connection leaves room for the everyday: for lighter moments, for not thinking too much, for simply being social. You see it often in professional relationships, with certain neighbors, or with the people you chat with at the park while walking your dog. That's why it helps to understand that some people aren't in our lives to shape us and we aren't in theirs to shape them. That perspective helps us enjoy those connections for what they are. Even if there's less room to fully express ourselves and the conversations stay more surface-level, it's worth learning how to move through those environments without constant friction—spaces where we don't have to share the same habits, join every discussion, think like everyone else or justify who we are.

This doesn't mean we should say yes until we're drained, but avoiding these moments entirely isn't the answer either. There are times to be with our tribe and there are times to enjoy a simple interaction with no hidden agenda. In the end, socializing is positive, regardless of how deep the relationship is.

Our personal growth is never linear. There will be moments when we lose sight of our purpose, days when motivation disappears, dark days when we feel crushed—or simply days when moving forward feels impossible.

That's when the people we surround ourselves with can become a light on our path.

People who remind us why we started when we've forgotten, who steady us when doubt shows up, who recognize the effort that so often goes unseen, who notice the improvements and celebrate with us—not only the wins, but also what didn't turn out the way we hoped. People who inspire us, who show us care, and who (at the very least) push us to become better people.

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PRINCIPLE 7

*If we cultivate our environment, we harvest our destiny.
And it grows best in fertile ground.*

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8.

The Symptom of a Society That Never Slows Down

It's fascinating to watch how we feel overwhelmed when we have too many things to do—and bored when we don't have enough. More often than not, we're busy with tasks that don't give us anything meaningful in return, but we file them under "it's just what you're supposed to do." We'll never have enough time to do everything we want to do or everything other people expect from us. So, wouldn't it make more sense to spend part of our time on the things we truly want (or need) to do, and cut the ones that do nothing but drain us: a complete waste of time? Making that kind of call requires honesty and a clear definition of what actually matters most.

We're always in a rush, chasing one goal after another, assuming it's "normal" to feel like we have to do more than we can handle. The better we get at juggling tasks, the longer our to-do list gets, and the sense that we're chasing the impossible grows.

It's like endlessly scrolling on social media, expecting to reach the bottom of the feed—only to realize it never ends. Maybe the smartest move is to do fewer things, not more, as long as they're truly worth it.

In the end, we're going to die, and it's hard to imagine anyone wanting to reach the finish line without having lived a life that mattered.

This cycle of constant busyness keeps feeding off the expectations around us. Our culture preaches a relentless pace to avoid being labeled lazy or unmotivated, which only increases the pressure to keep up.

How many times have we heard someone rattle off the number of hours they pour into work, commuting, paperwork, and endless, unsatisfying chores, as if it were something to be proud of? Strangely, it seems like

people brag about it because they take pride in leaving themselves the crumbs of their own life, convincing themselves that living exhausted means living well.

Otherwise, how do you explain people who can fill every second of the day with activities they don't want, think they want, or feel they should do; who carry work with them even on vacation; who answer emails while they're with their kids; who feel guilty if they're not doing something "special"; who constantly sign up for courses and events out of fear of falling behind; or who believe every free moment has to be used for something productive, something that justifies the time spent on it?

We've learned to measure our value by how much we do instead of asking whether any of it means anything.

Prioritizing matters, of course. But to do it, we first have to accept that some things will have to go.

And that starts with realizing just how much is available to us today.

| One | The weight of everything you could do.

Technology gives us tools to "manage our limited time better," but at the same time it exposes us to endless possibilities for how we could be spending it.

A calendar helps us stay organized, but it also reminds us of everything we couldn't fit into the day. Social media shows us interesting events, but also every one we're going to miss. Life keeps moving faster, and the options keep multiplying.

Before, you wouldn't even have considered a trip to Bali because affordable flights and workable connections weren't really a thing. Today, the option is right there, only a few clicks away.

And that's the problem: now we can do almost anything we can imagine and what haunts us is the thought that we're not doing it. It's not just fear of missing opportunities. It's the constant pressure that we could be squeezing more out of life, as if every choice we make is pulling us away from something better, professionally and personally. And so, we end up trapped in the paradox of abundance: the more we can do, the more we feel we're letting something slip by.

FOMO (fear of missing out) is the result of having too many options. It doesn't matter if we're exactly where we want to be, because there will

always be something else we could be doing.

| *Two* | It's important to refuse the urge to do it all.

Knowing what matters in our lives (and what doesn't) isn't that hard. What's hard is choosing what to do and what to let go of.

Being able to pick a few things, set the rest aside, and sit with the sense of loss that comes with admitting it's impossible to do everything is the first step to making sure that, at the end of our days, we don't regret abandoning what truly mattered to us.

And the simple fact that we even get to choose among options is valuable in itself—especially when you remember that, because life is finite, we could just as easily have had no options at all.

| *Three* | Time and money are two ways of paying—but only time is nonrefundable.

You can make money back, but you can't live a life twice. Time is the most valuable resource we have.

If you buy a defective computer, you can get a refund or a replacement. But the time we spend in a pointless relationship or in a job we hate is gone for good. No amount of effort will give back even a single miserable minute we've wasted.

Realizing that is essential. It makes it much easier to refuse the urge to do it all and focus on what truly matters to us. So be careful who and what you give your time to.

From the moment we're born, we're living on a countdown that can't be reversed.

| *Four* | Accepting all of the above with resolve.

We have to let that uncomfortable feeling exist: the moment we realize there will always be something else we could be doing, that we don't have time to do it all, that we have to prioritize what matters, and that time doesn't come back. We have to feel this fully. And instead of replacing our discomfort with another activity that makes us feel productive, the best alternative is to do nothing.

Name the feeling until it passes.

Accept that no matter what we do, the world will keep turning and that someone, somewhere, at this exact moment, is doing something that looks more exciting, more productive, or more meaningful. The world around us will make us feel like we're missing out simply because it's possible we could be living that moment, too. And the sooner we accept this, the sooner we stop running in a race with no finish line.

But accepting it doesn't mean replacing the obsession with doing more with a new obsession: filling our free time with activities that seem more "useful." There's no point in visiting more places on a trip, reading more books, seeing more friends, or making more calls if we're not doing it for the pleasure of the thing itself, but to keep adding items to the mental pile of experiences, commitments, or knowledge, just so we can tell ourselves that now, finally, we're making the most of life.

Rest (for rest's sake or doing nothing for its own sake, with no goal) is just as useful and important as any other task. Enjoying a moment of rest without turning it into a self-improvement project seems to have no value. So doing nothing at all—absolutely nothing—is something worth making room for in our lives

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PRINCIPLE 8

*Obsessing over making the most of your time
is the easiest way to waste it.*

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9.

The Problem With Avoiding the Wind

In the 1990s, a group of scientists launched an ambitious experiment called Biosphere 2 in the Arizona desert. Their goal was to build a self-sustaining ecosystem: a miniature world inside a dome sealed off from the outside. Inside, they recreated tropical rainforests, oceans, deserts, and even a forest where trees grew at an accelerated pace: no disease, no droughts, no storms. It seemed like the perfect environment for life.

But over time, the scientists started noticing something strange. The trees grew tall and strong—until they collapsed and fell for no apparent reason, as if their own structure couldn't support them.

The problem was that they had deprived the trees of something that was supposed to be their enemy: wind. In nature, wind shakes them, bends them, forces them to resist. But it's also their greatest ally. Without anyone noticing, wind shapes their resilience, pushing them to develop a denser inner layer called reaction wood, which allows them to withstand storms without snapping.

In Biosphere 2, protected from every kind of difficulty, the trees never developed that strength. They never faced challenge, and without it there was no adaptation. They grew quickly—but fragile. They were tall, but hollow. They looked strong, but in reality they couldn't support their own weight.

Today, we live in pursuit of constant comfort, avoiding even the slightest hint of discomfort. But the truth is that a certain dose of stress (or discomfort) makes us stronger, just as wind strengthens trees.

A clear example is strength training. During a workout, muscles develop tiny tears that, once repaired, make them stronger. If you got bloodwork done right after a hard training session, they'd probably want to admit you. The irony is that afterward you end up healthier and stronger with a body that's better prepared. Paradoxical, right?

Stress, in the right dose, creates important adaptations that strengthen us both physically and mentally. Avoiding discomfort is the fastest path to weakness.

***I One* | Choosing a deliberate dose of discomfort.**

The most direct way to grow stronger is to seek out discomfort ourselves. But it's important to do it gradually. Just as the right dose of stress can build strength, too much can break us. There are the classic methods everyone knows, like exercising, but it goes far beyond that. Spending more time in the cold, reducing or eliminating certain comforts, gradually facing our fears, doing short fasts, or confronting situations we've avoided simply because we didn't want to be uncomfortable.

Adding small doses of discomfort to our daily routine makes our mind stronger over time. And if the mind is stronger, we can handle whatever shows up in our lives without warning.

You could say that through small hits, we prepare ourselves for the big ones we can't predict, and that are bound to come.

***I Two* | Learning from the discomfort we didn't choose.**

Inevitably, life will hit us, sometimes softly, sometimes hard. Most of those hits will be unexpected.

This kind of discomfort isn't chosen, but that doesn't mean it can't strengthen us.

Everything that happens to us forges our character for better or worse and trying to take something from it (even when it feels impossible) is the smartest way to keep ourselves from ending up in a pit that's hard to climb out of.

"Did I go broke?" I think about all the lessons I learned so it doesn't happen again.

“Did my partner leave me because I acted like an idiot?” I think about everything I need to fix so my next relationship doesn’t have to go through the same thing.

“Did my friends leave me when I didn’t deserve it?” I think about what I’ve learned about people, loyalty, and (most of all) who I choose to let into my life.

“Did I lose someone I love?” Even though that’s infinitely more complicated, I try to think about everything that person left behind in me, how their existence shaped mine, and what I can do to honor their memory.

And above all, I try to become the kind of person they’d be proud to see, if they could.

***I Three* | We can’t aim to win without risk.**

We want to succeed in life—and not only professionally, even though that counts too. We want better health, better friends, a stable partner we can make a great team with, a strong, lean body, a home that feels like shelter, a job we don’t dread, a decent salary, and everything else a person can add to their wish list. Getting what we want means fulfilling our dreams. It means winning. But expecting to win without facing any risk is like expecting your muscles to grow without using them and without, sometimes, tearing them a little. Because if muscles have to be broken down a bit to grow, what makes us think everything else won’t work the same way?

What we earn without any difficulty is rarely valued. Any success tastes better when, looking back, we don’t just see what we achieved, but what we overcame to get there.

We can’t expect to win without risk.

***I Four* | Asking for help doesn’t make us weak—it makes us human.**

Carrying everything alone doesn’t make us stronger. No matter how resilient we are, this isn’t about proving we can handle everything—not to ourselves and not to anyone else. Knowing when to ask for help isn’t a sign of weakness, but a sign of intelligence and humanity. Admitting what we can’t handle takes more strength than pretending it isn’t there. There’s no battle someone else hasn’t fought before. Some people have been through

it, are going through it, and will go through it. Sometimes, simply sharing what weighs on us lightens the load.

We hide our wounds because we're afraid of looking weak, of being judged, of not measuring up, of being a burden. Repressing our feelings doesn't make them disappear. It just pushes them somewhere else, where they come back even stronger. It only pulls us farther and farther from ourselves.

Vulnerability isn't weakness. Dropping the act, pretending that nothing affects us, takes far more strength than trying to look like the opposite.

Not being okay all the time, being affected by things, and fighting battles are what make us human. The effort to keep going is what makes us worthy.

Even if we've evolved to withstand a certain amount of pain, it's worth remembering that we didn't evolve alone.

Connection with others not only makes us stronger—it reminds us that other people, just like us, are fighting their own battles, too. And they can help us. Asking for help isn't asking for too much and it doesn't make us a burden. Helping those who need it gives purpose to other people's lives and anyone who's reached out a hand in hard times knows how true that is.

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PRINCIPLE 9

A fire that doesn't burn doesn't forge.

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10.

The Case for Generalists in a World of Specialists

“A human being should be able to change a diaper, . . . conn a ship, design a building, write a sonnet, balance accounts, build a wall, set a bone, . . . cooperate, act alone, solve equations, analyze a new problem, . . . cook a tasty meal, fight efficiently. . . . Specialization is for insects.”—Robert A. Heinlein.

We live in a world that idolizes specialists. From our earliest years, we’re pushed to pick a lane, master one area, and shape ourselves into something so narrowly defined that any detour feels like failure. “Find your niche,” they tell us.

This obsession with specialization has its roots in the Industrial Age, when progress depended on repetition and the ruthless division of labor. Factories turned people into parts of a larger machine, where each person performed a specific, repetitive role to maximize efficiency.

That mindset spilled into education, training young people to fit a model where life was supposed to be linear: choose a path, perfect it, and stay there. That model worked in mechanical, static jobs—but it doesn’t fit a world where work changes as fast as the environment around it.

What if the real superpower isn’t knowing a lot about a little, but knowing enough about a lot?

Generalists are the explorers of the modern world. They act as the bridge and connective tissue in a system designed to reward hyper-competence and the surgical precision of specialists. They aren’t masters of a single craft, but they have an extraordinary skill: they spot connections

and solve problems others can't even see. Their knowledge isn't boxed into one field. Generalists are built for almost any arena.

To understand life is to see it as a complex system, one that links countless fields and depends on their interaction.

That's how nature works.

That's how life works.

That's how we work.

***I One* | The first thing we need to understand about life is how it interacts with the world.**

Life works like a complex system where nothing functions in isolation. It isn't simple or predictable. It's a web of small actions that create outsized effects from the largest ecosystems to the tiniest molecules inside our bodies.

Every component is part of something larger, complex, and interdependent. It's not the individual elements that sustain life, but the relationships between them.

Let's use a short story. It shows how the world we live in can turn against us when we isolate its parts too much.

In a valley surrounded by mountains, a community of farmers lived, masters of their craft. They knew everything about the land and the harvest, but they saw wolves as a problem for their livestock. "If we get rid of them, everything will be easier," they thought. And they did. At first, the decision seemed wise.

But without wolves, deer and goats multiplied out of control, stripping away the vegetation that protected the riverbanks. When the rains came, the hillsides couldn't hold the water, the rivers overflowed, and floods destroyed everything in their path, including the crops and the livestock. Eliminating the wolves set off a chain reaction.

Their real mistake was believing it was enough to understand one part without understanding the whole.

***I Two* | We dig so deep into our own fields that we rarely lift our heads to see what's happening elsewhere.**

Early specialization is tempting. It gives us an initial advantage that helps us stand out—and build a false sense of security around it. “Specialize in this and you’ll never be out of work.” But what starts as a benefit can turn into a limitation if we keep going deeper without ever looking up.

You see it all the time in the fields we rely on, a doctor who ignores nutrition, a nutritionist who doesn’t understand training, a trainer who doesn’t grasp psychology, a psychologist with no grounding in biology... and on and on.

When we build a career on a rigid set of skills and knowledge, we risk believing every problem can be solved with the same tools.

If all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.

| *Three* | Generalists connect worlds that others treat as separate.

Complexity science teaches a simple lesson: the world’s most important problems can’t be understood or solved from a single perspective. These challenges (complex systems) operate as interconnected networks where a small action can trigger unexpected consequences. In that context, the ability to integrate knowledge from different fields isn’t a luxury—it’s a necessity.

Generalists stand out because they can apply lessons from one domain to another, finding solutions others miss. Just as the most exceptional athletes explored multiple disciplines before excelling in one, the most innovative inventors, artists, and leaders didn’t achieve greatness by specializing early. Instead, they cultivated interdisciplinary intuition: learning to spot connections in a universe of variables that looks chaotic at first glance.

Complexity demands flexibility—an essential virtue in a hyperconnected world where challenges are global and the answers are never linear.

| *Four* | The future belongs to those who can move between worlds, not to those who fear exploring what they don’t know.

Life doesn’t come with a manual. The rules that worked yesterday can become irrelevant tomorrow. We live in an environment where uncertainty

isn't the exception—it's the norm. The problems we face aren't just new. They're unpredictable and the rules keep changing.

In a world obsessed with titles and labels, it's easy to mistake a generalist for someone who avoids commitment. But the reality is the opposite. Real commitment means continuous learning, exploring new ideas, and keeping a wide perspective. When everything shifts, the people willing to move and question the status quo are the ones who truly thrive. In an uncertain world, adaptability is more than a virtue, it's the art of navigating through the storm and finding a new horizon.

Today, someone can spend years studying and stacking credentials in the same field, but if they can't spot misinformation, make sense of it and act on it, it won't matter. If they can't use technology or adapt to new ways of working, they'll be outpaced by those who can. It doesn't matter how much knowledge they've accumulated if they can't use it in a world that no longer runs on the rules they learned.

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PRINCIPLE 10

*The more diverse the paths,
the more of the map you get to explore.*

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11.

The Person Everyone Wants to Have Around

Chances are we won't remember what they were wearing or their exact words, but we'll never forget how they made us feel. That's the truth we often overlook. We are how we make other people feel. A conversation we didn't see coming. A silence that knew how to be on our side. A kind gesture in the middle of chaos. Or even something that wasn't extraordinary at all—just exactly what we needed right then.

There's a deeply human art to making someone feel good in our presence. And how we make others feel doesn't just speak to our ability to connect. It also reveals how much we've connected with ourselves and where that connection comes from. Relationships aren't neutral; they always carry the weight of who we are and what we're looking for in them. Showing up with a need to be admired is not the same as showing up with an urge to impose your opinion with a fear of rejection or with a simple desire to be liked.

We get so busy building an identity (and making sure others see who we are) that in the race to become someone, we forget what matters most when it comes to relationships: how to be better for other people.

Some people seem to have a natural gift for it, while others get lost in the endless attempts to figure it out. What we often forget though is that in human relationships the simplest details leave the deepest mark. Most of us have a natural instinct for how to please others, even if we don't always get it right. Many of the skills that make an interaction work can sound like common sense, but making them deliberate allows us to sharpen them and

actually put them to work, especially if what we want is for the person in front of us to feel good around us.

***I One* | Be the kind of person the world wants to sit down with and share a life.**

We all want people close to us who look us in the eye when we speak, who listen without making us feel judged, who are genuinely happy to see us smile, who don't make us doubt that they care, who say our name in a way that makes us feel seen, who stay kind even when we mess up, and who jump in with us even when no one's quite sure where we're headed.

People who make you laugh, who dream with you, who hold a hug a beat longer, who love you well, and who chase happiness without taking it from anyone else. We all want people like that around us. And we all have the capacity to become them.

We spend our lives searching other people's eyes for what we can't find in our own. We want company. We want to belong. We want someone who pushes us to be better.

But how often do we do the same for the person in front of us? How often have we been the calm someone needed, the laugh that loosened the tension, the shoulder to lean on? How often have we called to ask, "How are you doing?" The real challenge isn't finding the people we want close—it's becoming them.

***I Two* | The power of truly listening.**

When we're sitting across from someone an almost automatic urge takes over: to speak before we've finished listening, to fill every silence with words, advice, or solutions, and to keep anticipating what we'll say next. And this keeps us from really connecting. It's as if silence exposes the truth that we don't know how to be with another person without saying something. We're not used to listening with our full attention. And when someone doesn't know how to listen, what they're indirectly saying is: "What I have to say matters more than what you have to say."

Listening means letting go of the need to be the main character and choosing instead to witness someone else.

Think about how it feels when someone interrupts you or cuts you off before you've finished speaking. It's like what you were about to say suddenly stops mattering. You don't just feel unheard—you feel unseen.

To truly see someone is to be present, to be able to feel what they feel, to look them in the eye without distractions, and to hold those moments of vulnerability without rushing to escape them. And many times, the person in front of us doesn't need our words—they need their own, said out loud, so they can finally make sense of them. *suyas propias, dichas en voz alta, para poder entenderlas.*

| *Three* | Asking real questions means caring about the answer.

When we talk to other people we tend to stay on the surface, that safe zone that doesn't ask much of us (or of them). We ask about work, their last trip, or their family with hardly any real interest. Going through the motions. Talking for the sake of talking. Comfortable conversations that keep us protected from anything too personal, too vulnerable. But what if, instead of asking, "How's work?" we ask, "How do you feel at work?" And what if, instead of asking someone what they're going to study, we asked why?

If we pay attention to the conversations we have we'll realize that very few people truly ask how you're doing. Not the usual "How are you?" but the generic "How's it going?" We toss this out without thinking, which only leads to automatic replies like "Good, how about you?" or "Tired, how about you?"

Asking with intention means looking someone in the eye and showing real interest in what they're feeling, what they're going through, what's driving them, or what's worrying them right now. Asking real questions means wanting to listen and caring about the answer. This isn't about skill. It's about attention.

If someone mentions they have an important presentation in two weeks, we can do something as simple as setting a reminder on our phone: "Ask Rachel on January 18 how the presentation went." When we remember those details, we show we were listening and that the other person matters to us beyond a single moment.

| *Four* | We struggle to be honest—not because we don't feel it, but because we're afraid to be vulnerable.

When was the last time we looked someone in the eye and said, “I love you”? When was the last time we said thank you, not out of politeness, but because we truly wanted that person to know how much we value what they do for us? How long has it been since we apologized, not because we wanted to be forgiven, but because we genuinely knew we were in the wrong? When was the last time we looked at someone and said, “You look beautiful.”?

It’s better not to wait until it feels “justified” to say what we feel. Not to save it for a goodbye. Not for a text message. Not for the end of a letter. Say it here, now, while we can still look that person in the eye.

It’s the truest way we have to get closer to their heart. A real compliment, one that sincerely recognizes something valuable. A sincere apology to rebuild the bridges that misunderstandings tear down. A thank you, not only to appreciate an act, but to honor the person behind it. A genuine smile—one that signals openness without saying a word.era, que demuestra accesibilidad sin necesidad de palabras.

| Five | What brings people together isn’t what they say—not even what they do. It’s how they feel when they’re together.

We enjoy being with the people who make us feel safe and that happens when the emotional tone between us is right, when we feel free enough to laugh or cry without holding back, without fear, when we can be, at our core, who we truly are without worrying about being judged. In short, when we feel at home with the person in front of us.

It isn’t about making every moment we share with other people perfect. It’s about creating spaces where imperfect is enough, where being silly is the norm, where even for a moment the world stops spinning so fast. That’s where real relationships are built, when there’s room to be who you are. In the end, people don’t come back to us for what we say, not even for what we do, but for how they feel when they’re with us. When they feel that, at least for a little while, life feels amazing.

| Six | Take care of the relationships you already have.

The most common mistake is taking for granted what we already have and assuming that what we have today will stay intact, that the people we love will always be there simply because they came into our lives. But if we

don't cultivate what we have it will eventually wither. In any relationship, it isn't enough to build it. You have to keep it alive. And that takes dedication, effort, attention, and time.

Calling even when they haven't called. Surprising them even when there's no special reason. Letting them know you want to see them without waiting for a special date or the "right" moment.

Losing what we love most because we didn't take care of it leaves a hard-to-fill emptiness, knowing we could have done more—and we didn't. The best choice is always to take care of it while we still can.

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PRINCIPLE 11

You are what you leave in other people's hearts.

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12.

How to Spot Those Who Are Trying to Con Us

Not that long ago, we lived in a world where reliable information was a privilege. Not only a privilege—it was also hard to reach. The average person had limited options: maybe a library, a university, or a specialized professional setting, but always with little certainty that what they found could truly be verified. Access to real knowledge took serious effort, a luxury reserved for those who wanted to make a living chasing certainty, for those who, out of sheer devotion, were willing to pursue it or for those who wanted to contribute to science.

Today, only a few years later, we're facing the opposite extreme: a society saturated with information, bombarding us from every angle. We've traded the discomfort of not knowing for the false comfort of believing we know everything. But what has changed? Or better yet—what do we still have in common?

Back then and now, we run into the same problem, charlatans and pseudoscience. For as long as we can remember, fraudulent stories have held a powerful pull in every society, where the gullible kept the folklore alive and the uninformed helped spread it. It's far more tempting to believe a grand, meaningless fable than to become the skeptic who questions it. Most people are more drawn to believing stories than to challenging them. But is that only a matter of culture, literacy, and access to truth? Or are we gullible by nature—too easily seduced by the outlandish?

Human beings are exceptional storytellers. That ability to tell stories is precisely what sets us apart from other animals. We don't just believe in stories—we love to build them. They give meaning to our lives. They're

how we've tried to explain everything we can't understand. They're the foundation of culture, religion, and history. They're also what made it possible to organize enormous societies once we left behind small Paleolithic tribes of a little more than 150 people.

And amid all that narrative there have always been people warning about the dangers of ignorance, like the father of medicine, Hippocrates, who tried to bring a little light to a world ruled by superstition.

Nearly twenty-five hundred years ago, he argued that people called epilepsy "divine" simply because they couldn't understand it, and that if we called everything we didn't understand divine, there would be no end to divine things.

For most of our history we've blamed illness on the divine (and, as surprising as it sounds, we still do), believing in miracle healers, using potions and amulets, trusting horoscopes, and outsourcing the truth to a handful of frauds who prey on human fear and desperation.

Most people may no longer believe every disease is a divine punishment, but we keep buying into the same storyline when we give credit to baseless theories—like the ones that blame 5G technology or "quantum energy" being out of alignment. We may no longer look for answers in chants, ointments, and sacred stones, but we still fall for promises of healing through juice cleanses, vibration therapies, and methods with no evidence behind them.

The shamans of the 21st century don't live in villages with drums anymore. Now they have social media, they shop on Amazon, some even went to college, and most of them still pull the same storytelling tricks.

Carl Sagan (one of the great astronomers and science communicators of the 20th century) argued that the cause of avoidable human misery usually isn't stupidity so much as ignorance, especially ignorance of ourselves. And if you add gullibility to ignorance, you get the perfect breeding ground.

The uncritical amplification by newspapers, TV news, social media, movies, and magazines (among many other outlets) has helped absurd ideas spread everywhere. And the more desperate someone is and the less informed they are, the less willing they'll be to exercise skepticism.

Pseudoscience and mass deception promise to satisfy emotional needs that science often leaves unmet. They offer fantasies, simplicity, promises, and conspiracies that grab our attention instantly, because they know we

have an endless supply of intellectual myopia and a troubling lack of critical thinking.

Skepticism should be our primary tool if we want to understand the world we live in better and more accurately. Science should be the method that helps us separate what merely sounds outlandish from what is actually true. To this day, it's the only method we have that has successfully challenged traditional "knowledge" and offered clear answers (even if they aren't as extravagant or wild) to many of our questions. And while science isn't a perfect tool for understanding, it's still the best one we have.

Science moves us toward a more accurate understanding of what the world is like—not what we wish it were. And it differs from pseudoscience not only because it has a vast body of well-studied, replicable evidence, but because it keeps refining its own errors and limitations, constantly questioning itself.

False information and nonsense are everywhere and just as we have mental habits that protect us (like avoiding dark alleys at night, locking the door when we leave the house, or double-checking the recipient's account number before making a big transfer), we should do the same with information. That's why it's essential to develop critical thinking and to have strategies that help us evaluate the claims we're exposed to every day.

In a world where information is abundant and truth is scarce, our best defense is learning to interpret it through the lens of science. Our lives depend, in part, on what we let into our minds. Let's be discerning, like we would be with a stranger trying to enter our home.

And because pseudoscience often disguises itself as science, the best approach is to build a set of habits that allow us to tell what kind of information we're dealing with. Let's give it attention, commitment, and courage. Only then will we avoid becoming gullible and ending up at the mercy of the first charlatan we come across.

| One | Truth doesn't shy away from simplicity.

It's common to dress up deception (or a lack of evidence) in multiple layers of intellectual smoke and mirrors to project wisdom or professionalism, and to avoid the questions that would expose it. When we hear someone say something that sounds excessively complex, we assume they must have

valuable information we don't and automatically feel a bit embarrassed to challenge it.

But when complexity is used for that purpose, it eventually gets tangled in its own words. Making something more complicated than it needs to be is often meant to impress other people, grab attention, boost professional status and, when the time comes, sell more.

And if an explanation strays too far from the basic laws of reality we already know and leans on irrational, convoluted elements as “proof,” distrust is always the safest option. If the information in front of us doesn't use a careful, modest, unbiased, clear, cautious, and restrained tone, and can't explain itself plainly and logically, it's not worth our time.

***I Two* | Three questions to ask before you buy in or walk away.**

Before we accept a claim, we should ask ourselves a few questions.

Who's telling me this? Not every voice carries the same weight or deserves the same trust. That doesn't mean they can't earn it—but knowing who's speaking is the first filter we should use.

How do they know? It's not enough to hear what they're saying. What matters is how they know it—and whether they back it up with verifiable facts. If what they're saying doesn't have clear, broad support from the scientific community we're better off putting our energy into something else and walking away from the claim.

What are they trying to sell me? There's always a purpose behind a message. The fact that someone is selling something doesn't automatically make them a fraud, but we have to learn to tell the difference between an honest offer (one that's genuinely trying to help and has real quality) and a pitch designed to profit from desperation or ignorance. Evaluate the intent behind it.

***I Three* | Truth needs independent sources to cross-check it.**

Relying on a single source is like looking at one small piece of a puzzle and assuming you know the whole picture. One piece can't show you the full image. The people who promise they have exclusive access to the truth (whether they base it on their isolated experience or claim privileged access

to sources unavailable to everyone else) are selling stories that have little to do with reality.

Solid evidence, by contrast, requires multiple independent sources. It's those different angles, tested against each other, that tell us whether what we're looking at is valid knowledge—or just an illusion built out of bias and personal desire. The more that independent lines of evidence converge on the same data and conclusions, the firmer the ground we have to place our beliefs on. And if that agreement holds across studies done in different places with large samples and rigorous methods, over time we can trust it even more.

This principle (cross-checking across multiple sources) is the foundation of science. The indispensable antidote to fallacy. That's why information worthy of trust grows stronger through diversity and is validated through careful replication by independent sources.

| Four | Over time, a lie can start to sound like the truth.

The more often we hear something, the more familiar it feels—whether it's true or not. That's the danger of illusory truth: a lie repeated often enough stops feeling like a lie. This is the fuel myths and hoaxes run on.

When something feels familiar, something we've heard (or keep hearing) again and again, we should ask ourselves whether it's considered true because there's evidence behind it or simply because it's been repeated so many times.

Unlike the previous point, where truth is built because independent sources cross-check it, here the opposite happens: a lie gets mistaken for truth because it's repeated without being questioned.

And how is it possible for a lie to spread around the world and end up feeling familiar in a culture?

The answer is simple, because it has something extravagant, exaggerated, fear-driven, grotesque, or scandalous about it, something that grabs our attention far more than a simple, rigorous, boring, evidence-based explanation.

It's more tempting to believe the stars will show you the way than to finally leave a job where you're being mistreated. It's more tempting to think a waist trainer will melt fat than to learn how to manage a calorie deficit with real precision.

Not every lie survives because it sounds good, sometimes it's because it saves us the effort of facing the truth.

***I Five* | Truth rarely survives in the land of “too much.”**

When something sounds too good or too bad to be true, it's probably not true.

Extremes are seductive, but they're often where attention-seekers thrive. Extremes trigger two of our most primitive emotions: hope and fear. Under these emotions, we're far more likely to spend money and believe what isn't true. Lies and scams rarely hold up on flat ground, free of sensationalism.

That's why, whenever we come across headlines, “news” or anything dressed up as information that's only trying to provoke a strong emotional reaction, the best move is not to give it a single second of our time. Chances are, it's false.

***I Six* | Science as a light in the dark.**

In a world full of deception, you'll often hear people dismiss the scientific method with the claim that science can't explain everything. That's like tossing your flashlight into the dark just because it can't light up the whole road at once. If we want to move forward with any sense, it's always better to use the light we have than to walk in the dark out of pride (or because the grand, dramatic story we want to believe feels more exciting).

“Science can't explain everything” is usually the last refuge of someone who doesn't want to let go of an idea, a belief, or bad information. But why would someone cling so hard to something that's already been shown to be false?

There isn't one single answer. Sometimes they're afraid their lie will be exposed. Other times they need a story that gives their beliefs meaning or they simply want attention. And then there are more complex cases involving people struggling with mental illness, addiction, or large-scale scams that operate globally.

What matters isn't why people cling to an idea, but whether it's true. And if it isn't, it's time to stop feeding it our energy. It only drains us.

| Seven | Think more. Be bored more. Learn more.

We're so busy taking in information that we barely leave room to reflect on it. Information overload makes us more vulnerable to believing any nonsense because we don't have the time or the energy to question it.

Being bored and doing nothing helps us recover a skill we're losing, processing what comes at us with skepticism and patience. That means thinking with discernment. Sometimes, less is more.

But we also need to learn how to explore, not just filter. Knowing how to look for reliable sources, understanding how science works, knowing how to read a book's bibliography, making sense of a scientific study, interpreting a chart, and recognizing what strong evidence looks like are essential navigation tools.

This isn't only about protecting ourselves from being wrong, it's about developing the curiosity of someone who won't settle for the first thing they hear. Critical thinking isn't inherited: it's trained and taught.

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PRINCIPLE 12

*If you don't question what you hear,
you end up speaking in someone else's voice.*

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13.

We're Experts at Trusting Our Perception Too Much

We're not always fooled by other people. Sometimes the biggest deception happens inside us—when we interpret reality through filters we didn't even know we were wearing.

Every day we process a relentless flood of information through our senses. We sort it and shape it to make sense of the world. We do it quickly and selectively, because if we had to stop and analyze every single thing (every piece of information that reaches our brain) we'd get stuck in analysis paralysis, unable to make decisions in time, and we'd become ineffective. The problem is that this built-in ability to filter information and speed up our responses doesn't always lead to the best conclusions when a situation calls for deeper analysis.

Unconsciously and automatically, we see reality through our own lenses. Depending on the circumstances, we subtly select what we want to see or what serves us, find patterns where there are none, and overestimate our judgment, believing we “knew it all along.” We assume we remember things exactly, when in fact memory gets rewritten every time we recall it. We think our opinion is objective, but it's shaped by what we believe. We feel rational, but we fall into traps (cognitive biases) again and again.

But why?

Because the brain wasn't designed to find the truth, it was built to make fast calls that keep us alive.

For most of human history, our ancestors lived in a hostile world where fast decisions meant the difference between life and death. The brain

evolved for speed, not accuracy. And this doesn't only show up in complex decisions, it shows up in everyday life too.

That's why, if we want to avoid misunderstandings, make better decisions, and stop falling for our own biases, we need to understand the shortcuts we use to justify what we think and what we believe.

Only when we understand how we filter reality can we widen our field of view. And only when we question what we take as certain can we start to see past our own certainties.

| One | The stories we tell ourselves, or narrative bias.

We love making sense of what we go through, even when the information is incomplete. Instead of accepting uncertainty, we fill in the gaps with stories that feel coherent. We'd rather believe a made-up story than sit with doubt.

Sometimes we create narratives that aren't very logical but fit what we want to believe—like thinking that the coins we've been noticing on the street lately are signs we're on the right path.

Other times, we build these stories in far more ordinary, seemingly rational situations—like when we assume a coworker we like, who's been distant lately, is trying to impress the boss to get a promotion. Because we don't tolerate gaps in the story very well we start looking for explanations. In this case, we might find out in a conversation that his marriage is in crisis, and throwing himself into work is his way of avoiding going back to a place that no longer feels like home.

Whether we learn that or not, in both situations we were missing information, and instead of thinking critically or simply asking, we preferred to write our own story.

Making assumptions is a mistake.

In social settings, silence can be one, too.

When we're the ones who don't want others completing our story, we can offer just enough information that people don't have to fill our silences with the wrong interpretations.

| Two | We see what we want to see, or confirmation bias.

We tend to seek out, interpret, and remember information that confirms our preexisting beliefs while ignoring what contradicts them. If we've decided

we don't like someone, we'll pay far more attention to everything negative they say or do, while overlooking their positive qualities and minimizing any evidence that challenges what we already believe about them.

This bias doesn't just affect trivial, everyday things—it also shapes how we interpret information, facts, and our own experiences.

If we think eating healthy is expensive, we'll focus on the priciest items at the grocery store and ignore more affordable options. If we believe traveling is dangerous, we'll be more likely to remember negative headlines about tourist destinations and forget all the positive experiences. In the same way, if we believe stepping on sidewalk cracks will make us sick, a little anxiety will be enough to convince us we must have stepped on one without noticing. And if we believe in folklore, we'll take vague anecdotes as proof simply because they fit what we want to believe. That's why, instead of hunting for reasons to prove ourselves right, even in our most irrational choices, it's worth looking for reasons to question them.

| *Three* | When we've invested too much to let it go, or the sunk cost fallacy.

The more time, effort, or money we've invested in something, the harder it is to admit we should let it go. We'd rather keep going just so we don't have to feel like it was wasted, even if that choice makes us lose even more.

Imagine spending six years earning a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in engineering, graduating at the top of our class. We join a company that promises a bright future, our parents are proud, and finally the effort has paid off. But every day we wake up with the feeling that what we do doesn't satisfy us. We know we could change course, but the idea of throwing all that effort away scares us. It's hard to admit we were wrong when we've invested so much, but that can sentence us to a life we don't want. It happens with relationships that no longer work but we've kept alive for years.

It happens with projects that no longer make sense but that we keep dragging along simply because we started. It happens with widely held beliefs, even after they've been debunked, because they've given meaning to our existence for decades. It happens with habits, decisions, and possessions that no longer fit who we are, but that we're afraid to let go of because we've invested too much time, effort, or money in them.

| Four | The danger of half-truths, or availability bias.

We overestimate the importance of a piece of information simply because it's presented in a shocking way or because it's easy to remember.

For example, the nightly news runs one of those alarming headlines our brain gives far too much weight to: "This year, fatal choking incidents while eating salmon have doubled—Is this food safe?" The background shows stock footage, a reporter with a grave tone, and charts that underline the message. Our first instinct is to think maybe salmon isn't such a good idea—maybe it's dangerous. But since we already know we have biases, we look into the numbers and realize that last year there was one death, and this year there were two (in a city of one million people). One year there was a 0.0001% chance of choking to death while eating salmon, and the next year it was 0.0002%. Mathematically, the headline is correct: double. But in our heads, it's a mess.

The full picture shows there's no real reason to stop eating salmon or to consider it dangerous, especially because we don't even know why those people choked. Did they have trouble swallowing? Did something else happen? What we do know is that the way the story was presented is attention-grabbing.

In the absence of solid information, the sensational almost always beats the sensible.

This isn't about distrusting everything. It's about remembering that what isn't said also counts. Context is everything, because often what's missing is what matters most.

| Five | It wasn't luck—it was me, or the self-serving bias.

We tend to credit our successes to our skill, but when we fail, we blame bad luck or outside circumstances. As uncomfortable as it is to admit, no matter how talented we are, there's always an element of chance and context shaping what's even possible.

The story is seductive: the self-made athlete, the entrepreneur who grew up poor, the millionaire who reached the top purely through grit and desire. The idea is that all success comes from effort, an unbreakable mindset, willpower, and the ability to thrive where nobody else could. From the epic of sacrifice to the mystique of wanting something badly enough, we love believing everything is in our hands.

But when we look at the evidence and actually examine what factors truly influence outcomes, we realize not everything depends on our ability, even if ability plays a major role. There are countless variables that can make the difference between being successful and simply having tried: the year and place you were born, your socioeconomic background, how well you slept last week, how you respond to fear or more simply how much time you actually have to chase what you want.

The world is full of elite athletes who grew up in poor neighborhoods and had more hours to practice than middle-class kids because they spent less time in school, and scouts knew exactly where to find them. Of Nobel Prize winners whose talent was accelerated by wealthy patrons. Of child prodigies who stood out not only because of ability, but because they were born in January and were evaluated alongside kids born in December—who were almost a year younger. Of famous actors who had the biggest film industry two blocks from home. Of gurus who didn't "attract" their wealth through thought alone, but inherited outsized fortunes. Of tech geniuses who changed the world with their ideas, but had computers long before most people even knew they existed. It's important to recognize our abilities, but it's just as important to acknowledge the role of other factors.

These are only a few of the most common cognitive biases, but there are many more. Knowing them doesn't eliminate their influence, but it does allow us to question our perception more clearly, make less impulsive decisions, and get closer to seeing the world as it is—not as we think it should be.

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PRINCIPLE 13

*The biggest lies don't come from outside,
but from within.*

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14.

The Balance Point for Relationships That Work

We can be related by blood and still feel like the relationship isn't working. We can talk every day and still feel miles apart. We can love hard and still not know how to love well. We can live under the same roof and still inhabit separate worlds. We can avoid conflict and still live in a truce that isn't peace. We can share a life with someone and still feel alone. We can have our best memories together and still can't stand being around each other.

We spend our lives in relationships, and yet many of the connections we have don't fully satisfy us or one way or another bring some kind of pain. Every relationship has its blind spots because no one enters a relationship empty-handed: each person comes with a backpack filled with what they've been through, what they're afraid of repeating, their personality, their ambitions, and their own way of understanding life. What we do with those differences is the magic of relationships. A double-edged sword that can make a relationship work—or leave it stuck and festering.

If both people can find a point of balance, differences can add to the relationship, perspectives widen, and the connection grows stronger. But if no one makes the effort to adjust, if each person clings to their own way of seeing the world without considering the other, without adapting, without making concessions, what could have brought them together ends up pulling them apart. Or worse, it keeps them together, but dissatisfied.

This doesn't mean forcing pieces that don't fit or planting a tree in the desert and expecting it to grow. Some relationships have so many sharp edges there's no point trying to sand them down. In those cases, the best

choice is to accept there are paths that shouldn't be walked hand in hand. But in many of the relationships we choose, the problem isn't the difference between two people—it's the resistance to adapting and building a shared space. To truly enjoy any relationship, we have to be willing to evolve with it.

| *One* | The fear of losing a part of ourselves.

We have an innate desire to feel free, which is why the idea of adapting can make us push back. It can feel like we're giving up a part of ourselves, like we have to stop being who we think we are. We resist because we're afraid of losing what defines us. But there's a difference between adapting so we can grow together, without losing each person's individual essence, and dissolving yourself to avoid making the other uncomfortable.

When we notice that fear, it's a good moment to question ourselves: "Am I right? Have I considered the way they think? Could their view be valid? Even if it's different, does it align with my values? If I give in, am I really neglecting myself? If I give in and adapt, am I building the relationship—or just speeding up its breakdown?"

It isn't easy to let go of the pride we all carry. And it isn't easy to look inward and admit what we could change, or to strengthen our ability to adapt to different situations. The person in front of us (just like us) isn't perfect and they aren't us, even if we're similar.

Adapting means seeing things from perspectives we'd never considered. It means communicating what hurts, listening to what bothers the other person, and actually taking it into account. It means letting go of the expectation that they'll change someday and taking responsibility for what's in our hands. It means shaping ourselves through interaction with the other person and letting that enrich the relationship, who we are, and our future connections. It means recognizing when resisting is unnecessary wear and tear—and when flowing with change is the better choice.

| *Two* | There will always be differences.

No matter how much love, friendship, or blood ties there are, no matter how many values we share or how well we fit together, there will always be differences.

We all carry fears, flaws, and experiences that shape an imperfect way of being. And when we relate to others, we bring all of that into the space between us.

What feels normal to one person can feel strange to the other. What gives one person security can create uncertainty in the other. What one person reads as a threat, the other takes as a lesson.

On top of that, the way we perceive any situation changes depending on timing, context, and emotional state. What feels like nothing to one person today can become a problem tomorrow. What we can handle calmly one day can become the trigger for chaos on another. There isn't a single "right" way to see things—and that's where conflict begins, when we expect the other person to think, feel, and act exactly the way we would.

So how do we handle differences better? By stopping the automatic reactions. By asking ourselves how we're interpreting what's happening, how we respond when something isn't the way we expected, by expressing what we feel instead of waiting for the other person to guess it, and by learning to tell the difference between a passing discomfort and a lasting problem.

The key is to train the inner voice that reacts the moment the other person does something that doesn't sit right with us. If we can't understand (at least a little) why the other person acts the way they do, we won't be able to navigate the relationship.

And understanding doesn't mean accepting what's unacceptable or tolerating behavior that goes against our values.

***I Three* | Adapting means more than accepting: it also means making concessions.**

It's true that for a relationship to thrive, multiple elements have to come together, including shared interests and shared values. But we'll never enjoy exactly the same things and we won't approach every situation the same way.

In that sense, adapting goes further, beyond accepting the other person, we also have to make concessions. Making concessions means giving something up (or doing something that isn't our favorite) for the sake of the relationship.

Maybe we don't love our partner's family, but making a concession means seeing them once in a while because it matters to the person we love. The same goes for tagging along with a friend to a concert in a genre we're not into simply because we value how important that plan is to them.

| Four | Being the only one making concessions can be exhausting.

A healthy relationship isn't one that never goes through hard moments or challenges, but it also isn't one that constantly disrupts our peace of mind. Relationships aren't always fifty-fifty: one person tends to do more of one thing, the other more of another. And that's fine. Relationships aren't spreadsheets.

The effort moves around depending on the season we're in, what each of us is carrying, and what life is asking of us. Sometimes one of us gives more in one place, the other gives more somewhere else, and that's part of how two imperfect people make it work. But when one person carries the full weight of always adjusting, exhaustion is inevitable.

If every conversation feels like work, if every disagreement means adapting and giving something up, if every interaction drains us mentally, if we feel the only way the relationship works is by constantly editing ourselves—then instead of growing together, we're losing ourselves.

We have to know how to hold on—but also when to let go. Leaving isn't always failure, just as staying isn't always bravery. We have to choose the people who are worth the effort.

Being family doesn't mean you're destined to stay together at any cost. Twenty years together doesn't mean you have to endure things that hurt. Being childhood friends doesn't justify tolerating unacceptable behavior. Saying goodbye can also be an act of love. Sometimes, ending a relationship is the only way not to end up broken.

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PRINCIPLE 14

*A healthy relationship isn't a battle of sacrifices,
but the balance between adapting and staying true to yourself.*

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15.

Ten Things About Money to Keep in Mind

We want money. We need it. There's no way around it. We've been using it for centuries as a medium of exchange to get our basic needs met. Most of what we need to survive today depends on it: food, housing, electricity, clothing—everything. We care about it because it matters.

We want more and more. Yet that importance doesn't always show up in how we manage it. We like to show it off, sometimes even more, to look like we have more than we do. We love seeing it, holding it, using it, spending it. We like the feeling that it's ours.

A lot of people say money can't buy happiness, but studies suggest well-being rises steadily up to around \$75,000 a year. Beyond that, the effect on well-being seems to level off. By contrast, earning less than \$12,000 a year is linked to struggling to cover basic needs like housing, food, and essential services, which fuels its opposite: distress.

It seems we all know what it's for, but few know how to relate to it. This may be because of how we were raised, cultural baggage, a lack of information, or simply not caring enough to learn. And yet money is still a taboo topic, surrounded by misinformation and discomfort.

Money is just another tool, and we have to learn how to use it. Getting clear on a few key concepts can be the difference between handling it well and losing it without even knowing why.

| One | What real wealth is.

Waking up with the whole day ahead of you, knowing you're in charge of your decisions and that you can choose what to do and what not to do, is the highest level of wealth. Who wouldn't want more control over their life?

Money obviously helps you feel that kind of control—but time matters even more. There's no point making \$20 million a month if you wake up every day without the freedom to decide what to do with your life. If your income allows you enough time to do what you want, you have a kind of wealth most people will never experience.

But do you really need a lot of money to gain more control of your time? How much, exactly? And what should you keep in mind?

| Two | What you spend matters far more than what you make.

We tend to judge wealth by what we can see. We build a picture of someone's financial situation from what they show (or what we think we're seeing), as if that were enough to draw a conclusion. The cars. The vacations. The houses. The watches. The Instagram photos. The restaurants.

Wealth is what you don't see. It doesn't matter how much you earn. If you spend it buying things, you'll end up with the things, but not the money. One person can enjoy time and freedom with less money, while another can be drowning, on the edge of bankruptcy, making a fortune every week. As Morgan Housel says, wealth is the cars you didn't buy, the clothes you passed on, and the first-class seats you didn't pay for. It's hard to think of wealth as something intangible because it's hard to picture everything we can't see.

The stupidest way to feel rich is to spend money on useless but flashy things. And doing it to prove to other people—or even to yourself—how much you have is the fastest way to drain it and become a slave to what you fear most: having less and less.

| Three | Our possessions speak for themselves—not for us.

When you're scrolling through social media and you see someone showing off a flashy car, you rarely think, "They must be a great person." What you probably think is, "That's a beautiful car (expensive, unusual—whatever). If I had it, people would think..." And people would think the same thing: that it's a beautiful car (expensive, unusual—whatever).

What we're really chasing when we show off our possessions is respect and admiration. Sometimes we're even trying to validate ourselves—prove to ourselves we deserve the reward. But our possessions impress other people far less than they impress us.

Using them as a yardstick for our worth (especially our self-worth) is a way of boxing ourselves into expectations we think other people have at the expense of our savings. What really speaks for us isn't what we own, but what we value and what we do.

| *Four* | If what we spend puts us in debt, we're done.

When we make financial decisions, we rarely think about what they'll do to our peace of mind. We focus more on the quick hit of dopamine or on adding one more thing to our list of possessions. When it comes to debt, there are two basic kinds: good debt and bad debt.

Bad debt is the kind most of us create. We use it to buy things or services that not only don't generate income, but end up costing more than what we paid for them (through taxes, insurance, or maintenance). It's what happens when we live beyond our means: we spend more than we make and, to cover the gap, we take out a bank loan.

As a result, we don't just go into debt. We also sacrifice part of our savings (money that could have been used to make more money) and we put up as collateral things we think are ours, but that, until the debt is paid off, belong to whoever lent us the money.

Good debt is debt you take on to invest in an asset with the intention that it will generate income. The idea is that once it's paid off, instead of taking money from you, it will start giving money back to you. One acts like a leak in your resources, the other works like an investment with a return.

| *Five* | Managing money so we can sleep at night.

Having cash on hand (a margin of safety) is key to improving our quality of life. But before we can build it, we have to identify and plug the leaks where our money keeps slipping away. There's no one-size-fits-all number, because everyone's needs are different.

Still, how much are we talking? A common rule of thumb is a financial cushion that covers anywhere from six months to two years of expenses. That way you can handle surprises without putting your stability at risk: a pandemic, a market crash, or any other unexpected situation.

The worst events are the ones you don't see coming, the black swans. That's why people go broke. Nobody can predict the unpredictable and you can't react if you're not prepared. Building a buffer for surprises helps you weather a few scenarios and buys you enough time so an unlikely event doesn't cause irreparable damage.

I Six | When money loses value.

Bills are made from a blend of cotton and linen, layered with security features. Coins are made from metal alloys. For most people, replicating either is practically impossible.

"I wish I could print money whenever I wanted," we've all thought at some point. But we can't. Central banks and governments, though, can expand the amount of money in the system. When they run up debt, more money gets created. It's that simple. And every time it happens, there's more currency in circulation. The problem is that the more abundant something becomes, the less it's worth. When there's excess money sloshing around the economy, prices rise. Over time, you can buy less with the same amount. That's called inflation.

What makes something valuable is scarcity. If it can be multiplied without limits, its value drops. That's why gold works as a store of value: it's limited.

Each year, money loses around 2% to 3% of its purchasing power. That means if you stash \$10,000 in a drawer today, ten years from now you'll only be able to buy what about \$7,750 buys today. You'll have "lost" \$2,250 without spending a cent. Bottom line: every time governments and central banks create more money, what you have today will buy less tomorrow.

I Seven | There's no wealth without financial literacy.

Saving and being mindful of what we spend is essential. But if we don't know how to protect our money over time, we'll lose it without even

noticing.

You don't have to be an expert to protect it from losing value. Something as simple as a savings account that earns enough interest to keep up with inflation can be enough to stop your money from shrinking, while keeping risk low and your money available.

If you also want it to grow over the long run, index funds are a simple, low-cost option. And if you're aiming higher, why not? That's possible too. But like anything else, the more complex it gets, the more you'll need to know. And the bigger the reward, the more risk you'll have to tolerate.

Because with money, as in life, ignorance is expensive—very expensive.

| Eight | Patience pays better than any paycheck.

Once you realize that cash sitting still loses value and you decide, depending on your risk tolerance, to put it to work, you can't ignore the power of compound interest. Whatever the return, if you don't touch it, your money will start making more money. And not just on the original amount, but on the gains you've already made, which then generate their own gains. That's exponential growth: the more you earn, the more you can earn. That's the core of compound interest.

At first it feels slow. But over time, its growth depends on one thing: patience.

| Nine | It's easy to get discouraged by the extremes.

Anything that looks huge (wildly profitable, famous, or influential) is usually the result of an exceptional event: an outlier among thousands or millions, or a story designed to sell you something. And yet most of our attention goes exactly to those exceptions. We love big wins that let us think big and dream, but it's worth remembering that people who are rewarded with enormous wealth when things go right have to pay an equally enormous price when things go wrong.

The bigger the potential payoff, the bigger the risk you have to take, and the lower the odds it will happen. Fixating on life at the extremes is the fastest way to end up with less and less money.

| Ten | Learning to be happy with less.

Learning to be happy with less gives you a boost similar to what you get when you increase your income—except it's easier to achieve and is under your control.

The more we need, the more dependent we become. The more dependent we are, the less freedom we have.

There's no greater misfortune than believing you're always missing something to feel whole.

This isn't about giving everything up or living with the bare minimum. It's about stopping the habit of measuring success by accumulation and starting to value it by peace of mind. The peace of mind that comes from knowing you don't have to run to keep up. It's knowing that life isn't built only on what you produce, but on what you can enjoy with what you already have, no matter what you make.

Having enough doesn't mean too little or settling for the minimum. It doesn't mean having a lot, either. It means understanding money for what it is: a tool that lets you enjoy real wealth—time.

Real wealth isn't what you own. It's what you no longer need to chase and the time you can use to do what truly matters to you.

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PRINCIPLE 15

*If you don't learn to manage your money,
you'll spend your life working for it.*

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16.

Expectations That Never Stay Still

Over the course of our lives, few things shape our sense of happiness as much as the expectations we build around it. They don't just define our idea of what happiness should look like. They also determine how we react when reality doesn't match what we expected.

What our life should look like. Our job. Our partner. Our friends. Our birthdays. Our trips. And not just that: how we should feel about all of it, and how everyone else should feel, too.

A lot of the time, our mood depends more on our expectations than on anything else. It's a weight we add to our mental load more often than we realize. When reality matches what we thought, we feel good. When reality exceeds what we thought, we feel even better. But when reality doesn't match what we thought at all, we feel bad. And the higher the expectation, the harder the fall. What we're really chasing is the gap between what we expected and what actually happened.

Expectations can be fuel that pushes us toward what we want—but they can also be an obstacle that takes us down if we don't handle them well. We shouldn't rely on them too much. Feeling bad, a lot of the time, is nothing more than an expectation that didn't come true, “This isn't what I expected” or “This isn't how I think it should be.”

The main takeaway is simple: the less we expect from things, the more satisfied we'll be with our lives.

| One | Well-being isn't in what's coming next.

One of the biggest traps with expectations is believing that something in the future will fix the discomfort you feel right now. It's common to think, "When I get that job..." or "when I move somewhere else..." or "when I find the right person...."

But what if that moment never comes? Or worse, what if it comes and it's not what you expected? The problem isn't wanting to improve. The problem is placing your well-being in something you don't even know will give you relief. Even imagining it gives you a shot of hope, because in your mind, everything fits perfectly, and you build a picture of how you'll feel. But reality is usually very different from imagination. Not better or worse—just different.

If you get used to placing your well-being in what's coming, you'll end up stuck in a constant state of dissatisfaction: how you feel now versus how you'll feel later, assuming your "now" isn't enough and the solution is always in the next thing.

The better alternative is to balance your desires, set expectations that match what you're likely to get and, above all, learn to enjoy what you already have. An alternative that doesn't require giving up your ambitions, but does let you live with less weight and more satisfaction in the present.

| Two | Expectations tend to grow faster than our circumstances.

The problem with expectations isn't just that they often mess with how we feel when reality doesn't match what we expected. It's that they have a bad habit of rising faster than the circumstances around us. As soon as we achieve something in our lives, our expectations move on to the next level. The gap between what we expect and what we get keeps widening because our expectations grow much faster than our ability to adapt to what we already have.

Keeping future ambitions from eclipsing present satisfaction isn't just important—it's often far more within our control than the circumstances themselves.

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PRINCIPLE 16

If you expect too much from life,

you end up unable to accept it.

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17.

How to Escape the Trap of Workplace Productivity

There was a time in our lives when we didn't know when it was 5:15, or what time the sun came up. We definitely weren't waking up because a watch on our wrist vibrated to tell us the sun was already out. Minutes didn't exist. Neither did the pressure to measure our days in hours. We lived by instinct: following the sun, the rhythm of the seasons, hunger, and fatigue. Time didn't dictate what happened. What happened dictated time.

What would we have chosen if we'd known everything the concept of time would do to us?

Our awareness of time marked a turning point. Early agricultural civilizations relied on observing natural cycles to know when to plant and when to harvest. That led to calendars and systems of measurement. Later came clocks, and with the Industrial Revolution, standardized schedules. That's when punctuality, efficiency, and an unprecedented obsession with productivity at work turned us into slaves to a system we designed ourselves and now use for everything. We built a system to optimize work. Today, we're the ones working for it.

This design has fueled a society that revolves around our careers, and it comes with a serious danger. When our lives start adjusting to work instead of work adjusting to our lives, we end up on a hamster wheel that only stops when we jump off. And if the inertia is too strong, the impact can be devastating. That's why the sooner we hit the brakes on that momentum; the sooner we can change its direction.

| One | Work expands to fill the time we give it.

If a task normally takes two months, something almost always happens: it takes us two months to finish. Give us a year and we'll stretch it across the entire year: slow, scattered progress at the start, then a last-minute sprint right before it's due. Students and exam deadlines are the clearest example.

The same thing happens with the workday. An eight-hour day (at best) is a bucket we keep filling until it's full. Some tasks are necessary. Others exist purely to pad the hours. Parkinson's Law is blunt: work expands to fill the time available. Give it eight hours and you'll find a way to use eight hours, even if that means dragging out processes, sitting through meetings that should've been an email or spending hours writing emails that could've been settled with a two-minute call.

Here's the problem. In most jobs, productivity isn't measured by results—it's measured by face time. Work doesn't end when what matters is done; it ends when the clock says it's over. Before clocks existed, time bent around what was happening. Today, we're the ones bending around time, following rigid schedules without questioning whether they make any sense.

Of course, not everyone has control over their time at work. Some roles are tied to the schedule by nature: hands-on roles, jobs that require you to be available to customers, work that can't realistically be "optimized." If that's your situation, the best move is to keep your work hours from spilling into the rest of your life. Don't stretch your day longer than necessary and don't take on tasks that aren't yours once you're off the clock, putting your personal life above your professional one.

But if you do have flexibility and control over your schedule, you need to flip the question: "If I only had two hours a day to work, what would I focus on?" You already know the answer: what actually matters.

That simple exercise exposes how much we could stop doing, delegate, or cut entirely. Keep what's essential, cut what's unnecessary, and prioritize what's left. Not only does it lower your stress, it gives you back something more valuable: time to live.

| Two | Doing more to get more?

We often confuse longer hours and more effort with better results and more credit. But most of the time, the opposite happens. We push harder than ever and still feel stuck while life slips through our fingers. Like running on

a treadmill, burning energy without going anywhere. Why do we do it? Sometimes because we think that's how you get ahead. Other times, simply because we're afraid of looking lazy, like a burden, just piling up reasons to get cut from the job or from the status that comes with being the one who puts in the most hours.

If we keep repeating the same tasks day in and day out without asking whether they're actually moving us toward what we want, it's possible we're investing our time in something that only drops us back at square one.

Effort doesn't always get rewarded. Effort without strategy is exhaustion. A lot of the time, it's not the person who works the most who goes the farthest—it's the person who learns to work differently.

The one who stays agile and adapts. The one who stops doing what adds nothing. The one who takes a step back so they can take two steps forward. The one who, once they understand why they're spending their hours the way they do, starts prioritizing themselves and what matters most. The one who also learns to stop and carve out the space that actually helps them thrive.

Let's give ourselves permission to slow down and ask whether what we're doing even makes sense. More hours won't automatically lead to better results or more credit. If the path we're on isn't taking us toward what we truly want, taking more steps will only take us farther away, faster, and turning back will start to feel like a burden we don't know how to carry.

| Three | Don't listen to other people's plans.

We spend our lives following plans we didn't even design. We're told we should climb, grow, do more, be more. That success is more money, more responsibility, more recognition. But we rarely stop to ask whether we even want what we're supposedly chasing. Here's a story that captures the pointlessness of the race for "more," and the mess we're slowly drifting into.

A carpenter sits in the shade of a tree, reading a book. Before long, a businessman passing by stops and asks what he does for a living. He's surprised to see someone so relaxed.

"I carve wooden figures and sell them," the carpenter says. "When I'm done, I spend most of my day reading, going for walks, and enjoying time

with my family.”

Appalled by how the carpenter uses his time, the businessman takes it upon himself to give him some advice:

“You should reinvest what you make and grow your woodworking shop. Then you should train employees to carve the same figures. After that, you could open branches in different cities and have a lot more people working for you, making and selling them all over the country. That way you’ll build a fortune and retire early.”

“And what would I do then?” the carpenter asks, curious.

“Well,” the businessman says, “you could spend your days reading, going for walks, and enjoying time with your family.”

| Four | The value of stopping and making time to think.

We’ve been taught that work is the only way to move forward. That the more we do, the more we’re worth. That if we stop, we lose. But no one ever taught us to ask whether what we’re doing is actually taking us where we want to go, professionally or personally. We live stuck on a workplace hamster wheel, where being constantly busy gets confused with progress, where working more is equated with success, and where the fear of doing less pushes us to do too much. But what’s the point of doing more and more if we don’t know where we’re going? Or what we want? Or what we believe we’re worth?

Stopping isn’t wasting time. Stopping is the only way to make sure we’re not wasting it.

If you never question what you’re doing, chances are you’ll end up following a path you never chose.

It’s essential to ask, “What am I doing this for? Why do I do this? What’s the cost? Is this really what I want to do? What part of my life am I sacrificing without realizing it? If I’m not okay with it, what am I going to do (starting today) to change it?”

When the trap of workplace productivity takes over our lives, taking it back starts with deciding what we’re going to do with the time we have.

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PRINCIPLE 17

If all you know is how to work,

you have no idea how to live.

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18.

Turned into Strangers by the Fear of What Others Think

We care far too much about what others think. Even people who swear they're immune to outside judgment still have moments of doubt—insecurities and fears tied to how they're perceived. Who hasn't felt the pressure to fit in, to avoid disappointing someone, or to not come across as something they're not?

From an evolutionary perspective, it makes perfect sense to want to belong. Being part of the group helped us survive. And while it's natural (and even necessary) to care what others think of us, sometimes that instinct comes at too high a price. We let the need for acceptance shape our opinions, our emotions, and who we are. We adapt so much to other people's expectations that we end up becoming strangers to ourselves.

So, if it makes sense to care what others think, where's the line? What should matter? And how do we know when we're giving it too much weight?

***I One* | Constant self-analysis. No pause. No rest.**

We're having a normal conversation (no pressure like speaking in public or admitting our feelings to someone) and still we fall into the habit of analyzing every moment of the interaction until we're drained. "What did they mean, exactly? Did I come off wrong? Do I seem weak? Or worse—stupid? Did I look awkward when I moved like that? Did I give the right impression?"

The whole thing becomes an emotional puzzle. Every piece we try to force into place only leads to more and more questions, both during the interaction and after it. We get pulled into a spiral of thoughts, searching for meaning or approval in something that might not even have either. Meanwhile, the moment we're supposed to be in passes right by us. We're busy decoding how we're coming across instead of paying attention.

| Two | Perfectionism: the fear of getting it wrong.

This over analysis is rooted in perfectionism and it can push us to avoid decisions or abandon goals out of fear of being imperfect. And that's just fear of judgment in disguise. Deep down, we're not as afraid of the mistake itself as we are of how other people will read it. Every time we keep postponing something to "improve it" over and over, what we're really doing is protecting ourselves from potential criticism and delaying a moment we don't think we'll be able to handle.

People are too busy dealing with their own lives to spend that much time judging what we do. And even if they do, at least in their heads, don't we do the same to others? Don't they have the right to do the same? Thinking otherwise is, in a way, its own form of egocentrism.

What's worse, making a mistake or staying paralyzed by fear? Mistakes are part of growth. Paralysis only steals time and opportunity.

| Three | Trying to please everyone—until you're drained.

This puts us in a position where we stop following our own values and start sacrificing our time and energy to earn other people's approval.

Sometimes all it takes is a familiar pattern. The weekend arrives and we planned to rest or spend time doing something we enjoy, and then someone calls and asks us to show up because "everyone" is going. Even if we don't want to, we say yes, not to disappoint them (and, more than anything, to avoid that nagging sense of being judged). Then a message comes in from someone who needs a favor, perfectly timed for right after we're done with the first event. We say yes again.

And suddenly we realize we have this awful habit of bouncing from one thing to the next while justifying it with lines like: "They need me," "I'd want them to do it for me," "I don't want anyone to feel bad," or "I'm doing

it for others.” In moments like this, we’re really just trying to escape the possibility of someone else judging us and quieting the fear of ending up alone. Meanwhile, our time evaporates into people’s expectations, as we run from judgments we don’t know (and may never know) if they’ll ever happen.

If we always say yes, we’re training people to assume we’ll never say no. Every unnecessary yes we pile onto our backs makes it heavier and harder to remember where we are in all of it.

This isn’t about disappearing on people. It’s about remembering that our time, our energy, and our wants matter.

When we set boundaries, we’re not only choosing ourselves—we’re also teaching people how to treat us.

| *Four* | Not being able to handle criticism.

Most of us struggle, to some degree, to handle criticism. But some people deal with that feeling far more often. Maybe we’re at dinner with friends, with our partner, or with coworkers, and someone dares to question something about us. A simple comment, and suddenly it’s there. Enough to ruin our day. All at once, discomfort starts growing inside us. Even if the intention isn’t bad, we experience it as an attack we have to defend ourselves against and recover from.

We make faces. We get irritated. We blow their words out of proportion. We get angry. And worst of all, in many cases, all of it happens only inside us. We get stuck in a contradiction between what we show (calm) and what we feel (rage and irritation).

Maybe we’ve mistakenly linked the comment to an attack on our worth. As if admitting we have flaws makes us less deserving of love or respect. If we think about it objectively (and the comment wasn’t meant to hurt), the problem isn’t the comment itself, but the weight we give it. When we take any criticism as an attack on our identity, all we do is carry a burden that isn’t ours.

It’s as if every negative word becomes an open wound that bleeds more with every thought we give it. This isn’t about ignoring all criticism. It’s about learning to hear it without letting it punch holes in our self-esteem. There’s a big difference between reflecting on a comment and letting it define us.

If the criticism is useful and helps us improve, we can learn from it. If it isn't, we can discard it.

In the same way, if we respect the person it's coming from, we can listen and try to understand it. If we don't, it's better not to waste more time or set a boundary. Not all criticism carries the same weight, and neither does the person saying it.

Letting go of the need to live at the mercy of other people's judgment doesn't mean becoming immune to it or pretending it doesn't matter. That's impossible.

It means learning not to let it run our lives. Understanding that matters. It's the first step toward setting the burden down, little by little.

The negativity we imagine in other people's thoughts about us is usually just a projection of our own insecurity, not their real perception. And that, by itself, tells us a lot about the areas we still need to work on.

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PRINCIPLE 18

*If you live to please everyone,
you die without ever being anyone.*

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19.

The Calm That Doesn't Solve Everything When Someone Comes at You (and How to Respond to Their Fire)

The line between a well-intentioned action and its opposite is often razor-thin. We live in a world packed with advice and solutions for almost everything, some useful, some not so much. A lot of it can be read in completely different ways, depending on the lens you're using.

The personal-development world offers an endless library of principles that sound great (even enlightened), but in practice can become a source of frustration if you take them literally, as we'll see in a moment.

It's one thing to learn to accept certain criticism or not give too much weight to well-meaning comments. It's another thing entirely to handle real conflict. Learning to do that in the most realistic, grounded way possible matters for two reasons. First, so we don't beat ourselves up for struggling with situations that aren't always under our conscious control and second, so we can show up more and suffer less in our personal relationships.

Handling conflict well can change the direction of our relationships. Our survival and well-being depend largely on the quality of those relationships. In most cases, conflict isn't the problem. Not knowing what to do with it is.

So, let's navigate everything around it and shed some light on situations that can be deeply challenging.

| One | If something bothers us, is it because we're judging it?

“If something bothers you, it’s because you’re judging it” is probably the most common mantra among the self-control crowd, right alongside the classic “It’s not you—it’s your ego.”

The idea is that if anything (an insult, a person, a situation) sets off even a flicker of discomfort, annoyance, or anger, it’s because you’ve judged it and labeled it, listening to your ego instead of who you are. The reasoning goes like this: nothing outside you can truly affect you. You decide how to feel based on the mental label you slap on it. And when you react, you’re failing to stay level.

And it doesn’t stop there. It doesn’t just make you responsible for what you feel. It puts your reaction under the thumb of the self-control you’re supposed to have once you create some distance from your ego. And if you can’t manage to feel serenity (and, on top of that, you can’t even perform it), that must mean you lack emotional intelligence and self-control.

In everyday life, where we sometimes overreact to small, insignificant things, this belief can be genuinely useful. Think about a traffic jam: not yelling, not laying on the horn, not stewing over how much time you’re “wasting.” Reminding yourself it’s not really up to you, and using the moment to listen to a podcast, call your parents, or simply sit there. With practice, you start retraining the negative emotions and impulsive reactions that show up in circumstances like these—circumstances that, if you’re honest, don’t have much impact on your life.

But life isn’t only traffic jams, stepping in dog poop, or spilling coffee on a new shirt.

There are more complex situations (especially conflict in relationships) where it’s not just the bad habit of overreacting at play. Biology is in the room, too.

In fact, part of that judging comes from our wiring, something that isn’t always fully up to what our conscious mind decides to feel or do. A wiring that tilts us toward certain emotions and reactions over others, depending on the situation.

| Two | The biology behind hard moments.

Stepping away from the belief that “if something bothers us, it’s because we’re judging it” matters in more complex situations for two reasons: first, it helps us be more compassionate with ourselves, and second, it pushes us

toward something more effective than trying to repress a response that often isn't fully under conscious control.

When is it hardest to “change our judgment” quickly and deliberately? An assault. A threat. Physical or verbal aggression. A provocation—any version of the same thing. In those moments, the body snaps into fight-or-flight, and that doesn't depend on our ability to decide how to act, let alone what to feel. It's a biological response shaped by genetics, experience, environment, and what's happening right now. A response designed to protect us, like any other animal facing danger.

Saying that fear, rage, or anger in those situations is “just” a product of your judgment (or your ego, if you like that term) isn't only wrong—it's dangerous, because it makes you feel like something is wrong with you. Intense emotions are natural and necessary. They get us ready to act, whether that means defending ourselves or getting away from real danger.

In fact, repressing these responses to prove you have “superior” emotional intelligence can backfire. It doesn't only create inner conflict. It can also ramp up the body's stress response in a way that, instead of helping, ends up taking a toll on both physical and mental health.

Under threat, the body releases hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, gearing us up for fight-or-flight. They raise heart rate, blood pressure, and available energy, so we can move fast.

They leave you with a very narrow window to respond calmly. If we force ourselves not to react and hide the emotion, we don't stop that hormonal surge; we also block the body from doing what those signals are meant for. You end up stuck on high alert, with the body continuing to release stress hormones without the expected outlet: running or fighting.

Over time, this means higher internal stress and extra strain on the nervous and cardiovascular systems, which can make anxiety episodes, depression, chronic stress, and out-of-place overreactions more likely later on. And in people who already have coronary artery disease, it may even raise the risk of worsening the condition. This is what happens when you hold it in, and hold it in, and keep holding it in—clinging to the idea that if you just stop judging it, it'll stop bothering you.

So emotional intelligence isn't about looking away and suppressing these responses. It's about recognizing them, understanding where they come from, and learning to manage them effectively so you can recover

properly once the threat has passed. In short: learning how to relate to our emotions.

| *Three* | The razor-thin line between what's acceptable and what isn't.

There's a razor-thin line between what's objective and what's subjective—between what's right and what's wrong. What one person reads as disrespect, another might see as completely normal. Still, there are behaviors that go beyond “different interpretations” and cross the line of basic respect and decency: yelling at someone, raising a hand at them, insulting them. Hard to justify as acceptable.

But violence doesn't always show up in obvious ways. Most of the time, someone who means to hurt you is, in their own way, a master of subtlety, using tactics that don't quite cross into the obvious, but still serve as cover against real pushback. Public “jokes” meant to humiliate, snide comebacks, provocative sarcasm, and the list goes on.

In those moments, if someone has violated our boundaries, instead of suppressing the emotion and pretending we're unaffected, we can respond—without resorting to violence, of course. That starts with getting clear on what those boundaries actually are and which behaviors we're willing to accept in our interactions, and which we aren't.

Once they're defined, it's essential to communicate them clearly and directly to the people who crossed them. But if we want them respected, we have to be consistent with them everywhere—not just when it suits us.

Does simply naming it make the fight-or-flight response disappear? Not always. Not completely. It depends on how satisfying it felt to say what needed to be said and on how much you think it landed with the other person.

Because clarity and delivery are skills you build. Nobody becomes the clear, concise communicator they've always wanted to be overnight. It takes practice and repeated exposure to similar situations. So, if, after setting our boundaries, we still feel stress moving through our body, we can use the following techniques to help discharge that biological response—without starting to slap people, even if sometimes it's not for lack of wanting to.

| *Four* | How to directly reduce the chemical flood your body just triggered.

Calibrating our responses and setting things straight is a good way to keep relationships from blowing up in seconds. But our primitive system doesn't do strategy—it wants fast action.

- I see a lion → Stress spikes → I run for my life → I burn off the stress (if I run far enough).
- Someone comes at me → Stress spikes → I run or I fight → I burn off the stress (if I make it out).

So instead of reaching for deep breaths, “stepping back” from ego-driven judgments, or trying to think your way into perspective in the middle of a cortisol rush, let's lean into something that can minimize (and sometimes even shut down) the stress response as it's happening.

Maybe less orthodox. Maybe less enlightened. Maybe more human.

To clear out the leftover stress hormones after you've set a boundary, one good option is to go physical right away: a few all-out sprints, a scream somewhere private, or a hard round on a heavy bag (if you've got one). A solid workout works too, and it comes with a double benefit of better health, less stress.

This isn't about feeding anger. It's about helping your system rebalance and keeping stress from getting stuck in your body. What you repress will surface sooner or later. And if it doesn't, it'll wear you down.

The key is to get creative about releasing what's built up in the smartest, least damaging way possible, for you and for the people around you. That's what separates us from animals: we can, to some extent, channel and redirect some of our physiological responses on purpose, even if it isn't easy at first (because it isn't).

A pit bull isn't going to bite a pillow after warning you not to mess with him again, because he can't reason like that. We can—at least partly. And that's where emotional intelligence comes in: in how we handle and direct our emotions.

| *Five* | Trying to grow as people and build emotional intelligence—without fooling ourselves.

Emotional intelligence and self-control aren't about staying unshaken all the time, in every situation. They're about facing life with a healthy mix of reason and emotion. Hiding behind simplistic "self-control" principles to justify our lack of action (when the truth is we're afraid to face hard situations, socially or personally) is the opposite of what we're actually after.

That takes a deeper understanding of our feelings and how they interact with the world around us, which lets us live in a more authentic, connected way. We're constantly shaped by what's around us; pretending we can step outside of it doesn't make sense.

Real self-control isn't about wiping out emotions. It's about accepting them and handling them well. And that's exactly where the skill gets built, in the hard part. The goal isn't to be calm all the time or to avoid conflict. It's to know what you're feeling—and to use that knowledge to face life with all its challenges and rough corners.

When we talk about things as complex as thoughts, reactions, and emotions, we often find ourselves at a crossroads between science and philosophy—between what's objective and what's subjective. And that's life: a mystery we're still far from solving.

It's common to run into claims (from both camps) like the ones mentioned earlier, or lines like: "you are the awareness observing your thoughts," "your thoughts are your ego—you are not your thoughts," "you're not the thinker—your mind is." But instead of clarifying anything, they often confuse and frustrate the people they're supposed to help.

Labels, stories, and definitions are human inventions meant to describe realities that sometimes slip past our understanding—and all it takes is Buddha saying it for the neuroscientist of the month to echo it.

But if "my brain" is part of "me," along with my heart, my lived experience, and my memories (what many people call the ego), then a fragmented perspective starts to make very little sense. We are a complex interplay of everything that makes up our existence. Embracing that complexity and acknowledging all its parts is part of what makes us who we are.

Many philosophies (and even some sciences) suggest a fragmented perspective. The problem is that this perspective can start to feel like a form

of dissociation and depersonalization—a denial of our existence as a coherent, connected whole.

This fragmented view was common in the early stages of medical science when problems in the body were treated as isolated issues, until a more integrated view made it clear that the interconnection between our systems is essential for understanding any aspect of our health and our behavior.

That's why separating our sense of self from our biological, psychological, and social processes is just repeating an age-old mistake. We are a coherent, connected whole. A unit where body and mind constantly interact with the environment, where each part of us influences the others, alongside our past and present experiences. Recognizing that connection helps us see ourselves as one unit and understand our experiences better, without splitting ourselves up or unnecessarily rejecting the very things that make us who we are.

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PRINCIPLE 19

*Self-control isn't about choosing what to feel,
but about knowing what to do with what you feel*

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20.

Sixteen Brief Ideas to Reflect on Our Lives

***I One* | Life isn't that bad if...**

You have a friend you can share your good news with, someone who's genuinely happy for you. You call your dad or your mom and they pick up. Someone you love values your advice. On Mondays, you're not already wishing the week were over. On weekends, you don't drown the week's stress in alcohol. Your home stays somewhere between 60°F and 80°F. Whenever you're thirsty or hungry, you can drink or eat. You don't need to show your personal life on social media. Your main entertainment isn't scrolling on a screen all day. You have the physical ability to play sports. You can read. You can learn. Nothing and no one forces you to live the life you have. You can plan your future instead of only worrying about the present.

***I Two* | When we normalize what hurts us, we turn what's good for us into something strange.**

We live in a world where people look at you funny if you say no to alcohol, but no one's surprised if you're someone who doesn't take care of yourself. Where watching the news is more normal than reading a good book. Where it's more common to complain about your job than to ask yourself if you could change it. Where a pair of heels on wrecked feet draws less attention than bare feet. Where posting your vacation and your pregnancy updates is more normal than meeting up with your friends and telling them about it.

Where choosing work over your family is admirable, and choosing your family over work gets labeled “lazy in disguise.”

Choosing what’s good for you doesn’t require explanations. We’ve gotten used to justifying healthy habits, which says a lot about the kind of society we’re becoming.

You don’t need to.

Keep making the small choices.

Keep doing what’s good for you, because you’re choosing yourself, even if it makes you feel like you don’t fit into what’s “normal.”

| *Three* | We’re really good at worrying.

When we’re in our room and we hear a noise in the background, like a building’s fire alarm, we feel relief when it shuts off. But soon after, the brain adjusts and picks up another, fainter one, then another, which used to go unnoticed, like the tick of a clock.

Problems work the exact same way. When we solve one, our tendency to worry doesn’t disappear. We just switch targets. The brain seems to crave its daily dose of struggle. It’s always looking for a reason to stay on alert. From an evolutionary perspective, it makes sense. This tendency increased our chances of survival. Our brain wasn’t designed for peace—it was designed for survival. It doesn’t rest. It recalibrates. It doesn’t eliminate worries. It replaces them. It doesn’t seek calm. It seeks problems to solve.

Understanding this can make us more compassionate when we face our problems and help us gain perspective. We can ask ourselves, “Which parts of my life sound like a fire alarm and which are just the tick of a clock?”

| *Four* | We’re terrible predictors.

We spend our lives weighing risks and trying to guess what’s coming, either to avoid the consequences or to take advantage of them. Sometimes the risk is mundane: “It’s going to rain, so I’ll stay home and watch a movie.” Other times it’s bigger: “They say the market is about to crash (or soar)... maybe I shouldn’t invest (or maybe I should).” We love predicting—and we’re terrible at it.

Sure, everyday events are easier to forecast. When we miss, nothing really happens. At worst, we lose a sunny day, or we get caught in the rain.

The real problem is high-impact events. They don't announce themselves. A pandemic. An accident. A major earthquake. A market crash. A housing bubble. When things are that big, nobody sees them clearly ahead of time, not in a way that's actually useful. And even if someone "calls it" once in a while, that doesn't mean they can predict the future. With eight billion people on the planet, every possibility gets said out loud sooner or later.

We can't reliably predict the big ones. What we can do is prepare for them. It's almost always smarter to invest our time in preparation than in prediction. The point isn't to guess whether it will happen. The point is to be ready if it does.

I *Five* | Trying to eliminate fear comes at too high a cost, because fear, by nature, never really goes away.

We often get tangled up in fear. We think it's a weight strapped to our back, and that with the right tool we'll finally be able to get rid of it. The problem with that belief is that we end up chasing the tool forever. First we try one. Then another. And so on. Each time convinced we're a little closer to dropping the weight, as if once we let it go it will disappear for good.

Fear doesn't work like that. Fear is more like a shadow, no matter how far we run, it stays with us. We can move, change direction, or flood the room with light. But the shadow doesn't vanish—it just changes shape. And the harder we try to erase it, the more frustrated we become, because it can't be erased.

What we can do is learn not to stop every time we see it, and to keep moving, even when it feels stronger than ever.

The problem isn't the shadow. It's the attention we give it. It's like a small sound in the night, the more we focus on it, the louder it gets. If something can't be eliminated, it's better not to wrestle with it or fight it. Otherwise, it will always find a way to catch up to us.

I *Six* | Nothing in this world is to be feared—only understood.

There's nothing more paralyzing than the fear of what we don't know. Not because it's dangerous, but because it forces us to face what we can't control: uncertainty. Most of the time, that fear fades as we get closer to

understanding it, but that takes time. Once you understand something, it stops controlling you. And once it stops controlling you, it stops scaring you.

And ultimately, whatever can't be understood has to be accepted, so we don't amplify our suffering.

| *Seven* | You can't expect results from what you don't practice.

You (your body, your health, your mind, and almost everything you are) are a reflection of what you do every day. Not what you do once in a while, and definitely not what you say you'll do but never do.

| *Eight* | How we treat ourselves shapes how others treat us.

How we treat ourselves teaches other people how to treat us.

If we don't respect ourselves or value ourselves, we invite disrespect. If we settle for what we know isn't right, they'll assume we don't need more. If we keep ignoring ourselves and staying quiet, we become invisible. If our inner voice is cruel, we'll end up surrounded by people who echo it. If we don't listen to our own voice, no one else will. If we don't try to improve our life, no one else will do it for us.

Just as we should treat others the way we want to be treated, we should treat ourselves the way we want others to treat us.

| *Nine* | We're always going to pay a price—but sometimes we get to choose how we pay it.

Facing fear is painful, but living ruled by it hurts even more. Learning takes time and energy, but staying lost in ignorance costs you far more. Working out and taking care of your health take effort, but carrying a body that won't cooperate comes at a higher price. Discipline is uncomfortable, but living without self-control ends up costing you more. Saving and managing your money means giving things up, but being trapped in debt weighs a lot more. Changing your life is scary, but staying where it hurts slowly wears you down from the inside.

We can't escape the price of being alive—but we can decide how we pay it.

Either way, the price gets paid, now or later—with interest. The difference is which one we choose.

| Ten | Idealizing someone is setting them up to disappoint you.

There's nothing more exhausting than constantly expecting someone to be the ideal person you've imagined.

Every time their behavior doesn't match that idealized image, you feel disappointed and you end up forcing them to carry a burden they don't deserve. Trying to force something that doesn't fit will only break it.

It's more honest to get to know the person in front of you than the one you built in your mind. If something doesn't add up, it's always better to talk about it. From there, you can decide whether to keep growing together or to take separate paths.

Silently waiting for someone to meet your expectations isn't just unfair—it's the fastest way to destroy a relationship.

| Eleven | What surrounds us says more about us than our own words.

Our body reflects our habits. Our calendar reflects our priorities. Our books reflect our mindset. Our friends reflect our character. Our spending reflects our relationship with money. Our choices reflect who we are. We can say whatever we want about who we are. But what surrounds us ends up saying it for us.

| Twelve | To grow, sometimes you have to take a few steps back. To learn, sometimes you have to unlearn.

We all want to start from where we are, because it took a lot to get here. Nobody wants to go back, even when it's the only way to do it right.

Learning isn't just collecting knowledge. It's also questioning what we thought we knew, letting go of what we were taught, and undoing the mental knots that keep us stuck.

When you keep moving in the wrong direction, every step just takes you farther from where you actually want to go. It's like building furniture with the wrong instructions. You can keep tightening screws and forcing pieces into place, but if the foundation is off, all you're doing is wasting

time. Sometimes the only way to do it right is to take it apart and start again —with the right instructions.

| *Thirteen* | What suffering reveals about our foundation.

Grief and suffering are inevitable. They test our foundation. And what that foundation is made of determines whether we stay standing.

Trying to dodge the storm is wishful thinking. It's unrealistic. How solid our footing is depends more on us than on the force of nature. We don't know whether we'll get a light shower or a tornado. But if the life we've built rests on straw, even gentle rain will soak us to the bone.

The point isn't to be immune to pain. It's to build values, and a mind, body, and life that can face it without breaking apart. To build solid ground so that, when the rain comes, it supports us instead of weighing us down.

| *Fourteen* | You can't connect the dots looking forward; you can only connect them looking back.

The answers aren't in what will happen, but in what already happened. Moving ahead without understanding what brought you here is walking blind. Who we are now is the result of the dots we connected in the past. And it's in the present that we can recalibrate them so that in the future, when we look back, we can feel proud of our story. If we don't understand how we got here, we won't know where to go next.

| *Fifteen* | When obsessing over tiny health details can ruin your health.

We live in a culture that pushes us to obsess over insignificant details, piling on unnecessary stress in the name of "health." Things that technically matter, but don't come close to moving the needle could be cutting out gum, unplugging the Wi-Fi at night, taking apple cider vinegar before meals and ginger tea in the morning, only eating grass-fed, pasture-raised beef and organic vegetables, using "clean" cosmetics, blue-light-blocking glasses after 6 p.m., Himalayan salt... At some point, every new obsession to "optimize" your health can start harming it, because it adds stress and feeds the need to control everything. More isn't better.

A better choice is almost always to focus (and act) on the fundamentals, where real results actually come from, such as prioritizing minimally processed foods, maintaining a healthy body composition, exercising, sleeping enough, moving daily, keeping strong social connections and improving your work environment. In short, master the basics without getting lost in the rest.

| Sixteen | When love goes out without anyone noticing.

You stop asking how their day went, but you still expect them to understand your bad mood. You stop showing care, but you still expect the affection to stay intact. You talk less and argue more. You stop looking at the other person because you're too busy looking at yourself. You stop having sex, but you still expect desire. You stop admiring them, but you still expect them to look at you like they used to. You confuse routine with stability, comfort with indifference.

And just like that, without realizing it, love becomes an echo of what it once was. Conversations keep circling the same topics, filled with automatic replies, and silences that aren't comfortable anymore, full of things no one dares to say.

Until one day, in the middle of all that routine, someone realizes there's nothing left to lose. That the only thing holding them together is fear—habit and sheer inertia. That love didn't leave all at once; it just wore down from being taken for granted.

Because love doesn't disappear overnight. It goes out slowly when no one keeps it lit.

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PRINCIPLE 20

A life without frequent reflection is inertia.

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21.

The Power of What We Project and What We Intend to Project

As kids, we learn that communication is about more than just words. We instinctively adjust our posture, tone, gestures, and words depending on who's in front of us—and how we want to come across. That ability helped us dodge the occasional punishment, fit in, form our first friendships, or make our grandparents swear we were angels. We were simply kids using an innate skill to communicate and thrive socially.

Communication goes far beyond the words we say. It's a constant dance between what we say and what our body language, voice, and facial expressions reveal without us even noticing. In every interaction, we read each other unconsciously, and we're usually pretty good at picking up on confidence, shyness, or dishonesty.

Getting what we put out to match (and not contradict) what we're trying to convey can be a real challenge. Especially when nerves show up, social pressure kicks in, or we're dealing with people who simply weren't born with certain social skills. The good news is that, even though everyone is different, we can all strengthen the hand we were dealt when we came into this world.

Improving our ability to say what we mean through our words and body language helps us navigate social situations better and enrich our relationships, but if we don't learn to master it, we risk sending messages that don't match how we actually want to be seen.

| One | What our appearance says about us.

In nature, almost every animal sizes up its own kind in seconds. No talking required: posture, the sheen of a coat, agility, the gaze. Without even thinking, they pick up on whether they're facing a threat, a leader, or a potential mate.

We're not that different. We live in a culture that insists judging appearance is shallow, but we're wired to do it. Looking good and being in shape can signal health, self-respect, energy, and the ability to act, to care, to protect, to handle problems.

Natural selection has kept this first read alive in social animals because it helps us make better calls. Would we trust a stranger who looks like they don't take care of themselves—someone who seems run-down or unhealthy? Most of us would hesitate.

What we wear (and how we wear it) also speaks for us. Clothes, colors, how clean and put-together we look, accessories, hair, beard... everything.

The person across from us doesn't need a fashion degree to tell whether we're trying to impress with labels, whether we take care of ourselves, whether balance and simplicity reflect confidence, or whether excess is just insecurity. Subtle tends to leave a better impression than anything over the top. Excess often gives away a need to be noticed.

There are no fixed rules, but in general, less is more.

***Two* | Our body language speaks before we do.**

No matter how much we talk, it's our body that reveals whether we feel at ease or we can't wait to leave, whether we're comfortable or guarded, whether what we're saying feels true to us or we're just repeating something we don't even believe. Without much effort, we can tell when someone is uneasy. They sway or keep shifting positions, fold their arms like a shield, cross their legs tightly, fidget because they don't know what to do with their hands, or let their gaze bounce around the room without ever really landing.

The real work is becoming aware of what we're putting out and choosing to change it. We might notice that we stare too intensely, or that we rarely hold eye contact. Sometimes, it's enough to know that holding it for 60 to 70 percent of the time is usually plenty to avoid making the other person uncomfortable.

When we make the effort to refine our nonverbal communication we don't just strengthen it—we also influence ourselves. An insecure person who consciously chooses to stand tall, relax their shoulders, stop hunching, use their hands with intention while speaking, and plant their feet firmly on the ground about shoulder-width apart, will inevitably send different signals to the people around them, but also to themselves. Adopting a confident posture can cue patterns tied to self-confidence, a sense of control, and inner steadiness. Sometimes we don't feel the way we want to because we've spent too long holding the postures that feed the opposite feeling. But everything starts to shift when we decide to change them.

***I Three* | The space we take up (and the space we give).**

The distance we keep from someone isn't about how much we want to—it's about trust. Just as we wouldn't walk into someone's home without knocking, we shouldn't invade someone's physical or mental space until they've given us permission.

Some people take over a conversation as if it belongs to them. Others offer a handshake that's too firm, a signal of dominance or provocation. Or the opposite, a limp grip that reads as insecurity or distrust. Navigating other people's physical and mental space is an art.

But one thing is obvious, nobody likes it when someone gets too close before they've earned that closeness. Or, when someone monopolizes the conversation to talk about themselves in a self-important attempt to get validation. And nobody likes being met with a blank stare when they share what they feel (whether it's joy or sadness), as if the other person doesn't quite know what to do with those feelings.

And even though we may realize we're often dealing with people who are emotionally oblivious, that isn't always the problem. Sometimes it's a lack of attention.

Who hasn't caught themselves on autopilot, still nodding and smiling while the other person is talking about something painful? Paying attention to how we behave in this area can help us improve our skills and be more present in our relationships. Sometimes it's less about being a great communicator and more about putting our attention where it belongs.

***I Four* | What we say—and how we say it.**

Even though nonverbal communication carries enormous weight, what we say still matters. And it's not enough to know what to say—you have to know how to say it. When we're nervous or insecure, it's easy to slip into a rushed rhythm, speaking without pauses, losing impact because our voice sounds like it's racing to finish, or scrambling to fill an awkward silence.

Trying to speak while listening to ourselves and judging ourselves at the same time usually makes us communicate less effectively. Being aware of the context we're in, getting regular exposure to similar situations, understanding that a well-placed silence hits harder than rushed speech, and enunciating while slowing down are things that help us think before we respond and get our message across more clearly.

Even if our nonverbal cues are strong, our pauses are well-timed, and our tone is right, what we want to say won't land if we can't find the right words when we need them. When our vocabulary is limited, we get stuck, we circle the point, and we pad our sentences with filler words because we don't know how to explain ourselves. We don't train ourselves in better language use by simply talking more (though that also matters), but by reading more, listening more, and seeking out what we still haven't explored. The better we learn to organize what we think, the easier it becomes to say it.

One thing is clear, no one, not even someone who's naturally gifted, becomes a strong communicator without stepping into communication again and again, in every form and in every kind of setting.

Still, at some point, nerves, doubt, insecurity, or lack of practice have betrayed all of us. Sometimes we try to sound firm and without realizing it end up lowering our voice, shrinking ourselves, not knowing how to break out of it. Or the opposite, where we try to project confidence and end up coming off as forceful. The truth is, the impression we leave on others doesn't depend only on what we say and how we project it, but also on their own filters, their biases and experiences, and the way their personality shapes what they hear.

That's why communication isn't a fixed formula, even if there are basic rules. It's a constant act of calibration between the people in it.

This isn't about changing who we are or completely reinventing how we express ourselves. What matters is recognizing how we do it so we can improve it—practicing first in safe environments, and then gradually

stepping into situations that are increasingly challenging. When our body aligns with our voice and our intent, people start listening.

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PRINCIPLE 21

It's not enough to be it—you have to project it.

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22.

What the Most Satisfying Couples Have in Common

We get swept up in how beautiful love looks in movies and novels, and quickly form an idea of what we want it to feel like in our own lives. The danger is that, to keep the story moving, they tend to show symbolic moments that wrap love in an aura of effortless magic, as if it all happens because it's meant to be. It works on the page and on screen, but the problem is bringing that logic into real life without seeing what it's built on.

So, when reality doesn't match that ideal we feel disappointed. A relationship thrives (or it doesn't) for countless reasons and while there's no magic formula, the most satisfying relationships tend to share a set of principles that make them work and keep them strong over time. What are they?

| *One* | Shared sexual attraction.

Sexual attraction in a relationship isn't just about physical appearance. It's a nonnegotiable starting point, but it isn't enough. It's also about the overall erotic energy around it, including the way someone speaks, the flirting, the nonverbal cues, self-confidence, humor, fantasy, and the whole set of traits that make up the identity we keep sensing over time.

In romantic relationships, partners aren't just drawn to each other—they want each other sexually. That attraction is the core of desire, the thing that drives the search for pleasure, and it's exactly what separates a romantic relationship from a friendship or a family bond. Sexual attraction isn't a

bonus. It's the engine that separates romantic love from keeping someone company. un añadido: es el motor que distingue amar de acompañar.

| *Two* | The foundation you build on must be compatible.

Despite the romantic cliché that opposites attract, the truth is that too many differences in values and in the kind of life you want can create conflicts that become serious obstacles to having a long, healthy relationship. Compatibility largely depends on sharing values, life goals, and a similar way of seeing the world. That doesn't mean being identical. It means finding enough common ground to build a life together without constant friction by both people being willing to commit to a shared direction.

| *Three* | Mutual trust without judgment.

Knowing we can put our life in the other person's hands (trusting they'll do whatever it takes to help us and take care of us) matters. But trust isn't just that. It also means feeling safe sharing our worries, our more intimate parts, our doubts, and our desires, without fear of being judged or rejected. And it means making room for the other person to share, too.

Solid trust is built through communication in all its forms, from expressing our feelings, boundaries, agreements, and disagreements, and working through conflict to the small gestures, like saying "I love you" or simply joking together.

Trust doesn't appear overnight; it's built slowly, over time. But it's always easier to break than to build.

| *Four* | The art of laughing together (often).

Humor, or better yet a good sense of humor, is another trait you see again and again in relationships that work.

Who can really imagine sharing a life with someone without shared laughter, inside jokes, and playful moments? For most people it would be hard to picture, and above all, it would be boring.

Being willing to laugh at yourself, to spark a burst of laughter in the other person and pull them into that atmosphere, turns love into more than a

relationship. It turns it into a real art, a virtue, and something deeply desirable.

When a couple gets bored, it's a sign they're no longer experiencing life in the same way, which over time can lead them to look outside for what they don't feel inside. A bad mood is the enemy of love.

| Five | Respect above all.

None of what we're talking about matters once respect is gone. Listening, feeling listened to, respecting each other's rights, and making sure we don't cross the boundaries we've set are the pillars that make a relationship work long term.

No one could imagine sharing their life with someone if they aren't treated with respect, if they don't feel loved, if they don't feel valued, or if affection and care have faded away. In a healthy relationship, respect, mutual interest, and courtesy should always come first, with no room for disrespect.

This is closely tied to empathy. Putting ourselves in the other person's shoes and living by one basic rule: treat the other person the way you'd want to be treated.

That doesn't mean there won't be conflict. But it does mean that when conflict shows up, it's handled in a way that protects the relationship, since we will watch our tone, our gestures, and our words.

| Six | The small gestures of affection.

There's one ingredient that acts as a constant reminder of the relationship's value: affection. It's the tangible expression of the love and respect two people have for each other. It's made up of small, daily gestures (both physical and emotional) that show care and attention. Those gestures are what keep the flame going even after the initial novelty has faded (a phase that, in reality, doesn't last long). They're small, conscious acts that remind both of you that love is still there.

Affection is the thread that ties together respect, trust, humor, dialogue, and attraction, creating an environment where love doesn't just survive—it feels worth protecting.

It should flow naturally, without the sense that you're constantly fighting to hold it together. If everyday life turns into a permanent struggle, an effort that feels more like sacrifice than love, you may be trying to keep something alive that isn't really there. And that, quite simply, is exhausting and destructive.

| *Seven* | The space each person needs.

It's essential (and honestly beautiful) to share a meaningful part of our lives with someone. But it's just as important to keep a degree of independence if we want the relationship to grow in a healthy way. That space (both mental and physical) is what allows us to stay who we are while we build something together. This isn't about pulling away or being selfish. It's about finding a balance where there's room for "my things," "their things," and, at the same time, "our things."

A healthy relationship doesn't erase individual identities—it respects them and enriches them. We can't give our best if we feel suffocated or if we lose our essence. Where there's space to be yourself, there's space to love.

| *Eight* | Without reciprocity, everything falls apart.

None of what we've mentioned works unless it's reciprocal. If all of these ingredients come from one person and not the other, suffering is guaranteed. The well-intentioned mantra of "give without expecting anything in return" isn't very useful in love. Wanting reciprocity in a relationship is completely natural (necessary, even). If you give affection, you'll want to receive it too. If you offer respect, you'll expect to be respected. If you desire your partner sexually, you can't make peace with their indifference. And the same goes for every other essential part of a relationship.

When there's balance across all these areas, commitment doesn't become something you have to ask for—it shows up naturally, because of love. The relationship flows like water, even if a few stones get in the way.

The most satisfying relationships aren't the ones without problems, but the ones that build, protect, and sustain the principles that hold them together.

Because in the end, love isn't a destination—it's a balance between giving, receiving, and taking care of what you build together.

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PRINCIPLE 22

*Aiming for love means understanding the pieces
that make it up and making them work.*

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23.

Questions to Know if We're With the Right Person

People say choosing the person you'll share your life with is one of the most important decisions we'll ever make. So much of our well-being depends on it: how we feel in our own skin, how we experience the present, and the kind of future we build.

There are times when you have zero doubt that you're with the right person and you hardly need to think about it. But it's also completely normal for doubts to show up along the way or in certain circumstances, just like they do in so many other areas of life.

Revisiting the eight principles of satisfying relationships from the previous chapter is the starting point for checking the foundation of your relationship.

In this chapter, we'll take it one step further with five simple questions with real depth, drawing on the work of psychologist Walter Riso, questions worth asking ourselves every now and then.

***I* One I Would I want someone I love to be with a person like my partner?**

There are two ways to read this question, and both answers can be as revealing as they are uncomfortable. On one hand, it invites you to look at your relationship from the outside: if someone you love deeply were in a relationship like yours, do you think they'd be happy? Would you feel good knowing they were with someone like your partner? Would you feel satisfied—and, more than anything, at ease? Maybe even proud?

On the other hand, it asks whether your partner would be a good presence in your loved ones' lives, someone you'd genuinely be glad to see sharing part of their life with.

It's not just about what we feel, but also about what the other person brings: their values, the way they treat us, their ability to build a life together.

If you wouldn't want a loved one to have a partner like yours, under either interpretation, it's time to ask: why do you want that for yourself? Maybe the answer is obvious. And maybe what comes next is obvious as well.

| *Two* | Do I love my partner for who they are right now, for who they were back then, or for who I hope they'll become?

Love changes over time, and that's normal. But loving someone means loving the person they are today, with their current strengths and flaws, even if we can still value who they were back then, because that's who we fell in love with in the first place. Do you love your partner as they are now? Or are you still in love with the version you met at the beginning? Or maybe with an idealized version that doesn't exist yet?

Loving who someone was or who they might be someday, isn't enough to hold a relationship together. Living on a memory means clinging to something that, over time, probably won't come back. And pinning your hopes on someone becoming a different person is building expectations that are even less likely to be met.

| *Three* | If I could travel back in time, would I take the exact same steps with my partner?

Looking back doesn't mean reliving the past with nostalgia. It means assessing the impact this relationship has had on your life. What emotions rise to the surface when you think about what you've shared with this person? Are there moments of love, support, and closeness that helped you grow? Or does it lean more toward wear and tear, disappointment, or regret?

No relationship is perfect, but it should bring you more peace than pain. If the relationship has taken more than it has given, maybe it's a good time to rethink where it's headed—and reinvent love.

When, despite everything, you'd still choose to do it all again, you're accepting both the good and the bad. That means even the hard parts have held value—something that helped you grow as a couple. Something still worth fighting for.

| *Four* | If I showed my deepest fears and vulnerabilities, would my partner make me feel safe?

Trust is one of the core pillars of any relationship that's meant to be loving. Feeling like we can fully open up (show our deepest fears and vulnerabilities) should give us a sense of safety, not fear.

If we choose to open up completely to someone and they use it against us, there's a good chance we've trusted the wrong person. If you don't feel fully safe and you worry that what you shared could be used against you, it's a red flag you shouldn't ignore. Emotional safety isn't a luxury. It's a basic need for a relationship to work.

| *Five* | Can my partner read my emotions? Do they show up for me in pain as much as they do in happiness?

Empathy is one of the best predictors of a relationship's long-term health. People who genuinely celebrate your joys and feel your pain are a sign of a bond that can grow and last. On the other hand, if the other person can't read our emotional signals, there's a good chance we're dealing with someone who's emotionally tone-deaf.

Indifference is one of the biggest enemies of any relationship. It's not just that the other person doesn't understand our emotions—it's that they don't even care to try. That emptiness slowly erodes the connection, turning what should be a refuge into a source of loneliness.

A relationship without empathy is doomed to stay shallow. It doesn't matter how hard we try to compensate for that lack of emotional connection with words or gestures. If there isn't a sincere, reciprocal response, the effort will be like planting seeds in barren soil.

If what you're facing is emotional indifference, the question you should ask is whether you really want a relationship where your inner world is ignored or minimized. The answer, as uncomfortable as it may be, can be the first step toward self-respect and finding a real connection.

Answering these questions honestly won't just help us evaluate our relationship. It will also help us come back to ourselves. Being with the right person doesn't just mean sharing the road. It means growing together in a love that nourishes, respects, and values who we are today—and who we want to become.

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PRINCIPLE 23

*If you have to go looking for reasons to convince yourself
they're the right person, they probably aren't.*

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24.

Making a Living from the Value We Bring to the World

There are doctors who do the job and doctors who love helping people. There are business owners who make a living and business owners driven by passion. Writers who know how to write and writers who light up when their work adds value. Cooks who cook and cooks who light up when they watch their guests melt with pleasure. Police officers who passed the test and police officers who would risk their lives for us. Musicians with an exceptional voice and musicians who want their music to be therapy for an audience that feels the same way. Film directors chasing the box office and film directors trying to leave a legacy. Teachers who teach and teachers who help you understand with their whole heart.

We can be the kind of people who carry an enormous amount of knowledge—and yes, that can be a real asset, one that opens doors to many professions. No doubt about it. It might even give us the chance to move through a vast world, because we learned the value of taking different roads: exploring, connecting, and crossing borders.

But there's a big difference between having a job to pay the bills and making a living doing what you're passionate about, with pride and meaning in what you do and what you bring. That second option lets us leave the world a little better than we found it. It lets us stop asking what life can give us, and start asking what we can give back.

| One | What we're good at.

Treating work as nothing but a way to make money is asking too little of life.

In most cases, money is the result of what we bring to the table, just like being in good shape is the result of taking care of ourselves.

Most of us have a talent—or at least something we’re good at. And even if “talent” sounds like too big a word, like you haven’t been blessed with that kind of gift, sometimes all it takes is to pay attention to the small things your friends and family notice right away. What comes naturally to you.

“Hey, you’re great at fixing bikes.” “You’ve got a good ear for music.” “Let the family photographer take the picture!” “I love listening to you talk—everyone pays attention.” “Can you help me decorate my room? I love how you set yours up.” “Thanks for listening when I needed it most...” Little comments like these, especially when you hear them again and again from different people, can tell you something important.

Socially, we weren’t taught to spot our strengths the way we were taught to spot our flaws and compare ourselves to everyone else.

This is why we often can’t recognize what we’re good at, the value we bring, or what we could offer the world to make tomorrow a little better. We think we should listen first to lines like “you should be a doctor” or “study math—you got a good grade,” instead of the small nuances where talent actually hides.

Those subtleties are worth paying attention to because many times they don’t show up as words—they show up as gestures, sensations, or emotions. If the people around us tend to come to us with their problems and ask for advice, isn’t that a sign that we have a gift for listening and for speaking, even if no one says it out loud?

If we want more than just an exchange of time for money, we should ask ourselves what we’re good at, what skills we have, what we do almost without thinking, and whether it adds value to the people around us. If we can spot it, we can lean into it. And if we lean into it, we can build a life around it.

| Two | Putting our talent to work for others.

We can have talent, but if that talent, no matter how small, does not create value in the real world, it’ll be very hard to make a living from it.

If you're good at writing, it won't be enough for you or your circle to like it. If you're good at cooking, it won't be enough to impress your partner. If you're good at helping people, it won't be enough to do it once in a while for the neighbors.

To know whether what you're good at can actually be your path, you have to test it outside the circles that have been cheering you on. Stepping outside your comfort zone is the ultimate test, it tells you whether what you carry inside is a tool you can build a life around.

| *Three* | The dreaded impostor syndrome.

Long before we can prove we can create real value, we often undermine ourselves with lines like “Who am I to do this?” “I’m really a fraud—an impostor” “I don’t deserve this” or “I’m not cut out for this.”

Sometimes it’s just lack of confidence. Sometimes we quit if we don’t get validation quickly. Sometimes we can’t tolerate being told “no.”

Along the way, we’ll run into criticism, doubts, and comments that discourage us. And that’s normal. We haven’t fully developed our skills yet. But being able to tell the difference between what’s trying to sink us and what can push us to get better requires having done the inner work first.

Self-esteem doesn’t appear overnight. It’s built day by day through small wins. We don’t do what we do because we have self-esteem. We have self-esteem because we do what we do.

Just as it matters to identify the skills we can build on, it’s just as important to learn how to handle criticism (both internal and external). Used well, it can sharpen our talent and keep us on the path, if we truly want to make a living from it.

| *Four* | Entrepreneur or employee.

There are two ways to make a living from the value we bring to the world: being our own boss (entrepreneurs) or working for someone else (employees). Both are equally valid and can lead to high levels of satisfaction but they come with different trade-offs.

Choosing one path or the other depends on how emotionally invested we want to be, our tolerance for risk, and our ability to manage

responsibility.

As a general rule, employees operate within policies, pay scales, and a hierarchy that limits their autonomy to some degree. In return, they usually get more stability, less uncertainty, and a more predictable routine.

Entrepreneurs take on more risk and responsibility—but they also have more freedom to decide, create, and scale their impact, both social and economic. There's no ceiling to what you can achieve.

Neither option is inherently better. What matters is that the choice aligns with our personality, our values, and the lifestyle we want to build. Each one meets different emotional needs.

For entrepreneurs, psychological well-being tends to be tied to autonomy, the ability to make our own decisions, control over our work environment, and a sense of competence.

For employees, it tends to be tied to stability, a predictable environment, and clarity of role.

Based on the psychological, social, and economic benefits each path offers, we can explore either path and choose the way to make a living that best fits what we have to offer.

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PRINCIPLE 24

*If you don't work to build your dreams,
you'll end up working to build someone else's.*

BookSharekh.com

25.

It's Not Just a Roof, It's Our Sanctuary

They say what you take care of takes care of you, and a home is a clear reflection of that effort.

Ever since we stopped living outdoors, we've needed to build shelters where we can be safe, rest, and connect with ourselves and with others. A place you're genuinely glad to come home to. Home is the physical space that reflects who we are and, at the same time, inspires us and the people we share it with. Even in chaotic seasons, home can make everything feel more manageable, because it shapes how we feel.

And yet, despite how important it is, a lot of people put caring for their home at the bottom of the list. Some think they don't have the money to improve it. Others neglect it because they don't own it. Most people simply don't know where to start or they don't see it as a priority. But beyond taking care of our health, our relationships, or our work, shouldn't it matter just as much to take care of and build the place we live?

| One | The emotional architecture of home.

Even without big luxuries, there's always resourcefulness. And with it comes how we shape the space we live in. We evolved outdoors, so whenever possible, it's worth choosing spaces with plenty of daylight. Our bodies crave it constantly. And if we deprive them of it, they may remind us by throwing our mood off. Spaces with plenty of daylight also tend to have better airflow, which helps prevent a heavy, stale feeling indoors and instead creates a sense of freshness—physically and mentally.

Why do most plants start to fade if they don't get daylight and fresh air? Something similar happens to us. But since we don't rely only on water, light, and air (we're not plants), we also have to consider other factors, like color and decor.

For millions of years, we've associated certain colors with vital signals in our environment: soft, natural shades (greens, blues, earthy tones) meant shelter, water, food, shade. That's why, when we're surrounded by a warm, soft, cohesive palette, like Scandinavian or minimalist design, our nervous system tends to relax. It's the same mechanism that helps us unwind when we're out in nature. So, incorporating colors, plants, textures, and decor that echo our natural environment helps keep our mood steadier than overly bright colors or cluttered, incoherent spaces, which tend to keep us keyed up.

What's easy, when you have money, is buying everything: brand-new furniture, matching decor, and professionals who make your place photo-ready. It's also easy to buy your partner a twenty-thousand-dollar Rolex if you can afford it, trying to prove your love with a gesture that takes barely a few minutes.

What's hard is taking the time to think through each detail and finding ways to decorate that reflect who we are—relying less on money and more on patience, creativity, and care.

A house becomes a home when we've put enough love into making it ours with such things as repainting an inherited piece of furniture, turning an old frame into a mirror, caring for a plant since it was barely a sprout, painting a watercolor and framing it. Small gestures that make our home feel inhabited by our story, not simply by our stuff.

Nothing guarantees perfect balance, but we can always do something to tilt the scales toward what makes us feel better. When we're doing well, we make better decisions.

I *Two* | The importance of routines and order.

Home isn't just the place we live—it's also everything that happens inside it. Routines and small daily rituals are essential for building a real connection and creating positive associations with the spaces we inhabit.

The smell of coffee in the morning, reading before bed, Thursday night dinners with friends, opening the windows to smell the rain: these are small

emotional anchors that tie us to our refuge.

What we bring to life at home shapes how it feels, and within that rhythm, cleanliness and order play an essential role. They reduce visual noise, clear the mind, and create a sense of calm that improves our well-being.

There's a difference between living in a place where everything feels in harmony and just surviving in chaos disguised as order. Sometimes, the secret isn't organizing more—it's owning less.

| Three | Where to build your sanctuary.

It's obvious that living in a quiet neighborhood where you can walk without worry, with nature nearby, visual harmony, and little noise can make a huge difference. But finding the ideal environment isn't always easy.

Housing prices often feel out of reach, but with patience, the right search filters, and clear priorities, it's still possible to find places that fit what we're looking for (at least in part).

Where we live also determines who surrounds us. We don't live in a bubble, we're part of a community. And while it's not about being friends with the whole neighborhood, having good relationships with the people around us doesn't just improve our quality of life, it can help us live longer. Feeling like part of a community strengthens our sense of safety, lowers stress, and improves how we experience the place where we spend so much of our time. It's not only where you live—it's also where you feel you belong, and even though building that takes time, it's always worth it.

Cutting back on small indulgences (as small as they may be) can bring us closer to a better home, though it depends on how much we value it and where it sits on our list of priorities.

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PRINCIPLE 25

*A home should shelter us from the storm,
not be part of it.*

BookSharekh.com

26.

Eight Skills That Make the Difference in an Emergency

We spend years in school memorizing facts we'll never use. We learn to recite the world's rivers, but we don't know what to do if someone starts drowning right next to us. We're taught how to solve equations, but not how to make better decisions. We can describe the layers of the atmosphere, but we don't know how to react if we get lost in a hostile environment.

There are skills no one teaches us—skills that can mean the difference between forging ahead or falling behind. They can save a life, open a door, or keep us from ending up stranded in another country.

These aren't optional nice-to-haves or good ideas to learn someday. They're skills anyone would benefit from mastering, so we won't be helpless when real life shows up. Things that can give us an edge.

***I One* | When every second counts.**

Emergencies don't announce themselves. In a matter of seconds, we can be the only person who can tip the odds toward life in a critical moment: someone having a heart attack right next to us, a friend choking and unable to speak, or a car accident.

Most of the time, we trust that if an emergency happens, we'll do what we can, or we assume we'll never find ourselves in that kind of situation. That's what professionals are for.

But this isn't about replacing them. It's about knowing the essentials, because many times, before they arrive (or when they're not there), acting fast can be decisive.

Knowing how to perform CPR, what to do when someone is choking, how to stop severe bleeding, or how to recognize the warning signs of a heart attack are among the most valuable skills we can have, both for ourselves and for others.

***I Two* | When your body is the only tool you have.**

A flood could trap your car, and the only way out might be through the window before it's fully submerged. A fire could cut off the exit and the only option might be climbing a fence to get away. Someone could lose consciousness and you'd have to carry them to safety. A current could pull a child out to sea and there's no one else to go after them.

Your body can be a tool or a limitation—and more often than we'd like to think, preparation makes the difference. Being in shape isn't a luxury. It's an evolutionary necessity.

Our species made it this far because we had strength, endurance, and agility (among other things). Today we don't need those abilities to hunt or outrun predators, but we do need them to stay capable and functional when something goes wrong.

To run more than a few yards without feeling like you're going to pass out. To have the strength to hold your own body weight, or someone else's. To swim a short distance without panicking.

Fitness isn't just about aesthetics or athletic performance. It's about being self-reliant (and useful) in the moments that actually matter.

***I Three* | It's not about fighting—it's about knowing how to react.**

When someone comes at us, the point isn't to fight back or prove how strong we are (unless there's truly no other option).

The point is to react in a way that protects us. Use the other person's momentum to create space and get away, spot an exit, break a grip when the person is stronger, understand a few basic self-defense principles, or recognize danger before it's too late.

This isn't about winning. It's about getting out unharmed. And it's not about living in fear—it's about being prepared, because when danger shows up you don't get a second chance.

If someone pinned us against a wall, if someone tried to force themselves on us, or if a stranger followed us at night, how would we react? If we woke up and there was someone inside our home, what would we do?

***I Four* | Not getting lost.**

Some people still don't know how to use GPS. Others rely on it so completely they've lost the ability to navigate without it.

But batteries die, signals drop, and sometimes you can't depend on a screen. Being able to read road signs, remember landmarks, move confidently through an unfamiliar place, and find your way back without a map aren't outdated skills—they're tools that still matter when technology isn't an option.

Stepping away from tech now and then keeps that internal compass alive.

***I Five* | Knowing when to walk away.**

There's a thin line between persisting and obsessing, between determination and pride. We've been taught that quitting is shameful—as if stopping automatically means failing. But not every battle is worth it and not every decision has to be carried all the way to the end.

Sometimes, if you don't hit the brakes in time, a situation can break you. And even when the temptation is to keep going, knowing when to walk away can save you—anything from your life to your peace of mind.

Learning to recognize the moment when pushing forward starts to cost more than you're willing to pay requires consciously choosing which battles to fight.

***I Six* | When being the passenger isn't enough.**

Not knowing how to drive usually isn't a problem in everyday life. There are alternatives: public transit, taxis, rides from people you know. But in an emergency, not being able to drive can become a real limitation. Waiting for a taxi or depending on someone to come get you can cost you minutes you can't afford to lose.

Being able to drive doesn't just let you get behind the wheel. It gives you independence, control, and the ability to act when you least expect it.

If the driver faints and you have to pull over somewhere safe, if someone needs to be rushed to the hospital in the middle of the night when you can't reach anyone for help, or if the only way out in a remote place is to take a car, driving can become about much more than getting around.

| *Seven* | The world gets smaller when you can communicate.

Getting stuck in a country where you don't speak the language isn't just inconvenient. It can leave you helpless. It's the difference between "I've got this" and "I'm at the mercy of whatever happens next."

Understanding the basics of a conversation, asking for help without relying entirely on an app, and making sure your message actually gets across can be the difference between solving a problem and getting trapped inside it.

And yes: English can cut through a lot of friction. It's the closest thing we have to a global language and it shows up everywhere: signs, airports, customer service, forms, and everyday conversations in more places than you'd think.

But the real advantage is knowing how to communicate even when your words aren't perfect. Keep sentences short, use numbers and landmarks, ask people to show you, repeat the one key point, and confirm what you understood. Learn a handful of local phrases that solve problems fast ("I need help," "Where is...?", "Can you write it down?") and you stop feeling like a tourist in your own life.

With a little consistent practice, your comprehension improves far more than you think—and you become someone who's never truly lost.

| *Eight* | Basic home skills.

Knowing how to shut off the power or the water in your home in an emergency, use a fire extinguisher without wasting time reading the instructions, or change a lightbulb without risking electrocution can prevent bigger problems.

Being able to handle a simple repair without calling a professional for every small issue (or cook something that gives you enough fuel in a

survival situation) may not be life-or-death skills, but they can save you a lot of time, money, and stress.

If you don't know how to take care of yourself, you live at the mercy of circumstances.

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PRINCIPLE 26

*It's not a question of whether you'll ever need it,
but what will happen when you do.*

BookSharekh.com

27.

How to Keep Your Brain Sharp Before It Starts to Dim

Taking care of your health isn't just about your physical body with its visible parts and hidden components or your mental health, which we can sense even if we can't see it.

There's one more piece that often goes unnoticed because we assume that if we take care of our body and mind, we're covered: the brain. Taking care of your body and mind helps, sure, but the brain still needs specific attention. It works like a muscle and if you don't train it regularly, it weakens.

The most direct way to build it up and slow its long-term decline is learning.

The day you stop learning is the day you start dying. Genetics may set the ceiling for your intelligence, but your commitment to building new skills and abilities determines how fully you reach that potential—and how much you actually use it. So, what tools can we use to learn and, more importantly, to learn better?

| One | The compound interest of learning.

Learning isn't just about accumulating information—it's about connecting ideas. When you build on what you already know, knowledge gets reinforced and multiplied.

But when you start from scratch, everything feels harder. Without a foothold, learning becomes a quagmire. That's why, when you begin learning something new, analogies make the path easier by building bridges between what's familiar and what isn't.

Every new piece of information adds to what you already know and enriches it, compounding your understanding and your ability to learn. As Matthew 25:29 (NIV) puts it: “For whoever has will be given more, and they will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what they have will be taken from them.”

Learning works exactly like that. The more you learn about a subject, the faster you can keep learning—just like money compounding over time. And the less you know, the more even that slips away.

| Two | The art of making sense of what you learn.

Connecting what you learn to what you already know is essential, but if you don’t take time to reflect, all that effort goes to waste. Reflection is stopping to look at the map you’re building and noticing the connections you’re drawing.

And it’s in that pause to reflect that learning starts to mean something. When you give something real attention, your brain holds on to it, organizes it, and stores it for the long term. Reflection is how it starts to make sense. It’s clarity.

Thinking about what you learned gives it a place in your mind, integrates it into everyday life, and makes sure it doesn’t vanish the moment you move on.

When you reflect, you connect. When you connect, you understand. And when you understand, what you learned becomes part of you.

| Three | Bringing it to life so it sticks.

Bringing what you’ve learned back to mind is like opening a treasure chest, and every time you do, that knowledge becomes more yours. It settles in. Retrieval is pulling information back out through prompts that force you to think, speak, or write. This step doesn’t just reinforce what you learned, it turns it into something solid and lasting.

One of the most effective ways to practice retrieval is through conversation. Talking about what you’ve learned doesn’t just strengthen memory. It forces you to structure your thoughts and organize what you know.

But there's an even more powerful tool: disagreement. When you run into a different opinion, you're forced to sharpen your arguments and defend them. That process activates and reinforces your knowledge far more deeply than a casual chat.

And what if you don't have anyone to talk to about it?

You don't need another person for retrieval to work. A great alternative is writing. Put it down on paper, in a blog post, or anywhere that lets you think it through and express what you know. Every time you recall something and put it into words (whether you speak it or write it), you strengthen those neural connections and make them more resilient.

| *Four* | The power of emotions in what we learn.

What we learn under intense emotion is more likely to stick (like moments of happiness or fear). We also tend to remember it in greater detail. When you bring real emotion into what you're learning, your ability to retain it gets even better. From an evolutionary standpoint, this makes perfect sense.

What hits us emotionally often carries a survival signal. But moderation matters. Too much emotion can be just as useless as too little, because too much can overwhelm you and shut down your ability to learn.

When you practice a skill, you can teach it to someone else. Being watched adds a level of intensity that reinforces what you're learning. If it's something more theoretical, you can say it out loud or explain it. That forces you to structure your ideas, which helps them stick.

Here's the thing: some topics naturally trigger stronger emotions in us, whether it's curiosity or genuine fascination, and that's a gift worth using because nothing has to be forced.

| *Five* | The spark that turns learning into pleasure.

When a topic truly excites you, every new discovery lights a spark that pulls you deeper. Learning stops feeling like a task and becomes a pleasure, and sticking with it feels effortless. Passion is the engine that drives consistent, authentic learning.

Even if passion doesn't show up right away, it often appears once you widen what you're willing to explore. A lot of the time, it's not about taking advantage of passion—it's about going and looking for it. People who are

naturally passionate will have it easier. If you're not, you can search for that spark patiently. Trust that it will show up.

The truth is that most people aren't bored by learning itself—they're bored by learning things they think are boring. And more than once, they end up realizing they were wrong.

Maybe they never imagined they could be interested in how the human body works on the inside or how the global economy works, simply because no one ever introduced it in a way that clicked. The funny thing is that when life nudges them toward those subjects, for one reason or another, they often discover they're fascinated. In the end, you can find passion in unexpected places.

Learning with passion doesn't just enrich your knowledge. It reshapes your perspective, expands your horizons, and moves you toward a more fulfilling life.

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PRINCIPLE 27

*The day you stop learning is
the day you start dying.*

BookSharekh.com

28.

The Evolutionary Leap We Can't Afford to Ignore

Making sense of a contract packed with ridiculous legalese, reviewing lab results and actually understanding the numbers, cooking a meal that helps you recover from an injury, fixing an appliance with zero experience, building a website without being a programmer—in short, things that not long ago demanded specific training are now right at our fingertips.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has changed the way we navigate the world.

AI isn't just a database. It's not a calculator. And it's not a search engine that spits out generic, context-free answers that leave you with more questions than clarity. AI is a tool that takes a specific problem and gives you the best possible solution: tailored to your situation, grounded in the best available information.

The real magic isn't only in the answers, but in how we train it, how we challenge it, and how we refine what it produces until we get what we actually need. We still get the final say. And with the right questions we can get solutions that were only possible through specialized training or from highly qualified experts.

A lot of people worry that AI will replace people—but did we complain when we stopped washing clothes by hand in a river and started using washing machines? Or when we went from walking long distances to having vehicles that got us there in minutes? History moves forward, and with it, the tools that let us go farther.

AI has already proved more effective than humans at certain tasks, like real-time language translation, bank fraud detection, or organizing massive volumes of data in seconds.

It's starting to outperform us even in more complex areas, like spotting genetic patterns to predict disease, building more accurate climate models, or developing new chemical formulas for medication. In fact, it's speculated that AI will soon take on tasks that have been exclusively human, like certain surgeries. In many medical and diagnostic tasks, its precision already surpasses ours, and it can often do better work without being affected by factors that so often interfere with human performance: stress, fatigue, or emotional pressure.

Using AI isn't about replacing thinking. It's about freeing up time and energy from tasks a machine can do better and faster.

If we don't have the ability to evaluate what it gives us, we'll just be trusting technology blindly instead of using it to think better. We'll become dependent instead of smarter.

The key isn't letting it think for us, but using it to think more—and think better.

That's why, as we use AI, we also need to keep expanding our mental database so we can filter what it throws at us, challenge it, sharpen it, interpret it, or compare it with what we already know. Learn to do that and you'll work in tandem with AI and go farther. Don't and you'll get stuck in misinformation, even with access to all the information in the world.

AI is already changing the rules of the game, which will push the industries that have survived by feeding off people's ignorance to the brink of collapse. Widespread access to clear, well-explained information will shrink the gap between experts and everyone else. Anyone who doesn't understand this shift will keep paying for answers they can now get in seconds.

We're barely using a tiny fraction of its potential, and what's coming will completely change the way we work, learn, and solve problems.

Not adapting to this new environment won't just mean missing opportunities; it will mean being left out of a new way of life, a world where everything is changing.

Technology moves forward but there's one thing no one ever (neither a machine nor anyone who looks like us) will be able to do: be us.

It won't be able to feel what we feel, live what we live, or give meaning to our own existence. That will always be our job.

PRINCIPLE 28

*Evolution doesn't wait
for those who resist it.*

BookSharekh.com

29.

The Worst-Case Scenario for a Better Life

You don't need a tragedy to realize what matters. Sometimes it's enough to imagine one.

Imagining loss (or worst-case scenarios) can remind us that everything we enjoy today could disappear at any moment. This isn't about spending your days fixated on potential catastrophes, but about pausing once in a while to remember that what we have can be taken from us without warning.

That can feel overwhelming, especially when the default message is the opposite: "think positive," "visualize everything you want," "life is wonderful." But life, as beautiful a gift as it is, doesn't always serve dessert.

Today might be the last day you talk to your mom. Your personal project might fail. Your partner could have an accident. Cancer could become an uninvited guest. Or you could be made a fool of in public.

Visualizing a few situations like these can keep us from sleepwalking through life, make us more grateful for what we have, help us see that some of what we fear may not be as scary as they feel, and make us value the small details more.

| One | What's the worst that could happen?

Fear has a strange way of warping reality. It makes every decision feel like a bet with irreversible consequences, as if one misstep will end the world, as if everything is life or death. But most of the time, the worst-case scenario is far less catastrophic than we tend to imagine. Unless your plan

involves something truly high-risk, the worst that usually happens is it doesn't go as planned. And you're still here.

Maybe tomorrow you lose your job and with it, your stability. But you can start over. Maybe you run out of money, but someone close to you can help you get back on your feet. And if not, a nonprofit, an aid program, something—anything that gives you a way to restart, even if it isn't easy.

A fall. An accident. An illness. Anything can happen. And in that case, what you have left is your life. As long as you have it, you have options.

It's unlikely all of this hits at once, but some things can (and will) go wrong. Just not as wrong as we thought. Or maybe they will. And if they do—then what? Will we die? Death would be the final problem, the one we still haven't solved.

But in reality, the worst scenarios we usually face are less final than we think. They don't throw us into the abyss—they reset the starting line. If you play out enough of those scenarios, you realize life rarely leaves you without a way out.

You can lose money, stability, relationships, even compromise your own values. But as long as you're still here, you still have room to rebuild and find a way to keep going.

That's how you turn the worst-case scenario into the best possible worst case. And it's how you remember that even the worst scenario hasn't happened yet, so you can enjoy what you have right now, while it's still yours.

| Two | Appreciating what we have.

There was a time when we were kids and didn't really understand how the world around us worked. Maybe that's why we enjoyed it so intensely. But we grew up, and over time we learned how things work. Once we understood them, the world stopped surprising us and started to feel like it wasn't enough.

We went from playing with a stick we found on the ground, marveling at a rainbow, or crying our eyes out when our favorite shirt tore to complaining about the rain, whining about bad Wi-Fi, or taking a parking spot for granted. We get used to everything, and without realizing it, we become incapable of enjoying what's around us. We start living on autopilot, not noticing, believing everything we have is a right.

Just as visualizing the worst-case scenario gives us perspective and helps us appreciate the present, practicing small, intentional discomforts reminds us how lucky we are.

If you have a car, you can stop using it for a few days, sleep without a pillow, spend a full day with your phone off, shut off the water at home, bandage up one foot so you can't use it fully, or leave the windows open in the dead of winter to remember what it feels like to be cold.

Those discomforts have the power to restore our ability to appreciate everyday life, to understand it's a privilege (because we could just as easily not have it) and not a right, and to remember that it's still extraordinary, even if habit makes us forget.

| *Three* | Memento mori: a reminder for life.

Everything is in motion—including us. Every birthday we blow out the candles thinking about the years we have, but the only years we really have are the ones we have left, and there's no way to know how many that will be.

Right now, we can't know how many more family meals we'll share with our parents, how many more times we'll make love to our partner, or when we'll see our grandfather for the last time.

Maybe this is the hardest part to read. No one finds it easy to imagine that, five minutes from now, you could get a call telling you that you lost someone you love. That they're gone. That you'll never hear their voice again or feel their hug.

But maybe it's also the part that wakes us up the most. The part that reminds us that every time we hang up the phone, we still have a chance to say, "I love you." That every time we're with that person, we can hug them. That we can choose to adapt more and argue less. Make the most of the moments, look them in the eyes, listen with full attention.

Hold on to the small, imperfect details that made them who they are: their quirks, their smile, the way they looked at you, the way they made you feel at home, so that if that day of loss ever comes, what weighs on you isn't that you didn't fully live and enjoy the time you had with them. You don't carry the guilt of being too busy to pick up their calls or answering in a rush, half present. Or of looking at them only to find what they should

change, instead of seeing them as they were. Or of believing there would always be time or that one day things would be different.

Maybe if we thought about this more, we could keep a loss from feeling like a sentence, and keep absence from turning into regret on top of grief. Maybe if we kept it closer, we'd learn to value the people who are still here, to actually be present in our relationships, to change the way we show up. And if the inevitable moment comes, we'd be able to hold the emptiness without letting it drag us under. And above all, to be without regrets.

As much as thinking about the death of the people we love helps us value them, there's another death we can't ignore: our own.

One day you can wake up, get dressed, and walk out the door like you always do. But this time, without knowing it, it could be your last day. No signs, no warnings, no countdown to let you do all those things you keep putting off. At some point, that day—and your life—could end without notice.

Living as if it were your last day doesn't mean going off the rails or acting like nothing has consequences. It's not about blowing everything up, ignoring the future, or living scared of dying. It's about remembering that everything is temporary. That every day we wake up is a gift, not a guarantee. That there won't always be another day for everything we postpone. That the time we waste today on useless worries, mindless distractions, or delaying life as if it were infinite is time we'll never get back.

Thinking about death is a jolt that wakes us from apathy. One day, without warning, it will be the last one—for real. For us, and for the people around us. And on that day, what will matter won't be how long we lived, but how we lived.

I *Four* I Seeing life with new eyes.

When we train ourselves to notice what we do have, we realize we were never as empty as we sometimes feel.

Gratitude doesn't change what happens, but it does change how we live it—and that's what truly shapes how we feel. Every day, even the worst day, gives us something to be grateful for.

Noticing it (whether you think about it or write it down) can nudge you toward gratitude instead of craving what you don't have. It doesn't have to

be big things or perfect moments—just small details that made today feel good or simply a little better. Little things, that once you notice them, stop being little.

Things that might be the whole point of life. A spring breeze, waking up to a kiss from your partner, dreaming about your favorite place from childhood, listening to leaves rustle, hugging your parents, walking with your best friend at night, dancing in the rain, reading to the sound of the ocean, drinking a glass of ice-cold water when you're thirsty, making a photo album, cooking for the people you love, waking up to the smell of coffee, the sound of birds in the morning, or one of those laughing fits you can't stop.

Maybe appreciating life is realizing *you're going to die and you haven't started living yet*. And then, starting.

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PRINCIPLE 29

To honor presence, imagine absence.

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A FINAL NOTE

We've spent many pages together, and now it's time for the two of us (the ones who wrote this book, Laura and Uli) to speak to you directly. After guiding you through these twenty-nine principles, we want to say goodbye by sharing something that has been (and still is) essential to our journey. Something we've mentioned again and again, but haven't fully defined because of how ambiguous the word can be: purpose.

Purpose, in the broadest sense, is what gives something value and meaning. Anything in life can have it: a relationship, a job, a trip, a change, a personal project—or, for that matter, a life. It rarely just appears out of nowhere. We're the ones who have to give it meaning.

Purpose pushes us to take the first step, but it only takes root when, for long enough, we put our values and decisions in service of it. When we act from the heart, even if we make mistakes and everything gets messy. Because that's exactly where learning happens. That's where values solidify and decisions sharpen, where things start to make sense or better yet, start to have purpose.

Maybe what gives our lives meaning is never letting go of the one reason that keeps us moving. At least one. One that justifies the effort, the choices, the sacrifices. A reason so deeply ours that even when everything shakes, it reminds us why we started. It's about living each day with meaning so that when the end comes, one life feels like enough. Because if we don't have something to believe in—something to give meaning to, something that moves us—we'll never do anything that's truly worth it.

So, whatever your purpose in life is, please let it be the reason you choose to act from the heart, and let your values and decisions be the raw material that helps you bring it to life.

We hope this book has helped you live better (and with more meaning), clarify your values, make better decisions, become a better person, and not let your destiny depend only on your circumstances. If it has, we can promise you this: we'll have fulfilled ours.

Thank you for reading this book.

One last thing: we know getting your life in order isn't easy, so we have something for you on the next page ☺

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BONUS DOWNLOAD

Only the most dedicated readers (those truly committed to their path) will have made it this far. If you're one of them, we have something special for you: access to The Life That Matters Challenge.

It's completely free, practical, and easy to follow, designed to turn the ideas in this book into action so you can start right now, living better and building a life that matters. To access the challenge, scan the QR code below or click [here](#):



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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Laura Falces is a Spanish author, science communicator and chemical engineer. She is the founder of lauufaal, co-founder of Team Montana Films and the author of several books. Through her writing and digital platforms, where she reaches more than 250,000 people (@lauufaal), she explores health, purpose, relationships and the decisions that shape a meaningful life.

Uli Moreno Montana is a Spanish author, science communicator and audiovisual producer. He is the founder and CEO of Team Montana Films, co-founder of lauufaal and the author of several books. His work brings together entrepreneurship, personal growth and mental resilience, with a focus on helping others build a life with direction and purpose.

Partners in life and work, Laura and Uli write about health, responsibility, meaning and the everyday choices that shape who we become.

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