

101  
ESSAYS

*that will*

CHANGE

*the way*

YOU

THINK

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BRIANNA WIEST





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# INTRODUCTION

In his book *Sapiens*, Dr. Yuval Noah Harari explains that at one point, there were more than just *Homo sapiens* roaming the Earth<sup>1</sup>. In fact, there were likely as many as six different types of humans in existence: *Homo sapiens*, *Homo neanderthalensis*, *Homo soloensis*, *Homo erectus*, etc.

There's a reason *Homo sapiens* still exist today and the others didn't continue to evolve: a prefrontal cortex, which we can infer from skeletal structures. Essentially, we had the ability to think more complexly, thus were able to organize, cultivate, teach, practice, habituate and pass down a world suited for our survival. Because of our capacity to imagine, we were able to build Earth as it is today out of virtually nothing.

In a sense, the notion that thoughts create reality is more than just a nice idea; it's also a fact of evolution. It was because of language and thought that we could create a world within our minds, and ultimately, it is because of language and thought that we have evolved into the society we have today—for better and for worse.

Almost every great master, artist, teacher, innovator, inventor, and generally happy person could attribute some similar understanding to their success. Many of the world's 'best' people understood that to change their lives, they had to change their minds.

These are the same people who have communicated to us some of the longest-standing conventional wisdom: that to believe is to become, that the mind is to be mastered, that the obstacle is the way<sup>2</sup>. Often, our most intense discomfort is what precedes and necessitates thinking in a way we have never conceived of before. That new awareness creates possibilities that would never exist had we not been forced to learn something new. Why did our ancestors develop agriculture, society, medicine, and the like? To survive. The elements of our world were once just solutions to fears.

In a more cerebral context, if you consciously learn to regard the "problems" in your life as openings for you to adopt a greater understanding and then develop a better way of living, you will step out of the labyrinth of suffering and learn what it means to thrive.

I believe that the root of the work of being human is learning how to think. From this, we learn how to love, share, coexist, tolerate, give, create, and so on. I believe the first and most important duty we have is to

actualize the potential we were born with—both for ourselves and for the world.

The unspoken line of everything I write is: “This idea changed my life.” Because ideas are what change lives—and that was the first idea that changed mine.

*Brianna Wiest — July 2016*

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<sup>1</sup> Harari, Yuval Noah. *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind. 1st Edition.* 2015. Harper.

<sup>2</sup> Holiday, Ryan. *The Obstacle Is The Way.* 2014. Portfolio.

SUBCONSCIOUS  
BEHAVIORS  
*that are*  
KEEPING YOU  
*from* HAVING  
THE LIFE  
YOU WANT

Every generation has a “monoculture” of sorts, a governing pattern or system of beliefs that people unconsciously accept as “truth.”

It’s easy to identify the monoculture of Germany in the 1930s or America in 1776. It’s clear what people at those times, in those places, accepted to be “good” and “true” even when in reality, that was certainly not always the case.

The objectivity required to see the effects of present monoculture is very difficult to develop. Once you have so deeply accepted an idea as “truth” it doesn’t register as “cultural” or “subjective” anymore.

So much of our inner turmoil is the result of conducting a life we don’t inherently desire, only because we have accepted an inner narrative of “normal” and “ideal” without ever realizing.

The fundamentals of any given monoculture tend to surround what we should be living for (nation, religion, self, etc.) and there are a number of ways in which our current system has us shooting ourselves in the feet as we try to step forward. Here, 8 of the most pervasive.

01. You believe that creating your best life is a matter of deciding what you want and then going after it, but in reality, you are psychologically incapable<sup>1</sup> of being able to predict what will make you happy.

Your brain can only perceive what it’s known, so when you choose what you want for the future, you’re actually just recreating a solution or an ideal of the past. When things don’t work out the way you want them to, you think you’ve failed only because you

didn't re-create something you perceived as desirable. In reality, you likely created something better, but foreign, and your brain misinterpreted it as "bad" because of that. (Moral of the story: Living in the moment isn't a lofty ideal reserved for the Zen and enlightened; it's the only way to live a life that isn't infiltrated with illusions. It's the only thing your brain can actually comprehend.)

02. You extrapolate the present moment because you believe that success is somewhere you "arrive," so you are constantly trying to take a snapshot of your life and see if you can be happy yet.

You convince yourself that any given moment is representative of your life as a whole. Because we're wired to believe that success is somewhere we get to—when goals are accomplished and things are completed—we're constantly measuring our present moments by how "finished" they are, how good the story sounds, how someone else would judge the elevator speech. We find ourselves thinking: "Is this all there is?" because we forget that everything is transitory, and no one single instance can summarize the whole. There is nowhere to "arrive" to. The only thing you're rushing toward is death. Accomplishing goals is not success. How much you expand in the process is.

03. You assume that when it comes to following your "gut instincts," happiness is "good" and fear and pain are "bad."

When you consider doing something that you truly love and are invested in, you are going to feel an influx of fear and pain, mostly because it will involve being vulnerable. Bad feelings should not always be interpreted as deterrents. They are also indicators that you are doing something frightening and worthwhile. Not wanting to do something would make you feel indifferent about it. Fear = interest.

04. You needlessly create problems and crises in your life because you're afraid of actually living it.

The pattern of unnecessarily creating crises in your life is actually an avoidance technique. It distracts you from actually having to be vulnerable or held accountable for whatever it is you're afraid of. You're never upset for the reason you think you are: At the core of your desire to create a problem is simply the fear of being who you are and living the life you want.

05. You think that to change your beliefs, you have to adopt a new line of thinking, rather than seek experiences that make that thinking self-evident.

A belief is what you know to be true because experience has made it evident to you. If you want to change your life, change your beliefs. If you want to change your beliefs, go out and have experiences that make them real to you. Not the opposite way around.

06. You think “problems” are roadblocks to achieving what you want, when in reality they are pathways.

Marcus Aurelius sums this up well: “The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.” Simply, running into a “problem” forces you to take action to resolve it. That action will inevitably lead you to think differently, behave differently, and choose differently. The “problem” becomes a catalyst for you to actualize the life you always wanted. It pushes you from your comfort zone, that’s all.

07. You think your past defines you, and worse, you think that it is an unchangeable reality, when really, your perception of it changes as you do.

Because experience is always multi-dimensional, there are a variety of memories, experiences, feelings, “gists” you can choose to recall...and what you choose is indicative of your present state of mind. So many people get caught up in allowing the past to define them or haunt them simply because they have not evolved to the place of seeing how the past did not prevent them from achieving the life they want, it facilitated it. This doesn’t mean to disregard or gloss over painful or traumatic events, but simply to be able to recall them with acceptance and to be able to place them in the storyline of your personal evolution.

08. You try to change other people, situations, and things (or you just complain/get upset about them) when anger = self-recognition. Most negative emotional reactions are you identifying a disassociated aspect of yourself.

Your “shadow selves” are the parts of you that at some point you were conditioned to believe were “not okay,” so you suppressed them and have

done everything in your power not to acknowledge them. You don't actually dislike these parts of yourself, though. So when you see somebody else displaying one of these traits, it's infuriating, not because you inherently dislike it, but because you have to fight your desire to fully integrate it into your whole consciousness. The things you love about others are the things you love about yourself. The things you hate about others are the things you cannot see in yourself.

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<sup>1</sup> Gilbert, Daniel. *Stumbling on Happiness*. 2007. Random House.

## *The* PSYCHOLOGY of DAILY ROUTINE

The most successful people in history—the ones many refer to as “geniuses” in their fields, masters of their crafts—had one thing in common, other than talent: Most adhered to rigid (and specific) routines.

Routines seem boring, and the antithesis to what you’re told a “good life” is made of. Happiness, we infer, comes from the perpetual seeking of “more,” regardless what it’s “more” of. Yet what we don’t realize is that having a routine doesn’t mean you sit in the same office every day for the same number of hours. Your routine could be traveling to a different country every month. It could be being routinely un-routine. The point is not what the routine consists of, but how steady and safe your subconscious mind is made through repetitive motions and expected outcomes.

Whatever you want your day-to-day life to consist of doesn’t matter, the point is that you decide and then stick to it. In short, routine is important because habitualness creates mood, and mood creates the “nurture” aspect of your personality, not to mention that letting yourself be jerked around by impulsiveness is a breeding ground for everything you essentially do not want.

Most things that bring genuine happiness are not just temporary, immediate gratifications, and those things also come with resistance and require sacrifice. Yet there is a way to nullify the feeling of “sacrifice” when you integrate a task into the “norm” or push through resistance with regulation. These, and all the other reasons why routine is so important (and happy people tend to follow them more).

01. Your habits create your mood, and your mood is a filter through which you experience your life.

It would make sense to assume that moods are created from thoughts or stressors, things that crop up during the day and knock us off-kilter. This isn’t so. Psychologist Robert Thayer argues that moods are created by our habitualness: how much we sleep, how frequently we move, what we think, how often we think it, and so

on. The point is that it's not one thought that throws us into a tizzy: It's the pattern of continually experiencing that thought that compounds its effect and makes it seem valid.

02. You must learn to let your conscious decisions dictate your day—not your fears or impulses.

An untamed mind is a minefield. With no regulation, focus, base or self-control, anything can persuade you into thinking you want something that you don't actually. "I want to go out for drinks tonight, not prepare for that presentation tomorrow" seems valid in the short-term, but in the long-term is disastrous. Going out for drinks one night probably isn't worth bombing a super important meeting. Learning to craft routine is the equivalent of learning to let your conscious choices about what your day will be about guide you, letting all the other, temporary crap fall to the wayside.

03. Happiness is not how many things you do, but how well you do them.

More is not better. Happiness is not experiencing something else; it's continually experiencing what you already have in new and different ways. Unfortunately as we're taught that passion should drive our every thought move and decision, we're basically impaled with the fear that we're unhappy because we're not doing "enough."

04. When you regulate your daily actions, you deactivate your "fight or flight" instincts because you're no longer confronting the unknown.

This is why people have such a difficult time with change, and why people who are constant in their habits experience so much joy: simply, their fear instincts are turned off long enough for them to actually enjoy something.

05. As children, routine gives us a feeling of safety. As adults, it gives us a feeling of purpose.

Interestingly enough, those two feelings are more similar than you'd think (at least, their origin is the same). It's the same thing as the fear of the unknown: As children, we don't know which way is left, let alone why we're alive or whether or not a particular activity we've never done before is going to be scary or harmful. When we're adults engaging with routine-ness, we can comfort

ourselves with the simple idea of “I know how to do this, I’ve done it before.”

06. You feel content because routine consistently reaffirms a decision you already made.

If said decision is that you want to write a book—and you commit to doing three pages each night for however long it takes to complete it—you affirm not only your choice to begin, but your ability to do it. It’s honestly the healthiest way to feel validated.

07. As your body self-regulates, routine becomes the pathway to “flow<sup>2</sup>.”

“Flow” (in case you don’t know—you probably do) is essentially what happens when we become so completely engaged with what we’re doing, all ideas or worries dissolve, and we’re just completely present in the task. The more you train your body to respond to different cues: 7 a.m. is when you wake up, 2 p.m. is when you start writing, and so on, you naturally fall into flow with a lot more ease, just out of habit.

08. When we don’t settle into routine, we teach ourselves that “fear” is an indicator that we’re doing the wrong thing, rather than just being very invested in the outcome.

A lack of routine is just a breeding ground for perpetual procrastination. It gives us gaps and spaces in which our subconscious minds can say: “well, you can take a break now,” when in fact, you have a deadline. But if you’re used to taking a break at that point in time, you’ll allow it simply because “you always do.”

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<sup>2</sup> Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. 2008. Harper Perennial Modern Classics.

# 10 THINGS EMOTIONALLY INTELLIGENT PEOPLE *do not* DO

Emotional intelligence is probably the most powerful yet undervalued trait in our society.

We believe in rooting our everyday functions in logic and reason, yet we come to the same conclusions after long periods of contemplation as we do in the blink of an eye<sup>3</sup>. Our leaders sorely overlook the human element of our sociopolitical issues and I need not cite the divorce rate for you to believe that we're not choosing the right partners (nor do we have the capacity to sustain intimate relationships for long periods of time).

It seems people believe the most intelligent thing to do is not have emotions at all. To be effective is to be a machine, a product of the age. A well-oiled, consumerist-serving, digitally attuned, highly unaware but overtly operational robot. And so we suffer.

Here are the habits of the people who have the capacity to be aware of what they feel. Who know how to express, process, dismantle, and adjust their experience as they are their own locus of control. They are the true leaders, they are living the most whole and genuine lives, and it is from them we should be taking a cue. These are the things that emotionally intelligent people do not do.

01. They don't assume that the way they think and feel about a situation is the way it is in reality, nor how it will turn out in the end.  
They recognize their emotions as responses, not accurate gauges, of what's going on. They accept that those responses may have to do with their own issues, rather than the objective situation at hand.
02. Their emotional base points are not external.