

## “Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less”

BY GREG MCKEOWN

In our hectic 21<sup>st</sup> Century lives with so many choices on how to spend our time, we find ourselves and our families stretched too thin, running from one event to the next. We are busy but not productive, and often feel that our time is constantly being hijacked by other people's agendas. For those of us in the military, we are “on duty” 24/7, tethered to our cellphones, pagers or blackberries. Is this really what our profession demands from us. I recommend a better way to balance our lives: “Essentialism” is an idea whose time has come.

Essentialism is more than a time-management strategy or a productivity technique. It is a systematic discipline for discerning what is absolutely essential, then eliminating everything that is not, so we can make the highest possible contribution toward the things that really matter. By forcing us to apply more selective criteria to determine what is Essential, the disciplined pursuit of less empowers us to reclaim control of our own choices about where we spend our precious time and energy—instead of giving others the implicit permission to choose for us.

Essentialism is not one more thing; it's a whole new way of doing everything. It's about doing less, but better, in every area of our lives. I wish I had found this book at the beginning of my career; I would have

not been as stressed out about trying to do everything and never saying no to requests from others.

### ESSENCE: What is the Core mind-set of an Essentialist?

#### 1. Individual Choice:

a. A choice is not a thing, a choice is an ACTION. If we surrender our ability to choose, something or someone else will step in to choose for us. While we may not have control over our options, we always have control over how we choose among them.

b. If you could only do one thing with your life right now, what would you do?

#### 2. The Prevalence of Noise

a. We live in a world where almost everything is worthless (noise), and a very few things are exceptionally valuable. John Maxwell: “You cannot overestimate the unimportance of practically everything.”

#### 3. The Reality of Trade-offs:

a. We can't have it all or do it all.

b. Essentialists see trade-offs as an inherent part of life, NOT as an

inherently negative part of life.

c. Instead of asking, “What do I have to give up?” they ask “What do I want to go BIG on?”

### EXPLORE: How can we discern the trivial many from the vital few?

To determine what is truly essential, we need:

- Space to Think: Especially when life seems to get busy, we need to build thinking time into our schedule
- Time to Look and Listen: Essentialists need to be powerful observers and listeners. Keep a journal and review it monthly
- Permission to Play: “play” is not just a break from work, but is very often the source of creative, imaginative breakthroughs
- Wisdom to Sleep: Essentialists see adequate restful sleep as necessary for operating at high levels of contribution
- Discipline to Apply Highly Selective Criteria to the Choices we Make: If the answer to whether or not something is essential is not a DEFINITE YES, then it is a NO

**ELIMINATE: How can we cut out the trivial many?**

In this section of the book, the “Essential Intent” of work or personal goals is clarified. Unlike the vague mission statements of many companies, an Essential Intent is both inspirational and concrete, meaningful and memorable, and

allows everyone in an organization to clearly understand our shared priority mission. Developing an Essential Intent is hard work, but once you have done this, you can now start the elimination process (Uncommit, Edit, Set Boundaries). If you read nothing else in this book, see the Chapter on “Dare,” which discusses the power of a graceful NO (people will actually

respect you MORE), and the 8 techniques we all need to have in our “NO Repertoire.”

**EXECUTE: How can we make doing the vital few things almost effortless?**

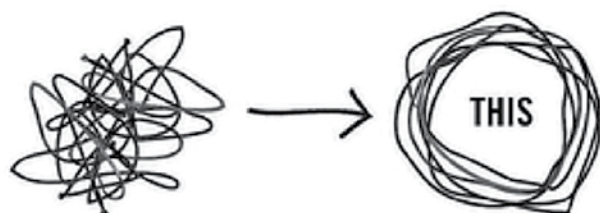
In this section, we learn how to invest the time we saved by eliminating nonessentials into designing a system to make execution almost effortless.

Techniques include:

- Buffer: Plan ahead and create a buffer to prepare for the unforeseen.
- Subtract: Don’t default to bandage solutions; Find and remove the obstacles that are keeping us from being successful.
- Progress: Celebrate small wins.
- Flow: the genius of routine. Proactively change to better habits, and once the habit is established, the activity won’t require as much brain focus.
- Focus on the present.

Summary: ESSENTIALISM is a discipline you apply each and every time you are faced with a decision about whether to say YES or whether to politely decline. It’s a method for making the tough trade-off between lots of good things and a few really great things. It’s about learning how to do less but better so that you can achieve the highest possible return on every precious moment of life. I encourage everyone to strongly consider this life-changing approach to all aspects of your life!

## The Model



	Nonessentialist	Essentialist
<b>Thinks</b>	<p><b>ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE</b></p> <p>“I have to.”</p> <p>“It’s all important.”</p> <p>“How can I fit it all in?”</p>	<p><b>LESS BUT BETTER</b></p> <p>“I choose to.”</p> <p>“Only a few things really matter.”</p> <p>“What are the trade-offs?”</p>
<b>Does</b>	<p><b>THE UNDISCIPLINED PURSUIT OF MORE</b></p> <p>Reacts to what’s most pressing</p> <p>Says “yes” to people without really thinking</p> <p>Tries to force execution at the last moment</p>	<p><b>THE DISCIPLINED PURSUIT OF LESS</b></p> <p>Pauses to discern what really matters</p> <p>Says “no” to everything except the essential</p> <p>Removes obstacles to make execution easy</p>
<b>Gets</b>	<p><b>LIVES A LIFE THAT DOES NOT SATISFY</b></p> <p>Takes on too much, and work suffers</p> <p>Feels out of control</p> <p>Is unsure of whether the right things got done</p> <p>Feels overwhelmed and exhausted</p>	<p><b>LIVES A LIFE THAT REALLY MATTERS</b></p> <p>Chooses carefully in order to do great work</p> <p>Feels in control</p> <p>Gets the right things done</p> <p>Experiences joy in the journey</p>