

Ego is the Enemy by Ryan Holiday | Book Summary by Paul Minors

INTRODUCTION

Who is this book for?

Ego is the Enemy is a fantastic read about how on the road to success, we mustn't let our ego's become a controlling factor in the way we act and make decisions. The book is a great continuation on from Ryan's last book, *The Obstacle is the Way*.

This book is for anyone with goals and ambitions, no matter where you are on your journey, Ryan Holiday helps make you realise, that you are your own worst enemy, that your ego, is the root of most of your problems. And if you can learn to understand this better, you can begin to adapt, make progress and stop being held back.

About the author

Ryan Holiday considers himself a writer and a media strategist. With 6 books under his belt and an extremely successful blog, Ryan has covered a lot of topics surrounding personal and business development. He has a passion for philosophy & stoicism as well as marketing, business, success, growth, marketing, self-awareness and learning. He studied under Robert Greene, author of *The 48 Laws of Power* and credits a lot of his success and strategies to Greene.

In this summary

Initially, Ryan discusses why so often journeys are started and fail, explaining that it's our own ego that gets in the way and holds us back. He discusses the symptoms of ego and what to do about them. Then Ryan examines success, what to do in the pursuit of success and how to manage it when you reach it. Finally, Ryan examines the concept of failure. Almost of us have faced failure, it's inevitable, but Ryan helps to clarify what you can do to rise again.

BOOK SUMMARY

SYMPTOMS AND THE CURING OF AN EGO

Ryan explains that the reason that so many of us begin a journey, chasing new aspirations and goals, but fail to follow through, is because our ego holds us back. It's what gets in the way, preventing us from reaching our true potential. And Ryan identifies that humility and reality, are the cure for the ego - that living in a fantasy land is not sustainable and does more damage than good.

What to avoid

Ryan identifies that has humans, we talk too much. We use it to fill a gap and cover up our uncertainty. It's this constant need to talk that gets in the way of work, we talk, talk, talk, about doing the work, but actually, less of the work gets done.

"The only relationship between work and chatter is that one kills the other."

Ryan also explains that we need to avoid distractions, that we face choices everyday that can act as 'distractions' and get in the way of our pursuit. If you can identify your purpose, and understand what you are here to truly do, then these choices will be easier to make. It's about stepping back and asking yourself if you really need this, or is it something your ego wants.

"Each opportunity—no matter how gratifying or rewarding—must be evaluated along strict guidelines: Does this help me do what I have set out to do? Does this allow me to do what I need to do? Am I being selfish or selfless?"

Learn & don't be passionate

Ryan emphasises the availability of education in our day and age. The access we have to information, books, free courses etc means that there are no barriers, no reason to not educate yourself further. And the technology means that there is a never-ending stream of things to learn, you should never be done. There is always room for improvement.

"Your ego is the enemy—it blocks us from improving by telling us that we don't need to improve. Then we wonder why we don't get the results we want, why others are better and why their success is more lasting."

Ryan recognises that we are always told to have passion, it's all about finding your passion, living passionately. When in fact, we need to focus on purpose and realism. He explains that purpose can be considered as similar to passion, but with realistic expectations. Purpose is like passion but reigned in a little. And you need the realism to have perspective, to understand what is realistic and what can truly be achieved. Realism is constantly checking in and making sure what we are doing is right, is on the right track and is moving forward. There's no space for dreaming.

"The critical work that you want to do will require your deliberation and consideration. Not passion."

Take a look at yourself

Ryan uses the example of a canvas to explain the concept of making other people look good, whether it be in your job or your personal life. Provide support so that others can be good & successful. Eliminate your ego and put others first.

"Find canvases for other people to paint on. Clear the path for the people above you and you will eventually create a path for yourself."

Ryan explains that you can guarantee, that when you are working towards your goal, something that is for you, then you will face reactions including complete indifference to total sabotage. People will go out of their way to try and make you fail.

It's here, that Ryan says the importance of avoiding ego is vital.

"Who can afford to be jerked around by impulses, or believe that you're god's gift to humanity, or too important to put up with anything you don't like? Those who have subdued their ego understand that it doesn't degrade you when others treat you poorly; it degrades them."

It's these situations where you have to be quiet, restrain yourself and just get on with the work. Don't react, because that's when you'll get distracted and stop focusing on the task at hand.

"Restraint is a difficult skill but a critical one. You will often be tempted, you will probably even be overcome. No one is perfect with it, but try we must."

Get out of your head

Ryan brings it back to the concept of realism, you have to live in the real world. Don't let your mind obsess and create abstracted versions of reality.

"Living clearly and presently takes courage. Don't live in the haze of the abstract, live with the tangible and real, even if—especially if—it's uncomfortable. Be part of what's going on around you. Feast on it, adjust for it."

Ryan identifies pride as a dangerous concept. Pride is responsible for making something that was a small achievement feel a lot bigger and more substantial than it really was. You have to stay realistic about your achievements and what they mean, what the results really are.

"Without this understanding, pride takes our self-conception and puts it at odds with the reality of our station, which is that we still have so far to go, that there is still so much to be done."

While some people are out there preaching that you can do less to succeed, Ryan really pushes home the idea that you have to work hard, you have to put in the hours and make it happen. Don't let your ego let you think you can get away with doing less, and achieving more.

"Work is finding yourself alone at the track when the weather kept everyone else indoors. Work is pushing through the pain and crappy first drafts and prototypes. Because there is work to be done. Work doesn't want to be good. It is made so, despite the headwind."

SUCCESS

Ego, Ryan explains is not the only issue, success is part of the problem. Ryan outlines that success is always so short-lived, and this is because our ego's shorten it. As you approach the end of a goal or are reaching success, you face new temptations, new problems.

"Sobriety, open-mindedness, organization, and purpose—these are the great stabilizers. They balance out the ego and pride that comes with achievement and recognition."

Always stay a student and never tell stories

Ryan encourages you to remain a student for ever, never let your ego think that you have graduated otherwise your learning will end. We need to always be pursuing bettering ourself, study, learn, read, make yourself uncomfortable with your lack of knowledge and challenge your assumptions.

"An amateur is defensive. The professional finds learning to be enjoyable; they like being challenged and humbled, and engage in education as an ongoing and endless process."

Ryan emphasises the risk of telling stories, writing your own narrative. The danger is that your life becomes fiction, you fall into the trap of pretending that you live this great life. Instead, you must remember the reality, focus on the real world and work hard.

"Instead of pretending that we are living some great story, we must remain focused on the execution—and on executing with excellence. We must shun the false crown and continue working on what got us here."

What's important to you?

Identifying what is truly important to you is the first step Ryan suggests you take. If you fail to do this, the successes you reach won't be as fulfilling as they could be. And the success won't last.

"This is especially true with money. If you don't know how much you need, the default easily becomes: more."

Ask yourself why you do what you do. That, Ryan says, is the most important question you need to ask yourself.

Limitations

Ryan recommends that you keep yourself in check regarding your limitations, it's important to regularly assess and acknowledge these. Common limitations include;

- **Entitlement**- this can be dangerous because it's the assumption that this is yours and you have earned it. Entitlement doesn't encourage valuing anyone else's time as valuable as your own.
 - **Control** - the belief that everything must be done your way can create more problems than solutions.
 - **Paranoia**- if you think that you cannot trust anyone but yourself is isolating. It means that you are the only priority and only you can get anything done. The concept of "looking out for number one" can make you a lonely prisoner of your own false reality.

Management and teamwork

As you reach success in a venture, your life changes from working more and more to making more decisions and delegating. It's important to manage yourself and others fairly and with progress in mind.

Ryan points out that anyone who cannot manage other people, those micromanagers we are all familiar with, are egotistical and almost always end up overwhelmed with too much to do.

"Worse yet are those who surround themselves with yes-men or sycophants who clean up their messes and create a bubble in which they can't even see how disconnected from reality they are."

Ryan explains that if you want to progress and achieve results, you must understand the goals and priorities of the organisation, the why. Then follow through with these, and then, only then, will you reap the benefits.

Ryan discusses that when a team has worked together and achieved greatness, this is when the real problems begin. Individuals that once made up the team begin to let their egos grow, they start looking out for themselves rather than the team as a whole. And this is when everything starts to unravel.

Ryan encourages you to realise that you are not special, you are not better than anyone else on the team. Of course, you can want acknowledgement, and want to reap the benefits, but you need to balance it with the reality of the situation. The team got you there, you didn't do it alone.

"Soccer coach Tony Adams expresses it well. Play for the name on the front of the jersey, he says, and they'll remember the name on the back."

Realise your reality

"It's hard to be humble when you're as great as I am," Muhammad Ali once said.

Ryan encourages you to check in with reality regularly. Remind yourself about the harsh realities of life, the hardships people face. Acknowledge that there are forces beyond your control, that in this world, you are pretty insignificant. Doing so will allow you stay humble, stay accountable and stay realistic.

"Let the feeling carry you as long as you can. Then when you start to feel better or bigger than, go and do it again."

Ryan describes successful people who live a modest life, they live in normal homes, wear normal clothes and do normal things. You probably haven't head of them before, but that's the way they want it to be. Living this life doesn't mean they aren't successful, it means that they remain sober and can stay focused on their jobs.

"Sobriety is the counterweight that must balance out success. Especially if things keep getting better and better."

BUT WHAT IF I BAIL?

"Instead of letting power make us delusional and instead of taking what we have for granted, we'd be better to spend our time preparing for the shifts of fate that inevitably occur in life. That is, adversity, difficulty, failure."

Ryan describes failure as inevitable, there's no avoiding it. He points out that more often than not, you are the cause of your own failure. And it's part of the 'cycle of life' there are ups, and downs, and so on...

Ryan emphasises that it's impossible to be continuously successful, and the chances of succeeding on your first journey are increasingly real. There's numerous setbacks you can expect to face.

"Ego not only leaves us unprepared for these circumstances, it often contributed to their occurrence in the first place. The way through, the way to rise again, requires a reorientation and increased self-awareness."

The key to riding our failure, according to Ryan, are; purpose, poise & patience.

Dead or Alive?

According to Robert Greene, influential mentor to Ryan; there are two types of time. Dead time is when you are passive, biding time and alive time is moments of action, learning, evolving, growing. And every time we face failure, you can choose to proceed with alive time or dead time.

"As Booker T. Washington most famously put it, "Cast down your bucket where you are." Make use of what's around you. Don't let stubbornness make a bad situation worse."

Ego is the reason

According to Ryan, ego is responsible for a lot.

- Ego is the reason we delay things, we avoid doing the things that may change our lives for the better,

- Ego can kill what we love,
- It blocks us from thinking long term, from sharing credit with others,
- Ego allows us to crave the spotlight
- Ego encourages us to always thrive for more, to be greedy.

A hard road

Ryan recommends that you need to keep your own scorecard. That it's important in the journey of being a better, less selfish, more rounded person. Judge yourself based on your own standards, and share credit where credit is due.

Ryan acknowledges that despite the circumstances, in any unpleasant circumstance, or when facing failure, the default emotion is to hate. Shift the blame and responsibility away from yourself onto someone else.

However, Ryan emphasises that this doesn't help us progress, develop or learn. We become stagnant in failure.

Instead, pursuing love, leaves us open to positivity and productivity.

Ego is always the enemy

"Whatever is next for us, we can be sure of one thing we'll want to avoid. Ego. It makes all the steps hard, but failure is the one it will make permanent. Unless we learn, right here and right now, from our mistakes. Unless we use this moment as an opportunity to understand ourselves and our own mind better, ego will seek out failure like true north."

Ryan leaves us with his mantra;

Not to aspire or seek out of ego.

To have success without ego.

To push through failure with strength, not ego.

CONCLUSION

Key Takeaways

- Never stop learning.
- Don't focus only on passion.
- Make it a priority to make others look good.
- Entitlement, Control & Paranoia are all limitations that will hold you back. Don't be entitled, don't be a control freak and don't be paranoid, not everyone is out to get you.
- Failure is inevitable.
- Purpose, poise and patience are the key to helping you get through a failure.
- Your ego, is always your enemy.

Further Reading

Other reads by Ryan Holiday include [The Obstacle is the Way](#) - an instructive read about how to overcome any obstacle or challenge you face and turn it into an advantage and [Trust Me I'm Lying](#) - an eye-opening insight into how the modern media operates, the economy that drives it and how the system can be manipulated.

Robert Greene was one of the most influential people in Ryan Holiday's life and his book [The 48 Laws of Power](#) outlines key steps to understanding how to use and enforce your power.

Ryan Holiday talks about finding your why, and similarly, Simon Sinek's book [Start With Why](#) examines what it takes to be a successful leader, and how starting with why is the key to inspiring others.

[Guidelines](#) is my eBook that summarises the main lessons from 33 of the best-selling self-help books in one place. It is the ultimate book summary; Available as a 80-page ebook and 115-minute audio book. Guidelines lists 31 rules (or guidelines) that you

should follow to improve your productivity, become a better leader, do better in business, improve your health, succeed in life and become a happier person.

Action Steps

1. Are you still actively learning? **Try to read more, or enrol in a course.**
Don't let your ego think you are done.
2. Identify **what is important to you.** Why do you do what you do?
3. If you enjoyed this book summary, purchase the full book on [Amazon](#).