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EGO IS THE ENEMY

By Ryan Holiday

PROLOGUE

- “Virtue begins with understanding and is fulfilled by courage.” — Demosthenes

INTRODUCTION

- “The first principle is that you must not fool yourself, and you are the easiest person to fool.”
— Richard Feynman
- Ego: An unhealthy belief in our own importance. Arrogance. Self-centered ambition.
- Ego is a magnet for enemies and errors.
- Ego inhibits true success by preventing a direct and honest connection to the world around us.
- Comfort keeps ego around. Pursuing excellence can be terrifying. Ego soothes that fear. It is the salve to that insecurity. It is a short term fix with long term consequences.
- Technology allows us to boost our ego like never before. Social media, mass communication.
- We are always in one of three stages
 - Aspiring to something
 - Achieving success
 - Dealing with failure
- Proper view of ego allows us to
 - Be humble in our aspirations
 - Gracious in our success
 - Resilient in our failures
- What replaces ego is humility, but rock hard humility and confidence. Ego is artificial confidence.

PART I: ASPIRE

TO WHATEVER YOU ASPIRE, EGO IS YOUR ENEMY

- The ability to honestly evaluate one's own ability is the most important skill of all. Without it, improvement is impossible. And ego makes this process difficult every step of the way. Arrogance and self absorption inhibit growth.

TALK, TALK, TALK

"Those who know do not speak. Those who speak do not know."--Lao Tzu

- It is a temptation for everyone to have talk and hype replace action.
- So what is scarce and rare? Silence. The ability to deliberately keep yourself out of the conversation and subsist without validation. Silence is the respite of the confident and the strong.
- "Never give reasons for what you think or do until you must." – General Sherman
- Talking and doing fight for the same resources. One of them actually gets things done.
- The only relationship between work and chatter is that one kills the other.

TO BE OR TO DO?

- Do you want to be someone or do something? Is your purpose more important than your standing?
 - What is your purpose? What are you here to do?

BECOME A STUDENT

- The power of being a student is not just that it is an extended period of instruction. It also places the ego and ambition in someone else's hands.
- The pretense of knowledge is our most dangerous vice because it prevents us from getting better.
- +, -, = (plus, minus, equal) system. Train with someone better than you to learn, train with someone less than you to teach, train with someone the same as you to challenge.
- "It is impossible to learn that which one thinks one already knows." – Epictetus

DON'T BE PASSIONATE

- Passion may be the very thing holding you back from power or influence, or accomplishment.
- Because just as often, we fail with--no, because of--passion.
 - Not talking about caring, but talking about passion of a different sort. Unbridled enthusiasm.

- John Wooden was described as “dispassionate.” It was a clinical, disciplined, and consistent dedication to what was required to make their team great.
- Passion typically masks a weakness. The impetuosity, frantic nature of it are poor substitutes for discipline, for mastery, for strength and purpose and perseverance.
- As humans, we require in our ascent, purpose and realism. Purpose is like passion with boundaries and realism is detachment and perspective.
- “Great passions are maladies without hope.” --Goethe
- Passion is form over function. Purpose is function, function, function.

FOLLOW THE CANVAS STRATEGY

- Internships.
 - How dare I be forced to do stuff I don't like, for people I don't respect as I make my way in the world.
 - Be an “anteambulo,” someone that clears the path for people above you and you will eventually create a path for yourself.
- Few realities when starting out
 - You are not nearly as good or as important as you think you are.
 - You have an attitude that needs to be readjusted.
 - Most of what you think you know or most of what you learned in books or in school is out of date or wrong.
- Not endorsing sycophancy.
- It is awesome to make other people look good!
- Belichick.
 - Became obsessed with what other coaches called “grunt work,” analyzing film. Critical component of his success.
- What if you took the approach to “be less, do more.”
 - Connect people, help people, make other people look great, find what no one else wants to do and do it. Find inefficiencies, redundancies, and do it.

RESTRAIN YOURSELF

- Jackie Robinson was the first black professional baseball player.
 - When recruited by the Dodgers, the manager asked him if he had the courage to not fight back. Because that was what the overall purpose demanded.

There was more riding on Jackie's success than Jackie's career.
- When you want to do something big, important, and meaningful, you will be subjected to treatment ranging from indifference to outright sabotage. Count on it.
- In this scenario, ego is the opposite of what is needed.

GET OUT OF YOUR OWN HEAD

- "The person who thinks all the time (rather than acts) has nothing to think about except thoughts, so he loses touch with reality and lives in a world of illusions." --Alan Watts
- "If you are not careful, station KFKD (K-Fucked) will play in your head 24 hours a day, nonstop, in stereo."
- Live clearly and in the present. Don't live in the haze of the abstract. Live with what is tangible and real, even if--especially if--it's uncomfortable. Be part of what is going on around you.
- There is no one to perform for, just work to be done and lessons to be learned.

THE DANGER OF EARLY PRIDE

- Pride blunts the very instrument we need to own in order to succeed: our mind. Our ability to learn, to adapt, to be flexible, to build relationships, all of this is dulled by pride.
- **Pride and ego say:**
 - I am an *entrepreneur* because I struck out on my own.
 - I am going to *win* because I am currently in the lead.
 - I am *rich* because I made some money.
 - I am *special* because I was chosen.
- John D. Rockefeller practiced nightly conversation with himself.
 - "Because you have got a start, you think you are quite a merchant; look out or you will lose your head--go steady."
- When feeling pride, ask yourself "what you are missing?" What would the more humble person see?

WORK, WORK, WORK

- “The best plan is only good intentions unless it results in work.” — Peter Drucker
- “The poet’s function is not to experience the poetic state; that is a private affair. His function is to create it in others.” --Paul Valery
- Where we decide to put our energy is where we will ultimately reach our accomplishments.
- As a young man, Bill Clinton began a collection of notecards upon which he would write names and phone numbers of friends and acquaintances who might be of service when he eventually entered politics. Each night, he would flip through the box and make phone calls and write letters, or add notations about their interactions. Over the years, his collection grew to 10,000 cards before it was digitized.
- Great athletes love the practice.
- “When you are not practicing, remember that someone somewhere is practicing, and when you meet him, he will win.” --Bill Bradley
- There is no substitute, there is no alternative, excellence takes work.

FOR EVERYTHING THAT COMES NEXT, EGO IS THE ENEMY

- There is a gap between raw talent and the result you want. Talent can get you into the door, but there is still a gap between that and excellence. Do we cover up this gap with weak substitutes or do we put the time in and assess our shortcomings?
- The truly ambitious humbly face their shortcomings, put the time in, and get after it.

PART II: SUCCESS

- Ego blinds. It tells you that you can do no wrong. It distorts reality.
- We can’t learn if we think that we know everything.
- Will you be able to handle success, or will it be the worst thing that ever happened to you?

ALWAYS STAY A STUDENT

- “Every person you meet is your superior in some area, so learn from them.”
- Genghis Khan was a perpetual student. Constantly learned from the empires he conquered.
- We succeed and find ourselves in new situations and we have to adapt. The promoted salesman must learn how to manage. The founder must learn how to delegate.
- The pressure to make others feel like we know everything can be paralyzing.
- The humble continually improve. Humility promotes learning.
- If you are not learning, you are dying.

- Pick up a book on something you know nothing about. Put yourself in a room where you are the least knowledgeable. The amateur is defensive. The professional finds learning enjoyable, being challenged a thrill.

DON'T TELL YOURSELF A STORY

- “Myths become myths not in the living but in the retelling.”
- Bill Walsh and the 49ers
 - Took them from being the worst team in football to Super Bowl victory in three years.
 - Said he wasn't focused on the Super Bowl, they were focused on standards of performance.
 - What should be done. When it should be done. How it should be done.
 - They focused on high standards and what it meant to them.
 - Coaches wore ties and tucked their shirts in.
 - Players could not sit down on the practice field.
 - Everyone gave maximum effort all the time.
 - Believed the standards would instill excellence, and excellence would produce the desired results. The “score takes care of itself.”
 - Writing our own narrative after good results happen can lead to arrogance. Be careful how you craft that story. We have the tendency to simplify things when they were never that simple.
 - Don't deceive yourself. When you get good results, don't fashion a story that turns it to myth.

WHAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU?

- Too many of us waste precious life doing things we don't like, to impress people we don't respect, to get things we don't want. We do this to feed our ego.
- No matter how much you accomplish, you will come across people that will make you feel like you have not done anything. So we pick up the pace to keep up with them.
- It is good to be competitive, when you have clarity about who you are competing with and why.
- Have clarity about what you are after. Say no to the other things. Allow yourself to be content. Ignore those that try to mess with your pace.

ENTITLEMENT, CONTROL, AND PARANOIA

- Entitlement assumes: This is mine. I've earned it. It also nickel and dimes other people because it can't conceive of valuing another person's time as highly as its own.
- Control says that it must be done my way, even the little things, the inconsequential things. It

exhausts people whose help we need.

- Paranoia thinks, "I can't trust anyone." I am in this totally by myself and for myself.
- "He who indulges empty fears earns himself real fears."--Seneca

MANAGING YOURSELF

- Many times in leadership, the days are less about doing and more about deciding. Such is the nature of leadership.
- It comes with accepting that others may be more qualified or specialized in areas in which you consider yourself competent.
- We must be aware of our strengths and weaknesses. Our faults and tendencies. We have to manage them, we have to get with others who can cover our blind spots and complement our strengths.

BEWARE OF THE DISEASE OF ME

- Pat Riley says that teams that seek success go through stages.
 - The innocent climb.
 - Before success, a team is innocent.
 - If the conditions are right, they watch out for each other and work together toward their collective goal.
 - Success
 - The Disease of Me
 - It is Shaq and Kobe unable to play together.
 - It is Jordan punching his own team members
 - It is us thinking we are better, that we are special, that we are so different and better than anyone else, no one can understand.
- Play for the name on the front of the jersey and they will remember the name on the back.

MEDITATE ON THE IMMENSITY

- If you look into the night sky, into nature, you cannot help but feel humbled by the immensity of the universe. Reconcile yourself with the realities of life. Realize how much came before you and how only the wisps of it remain.

MAINTAIN YOUR SOBRIETY

- Far too many leaders are intoxicated with ego, power, with position.
- “Fear is a bad advisor.”
 - Make the right decision, not driven by recklessness or fear.
- Don’t be deceived by the recognition you have received or the amount of money in your bank account. Fight to stay sober. Talk to yourself and remind yourself to stay sober.
- “It requires a strong constitution to withstand the repeated attacks of prosperity.”
- If you want to live happy, live hidden.

FOR WHAT OFTEN COMES NEXT, EGO IS THE ENEMY

- Aristotle preached the “Golden Mean,” which is the balance between extremes.
 - Endless ambition vs. complacency
 - Avoiding the “undisciplined pursuit of more”

PART III: FAILURE

- No one is permanently successful and no one finds success on the first attempt.
- Almost always, your road to victory goes through a place called “failure.” You must understand what caused it and how to move on.
- Ego wants things to be “fair.” Psychologists call it narcissistic injury when we take personally totally indifferent and objective events. When we believe that our sense of self is fragile and dependent on things going our way all the time.
- Will your ego betray you when things get difficult?

“It is because mankind are disposed to sympathize more entirely with our joy than our sorrow, that we make parade of our riches, and conceal our poverty. Nothing is so mortifying as to be obligated to expose our distress to the view of the public, and to feel, that though our situation is open to the eyes of all mankind, no mortal conceives for us the half of what we suffer.”

– Adam Smith

ALIVE TIME OR DEAD TIME

- There are two types of time in our lives.
 - Dead time. People are passive and waiting.
 - Alive time. When people are learning, acting, and utilizing every second.
- Make use of the time around you, be alive!

THE EFFORT IS ENOUGH

- “What matters to an active man is to do the right thing; whether the right thing comes to pass should not bother him.” --Goethe
- There will be times when we do everything right and the results will be negative. Depending on what motivates us, this result can be crushing. Doing the right thing should be enough.
- The less attached to outcomes and the more attached we are to the process (doing things right), the better. When ego is present, this is never enough.
- “Success is peace of mind, which is a direct result of self-satisfaction in knowing you made the effort to do your best to become the best that you are capable of becoming.” – John Wooden
- John Kennedy Toole’s great book *A Confederacy of Dunces* was universally turned down by publishers, news that so broke his heart that he later committed suicide in his car on an empty road in Biloxi, Mississippi. After his death, his mother discovered the book, advocated on its behalf until it was published, and it eventually won the Pulitzer Prize.

FIGHT CLUB MOMENTS

- The list goes on and on with names of people who have hit rock bottom and were transformed and strengthened. Hard things are broken by hard things.
- Significant life changes come from moments we are thoroughly demolished.
- These events seem to be defined by 3 traits
 - They almost always came at the hands of some outside force or person.
 - They often involved things we already knew about ourselves but were too scared to admit.
 - From the ruin came opportunity for great progress and improvement.

DRAW THE LINE

- People make mistakes all the time. We take risks, we mess up.
- Ego, however, tells us to keep going, to double down, to fix. Don't let your ego make it worse.
- "He who fears death will never do anything worthy of a living man." – Seneca
- The person who will do anything to avoid failure will almost do something worthy of failure.

MAINTAIN YOUR OWN SCORECARD

- Tom Brady was picked in the 6th round (the 199th pick) of the 2000 draft. He started his first season as the 4th string. Arguably the best NFL draft pick ever. But the Patriots were disappointed in that their system failed to identify him before the 6th round.
- "Vain men never hear anything but praise."
- Each team, each person, who strives for excellence has an inner scorecard that is simply a higher standard than nearly everyone else. They don't care about reaching other people's standards, they care about reaching their own standards.

ALWAYS LOVE

- When you try to destroy something out of hate or ego, it tends to give it new life. Particularly in the age of the internet.
- The better response is love. For the neighbor that won't turn down the music, for the parent that let you down, for the person that lost your paperwork, for the critic who attacks you, the best response is love.
- Rage, anger, hatred, do more damage to the person holding it than the person receiving it.

FOR EVERYTHING THAT COMES NEXT, EGO IS THE ENEMY

- Whatever you are facing, failure or success, you can learn greatly from it. The difference between learning and going into further ignorance? Ego. Pushing your ego to the side allows you to learn.
- It is an endless loop. Aspiration leads to success (and adversity.) Success creates its own adversity (and hopefully new ambitions), and adversity leads to aspiration and more success.

EPILOGUE

- Working on your ego is like sweeping the floor. You don't do it just once. Yes, you can clean it good, but you still need to clean it regularly. Dust and dirt accumulate.
- Any fool can learn from experience, the truly wise learn from other people's experiences.