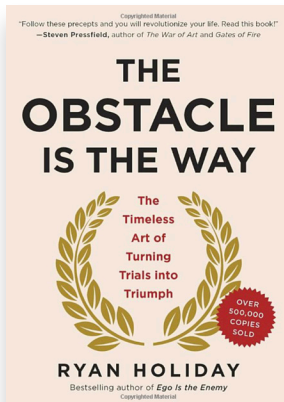


EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARIES

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The Obstacle is the Way

THE NUTSHELL

Portfolio / Penguin 2014

Introduction

Let's be honest. It's not often we find ourselves in horrible situations we must simply endure. Rather, we face some minor disadvantage or get stuck with some less-than-favorable conditions, or we're trying to do something really hard and find ourselves outmatched, overstretched or out of ideas. Well, the same logic applies. Turn it around. Find some benefit. Use it as fuel. It's simple. It's not just: how can I think this is not so bad? It is how to make yourself see that this could be an opportunity to gain a new foothold, move forward, or go in a better direction. Learn to be ceaselessly creative and opportunistic.

Perception

You will discover that what matters most is not what these obstacles you face are, but how you see them and whether you keep your composure. This reaction determines how successful you will be in overcoming them.

Where one person sees a crisis, another can see opportunity. Where one is blinded by success, another sees reality with ruthless objectivity. Where one loses control of emotions, another can remain calm. Desperation, despair, fear and powerlessness are functions of our perceptions. We either choose to give in to such feelings or choose not to.

The Obstacle is the Way

There are a few things to keep in mind when faced with a seemingly insurmountable obstacle. You must try:

- To be objective
- To control emotions and keep an even keel
- To choose to see the good in a situation
- To steady your nerves
- To ignore what disturbs or limits others
- To place things in perspective
- To revert to the present moment
- To focus on what can be controlled

This is how you see the opportunity within the obstacle. It does not happen on its own. It is a process that results from self-discipline and logic.

Action

In life, it doesn't matter what happens to you or where you came from. It matters what you do with what happens and what's been given. The only way you'll do something spectacular is by using it all to your advantage. No one is saying you can't take a minute to think, "Dammit, this sucks." By all means, vent. Exhale. Take stock. Just don't take too long, because you have to get back to work. Each obstacle we overcome makes us stronger for the next one.

We don't have the luxury of running away or hiding because we have something very specific we're trying to do. We have an obstacle we have to lean into and transform. No one is coming to save you. If we'd like to go where we claim we want to go to accomplish what we claim are our goals—there is only one way. That's to meet our problems with the right action. Therefore, we can always (and only) greet our obstacles:

- with energy
- with persistence
- with a coherent and deliberate process
- with iteration and resilience
- with pragmatism
- with strategic vision
- with craftiness and savvy
- and an eye for opportunity and pivotal moments

Are you ready to get to work?

The Obstacle is the Way

Will

Certain things in life will cut you open like a knife. When that happens the world gets a glimpse of what's truly inside you. So what will be revealed when you're sliced open by tension and pressure? Iron? Or air? Or bullshit? As such, the will is the critical third discipline. We can think, act, and finally adjust to a world that is inherently unpredictable. The will is what prepares us for this, protects us against it, and allows us to thrive and be happy in spite of it. It is also the most difficult of all the disciplines. It's what allows us to stand undisturbed while others wilt and give in to disorder. It makes us confident, calm and ready to work regardless of the conditions. It helps us be willing and able to continue, even during the unthinkable, even when our worst nightmares have come true.

These lessons come harder but are the most critical to wresting advantage from adversity. In every situation we can:

- Always prepare ourselves for more difficult times
- Always accept what we're unable to change
- Always manage our expectations
- Always persevere
- Always learn to love our fate and what happens to us
- Always protect our inner self, retreat into ourselves
- Always submit to a greater, larger cause
- Always remind ourselves of our own mortality
- And, of course, prepare to start the cycle once more

Final Thoughts

In mastering these three disciplines we have the tools to flip any obstacle upside down. We are worthy of any and every challenge. Of course, it is not enough to simply read this or say it. We must practice these maxims, rolling them over and over in our minds and acting on them until they become muscle memory.

But don't worry; you're prepared for this now, this life of obstacles and adversity. You know how to handle them, how to brush aside obstacles and even benefit from them. You understand the process.