Ego Is The Enemy by Ryan Holiday

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These are the notes I took, and the quotes that stood out to me, as I read Ryan's book, Ego Is the Enemy.

I will start out by saying that, for the most part, I try really hard to apply humility to all areas of my life (family, work, church, friends, hunting, etc.). These efforts are a daily battle though, and this book helped me recognize several areas where I have slacked and need to do better.

Each one of us has the ability to improve in this area, and we also have the ability to neglect the efforts needed to stay on top of ego and pride. One of the examples Ryan uses in the book was that our ego is like a floor. A floor needs to be swept continually, as dirt and dust are continually building up. We sweep one day, and we need to sweep it again the next day. Our egos are similar....just because we do it once – or once in a while – doesn't mean it stays clean forever.



Ego (pride, arrogance, whatever you want to call it) is at the center of almost every detail of drama. From issues at work, in our marriage and family, and within our endeavors in hunting, ego works as a wedge to separate us from true happiness. When what we want becomes a greater desire than what we want for those around us, ego has become the enemy.

I first listened to the audiobook of Ego Is the Enemy on Audible on a roadtrip a month or two ago. About halfway through the audiobook, I found myself thinking about all the people I knew who struggled with ego, and assessing how ego was causing them to act in certain ways. It was like an alder branch slapping me alongside my face as I realized it was ego in me that was causing me to focus on the weaknesses and shortcomings of others. I listened to the rest of the audiobook with more of an open mind on how I needed to work on my own ego. Then, a few weeks later, I ordered the hardcopy of the book and read it again, this time focusing on what I could apply to my own ego. It was life-changing. I took notes, and highlighted multiple pages in the book as I read it for the second time.

I hope these book notes and quotes will resonate with you in a way that will pique your interest and inspire you to evaluate how ego is affecting you in your life. If you feel so inclined, I would highly recommend picking up a copy of the book or listening to the audiobook as well. In no way am I affiliated with the book or with Ryan Holiday – I am just simply passing along a resource that I feel has been a great help to me in my life.

My notes are written in standard font, and *quotes from the book are italicized* (and sometimes bold if they really stood out to me).

Book Notes and Quotes from Ego Is the Enemy by Ryan Holiday

After the Intro, the book is broken into 3 sections: Aspire, Success, Failure. In all that we do, we are either aspiring to do (or become) something, achieving success, or going through some challenge, trial, or failure. In all three aspects, Ego is the Enemy!

Ryan categorizes these three aspects as: ambition, achievement, and adversity...In short, this book will help us be: humble in our aspirations, gracious in our success, and resilient in our failures.

If you struggle with ego – or any of the associated symptoms of ego and pride – you need to read this book. If you don't struggle with ego, you need to read this book twice... 😳 Once to recognize how ego affects all of us,

and then again to see what you can do to make needed changes to reduce ego in your life... ③ (see quote #4 & #5 below)

Sometimes, we don't even recognize what ego is or how it might be affecting us. Ryan defines ego by saying,

"The ego we see most commonly goes by a more casual definition, an unhealthy belief in our own importance. Arrogance. Self-centered ambition. That's the definition this book will use. It's that petulant child inside every person, the one that chooses getting his or her way over anything or anyone else. The need to be better than, more than, recognized for, far past any reasonable utility - that's ego. It's the sense of superiority and certainty that exceeds the bounds of confidence and talent."

One of the comments he makes on ego really resonated with me:

"Ego is stolen. Confidence is earned. It's the difference between potent and poisonous."

Introduction

Ego is the "type of storytelling in which eventually your talent becomes your identity and your accomplishments become your worth."

To be successful: Goals must be put – and kept – higher than a desire for recognition. If you are wanting to "be" something or somebody, ego is setting your course. If you are wanting to "do" something, you will be far more successful and far better able to keep ego at bay. Plus, by "doing" something, you will naturally "become" someone. The opposite is not true...

"While the history books are filled with tales of obsessive, visionary geniuses who remade the world in their image with sheer, almost irrational force, I found that if you go looking you'll find that history is also made by individuals who fought their egos at every turn, **who eschewed the spotlight, and who put their higher goals above their desire for recognition."**

QUOTE #4 - "Perhaps you've always thought of yourself as a pretty balanced person. But for people with ambitions, talents, drives, and potential to fulfill, ego comes with the territory. Precisely what makes us so promising as thinkers, doers, creative and entrepreneurs, what drives us to the top of those fields, makes us vulnerable to this darker side of the psyche."

QUOTE #5 - "We think something else is to blame for our problems, most often, other people. We are, as the poet Lucretius put it a few thousand years ago, the proverbial "sick man ignorant of the cause of his malady." Especially for successful people who can't see what ego prevents them from doing because all they can see is what they've already done."

<u>Aspire</u>

As I read the book, I think I felt the most resonation with this section. Even if we are successful – or we are failing – I think we are all still aspiring and working towards something greater. Because of that, I feel that the info in this section applies to the other sections as well.

Ryan mentions that as we are working toward a goal, it is "Poise, Not Pose" that will get us there.

United States military officer William Sherman, during the Civil War, was a great man. "One of Sherman's biographers summarized the man in this way: "among men who rise to fame in leadership two types are recognizable, those who are born with a believe in themselves and those in whom it is a slow growth dependent on actual achievement. To the man of the last type their own success is a

constant surprise, and it's fruits the more delicious, yet to be tested cautiously with the hunting sense of doubt whether it is not all a dream. In that out lies true modesty, not the shim of insincere selfdepreciation, but the modesty of "moderation", in the Greek sense. It is poise, not pose.""

I mentioned it in the Intro section, but it is far more important – and effective – to focus on doing something rather than trying to be something. Ryan said, *"To be or to do – life is a constant roll call."*

"It's about the doing, not the recognition. In this course, it is not "who do I want to be in life?", But "what is it that I want to accomplish in life?""

Ryan uses several real-life examples of people who have succeeded by keeping Ego at bay, as well as several real-life examples of people who have crashed and burned due to their egos. One of my favorite stories he shared was of the lead-guitarist for the band Metallica, Kirk Hammett. (I blame Dirk for introducing me to Metallica back in high school)...

In a nutshell, Kirk Hammett had only been playing guitar for a few years (he was 19). The previous guitarist for Metallica, Dave Mustaine, was fired by the band, and they called Hammett to see if he wanted to come audition. He sold a few items to be able to afford the plane ticket from California to New York, and was hired on the spot. It would be easy to sit back and think, "I've arrived" in this situation, but Kirk knew better. He signed up for guitar lessons from legendary guitar teacher, Joe Satriani.

"That was the point – Kirk wanted to learn what he didn't know, to firm up his understanding of the fundamentals so that he might continue exploring this new genre of music you know had a chance to pursue."

"In other words, despite joining his dream group and quite literally turning professional, Kirk insisted that he needed more instruction – that he was still 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 place, because it prevents us from getting any better."

I love that last quote....I think we sometimes feel like we know "enough" and stop yearning to learn more. To be truly successful, we must remain forever a student!

"You cannot get better if you're convinced you are the best."

Frank Shamrock, the great UFC fighter, has a system he uses for training new fighters. He calls it the "plus, minus, equal" system.

He said, "Each fighter, to become great, needs to have someone better that they can learn from, someone lesser they can teach, and someone equal that they can challenge themselves against."

"You will not find the answers if you're too conceited and self-assured to ask the questions. You cannot get better if you're convinced you are the best."

Similar to the concept of "doing" rather than "being", Ryan points out the importance of doing things with PURPOSE, not PASSION.

"Purpose de-emphasizes the I. Purpose is about pursuing something outside yourself as opposed to pleasuring yourself." (self-promotion, recognition, etc.)

"Passion is seen in those who can tell you in great detail who they intend to become and what their success will be like. They can tell you all the things they're going to do, or have even begun, but they cannot show you the progress. Because there rarely is any."

"The world tells us to keep and promote a "personal brand." We are required to tell stories in order to sell our work and our talents, and after enough time, we forget where the line is that separates our fictions from reality."

"In reality, there's no one to perform for. There is just work to be done."

Greatness comes from humble beginnings; it comes from grunt work. It means you are the least important person in the room – until you change that with results.

I remember loving Michael Jordan while I was growing up. I even had the opportunity to watch him play. It always amazed me how detailed and diligent he was. He was the greatest basketball player of all time (in my humble opinion), yet he always practiced with intense focus and attention to details. When he came out of retirement, he was 40+ years old, and playing with and against some amazing talent that was half his age. Yet in pre-game warm-ups and in practice, he did all the small things. He ran all the way out to the free throw line during drills and reached down and touched the line before sprinting back to the baseline. The other players would walk out and look down at the line, then jog lazily over to the baseline. His attention to details and his amazing work ethics are what propelled him to be the best. He was 40+ years old....he was already recognized as the best. Yet he continued to do what made him great in the first place, and never lost sight of what that was – hard work!

Fake it 'til you make it...DOESN'T WORK!!!!

"There is the popular quote, fake it till you make it. When it is difficult to tell a real producer from an adept self-promoter, of course some people will roll the dice and managed to play the confidence game. Rather, make it so you don't have to fake it – that's the key."

"If you were doing the work and putting in the time, you won't need to cheat, you won't need to overcompensate."

"Bill Walsh was the coach of the San Francisco 49ers in the early 80s. They were two and 14 the season before he took over. He implemented what he called his "standard of performance". Basically what should be done, when, and how. Things like no sitting down on the practice field, coaches had to wear a tie and took their shirts in, everyone had to give maximum effort and commitment, the locker room was kept neat and clean, no smoking, no fighting no profanity, passing routes were monitored and graded down to the inch, practices were scheduled to the minute. It would be a mistake to think this was about control. It was about instilling excellence. The seemingly simple but exacting standards mattered more than some grand vision or power trip. In his eyes, if the players take care of the details, "the score takes care of itself." The winning would happen."

Lastly, there is the jealousy we sometimes feel as we see others trying to achieve success. Maybe they are hollow self-promoters who are trying to be something without trying to do something. Maybe they are trying to get attention for something they feel they are good at. Regardless of what others are doing, it's important to realize that their efforts are not going to affect the outcome of your efforts. Even if they are direct competitors. You just go and "do" what it is you are striving to do, and don't focus on what others are doing. Set your goals, create a plan to achieve those goals, then work. When we continually look back to see what everyone else is doing or saying, it distracts us and takes our focus off what we need to be accomplishing.

A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you. - C. S. Lewis

In the podcast with Brian and Jordan, we mentioned the "Crab Analogy" that we see so often in the world today (and even unfortunately, amongst fellow hunters). If you place a single crab in a bucket, the crab has the ability to climb out. So, in order to keep the crab in the bucket, it's necessary to place a second crab in there with him. As one crab begins to attempt to climb up out of the bucket, the other crab will reach up and pull it back down, preventing it from ever climbing out. Pulling those around us down in NOT the way to get to the top.

"Vain men never hear anything but praise."

"Ego – it feels good. So much better than those feelings of doubt and fear and Normalness. And so we stay stuck inside our heads instead of participating in the world around us. That's ego, baby."

Success

"Here you are at the pinnacle. What have you found? Just how tough and tricky it is to manage. You thought it would get easier when you arrive to; instead, it's even harder – a different animal entirely. What you found is that you must manage yourself in order to maintain your success."

Success often brings ego...and once ego gets used to being stroked, it can be almost impossible to satiate. Don't confuse ego with confidence in this state (or any other state). Confidence is OK, and necessary. But when our attitude exceeds the bounds of confidence – which can be a very thin line – ego takes control.

"Ego needs honors in order to be validated. Confidence, on the other hand, is able to wait and focus on the task at hand regardless of external recognition. Let's make one thing clear: we never earn the right to be greedy or to pursue our interests at the expense of everyone else. To think otherwise is not only egotistical, it's counterproductive."

There is no "arrival"...going back to my example of Michael Jordan, no matter where you are in the process, hard work is the only thing that will keep you there AND keep you moving forward.

"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. Because that is the only thing that will keep us here."

Success is not in being something or achieving something....it's in finding contentment...

"That's how it seems to go: we are never happy with what we have, we want what others have too. We want to have more than everyone else. We start out knowing what is important to us, but once we've achieved it, we lose sight of our priorities. Ego sways us, and can ruin us."

"Napoleon said, "man of great ambition have sought happiness, and have found fame." What he means is that behind every goal is the drive to be happy and fulfilled – but when egotism takes hold, we lose track of our goal and end up somewhere we never intended."

Success cannot be tied to what you think others want you to do or become. Think about what you want to achieve, and what will make you happy. Then, go do it.

"So, why do you do what you do? That's the question you need to answer. Stare at it until you can. Only then will you understand what matters and what doesn't. Only then can you say no, can you opt out of the stupid races that don't matter, or even exist. Only then is it easy to ignore successful people, because most of the time they aren't – at least relative to you, and often even to themselves. Only then can you develop that quiet confidence."

"It doesn't make you a bad person to want to be remembered. To want to make it to the top. To provide for yourself and your family. After all, that's all part of the allure. There is a balance. 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."

Even once we feel like we are achieving success, we cannot afford to sit back and rest. Keep working. Perhaps even more importantly, keep learning. Don't ever feel like you are an expert or that you know more than everyone else....

"The physicist John Wheeler, who helped develop the hydrogen bomb, once observed that "as our island of knowledge grows, so does the shore of our ignorance.""

"No matter what you've done up to this point, you better still be a student. If you are not still learning, you're already dying."

Ralph Waldo Emerson said "every man I meet is my master in some point, and in that I learn of him."

"It takes a special kind of humility to grasp that you know less, even as you know and grasp more and more."

Competition is healthy. Being competitive can be healthy. But it needs to be fueled with the right motivations and tempered with the right attitude.

"The sad feedback loop is that the relentless "looking out for number one" can encourage other people to undermine and fight us. They see that behavior for what it really is: a mask for weakness, insecurity, and instability. In its frenzy to protect itself, paranoia creates the persecution it seeks to avoid, making the owner a prisoner of its own delusions and chaos. Is this the freedom you envisioned when you dreamed of your success? Likely not. So stop!"

"Let's be clear: competitiveness is an important force in life. It's what drives the market and is behind some of mankind's most impressive accomplishments. On an individual level, however, it's absolutely critical that you know who you are competing with and why, that you have a clear sense of the space you are in. Far too often, we look at other people and make their approval the standard we feel compelled to meet, and as a result, squander our very **potential and purpose**."

"The complete and utter sense of certainty that got you here can become a liability if you are not careful. The demands and dream you had for a better life? The ambition that fueled your effort? These begin as earnest drives, but left unchecked become hubris and entitlement. The same goes for the instinct to take charge; now you are addicted to control. Driven to prove the doubters wrong? Welcome to the seeds of paranoia."

"Here's the other part: once you win, everyone is gunning for you. It's during your moment at the top that you can afford ego the least – because the stakes are so much higher, the margins for error are so much smaller. If anything, your ability to listen, to hear feedback, to improve and grow matter more now than ever before."

I am a self-proclaimed control freak. I have a hard time allowing others to control something that may have an effect on me. It is one of my greatest weaknesses that I struggle with. When it comes to elk hunting, it can be harnessed in a way that can bring success. But in most other areas of my life, it is an obstacle.

"Control says, it almost be done my way – even little things, even inconsequential things. It can become paralyzing perfectionism, or 1 million pointless battles fought merely for the sake of exerting it's say. It too exhausts people whose help we need, particularly quiet people who don't object until we've pushed them to their breaking point."

"What matters is that you learn how to manage yourself and others, before your industry eat you alive. Micro managers are egotists who can't manage others and they quickly get overloaded. So do the charismatic visionaries who lose interest when it's time to execute. Worse yet are those who surround themselves with yes – men or sycophants to clean up their messes and create a bubble in which they can't even see how disconnected from reality they are."

Failure

No path to success is free of failures. I like to use elk hunting analogies...a lot...to help establish a theme or prove a point. When it comes to failure, elk hunting is a perfect example. As elk hunters, we are going to fail every day. Maybe not ultimately, but there will be obstacles that cause us to stumble and do their best to prevent us from reaching our goal of success. The key is to push on, to learn from the failures, and to change what is within our control to change to minimize the possibilities of those failures coming back over and over.

"Here we are experiencing the trials endemic to any journey. Perhaps we've failed, perhaps our goal turned out to be harder to achieve than anticipated. No one is permanently successful, and not everyone find success on the first attempt. We all deal with setbacks along the way. 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 re-orientation and increased self-awareness. We don't need pity – our own or anyone else's – we need purpose, poise, and patience."

"At any given time in the circle of life, we may be aspiring, succeeding, or failing - though right now we're failing. With wisdom we understand that these positions are transitory, not statements about your value as a human being. When success begins to slip from your fingers – for whatever reason – the response isn't to grip and claw so hard that you shatter it to pieces. It is to understand that you must work yourself back to the aspirational phase. **You must get back to the first principles and best practices.**"

When we are met with failures and setbacks and challenges, our attitudes will often propel us through these trials. For the most part, these setbacks are going to be temporary. A good attitude will often help navigate a clearer course that can set us back on the path toward success. A bad (negative) attitude will rarely do anything to help.

"Humble and strong people don't have the same trouble with these troubles that egotists do. There are fewer complaints and far less self immolation. Instead, there's stoic – even cheerful – resilience. Pity isn't necessary. Their identity isn't threatened. They can get by without constant validation. **This is what we are aspiring to – much more than mere success.** What matters is that we can respond to what life throws at us."

"The only real failure is abandoning your principles. Killing what you love because you can't bear to part from it is selfish and stupid. If your reputation can't absorb a few blows, it wasn't worth anything in the first place."

"Life isn't fair. Ego loves this notion, the idea that something is fair or not. Psychologist call it narcissistic injury when we take personally totally indifferent and objective events. We do that when our sense of self is fragile and dependent on life going our way all the time. Whether what you're going through is your fault or your problem doesn't matter, because it's yours to deal with right now."

While it can be important to listen to the feedback of others, set your own goals and work hard. When you fail, don't reset or recalibrate based on the background noise. Find a quiet place where you can do a realistic self-assessment and recognize what went wrong, and more importantly, what you need to do to get back on course.

Bo Jackson was a great athlete. He was an incredible football player, and an incredible baseball player. He hit many homeruns, but was often upset when he hit a homerun if he didn't hit it perfectly. To almost everyone else, the homerun was the success. But he – and many greats – don't aspire to please the audiences.

"This is characteristic of how great people think. It's not that they find failure in every success. They just hold themselves to a standard that exceeds what society might consider to be objective success. Because of that, they don't much care what other people think; they care whether they meet their own standards. **And the standards are much, much higher than everyone else's."**

One of the last sections of the book talks about haters. There is so much blame and negativity in the world, and we see it every day in the hunting industry. So and so is a poser, so we expose them for their lack of experience and success, somehow feeling that their hollow success is going to disrupt our attempts. The sad reality is that their success will only affect our success if we let it. The two are mutually exclusive. It is completely possible for someone else to enjoy success – even fame and attention – and for us to achieve success at the same time. However, if we are continually trying to discredit or disprove others – as justified as we may feel we are – we are looking back and not ahead, and will have difficulty steering our own ship.

"In failure or adversity, it's so easy to hate. Hate defers blame. It makes someone else responsible. It's a distraction too; we don't do much else when we are busy getting revenge or investigating the wrongs that have supposedly been done to us. Does this get us any closer to where we want to be? No. It just keeps us where we are – or worse, arrests our development entirely."

"This obsession with the past, with something that someone did or how things should have been, as much as it hurts, is ego embodied. Everyone else has moved on, but you can't, because you can't see anything but your own way. You can't conceive of excepting that someone could hurt you, deliberately or otherwise. So, you hate."

I will admit that this last section took me a little by surprise. In my own life, I know that love is the answer to so many challenging situations. But to have Ryan Holiday suggest that love is the answer to overcoming failure was a bit shocking. I guess I thought maybe that was a personal antidote that the world seems to overlook, so to hear a "worldly figure" like Ryan Holiday express his conviction that love can overcome many tough situations, I was pleasantly surprised.

"You know what is a better response to an attack or a slight or something you don't like? Love. OK, maybe love is too much to ask for whatever it is that you've had done to you. You could at the very least try to let it go. You could try to shake your head and laugh about it."

""Martin Luther King Junior said, "hate at any point is a cancer that gnaws away at the very vital center of your life and your existence. It is like eroding acid that Eats away the best and the objective center of your life." Take inventory for a second. What do you dislike? Who's name fills you with repulsion and rage? Now ask: have those strong feelings really helped to accomplish anything? The question we must ask for ourselves is: are we going to be miserable just because other people are?""

Whatever is next for us, we can be sure of one thing we will 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.**

Conclusion

"Martial art teacher Danielle Bolelli explained that training was like sweeping the floor. "Just because we've done it once, doesn't mean the floor is clean forever. Every day the dust comes back. Every day we must sweep. The same is true for ego. You would be stunned at what kind of damage dust and dirt can do over time. And how quickly it accumulates and becomes utterly unmanageable."" Don't aspire to "be" somebody. That is a hollow aspiration that will always leave you wanting more and never being satisfied. Think of what you want to do. Then, aspire to accomplish, not become. That is what will bring true happiness.

"It is admirable to want to be a better businessman, better athlete, better conqueror. We should want to be better informed, better off financially. We should want to do great things. I know that I do. But no less impressive an accomplishment: **being better people, being happier people, being balanced people, being content people, being humble and selfless people. Or better yet, all of these traits together.**"

Every day for the rest of your life you will find yourself at one of these three phases: aspiration, success, or failure. You will battle the ego in each of them. you will make mistakes in each of them. You must sweep the floor every minute of every day. And then, sweep again.