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Book Summary



The Earned Life **Lose Regret, Choose Fulfillment**

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Review

By Katie Fleming

It's easy to live a life of regret. We can all look backward at the missed opportunities and mistakes we've made. Through our sadness, we could commit to never doing "that" again. We may even find instructive lessons in our regret and still feel the hurt.

In **The Earned Life**, Marshall Goldsmith asserts that regret is "the counterweight to fulfillment." The *New York Times* best-selling author and leading executive coach believes we all live our lives on the continuum between these two points, but our goal should be to make choices, take risks, and put in the effort to live our purpose. Doing so won't guarantee our success. However, it will help us earn the lives we want to lead by choosing what matters to us and putting it first in every moment.

English **Means to Live an Earned Life**

Goldsmith believes we live an earned life when we use facts and our own clear goals to make choices. We accept the risks that might come with these choices because we know what matters to us. We also put in the maximum effort because we know how far we must go to succeed.

Our work won't give us unmerited success. Goldsmith says that when we lead an earned life, we earn our rewards day by day with specific, intended actions. He coaches us to shape the lives that are in front of us to tip the balance toward fulfillment rather than regret. With this mindset, we can choose what to pursue, what to achieve, where to invest our time, and just as importantly, where to stop wasting it.

This purposeful, clear living can help us live two new truths. The first is that we'll grow through every incremental improvement we bring to our lives. The second is that we'll find fulfillment through the steps we take.

What's Getting in the Way

Choice and *action* are the two prevailing themes of leading an earned life. But even in our action-driven modern world, in a country where choice and freedoms are our bedrock, it's easy to feel overwhelmed by these themes.

Sometimes, we can suffer from inertia. We persist where we are, even when what's happening in our lives isn't working for us. When we see opportunities in front of us—and even when they fall in our laps—we sometimes turn our heads and ignore them. Goldsmith knows it can be hard to shake ourselves free from this state. He suggests that where we allow ourselves to be today is a good predictor of where we'll be in five years. If we choose to be stagnant now, stuck in a life that isn't fulfilling us, it's quite conceivable that we'll be in a similar state in the years to come.

At other times, we're stuck because of our programming. The lessons we learned from childhood have molded our beliefs about who we are, what we can have, and what we can do.

Goldsmith names many other barriers that can stand in the way of an earned life. One is that we can be undone by our obligations. When we have too much on our plates, we can't find the bandwidth we need to take smart steps forward. Another is that we suffer from poor imagination, and at the

same time, we're obsessed with vicarious living. He also talks about the barriers that come from being winded by the pace of change, believing we have all the time in the world to get started or fearing we have too little.

Barriers like these rarely cancel out our yearning for fulfillment. However, they can lock us in place and keep us from taking steps forward. The good news is that the barriers aren't permanent. Goldsmith affirms that we can dismantle them and make conscious decisions that will help us live purposeful, fulfilling lives.

How We Must Go About It

Goldsmith explains that we need specific internal qualities to break down our barriers and live an earned life. Through his research, he's found that our odds of failure increase dramatically when any one of these attributes is missing.

The first of these qualities is *motivation*. We must find a driving force that ignites our desire to move toward our goals. It must be strong and compelling enough to push us forward even when we encounter setbacks.

The second quality is *ability*. We can set the loftiest goals imaginable, but those goals will be unattainable if we lack the basic skills needed to make them a reality.

The third quality is *understanding*. We should know *what* we must do to succeed and have a clear idea of *how* to do it. It's just as important that we're clear on what could jeopardize our success.

The fourth quality is *confidence*. We need a deep belief in our ability to do what we set out to achieve.

Two external factors also up our odds of succeeding at any challenging task or goal: *support* and a *marketplace*. We need help, coaching, and kindness from people as we challenge ourselves in new ways. We also need a place where our efforts will matter and be appreciated by others.

The Building Blocks of Discipline

As we've seen, mindset is critical to living an earned life. Actions are just as important. Goldsmith stresses that we must build new frameworks for ourselves so we can execute our choices and accomplish our goals.

Discipline and willpower are important parts of this framework. Goldsmith advises us to follow our plans religiously and resist anything that tempts us away from our path if we want to succeed. Unfortunately, discipline and willpower are two personal qualities we often overestimate in ourselves. Nearly all of us can benefit from building up these traits. We can do this by improving our compliance, accountability, follow-up, and performance measurement. None of these attributes are inherited. We must practice them—and earn them—every day.

Playing the Long Game

Earning our lives means playing the long game. Through it, we must stay focused, keep our energy and motivation high, and avoid burnout. We must also become masters of timing so we can see what we need to do and when doing it matters the most.

Earning starts when we commit to retooling our lives and take the first steps to make it a reality. It continues as we disengage from the past and free ourselves from the barriers we once allowed to stand in our way. Earning becomes a mainstay as we learn the dynamics of what works for us and what holds us back. We change our responses and habits to get closer to the outcomes that matter to us. And finally, earning our lives comes to a close when we accomplish our bold, purposeful mission.

The Steps We Take Next

If we're ready to live rich, fulfilling lives—that are earned and not given—there are steps we can take to get started. First, we must dive into what matters to us and set clear goals around those things. Second, we must build up the traits in ourselves that will make our goals a reality. Goldsmith tells us credibility, trustworthiness, and empathy are among the most important. Third, we need to develop a yardstick we carry along the way to gauge whether we're the people we want to be right now or how much further we need to go. And finally, we must find a community of people who inspire us, coach us, and help us live our purpose.

Bottom Line

The Earned Life is a deeply inspiring guide to finding fulfillment in a world where regret is more often at the forefront. In it, Goldsmith gives us the gentle push we need to question whether we're on the right path, what's holding us back, and what we need to do to move forward.

This isn't a casual read. Some of the biggest lessons he shares are buried deep within his stories, and even the more obvious directives require some deep reflection. Still, it's a great choice for anyone who can devote small blocks of time to thinking about the life he or she wants to lead and is ready to execute for success.

About the Reviewer

Katie Fleming is a professional writer from Ohio who specializes in content creation for small business leaders. She's also the cofounder of www.owneractions.com, an online platform that helps entrepreneurs work through the challenges of starting, growing, and exiting their ventures.

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