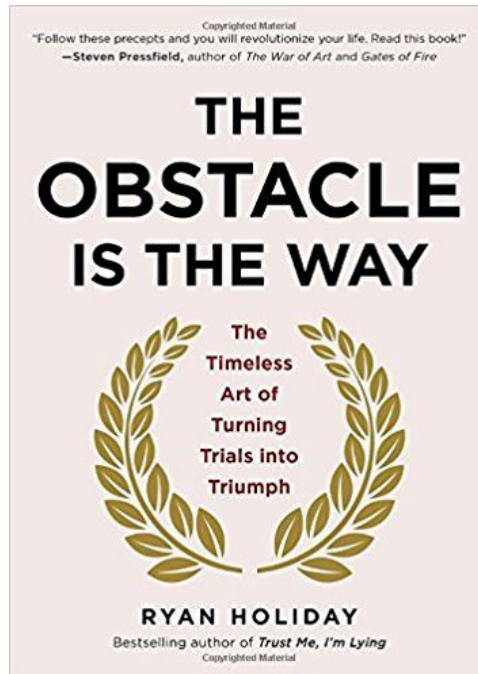


Favorite Quote:

“The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way.”
—Marcus Aurelius”



Summary: published in 2014, *The Obstacle is the Way* is a 184-page exploration of Stoic philosophy coupled with practical applications for modern-day challenges. This book expands upon the three Stoic Disciplines of Perception, Action and Will by providing historical examples of them in action, along with suggestions for applying them in our own lives. The end goal: flip any obstacle to your advantage.

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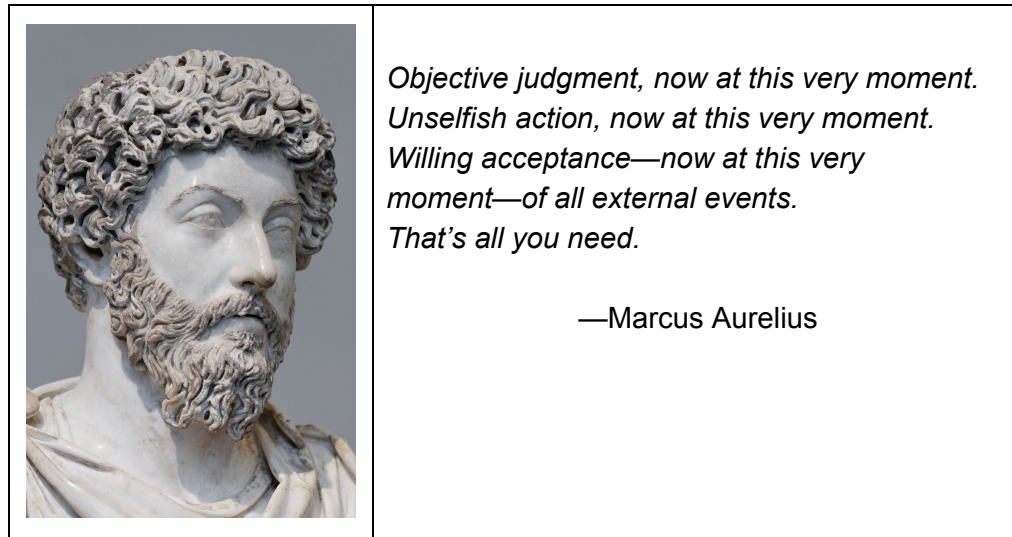


Author's Brief Bio:

I am Ryan Holiday and I am a writer and media strategist. When I was 19 years old, I dropped out of college to apprentice under Robert Greene, author of *The 48 Laws of Power*. I went on to become the director of marketing for American Apparel (you might have seen some of the controversial campaigns I was a part of). My creative agency, [Brass Check](#), has advised clients like Google, TASER, and Complex, as well as many prominent bestselling authors, including Neil Strauss, Tony Robbins and Tim Ferriss. I am the author of six books, including *The Obstacle Is the Way*, *Ego Is the Enemy*, *The Daily Stoic* and *Perennial Seller*.

Preface & Introduction

Overview: the author presents his objective for this book: “I want to show you the way to turn every obstacle into an *advantage*.” Not just to “be positive” but to learn to be relentlessly creative and opportunistic. Obstacles are not only to be expected but embraced. Obstacles are actually opportunities to test ourselves, to try new things, and ultimately to triumph.



Favorite Quotes

- “The world is constantly testing us. It asks: Are you worthy? Can you get past the things that inevitably fall in your way? Will you stand up and show us what you’re made of?”
- “The things which hurt, instruct.” —Ben Franklin

Notes

- “Problems” are a commodity. Everyone has them. There is really only one thing that is at fault: our attitude and approach.
- Great individuals, like great companies, find a way to transform weakness into strength.
- The author contends our generation is soft, entitled, and scared of conflict. I couldn’t agree more. Great times are great softeners. Stoic philosophy can create strength.

Part I: Perception

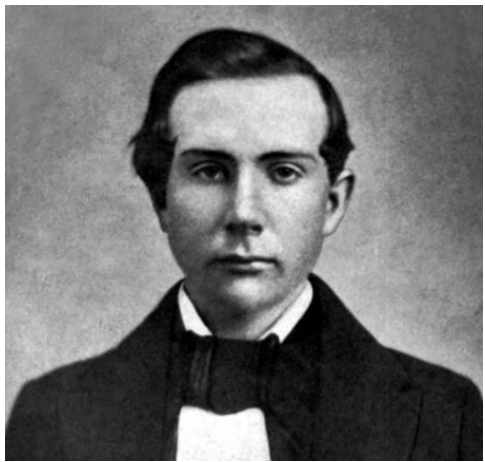
Overview: Ryan Holiday introduced the first Stoic discipline: perception. The discipline of perception involves filtering out prejudice, expectation, and fear to accomplish one goal: objectivity. It helps us see people, things, events as they *truly* are—through the power of observations—untainted by emotions and personal bias.

Favorite Quotes

- “While others are excited or afraid, we will remain calm and imperturbable [or *sangfroid*].”

- “Tranquil courage in the midst of tumult and serenity of soul in danger.” —Voltaire describing the military success of the first Duke of Marlborough
- “Don’t let the force of an impression when it first hit you knock you off your feet; just say to it: Hold on a moment; let me see who you are and what you represent. Let me put you to the test.” —Epictetus
- “The perceiving eye is weak. The observing eye is strong.” —Miyamoto Musashi, *The Book of Five Rings*
- “We cannot spend the day in explanation.” —Emerson

Notes

	<p>John D. Rockefeller, at the age of 25, mobilized investor support and \$500,000 to buy oil wells. When he began surveying the landscape, he resisted the hype, said it didn’t feel right, and returned all the money. He resisted temptation and excitement. Within 20 years he controlled 90 percent of the oil market.</p> <p>[Please pardon the creepy picture of young Rockefeller. It’s the best I could find via FineArtAmerica.com]</p>
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- Situations, by themselves, cannot be *good* or *bad*. This is something—a judgement—that we, as human beings, assign to situations with our perceptions.
 - In other words, through our perception we are complicit in the creation of each of life’s obstacles.
- The Stoics embraced “contempt for first impressions” which they practiced to *lay things bare and to strip away the legend that encrusts them*.

“Most people are slaves to impulses and instincts they have never questioned.”

- Stoic phrase: *What is up to us, what is not up to us*. What is up to us? The following:

• Our emotions	• Our perspective
• Our judgments	• Our desires
• Our creativity	• Our decisions
• Our attitude	• Our determination

- Humans tend to overthink things by assigning meaning, fairness, motive—then we wonder why we don't have the energy to actually deal with our problems. If we'd just gotten to work we'd probably be done already.
- Love this word: dispassionately.
- "This moment" is not your life, it's just a moment in your life.

On a business venture gone bad

- Let's say your hypothesis turned out to be wrong. Why should that upset you?
- It wouldn't piss off a scientist, it would *help* him. **Maybe don't bet so much on it next time.**
- And now you've learned two things: 1) that your instinct was wrong, and 2) the kind of appetite for risk you really have.

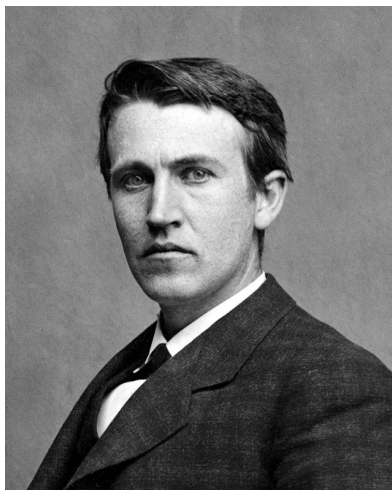
Part II: Action

*"So the first step is: Take the bat off your shoulder and give it a swing.
You've got to start, to go anywhere."*

Overview: part II introduced the second Stoic discipline: action. The basic premise is that our movements and actions define us so we must act deliberately, with boldness, and with persistence. The discipline to sustain action is one of life's most valuable skills, for genius is often persistence in disguise.

Favorite Quotes

- "We must all either wear out or rust out, every one of us. My choice is to wear out." —Theodore Roosevelt
- "Always think with your stick forward." —Amelia Earhart
- "Persist and resist." —Epictetus
- "Cling tooth and nail to the following rule: not to give in to adversity, not to trust prosperity, and always take full note of fortune's habit of behaving just as she pleases." —Seneca



Story of Thomas Edison in 1878 who was willing to test 6,000 different filaments to find one that worked. He eventually found it, proving that genius often is persistence in disguise.

Notes

- Many of us assume the world moves at our leisure. We delay when we should initiate. We jog when we should be running or sprinting. And then we're shocked—*shocked!*—when nothing big ever happens, when opportunities never show up.
- As a society, we talk a lot about COURAGE. But we forget that its most basic level it's really just taking action. If you want momentum, you'll have to create it for yourself.
"Everything we do matters. Everything is a chance to do and be your best."
- Do you have the PEP? *Patience, Energy, Persistence.*
- Action and failure are two sides of the same coin. Failure is a source of breakthroughs.
- To act well, we must acknowledge **two main enemies**: disorder, and distraction.
- There's a tendency to be so busy thinking about the future that one doesn't take pride in the tasks they're given right now. This is foolish.

"How you do anything is how you can do everything."

- The famous writer and psychologist Viktor Frankl found the question *What is the meaning of life?* to be presumptuous as though it is someone else's responsibility to tell you. Instead, he said, the world is asking YOU that question. **It's your job to answer with your actions.**
- Think progress, not perfection. What is critical, what is extra.
- On adversity: rename it, and claim it.

"External factors influence the path, but not the direction: forward."

- Story of Obama at a campaign low point due to the Reverend Wright remarks: goes on to deliver the transformative *A More Perfect Union* speech ([transcript](#); [video](#))
 - "You never want a serious crisis to go to waste. A crisis provides the opportunity for us to do things that you could not do before." —Rahm Emanuel, Obama adviser
- Perceptions can be **managed**, actions **directed**. We can always **think clearly**, **respond creatively**.

"Nothing can ever prevent us from trying. Ever."

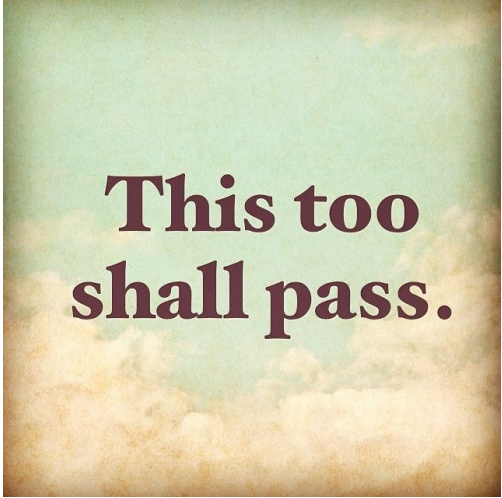
- When an obstacle or challenge appears, ask yourself: "What can this help me get better at?"

Part III: Will

Overview: we are introduced to the third Stoic discipline: will. Will is defined as our internal power which can never be affected by the outside world. Once we think and act, will empowers us to adjust to a world that is inherently unpredictable. Our will prepares us for when life cuts us open like a knife. It is also considered to be the most difficult of all the disciplines. It is about giving up control and learning what the Stoics called the Art of Acquiescence.

Favorite Quotes

- “Nothing happens to a wise man against his expectation nor do all things turn out for him as he wished but as he reckoned—and above all he reckoned *that something could block his plans.*”
—Seneca
- “Nature, in order to be commanded, must be obeyed.” —Francis Bacon

	<p>Lincoln's favorite saying, one he said was applicable in any and every situation he could encounter. He appreciated the ephemeral nature of challenges.</p> <p>"This too shall pass" is originally a Persian adage reflecting on the temporary nature, or ephemerality, of the human condition. The general sentiment is often expressed in wisdom literature throughout history and across cultures, although the specific phrase seems to have originated in the writings of the medieval Persian Sufi poets.</p> <p>It is known in the Western world primarily due to a 19th century retelling of Persian fable by the English poet Edward FitzGerald. It was also notably employed in a speech by Abraham Lincoln before he became the sixteenth President of the United States.</p>
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Notes

- It is not well known that Lincoln battled crippling depression his entire life. He learned to endure it, articulate it, and find benefit and meaning from it. A true testament to his self-reliance, maturity, and growth mindset.

“True will is quiet humility, resilience, and flexibility.”

- Lincoln was also known for his patience because he understood difficult things took time. He found purpose and relief in a cause bigger than himself and his personal struggles.

“With all our modern technology has come the conceited delusion that we control the world around us.”

- The Stoics have a metaphor for will called the **Inner Citadel** which represents a fortress inside of us that no external adversity can ever break down.
- Psychologist [Gary Klein](#) designed a technique called a *premortem*: envisioning what could go wrong, and what will go wrong, in advance.
- Stoics practiced the “Art of Acquiescence” which was a graceful acceptance—and rechanneling—of life’s challenges. It is NOT about giving up.
 - Examples:
 - Jefferson: speech impediment. Channeled his energy into writing.
 - Edison: almost completely deaf. Developed insanely good power of observation.

“If someone we knew took traffic signals personally, we would judge them insane.”

- There are many sayings for this mindset:

<i>Deo volente</i> , or God willing	As fate would have it.
Heaven forbid.	Nature permitting.
Murphy's Law/	Play it as it lies.

- Try responding to hardship and challenge with a smile. Adopt a cheerful attitude in dire straights and recognize they are outside your control.

"We don't get to choose what happens to us, but we can always choose how we feel about it."

- You love it [challenges, obstacles, etc.] because it is all FUEL. And you just don't want fuel, you need it. Be grateful for it.
- Our actions can be constrained, but our will can't be. That is the difference between the two.

On helping others

- When we focus on others our own personal fears and troubles diminish.
- Stop pretending that what you're going through is somehow special or unfair [reminds me of [The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck](#)]
- "It's not about you." —Rick Warren, *A Purpose-Driven Life*

"We're all just humans doing the best we can."

On mortality

- Story of Montaigne's near death experience and subsequent emergence as more energized, curious and purposeful.
- "Every third thought shall be my grave." —Shakespeare, *The Tempest*
- *Memento mori* is a Roman saying that means remember you are mortal.
- "The paths of glory lead but to the grave." —Thomas Gray [pretty cynical and negative though]
- In the shadow of death, prioritization is easier. Also: graciousness, appreciation and principles.

On the law of nature

- One does not overcome an obstacle to enter the land of no obstacles. Success is not the absence of obstacles.
- Get ready for more: never rattles, never frantic. Always hustling. Never anything but deliberate.
- "Behind the mountains are more mountains." —Haitian proverb

The Obstacle Becomes the Way


Overview: Philosophy and action are not contradictory. They are essential to one another. Now that you've read this book [or these notes] it's time to identify a few things you want to take action on.

Favorite Quotes

- “A Stoic is someone who transforms fear into prudence, pain into transformation, mistakes into initiation and desire into undertaking.” —Nassim Nicholas Taleb
- “To be a philosopher is not merely to have subtle thoughts, nor even to found a school. . . it is to solve some of the problems of life, not only theoretically, but practically.” —Henry David Thoreau

Notes

- Stoics like the metaphor of fire. Here is a quote from Marcus Aurelius’ journal

	<p><i>“When the fire is strong, it soon appropriates to itself the matter which is heaped on it, and consumes it, and rises higher by means of this very material.”</i></p> <p>—Marcus Aurelius</p>
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- This book in a nutshell:
 - First, see clearly.*
 - Next, act correctly.*
 - Finally, endure and accept the world as it is.*
- Be like Rockefeller: cool under pressure, immune to insults and abuse. See opportunity in the darkest of places.
- Another capsule summary:
 - See things for what they are.*
 - Do what we can.*
 - Endure and bear what we must.*