

By Maggie Kurtts

About a month before COVID brought our world to a grinding halt, I wrote a book review on Ryan Holiday's latest book [Stillness is the Key](#). At the time, I was feeling pretty overwhelmed by all the demands I had placed on myself and my family. This book gave a simple solution to my problem — stop.

It took a worldwide pandemic to remove external demands from our life and return my focus to my family. Schedules once driven by sports, school, and activities now feel long forgotten. When I read the words below, of my pre-COVID self, struggling to meet pre-COVID demands, I realize that I might have found exactly what I was seeking.

Busy is a choice

Our family calendar looks more complicated than my old flight schedule. Matching aircraft, crews, and mission equipment to a week's worth of flights has **NOTHING** on running a household these days. Trying to get kids to all their activities, while making sure you volunteer "enough" at school, attend PTO meetings, and maybe sneak in a workout is more complex than air assault planning!

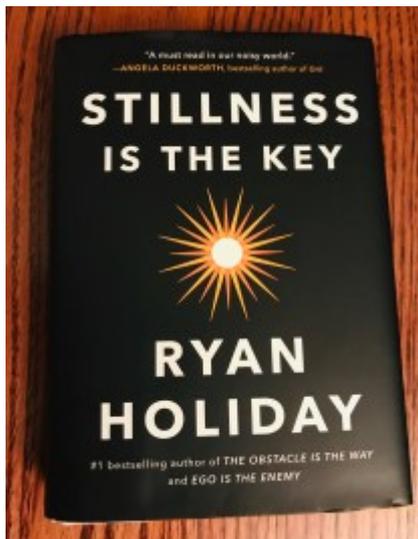
As I looked at our upcoming week's worth of activities and struggled to figure out how I could be in two different places at the same time on Friday night - I realized something very critical.

I chose all this

Not a single event on this calendar was forced upon me or my family. We chose to do sports, or volunteer groups, or workout classes. I begrudgingly added my name to the now endless number of "to bring" lists in signup genius.

Why...?

Ryan Holiday's book [*Stillness is the Key*](#) hit me right up front with an ugly truth: I am doing all this because I think *I am supposed to do it*. Other people need me right? This is the kind of person I am - or I want to be...Right?



[*Stillness is the Key*](#) helped me take the first step to answering that question in my overly busy life. It was remarkable simple, but shockingly difficult.

Stop

Stop doing. Hold still. And listen. Ryan explores how life bombards us in three critical dimensions: mentally, spiritually, and physically. We experience demands imposed upon us by others and we struggle when we try align our three dimensions with someone else's values.

“Stillness” provides a roadmap for the reader to get their mental, spiritual, and physical self off the *express highway of external demands* and back onto the road of self. For me, as I read the book, I focused on my tendency to overcommit - both myself and my family - to things we did not need. I reflected on how these demands drew me away from our real goals and family values, despite maybe looking pretty good to everyone else.

Each night, as I worked my way through this short book, I started to slow down just a little bit more. I thought about ways to live deliberately. I started seeing where I was committing time and energy to things others valued but I did not.

Today, I strive to read more of *everything*, play epic legos wars with my kids, and enjoy the peace of a quiet walk with my dog. I try to listen to the chirp of birds on my walk rather than drown out the nature’s chorus with a podcast or audiobook.

It took slowing down to see just how much time I really had. And just like that, I wasn’t busy anymore.

Maggie graduated from the United States Military Academy in 2004 and served in Iraq and Afghanistan as an aviation officer. She has a PhD in nuclear engineering and is a military spouse. Today, Maggie continues to serve as a parent, a writer on Veteran issues, and a researcher. A version of this post can be found at owlsvoyage.com.

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