



By Joe Byerly

## Lesson #1: The finish line is never fixed

Several authors warned about the dangers of hitching our happiness to goal achievement. Too many of us spend years doing things we don't enjoy while sacrificing the things that bring us fulfillment, all in the name of achieving success in the future. Some of us even think we're managing success, but in actuality, success is managing us. That's because the finish line of ambition is never fixed. It moves on us each time we cross it.

In his book, [From Strength to Strength](#), Arthur Brooks points out that it's too easy to find ourselves running life on the Hedonic Treadmill. The dopamine high that achievement brings quickly dissipates after we get our hands around it. We're left wanting to feel it again, so we chase after more. We expect to feel contentment on the other side of our goals, only to find the desire to chase our next success. He writes, "No matter how fast we run, we never arrive." In [The Earned Life](#), Marshall Goldsmith also commented on the dangers of living solely for ambition, writing that it gives us a rinse and repeat rhythm to life which doesn't necessarily equate to happiness or fulfillment.

Instead, we should live for the journey, the grind, and the verb; for the sake of the action itself. It's why Dave Grohl chose to start the Foo Fighters instead of joining Tom Petty and the Heartbreakers, a story he shares in his book [The Storyteller: Tales of Life and Music](#). Or, why Canadian Astronaut Chris Hadfield wrote in [An Astronaut's Guide to Life On Earth](#), "Success is feeling good about the work you do throughout the long, unheralded journey that may or may not wind up at the launch pad." It's why the ancient spiritual text [The Bhagavad Gita tells](#) us we have the right to our work, not the fruit of our work.

## Lesson #2: Be deliberate with time

Although time, like money, is a scarce resource, it somehow slips through our fingers. As the Roman philosopher Seneca pointed out 2,000 years ago in [On the Shortness of Life](#), "Nobody works out the value of time; men use it lavishly as if it costs nothing...[Because] it will cause no commotion to remind you of its swiftness, but glide on quietly. It will not lengthen itself for a king's command or a people's favor."

Many of us spend our lives moving at 100mph, and even in those moments we're not engaged in some activity, we lose minutes, even hours of our lives mindlessly scrolling social media apps. Instead of living our own lives, we ironically spend our free moments watching other people live theirs. I can't tell you how many times I've picked up my phone to check a notification only to put it down an hour later.

Unfortunately, what's lost on most of us (besides our time) is the realization that our inattention to how we spend the seconds, minutes, and hours is directly related to our level of happiness. In [Happier Hour](#), Dr. Cassie Holmes argues that "time is the singular resource that if invested correctly can produce a good, maybe even great life. If you know how to invest your time and are invested in your time, you can make yourself happier."

Therefore, we should make deliberate choices with how we spend our time. Famed investor [Naval Ravikant](#) suggests we spend our time doing activities that produce compound interest. I've found that fitness, relationships, and abilities require small, continuous investments that produce Ravikant's compound interest and are more rewarding than chasing likes and comments on social media.

Juliet Funt, in [A Minute to Think](#), argues we should embrace moments of white space in our lives to pause and think. Because when we fill our calendars with constant activity, "we miss game-changing breakthrough ideas that fail to grace us with their presence because busyness is barring the door. We miss human moments of serendipity and connection that should occur in the in-between moments of life - because in-between moments no longer exist."

Finally, author Steven Pressfield encourages us to [put our asses where our hearts want to be](#) - in that mental or physical space that positions us to make progress on our life's journey.

Obviously, there's no one-size-fits all guide to how we should spend our time; that's up to each of us. The key is to make deliberate choices about where we invest our time and energy, otherwise it ends up slipping away. And unfortunately, this realization doesn't strike many of us until it's too late. As Susan Cain reminds us in [Bittersweet](#), it's not until we know we are going to die that we quit caring about ambition, status, and getting ahead and instead start to narrow and deepen our perspective on what matters most.

### **Lesson #3: The Hero's Journey is open to all of us**

Do you know your purpose?

Great books drive us to ask tough questions like this one.

In his book [Pathways to Bliss: Mythology and Personal Transformation](#), Professor Joseph Campbell asks a question that I haven't been able to escape: "In the West, you have the liberty and the obligation of finding out what your destiny is. You can discover it for

yourself. But do you?"

Are you following your destiny? Are you willing to leave the path of comfort and ease to one of danger and discomfort to achieve it?

Destiny. Purpose. Courage to answer the call. These are themes I've been wrestling with over the last year. It's not easy to think deeply like this. As a matter of fact, it's almost impossible. In today's world, it's easier to live a distracted life than a deliberate one. We spend most of our waking hours trying to stay on top of our professional and personal commitments. To unplug from the stressors of life, we binge watch entire seasons of our favorite shows, and then watch other episodes suggested by an algorithm. And when we do have quiet time, we take our phones out to check notifications, scroll through social media apps, and stay up to date on the hourly breaking news.

What if destiny is calling and we're not listening?

For those of you who aren't familiar with Joseph Campbell or his work, he is the man behind the concept of The Hero's Journey, which he discusses in his book [\*The Hero with a Thousand Faces\*](#). It's a universal pattern or plot that appears in myths, religions, and literature regardless of culture or historical period. His writings have influenced artists such as George Lucas, the founders of Pixar, and many of today's bestselling authors.

The Hero's Journey is the story of our call to do something greater with our lives, something in service to others. It requires us to go inward to do the tough work of figuring out who we are and what gift is inside of us, and then return outward to our communities with that gift in hand. Campbell argues that if we are open to it, the Hero's Journey can help us work out the plot of our lives.

As I read more and more about the journey, I see the plot everywhere. I see it in movies. I see it in books. I see it in the lives in the biographies I've read.

I see it in my own life.

I thought I knew myself until I started doing the deep internal work required of the Hero's Journey. As Richard Rohr wrote in [\*Falling Upward\*](#), "Life is a matter of becoming fully and consciously who we already are, but it is a self that we largely do not know."

What if, in all the noise and all the commitments our younger selves made, we're missing

the current call to fulfill our unique destiny? Or, what if we've felt the pull towards something greater, but haven't taken the time to give it a second thought, and remained living in a way that doesn't live up to our untapped potential? Or, what if the fear of the unknown was too great, so we've shut the door on the Hero's Journey?

Maybe reading, writing, and reflection could have given us the space to think through these things, but we didn't make the time for it. I know. For the longest time I felt like I couldn't make the time.

The first step of any adventure is always the hardest, answering the call and beginning the inner search to "know thyself". This was true for me and was echoed explicitly and implicitly throughout many of the books I read this year. In [The School of Life](#), Alain de Botton wrote, "One of our greatest challenges is to understand the peculiar content of our own minds. We may look like the ultimate owners of our skulls, but we remain practical strangers to too much of what unfolds within them."

And because we remain strangers to much of what's inside our own heads, we struggle and stumble through life, occasionally catching glimpses of ourselves through action. But, if we're not paying attention, we miss the lessons those glimpses teach us.

In [his recently published memoir](#), Steven Pressfield recounts his own Hero's Journey throughout his decades in "the wilderness". At first he refuses the call, and then he struggles as he tries to figure out who he is and what his unique gift is. He shares stories of painful experiences as a truck driver, apple picker, and struggling screenwriter, all in the hopes of helping men and women in similar situations who he will never know. Imagine if Pressfield would have stayed in the wilderness and refused the call.

What's the call that you haven't answered yet? In 2023, I will dive deeper into the Hero's Journey to help you find your purpose and follow the destiny you were meant for. I'll share these lessons through my weekly reflective email, [The Sunday Email](#), which is intended to be short and to the point, something you can read while drinking your first hot cup of coffee in the quiet of an early Sunday morning.

*This post originally appeared in December's Monthly Reading List email sponsored by [MTNTOUGH](#). They offer on-the-go programming to build mental toughness, pack on muscle, and improve your endurance anytime, anywhere with no equipment or a full gym. They are currently offering 40% Off an ANNUAL Subscription with code: FTGN40A*



# What I Read in 2022

Each month is hyperlinked so you can review that month's email.

## [January](#)

[An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth](#) by Chris Hadfield

[Creativity: The Psychology of Discovery and Invention](#) by Dr. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi

[Marine Maxims: Turning Leadership Principles Into Practice](#) by Col Thomas J. Gordon, USMC (RET.)

## [February](#)

[The Burnout Epidemic: The Rise of Chronic Stress and How We Can Fix It](#) by Jennifer Moss.

[True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements](#) by Eric Hoffer

[The Hero with a Thousand Faces](#) by Joseph Campbell

## [March](#)

[The War of Art: Break through the Blocks and Win Your Inner Creative Battles](#) by Steven Pressfield

[See, Solve, Scale: How Anyone Can Turn an Unsolved Problem into a Breakthrough Success](#) by Danny Warshay.

## [April](#)

[Before You Say Anything: The Untold Stories and Fail Proof Strategies of a Very Discreet Speech Writer](#) by Victoria Wellman

[Fooled by Randomness: The Hidden Role of Chance in Life and in the Markets](#) by Nassim Taleb

[How To Host a Viking Funeral: The Case for Burning Your Regrets, Chasing Your Crazy Ideas, and Becoming the Person You're Meant to Be](#) by Kyle Scheele

[The Great Mental Models Volume One](#) by Shane Parrish of [Farnham Street Blog](#).

[War Transformed: The Future of Twenty-First Century Great Power Competition and Conflict](#) by Mick Ryan

## [May](#)

[A Minute to Think: Reclaim Creativity, Conquer Busyness, and Do Your Best Work](#) by Juliet Funt

[Hearts Touched With Fire: How Great Leaders are Made](#) by David Gergen

[Bittersweet: How Sorrow and Longing Make Us Whole](#) by Susan Cain

[Verissimus: The Stoic Philosophy of Marcus Aurelius](#) by Donald J. Robertson and Ze Nuno Fraga

[The Storyteller: Tales of Life and Music](#) by Dave Grohl

## June

[The School of Life](#) by Alain de Botton

[Plays Well With Others: The Surprising Science Behind Why Everything You Know About Relationships is Wrong](#) by Eric Barker

[The Earned Life: Lose Regret, Choose Fulfillment](#) by Marshall Goldsmith and Mark Reiter  
[Upgrade](#) by Blake Crouch

## July

[HBR's 10 Must Reads On Managing Yourself](#) by the Harvard Business Review.

[From Strength to Strength](#) by Arthur C. Brooks

## August

[The Almanack of Naval Ravikant: A Guide to Wealth and Happiness](#) by Eric Jorgenson

[James Patterson: Stories of My Life](#) by James Patterson

[Put Your Ass Where Your Heart Wants to Be](#) by Steven Pressfield

[Creativity, Inc.: Overcoming the Unseen Forces That Stand in the Way of True](#)

[Inspiration](#) by Ed Catmull with Amy Wallace

[Always Faithful: The Story of the War in Afghanistan, the Fall of Kabul, and the Unshakable Bond Between a Marine and an Interpreter](#) by Major Tom Schueman and Zainullah Zaki

## September

[Happier Hour: How to Beat Distraction, Expand Your Time, and Focus on What Matters Most](#) by Cassie Holmes, PhD

[The Overstory: A Novel](#) by Richard Powers

[Shackleton: The Biography](#) by Sir Ranulph Fiennes

[Fans First: Change the game, Break the Rules, and Create an Unforgettable Experience](#) by Jesse Cole

## October

[Discipline is Destiny: The Power of Self-Control](#) by Ryan Holiday

[Trillion Dollar Coach: The Leadership Playbook of Silicon Valley's Bill Campbell](#) by Eric Schmidt, Jonathan Rosenberg, and Alan Eagle

[How Proust Can Change Your Life](#) by Alain de Botton

[Meditations: The Annotated Edition](#) Translated, Introduced, and Edited by Robin Waterfield

## November

[\*Gavin at War: The World War II Diary of Lieutenant General James M. Gavin\*](#) edited and annotated by Lewis Sorley

[\*The Bhagavad Gita\*](#), introduced and translated by Eknath Easwaran

[\*Soul in the Game: The Art of a Meaningful Life\*](#) by Vitaliy Katsenelson

## **December**

[\*Govt Cheese: A Memoir\*](#) by Steven Pressfield

[\*Monstrous: Sea Monsters in Maps and Literature\*](#) 1491-1893 by Erling Sandmo

[\*The Hero's Journey: Joseph Campbell on His Life and Work\*](#) by Joseph Campbell

[\*Pathways to Bliss: Mythology and Personal Transformation\*](#) by Joseph Campbell

[\*Awakening the Heroes Within\*](#) by Carol S. Pearson

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