

THE BIG IDEAS

Learning to Learn

Starts with "Why?!"

Conquering Fear

The great enemy.

Think of Yourself

Less.

Happiness Isn't a Goal

It's a by-product.

Time Management 101

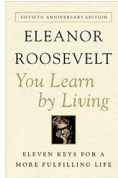
Eleanor's Top 4 Big Ideas.

Dreams of Perfection

+ Reality.

Life As an Adventure

All the way!



You Learn by Living

Eleven Keys for a More Fulfilling Life

BY ELEANOR ROOSEVELT · HARPER PERENNIAL © 2011 · 224 PAGES

"When one attempts to set down in bald words any answers one has found to life's problems, there is a great risk of appearing to think that one's answer is either the only one or the best one. This, of course, would be nonsense. I have no such all-inclusive wisdom to offer, only a few guideposts that have proved helpful to me in the course of a long life. Perhaps they may steer someone away from the pitfalls into which I stumbled or help them to avoid the mistakes I have made. Or perhaps one can learn only by one's own mistakes. The essential thing is to learn.

Learning and living. But they are really the same thing, aren't they? There is no experience from which you can't learn something. When you stop learning you stop living in any vital and meaningful sense. And the purpose of life, after all, is to live it, to taste the experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience. ...

One's philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes. In stopping to think through the meaning of what I have learned, there is much I believe intensely, much I am unsure of. But this, at least, I believe with all my heart: In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And the choices we make are ultimately our own responsibility."

~ Eleanor Roosevelt from *You Learn by Living*

"We all create the person we become by our choices as we go through life. In a very real sense, by the time we are adults, we are the sum total of the choices we have made."

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

[Eleanor Roosevelt](#) wrote those words in 1960, two years before she passed away at age 78.

Born in 1884, Eleanor was Teddy Roosevelt's niece and served as the First Lady for 12 years—through her husband Franklin D. Roosevelt's terms as President during the Great Depression and World War II.

She went on to play a leading role as a diplomat in the United Nations and chaired the committee that drafted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

She is one of the six moral exemplars featured in [William Damon](#) and [Anne Colby](#)'s great book [The Power of Ideals](#) and was one of the most loved and influential women of the 20th century.

This book is a beautifully written, inspiring look into "Eleven Keys for a More Fulfilling Life." Eleanor humbly shares the wisdom she gained by living life as a daring adventure. It's a joy to read and packed with Big Ideas. (Get the book [here](#).)

I'm excited to share some of my favorites so let's jump straight in!

LEARNING TO LEARN

"There is a wonderful word, *why?*, that children use. All children. When they stop using it, the reason, too often, is that no one bothered to answer them, no one tried to keep alive one of the

"Courage is more exhilarating than fear and in the long run it is easier. We do not have to become heroes overnight. Just a step at a time, meeting each thing that comes up, seeing it is not as dreadful as it appeared, discovering we have the strength to stare it down."

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

most important attributes a person can have: interest in the world around him. No one fostered and cultivated the child's innate sense of the adventure of life.

One of the things I believe most intensely is that every child's *why* should be answered with care—and with respect. If you do not know the answer, and you often will not, then take the child with you to a source to find the answer. This may be a dictionary or encyclopedia which he is too young to use himself, but he will have had a sense of participation in finding the answer."

That's from the first chapter on "Learning to Learn."

Eleanor tells us that "Nothing alive can stand still, it goes forward or back. Life is interesting only as long as it is a process of growth; or, to put it another way, we can grow only as long as we are interested."

If we want to make our life a daring adventure in which we learn by living, we *must* keep our curiosity alive.

As the father of a 3 1/2-year-old whose favorite question is "Why?" I particularly connect with this Idea and I'm even more inspired than ever to continue to show up and patiently, enthusiastically support Emerson in uncovering the answers to (all!) his *why*'s! :)

Let's remember that curiosity is a key to growing which is a key to flourishing.

What's firing you up these days?

How can you cultivate that passion to grow—both in yourself and those around you?!

CONQUERING FEAR: THE GREAT ENEMY

"The encouraging thing is that every time you meet a situation, though you may think at the time it is an impossibility and you go through the tortures of the damned, once you have met it and lived through it you find that forever after you are freer than you were before. If you can live through that you can live through anything. You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face.

You are able to say to yourself, 'I lived through this horror. I can take the next thing that comes along.'

The danger lies in refusing to face the fear, in not daring to come to grips with it. If you fail anywhere along the line it will take away your confidence. You must make yourself succeed every time. *You must do the thing you think you cannot do.*"

That's from chapter #2: "Fear—the Great Enemy."

Eleanor tells us that as a child and young woman she was incredibly timid and shy. She systematically worked on conquering her fear and talks about the self-discipline required to do so.

She's quite clear that we must (!) face our fear every.single.time.

The result?

We "gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face."

As I was reading this chapter, I was reminded of [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#) who told us the same thing: "Always, always, always, always, always do what you are afraid to do."

And, as we know, [The Tools](#) guys are so clear on the power of leaning into our fear that they tell us we need to "reverse our desire"—moving from wanting to avoid painful things at all costs to KNOWING that all growth exists on the other side of our comfort zone; therefore, we should say, "BRING IT ON!" to ourselves each and every (!) time we feel the fear.

*"Our doubts are traitors
And make us lose the good
we oft might win
By fearing to attempt."*

~ William Shakespeare

I'm also reminded of [Jim Rohn](#)'s wisdom from a recent Note on [Leading an Inspired Life](#). He tells us: *"Instead of worrying, concentrate on doing the best job you've ever done in your life."*

Let's do a quick check in on you and your fear.

What's one fear that you've overcome? Can you see how it's made you stronger? Feel the power you have now that you didn't have before.

And, any fears currently bubbling up? Can you step back, see it, and recognize the opportunity to get stronger as you really stop to look it in its face?

We must do the things we think we cannot do. Over and over and over again—aggregating and compounding all the power earned each step of the way!

P.S. Eleanor's hubby FDR had some wise words on fear as well. He reminded us that *"The only thing to fear is fear itself."*

THINK OF YOURSELF LESS

"Success must include two things: the development of an individual to his utmost potentiality and a contribution of some kind to one's world."

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

"Looking back, I see how abnormally timid and shy I was as a girl. As long as I let timidity and shyness dominate me I was half paralyzed. But again self-discipline was the great help. I had to learn to face people and I could not do it so long as I was obsessed with fears about myself, which is the usual situation with shyness. I learned a liberating thing. If you will forget about yourself, whether or not you are making a good impression on people, what they think of you, and you will think about them instead, you won't be shy.

Do the things that interest you and do them with all your heart. Don't be concerned about whether people are watching you or criticizing you. The chances are that they aren't paying any attention to you. It's your attention to yourself that is so stultifying. But you have to disregard yourself as completely as possible. If you fail the first time then you'll just have to try harder the second time. After all, there's no real reason why you should fail. Just stop thinking about yourself."

Want to conquer timidity/shyness/social anxiety?

Take the spotlight off of you and put it onto the people with whom you're interacting.

—> *"If you will forget about yourself, whether or not you are making a good impression on people, what they think of you, and you will think about them instead, you won't be shy."*

Do the things that interest you and do them with all your heart. And remember that *"it's your attention to yourself that is so stultifying."*

Disregard yourself and just pour yourself into what you're doing!

[William Damon](#) and [Anne Colby](#) put it this way in [The Power of Ideals](#): *"This is a central thread of world wisdom throughout the ages. Fulfillment and peace of mind come not from trying to create the most attractive possible self but from taking the focus off the self: not thinking less of oneself, but thinking of oneself less."*

<— Let's do that.

HAPPINESS IS NOT A GOAL, IT'S A BY-PRODUCT

"Happiness is not a goal, it is a by-product. Paradoxically, the one sure way not to be happy is deliberately to map out a way of life in which one would please oneself completely and exclusively. After a short time, a very short time, there would be little that one really enjoyed. For what keeps our interest in life and makes us look forward to tomorrow is giving pleasure to other people."

"Usefulness, whatever form it may take, is the price we should pay for the air we breathe and the food we eat and the privilege of being alive."

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

Those are the first words from a chapter on "Learning to Be Useful."

Nietzsche comes to mind. In [Thus Spoke Zarathustra](#) he tells us: "This is the manner of noble souls: they do not want to have anything for nothing; least of all, life. Whoever is of the mob wants to live for nothing; we others, however, to whom life gave itself, we always think about what we might best give in return... One should not wish to enjoy where one does not give joy."

Then there's [Viktor Frankl](#)'s wisdom which I have shared more than any other in these Notes: "Don't aim at success—the more you aim at it and make it a target, the more you are going to miss it. For success, like happiness, cannot be pursued; it must ensue, and it only does so as the unintended side effect of one's personal dedication to a cause greater than oneself or as the by-product of one's surrender to a person other than oneself."

Happiness is not a goal in and of itself. It is a BY-PRODUCT of our commitment to something bigger than ourselves.

Our goal?

Our goal is to be useful—to discover and give our gifts to the world.

Here's how [David Brooks](#) puts it in [The Road to Character](#): "In this method, you don't ask, What do I want from life? You ask a different set of questions: What does life want from me? What are my circumstances calling me to do?"

In this scheme of things we don't create our lives; we are summoned by life. The important answers are not found inside, they are found outside. This perspective begins not within the autonomous self, but with the concrete circumstances in which you happen to be embedded. This perspective begins with an awareness that the world existed long before you and will last long after you, and that in the brief span of your life you have been thrown by fate, by history, by chance, by evolution, or by God into a specific place with specific problems and needs. Your job is to figure certain things out: What does this environment need in order to be made whole? What is it that needs repair? What tasks are lying around waiting to be performed? As the novelist Frederick Buechner put it, 'At what points do my talents and deep gladness meet the world's deep need?'"

Here's to being uber-useful! :)

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT'S TIME MANAGEMENT 101

"What matters now, as always, is not what we can't do: it is what we can and must do."

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

"We have all the time there is. The problem is: How shall I make the best use of it? There are three ways in which I have been able to solve that problem: first, by achieving an inner calm so that I can work undisturbed by what is going on around me; second, by concentrating on the thing at hand; third, by arranging a routine pattern for my days that allots certain activities to certain hours, planning in advance for everything that must be done, but at the same time remaining flexible enough to allow for the unexpected. There is a fourth point which, perhaps, plays a considerable part in the use of my time. I try to maintain a general pattern of good health so that I have the best use of my energy whenever I need it."

There ya go. Eleanor Roosevelt's Top 4 Big Ideas on how to make the most of our precious time.

Let's do a quick review.

- 1. Inner calm.** We need to be able to shut off the noise of what's going on outside us (literally and figuratively) AND turn off the noise inside our own heads.
- 2. Concentrate on one thing.** We need to "learn to concentrate, to give all your attention to the thing at hand, and then to be able to put it aside and go on to the next thing without confusion."

3. **Routines.** We've gotta build our systems. *"I find that my life is much more satisfactory when it forms a kind of pattern, though I do not believe in too rigid a pattern."*
4. **Energy!** We've gotta have the ENERGY to use our time wisely. *"I learned, as a small child, to follow a common-sense regime in living and to feel responsible for keeping myself in good health."*

How are you doing with each of those?

What's awesome? What needs work? What will you do to optimize?

P.S. Eleanor also tells us: *"Of course, all this presupposes that you not only want to know how to use your time but that you have some use for it. I think almost anyone would agree that unless time is good for something it is good for nothing."*

The most unhappy people in the world are those who face the days without knowing what to do with their time. But if you have more projects than you have time for, you are not going to be an unhappy person."

REALITY + OUR DREAMS OF PERFECTION

"Remember that you have not only the right to be an individual; you have an obligation to be one. You cannot make any useful contribution in life unless you do this."

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

"Just as all living is adjustment and readjustment, so all choice, to some extent, must be compromise between reality and a dream of perfection. We must try to bring the reality as close to perfection as we can, but we must not demand of it the impossible. It is only an approximation that anyone can reach, but the closer one tries to approximate it, the more he will grow. If he keeps his dream of perfection and strains toward it, he will come closer to achieving it than if he rejects the reality because it was not perfection."

I'm prepping for Conquering Perfectionism 101 as I write this Note.

One of the key themes will be the fact that we need to simultaneously hold our super high standards (going for perfection) while embracing the constraints of reality (knowing we'll never actually reach perfection).

[Tal Ben-Shahar](#) captures this brilliantly and echoes Eleanor's wisdom in [The Pursuit of Perfect](#). He tells us: *"... psychologists today differentiate between positive perfectionism, which is adaptive and healthy, and negative perfectionism, which is maladaptive and neurotic. I regard these two types of perfectionism as so dramatically different in both their underlying nature and their ramifications that I prefer to use entirely different terms to refer to them. I will refer to negative perfectionism simply as perfectionism and to positive perfectionism as optimalism."*

We have negative perfectionism and then positive perfectionism. The perfectionist vs. the optimalist. (Which are you? :)

[John Wooden](#) echoes this wisdom as well: *"Perfection is what you are striving for, but perfection is an impossibility. However, striving for perfection is not an impossibility. Do the best you can under the conditions that exist. That is what counts."*

His path to that perfection? Try to do your best to make TODAY a masterpiece.

—> *"When you improve a little each day, eventually big things occur. When you improve conditioning a little each day, eventually you have a big improvement in conditioning. Not tomorrow, not the next day, but eventually a big gain is made. Don't look for the big, quick improvement. Seek the small improvement one day at a time. That's the only way it happens—and when it happens, it lasts."*

Here's to S...T...R...E...T...C...H...I...N...G... ourselves toward our ideals!!!

P.S. Remember: Our ideals are guiding stars, not distant shores.

“Surely, in the light of history, it is more intelligent to hope rather than to fear, to try rather than not to try. For one thing we know beyond all doubt: Nothing has ever been achieved by the person who says, ‘It can’t be done.’”

~ Eleanor Roosevelt

LIFE AS AN ADVENTURE ALL THE WAY!

“Every age, someone has said, is an undiscovered country. We are constantly advancing, like explorers, into the unknown, which makes life an adventure all the way. How interminable and dull that journey would be if it were on a straight road over a flat plain, if we could see ahead the whole distance, without surprises, without the salt of the unexpected, without challenge. I wish with all my heart that every child could be so imbued with a sense of the adventure of life that each change, each readjustment, each surprise—good or bad—that came along would be welcomed as a part of the whole enthralling experience.”

The dominant theme of the book is Eleanor’s optimistic spirit and desire to experience life “to the hilt”—sucking the marrow out of life as Henry David Thoreau would put it.

How awesome would it be if every child (and adult!) “*could be so imbued with a sense of the adventure of life that each change, each readjustment, each surprise—good or bad—that came along would be welcomed as a part of the whole enthralling experience.*”

We can’t experience life that way unless we see E.V.E.R.Y.T.H.I.N.G. that happens as part of one big awesome adventure.

I’m smiling as I type thinking of “Bring it on!” + Jocko Willink’s response to everything (= “Good!”) and [Byron Katie](#)’s wisdom that it’s all about [Loving What Is](#).

Here’s to learning by living as we fully embrace this one precious adventure of ours!

B

Brian Johnson,
Chief Philosopher

If you liked this Note,
you’ll probably like...

[The Power of Ideals](#)

[Selected Writings of Ralph
Waldo Emerson](#)

[Noble Purpose](#)

[The Path to Purpose](#)

[The Road to Character](#)

[The Tools](#)

[Thus Spoke Zarathustra](#)

About the Author of “You Learn by Living”

ELEANOR ROOSEVELT



Anna Eleanor Roosevelt was born in New York City on October 11, 1884. She married Franklin Delano Roosevelt on March 17, 1905, and was the mother of six children. She became First Lady on March 4, 1933, and went on to serve as Delegate to the United Nations General Assembly and Representative to the Commission on Human Rights under Harry S. Truman, and chairwoman of the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women under John F. Kennedy. She died on November 7, 1962, at the age of seventy-eight.

About the Author of This Note

BRIAN JOHNSON



Brian Johnson loves helping people optimize their lives as he studies, embodies and teaches the fundamentals of optimal living—integrating ancient wisdom + modern science + common sense + virtue + mastery + fun. Learn more and optimize your life at brianjohnson.me.