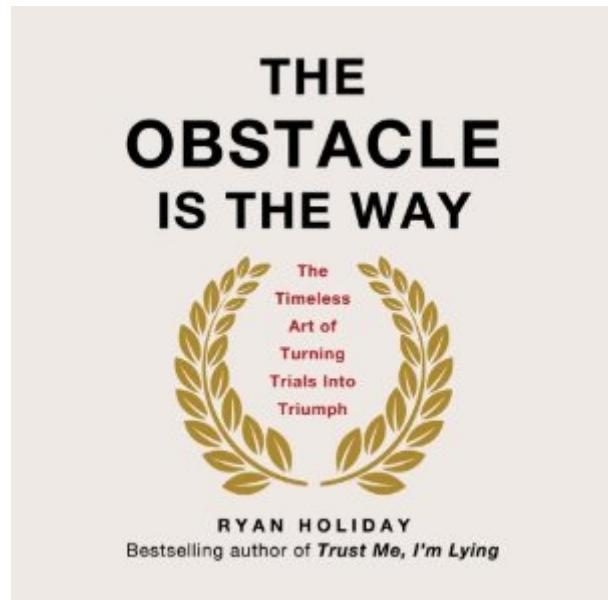


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The Obstacle Is The Way: The Timeless Art Of Turning Trials Into Triumph



Synopsis

"The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way." (Marcus Aurelius) We are stuck, stymied, frustrated. But it needn't be this way. There is a formula for success that's been followed by the icons of history - from John D. Rockefeller to Amelia Earhart to Ulysses S. Grant to Steve Jobs - a formula that let them turn obstacles into opportunities. Faced with impossible situations, they found the astounding triumphs we all seek. These men and women were not exceptionally brilliant, lucky, or gifted. Their success came from timeless philosophical principles laid down by a Roman emperor who struggled to articulate a method for excellence in any and all situations. This book reveals that formula for the first time - and shows us how we can turn our own adversity into advantage.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

There are two groups of people who this book will be helpful for: Those who have never heard of Stoicism and have an intractable problem in their lives they're trying to deal with (who the hell doesn't have that?). And those who've heard of / practice stoicism in their lives. To the former this book is quick, punchy and doesn't fluff around. Ryan Holiday jabs you with advice inspired by Stoicism in particular two of Marcus Aurelius' aphorisms: "The mind adapts and converts to its own purposes the obstacle to our acting. The impediment to action advances action. What stands in the way becomes the way." (Book V:20) And "Objective judgement, now, at this very moment. Unselfish action, now, at this very moment. Willing acceptance - now, at this very moment - of all external

events. That's all you need." (Book IX: 6) If you're familiar with Pierre Hadot, then you'll be familiar with the argument that ancient philosophy wasn't so much an exploration of metaphysics, but more an exploration on how to live the good life. A study on how to live. People studied Philosophy so that they could handle life. Ryan Holiday explores this and offers anecdotes and short simple advice on how to deal with an obstacle in life. In summary: Alter your perception, Take action, Discipline your will. You can tell at the back that the bibliography from whence Ryan got his anecdotes is vast (it covers more than 3 pages), yet he summarises the stories succinctly in each of his chapters. Lesser writers would have made this book 3 times its size. Also Ryan's writing style is simple and actionable. One can't help but see the influence of his mentor Robert Greene in his writing, yet also the short and punchy style of Steven Pressfield (Seth Godin also borrows Steven's style). For those who know of Stoicism and who practice Stoicism this book is even more damn helpful. Here finally we have a treasure trove of anecdotes of people in history who demonstrate certain Stoic traits. We can acquire certain ideas that we can use to improve our lives. In conclusion this is a book on philosophy, but on how philosophy was supposed to be. A practice to help us live our lives better, and deal with our problems. Burn all your self help books and read this. You'll never look back.

The premise of this book is great: instead of trying to avoid obstacles or complaining about them, embrace adversity and learn to thrive in spite of it. The first few pages were like an inspiring halftime talk from a football coach, and they had me excited and ready to take on the world. As I delved further into the book, I found that the principles of Stoicism are incorporated in a smooth, teachable manner (so I didn't feel like I was being lectured incessantly about Stoic philosophy) and each chapter starts out with a thought-provoking quote. The author's writing style is direct and easy to understand, and multiple times I found myself highlighting a phrase I found impactful. In spite of these assets, I ultimately felt that the book fell short. Like his mentor Robert Greene, the author weaves in stories of famous historical figures to illustrate each lesson. Unlike Greene's books, however, I found this book's analysis to be quite superficial. For example, in the chapter titled "Channel Your Energy" the author brings up Toussaint Louverture, the fascinating individual who led the only successful slave insurrection in history that led to the creation of a nation. I was expecting an exciting tale from Louverture's life, yet the author simply referenced him for one paragraph to say that his name meant "the opening" because he was "fluid" and "uncontainable." That's it? Why even bother to bring him up? Many, many times the author would bring up a figure from the past only to mention a brief, shallow connection to the chapter's topic before re-engaging in his own pontification, which for the most part revolved around challenging the reader to stop "playing video

games" and get off the couch. This might be good advice for some, but not every reader is sitting in front of a PlayStation wondering where life went wrong and awaiting a tongue-lashing from the author. Although the writer has a good voice and I enjoyed his style, there were times where I thought the book could have benefitted from much better editing to tease out some of the fluff. When I read the phrase, "whatever you're doing, it's going to be harder if your plan includes defying physics or logic" I found myself thinking, "no kidding? I'm glad I paid money to read this." Some of the stories were a little less than factual. Was Antietam a huge victory for the Union in the Civil War? It's been a while since I've taken a history course, but it was my understanding that Antietam is considered by most to have been a bloody stalemate. Also, the author made a good point about Obama handling the Reverend Wright fiasco pretty well with a great speech, but I think it's a stretch to say this "propelled" Obama into the White House. I even found some of the author's statements to be contradictory. When describing Jack Johnson's boxing match against the Great White Hope, he said Johnson was "smiling, joking, playing the whole fight" in response to the racial tension of the crowd because "there's no value in any other reaction." Really? Well then why did you praise Joe Louis just a few chapters before for making a point to show no emotion at all during his boxing matches, also in regard to racial tension? Selectively choosing people or instances from history to back up your beliefs leads to inconsistencies, of which the book has many. Demosthenes is praised for not giving up and becoming a great orator, but Jefferson is praised for giving up on becoming a great orator and instead focusing on writing. Well, which is correct? If you want to succeed in politics and aren't a great orator, should you practice and never give up until you succeed, or acknowledge your weakness and focus on becoming a better writer? The truth is, there are many paths to success and ways around obstacles, so many of these so-called principles or rules make sense in one context and are valueless in another. Even so, the author deserves credit for putting together a considerable list of great quotes, providing an overarching yet flawed framework for applying Stoicism to your daily life, and occasionally saying something inspiring that prompts the reader to action and inspires the belief that obstacles are not to be cursed but embraced and overcome.

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