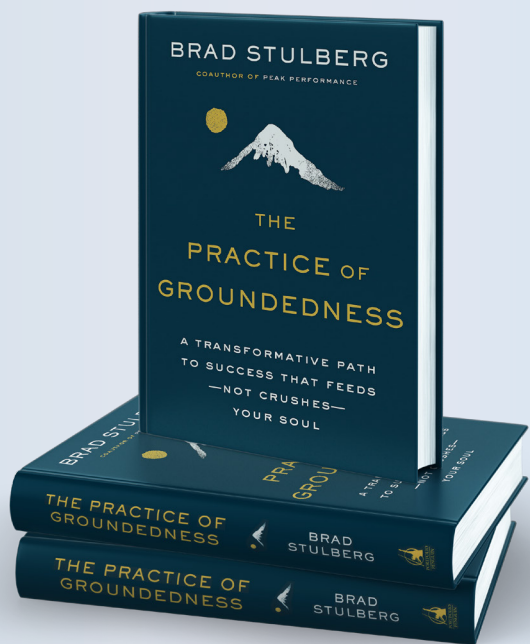


BOOK SNAPS™

Zooming In On Your Next Read



The Practice of Groundedness

By Brad Stulberg

Brad Stulberg researches, writes, and coaches on human performance, well-being, and sustainable success. He is bestselling author of *Peak Performance* and *The Passion Paradox*. His work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Los Angeles Times*, *New York Magazine*, *Wired*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Outside Magazine*, *Forbes*, and more. He is also co-founder of the Growth Equation, a multi-media platform dedicated to the art, science, and practice of performance and well-being (www.TheGrowthEq.com).

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A Healthier, More Sustainable Model for Success

Brad Stulberg coaches business executives, successful entrepreneurs, leaders in medicine, and athletes of elite status. In 2019 he started to notice a disturbing trend among his clients. While he used to focus sessions with them on developing habits and routines that improve and sustain high-level performance, he was being pulled into conversations around being burned out or the desperate need to turn work off and take a restorative break, but not being able to take a real break, even for a weekend, without feeling “restless or insecure” about work.

This angst, as Stulberg describes it, is a “deep-seated need to always be pushing toward something, lest they feel a widening gap, a sense of emptiness in their lives.” And this was not the only alarming feeling or state he was identifying in his clients. Many other clients reported feeling scattered and distracted, inside and out, entangling them in an endless loop of second guessing themselves, looking back to see if they did the right thing, looking forward to plan their next move, and “getting caught up in what-if scenarios.”

The themes of restlessness and emptiness extend far beyond Stulberg’s own client base. In his writing and research in the worlds of performance, well being, and life satisfaction he has come across this notion of wide reaching discontent in our culture. When viewed from the outside, these top athletes, intellectuals, and creative types seem to have it all. But on the inside, they feel something’s not quite right at a deep level. They are “bothered by a lingering sense of dissatisfaction.” They want to turn off “all the news and busyness and email and social media notifications” and stop focusing on what’s next but when they do, they “feel unsettled and restless, fluctuating between aimlessness and angst.”

Men tend to describe this as a constant pressure to be invincible and women tend to describe it as feeling like they are constantly striving to meet an impossible expectation. Stulberg calls it “heroic individualism” which is “an ongoing game of one-upmanship, against both yourself and others, paired with the limiting belief that measurable achievement is the only arbiter of success.” You may do a great job of looking like you have it



all together on the outside, but with “heroic individualism you chronically feel like you never quite reach the finish line that is lasting fulfillment.”

Heroic individualism is a common way of life in today’s world. In *The Practice of Groundedness: A Transformative Path to Success that Feeds—Not Crushes—Your Soul*, author Brad Stulberg asserts that groundedness is the antidote to this widespread being untethered and dissatisfied. In it he lays the foundation for the main principles that define groundedness in the first part of the book. The second part of the book shows readers how to put those principles into action, with life changing results.

The Principles of Grounded Success

Stulberg defines groundedness as “unwavering internal strength and self confidence that sustains you through ups and downs. It is a deep reservoir of integrity and fortitude, of wholeness, out of which lasting performance, well being, and fulfillment emerge.” Groundedness does not ask you to let passion, productivity, or performance fall by the wayside. Rather, it makes these qualities steady so that all you are striving for is focused, sustainable, and fulfilling.

Your efforts are in line with your values, interests, and your authentic self. Only by being grounded, can you truly soar. Stulberg identifies and describes six principles that contribute to grounded success, which are evidence-based and exist at the “convergence between modern science, ancient wisdom, and the experience of happy, healthy, high-performing people.”

Acceptance: You cannot move forward, wherever it is you’d like to go, until you take stock of and fully accept where you are right now. So many of us get burdened with the heaviness of life. Things get messy. Things happen that are completely outside of our control. People let us down. This harsh reality can be difficult to accept. When things are not going our way, it is easier to “default to magical thinking, convincing ourselves that we are in a better place than we are.” This phenomenon is called “motivated reasoning” and it refers to our human tendency to “reason our way into seeing things as we’d like them to be” instead of how they truly are.

We see this play out routinely in the professional lives of people. They know they absolutely despise the job they are in, but they don’t want to deal with the discomfort of finding a new one so they stay. Miserable, but employed. Even easier than that, we just ignore the hard feelings associated with what is going wrong all together. We reach for distraction and numbing and then wonder why we still feel bad. “We engage in frantic and compulsory activity” like thinking positive thoughts or buying stuff we don’t need or sending out tweets. “We expect things to get better without ever acknowledging or accepting our true starting point.”

To make progress of any kind, the first step “requires recognizing, accepting, and starting where you are. Not where you want to be. Not where you think you should be. Not where others think you should be. But where you are.” Acceptance is critical to your present happiness and performance as well as a key component to changing your future.

Presence: Modern Western society highly values speed, efficiency, and being productive above all else. We use technologies that allow us to be online, and thus available, virtually all the time. Our economies are centered around products and services that are competing to “win over and control our attention.” Rather than giving anything deep, direct attention, we flit from task to task, thought to thought, engaged in the act of being busy.

A prime example of this tendency is the myth of multitasking. Once celebrated as a defining characteristic on a person’s resume, we know now that multitasking is not real. No one can engage in multiple activities at once. A multitude of studies have confirmed that multitasking is not doing multiple things at once. It is actually switching between activities, giving each activity attention one at a time but jumping back and forth between them. Spoiler alert! This does not improve performance at all. It actually hurts it, quite significantly.

It has been shown that when we multitask on two tasks, we are not getting twice as much done. In fact, we get “only about half as much done, with a lower level of quality and enjoyment.” When we multitask, we do worse, not better. Conversely, if we do one thing at a time, it receives all of our attention and focus. In effect, we are being present in that moment giving that activity our all. And we perform far better as a result. And it’s not just our performance that stands to benefit from us being present.

Research has shown that our emotional well being is vastly improved when we stop scattering our attention. “Constant interruptions and nonstop busyness exact a severe toll on mental health.” We are far happier when we are “fully present” instead of doing something while thinking about something else. The more scattered we are, the “more likely we are to feel angst and discontent.” The cure is to become present.

Being present is all about “being fully here for what is in front of you. Presence is a concentrated quality of mind that lends itself to strength and stability. If you deliberately practice presence, it can drastically improve your life, both personal and professional.”

Patience: Counterintuitively, when we attempt to push things through and make things happen, sometimes the impact is for progress to actually slow down or stop altogether. In an effort to start seeing immediate results, we problem solve and try to fix things to keep it moving forward but that backfires on us. If you want to be effective, sometimes you have to practice patience.

This is not the kind of patience that is “equivalent to waiting forever without results.” Instead, it is “a thoughtful and steady persistence that requires slowing down in the short term to go faster and farther in the long term.” Instead of making things happen, you begin letting things happen. Patience is the best medicine to cure our tendencies to “hurry, rush, and overemphasize acute situations in favor of playing the long game.” The results are more lasting, stable, and strong when they are anchored in patience.

Vulnerability: In the age of social media, we have all become experts at presenting who we want to be online, rather than who we really are. We “show up” in a display that communi-



Groundedness requires us to just be ourselves.”

cates that we have it all together and everything is just fine and dandy in our lives. Not only do we only post the things that we think portray us in the best light, we change our actual image through filters and photo editing. There is little authenticity left after such careful curation.

It leaves us wondering if we are the only ones who struggle, who are harboring secrets about the real state of our lives. Everyone involved, from those posting to those viewing, has their perception shaped and changed in subtle but constant ways. We are all “keeping up with the digital Joneses” and as a result, we never feel like we are enough or that we have enough. It creates a cognitive dissonance inside us where our internal and external lives don’t mesh up.

Groundedness requires us to just be ourselves. The ticket to being okay with who you truly are is to be vulnerable. You have to be honest with everyone about who you really are, especially “when that means confronting perceived weaknesses and fears.” You must place a priority on being completely open to “the good, the bad, the beautiful, the ugly.” When you open up to your vulnerabilities and better yet, share them with the world, you become more solid and grounded.

Deep Community: Despite the fact that old-growth redwood trees stand more than 200 feet tall, their roots only go about six to twelve feet into the ground. They are able to remain standing in any kind of weather because their roots grow out, sometimes hundreds of feet, and become entangled with the roots of neighboring trees. Together, they survive. And humans are no different.

“We, too, are meant to be part of a network that is larger than us. We, too, thrive in collectives. We, too, are most grounded when we are enmeshed in tightly knit communities.” Unfortunately, loneliness is an upticking trend in America. We feel like we are more connected than we have ever been, but it’s a false promise. Our loneliness breeds higher stress, decreased quality of sleep, increased risks of numerous serious diseases, anxiety, depression, and inflammation. Loneliness is bad for our health and wellbeing. We are lacking community and it’s starting to show.

“Our ability to survive, let alone thrive, relies upon being members of a tribe.” It’s time we turn our energy towards others, forming bonds, belonging to something bigger than ourselves, and making the world and our inner selves a better place. Deep community is a “basic human need” and it is necessary for groundedness.

Movement: There are innumerable studies that show the correlation between exercise and improved physical and mental well being. Movement can prevent mental illness and also treat it.

Society has given movement a bad reputation through our “infatuation with gut-wrenching workouts, external appearance, and exercise as a punishment.” This has created a distorted view of “our bodies and how we ought to use them” instead of allowing us to embrace genuine movement as a means to a better life.

Our bodies and our minds are integrated with one another. They are not separate stand-alone systems. What is happening in one has a very real effect on the other. When we regularly move our bodies “we do a better job of controlling our emotions, we think more creatively, and we retain more information.” The science illuminating the very real connection between the mind and the body is starting to catch up to what the ancient Greeks knew intuitively. They have to be treated holistically, to promote health of both.

Movement is a principle of groundedness because it works to create “generalized well being, strength, and stability” in the body and in the mind. On top of that, movement supports the other foundational principles of groundedness. Whatever movement you engage in is not prescriptive. It just needs to happen regularly to reap its many rewards.

Living a Grounded Life

It is one thing to begin to understand the principles of groundedness. It is a different beast altogether to live by them. The principles help you make the necessary mindshift, but living a grounded life requires that you start practicing them. We become what we do and the key to doing this life in a grounded way is effort.

You will still have bad days and good days. You will never be perfect at living the principles every moment of every single day. That is why it is called a practice. You just keep putting effort forth and the results will come. It’s important to note that your focus should be on that effort, not the outcome you expect to get. Like the principle of patience, getting out of your own way is the way forward. Focus on the process, not the prize.

Upheaval, change, uncertainty, and challenge are a foregone conclusion in this thing called life. How we navigate those times is up to us. By living the principles of a grounded life, we are poised to take on anything. We are ready to make the most of our very short time here on Earth. We will live an intentional life of our own choosing, with two feet planted firmly on the ground.