

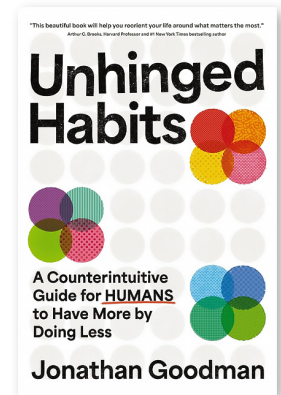


# Executive Book Summaries®

## Unhinged Habits

A Counterintuitive Guide for Humans to Have More by Doing Less

by **Jonathan Goodman**



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in Caves

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### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Many high-performing people feel quietly stuck. Calendars are full, purchases add up, and progress appears steady, yet something essential feels absent. The modern habit loop rewards busyness and accumulation, even when it crowds out meaning. Over time, this creates a life that looks successful on paper but feels misaligned in practice. The real problem is living on autopilot—following routines and definitions of success that were never consciously chosen.

*Unhinged Habits: A Counterintuitive Guide for Humans to Have More by Doing Less* argues that the answer is not doing more but doing less with greater intention. At the center of the book is strategic subtraction: removing habits, goals, relationships, and possessions that dilute focus and satisfaction. Rather than chasing constant balance, the author proposes embracing seasons of focused intensity, deliberate imbalance, and periodic reassessment. By committing to fewer priorities and clearer trade-offs, readers can align short-term actions with long-term fulfillment while remaining present in what matters now.

Drawing on his experience building multi-million-dollar businesses while traveling with his family, Jonathan Goodman offers practical frameworks for rethinking work, money, friendship, and love—arguing that a deliberately unbalanced life can ultimately be a richer one.

### IN THIS EXECUTIVE BOOK SUMMARY

- Learn how strategic subtraction can create more clarity, wealth, and fulfillment
- Understand why consistency alone often fails, and when intensity matters more
- Reframe success around seasons, not balance, to reduce guilt and burnout
- Build deeper friendships by investing in fewer, more meaningful relationships

## INTRODUCTION

## The Secret Hidden in Plain Sight

Our lives have three priorities: money, health, and relationships. It's rare to have all three going well at the same time. Young people often have relationships and health, but no money. In midlife, we often have health and money, but no time for relationships. When old, we're often rich in money and relationships, but poor in health.

The challenge we all face is balancing short-term desires with long-term planning. It's getting the order right: setting us up for a bright future without missing the magic in the present.

What follows is a practical framework to identify what truly matters in your life and the courage to eliminate everything else. You'll learn how to break free from society's outdated expectations, your own bad habits, and the incessant pressure to do more.

Instead of constantly adding commitments, people, and things to your life, you'll become a master of the art of strategic subtraction, creating space for what's essential and discarding what's not.

It's easy to fall into patterns—lazily accepting even the silliest additions to our lives and never reassessing whether something helps us, hurts us, takes up space, or, in this case, makes any sense. We keep things as they are simply because that's how they've always been.

I call this the *Slinky Effect*: when we get so used to the silly, invisible habits running our lives that we don't even notice them anymore. And *that's* the problem.

In a modern world designed to distract us, we don't actively architect our lives. We default into them. Most people think the solution to feeling overwhelmed is to do more, optimize better, and work harder. That's wrong. You need to do less, but with more intention.

If your days are full yet not fulfilling, it's time for you to examine your life honestly and, perhaps, break some bad habits.

## CHAPTER 1

## Birds Never Sing in Caves

No matter how deep down the achievement rabbit hole you are, it's possible to dig your way out—to walk about wide-eyed like a kindergartner, excited once again about the littlest blade of grass, with days filled with surprises.

Philosopher Henry David Thoreau wrote, “Birds do not sing in caves.” And neither do we. When you explore with intention, you cease to become intent in your complacency.

Exploration isn't about geographic distance but about the internal journey of breaking free from the caves of our own making: those comfortable, predictable routines that dull our senses and shrink our world.

When you explore with intention, you break free from those caves of comfortable routine. But stepping outside our routines requires overcoming a powerful human instinct: the desire for safety and predictability.

This often means ranking safety third, behind growth and experience, not first and not even second. This doesn't mean being reckless. It means recognizing that avoiding all risk is itself the greatest risk.

When you approach life this way, you'll discover that exploration isn't just about going to new places but about becoming more fully alive wherever you are. You'll begin to see opportunities where others see only risk. You'll develop your awareness, adaptability, and openness to the unexpected.

### Laws of Living Lost

Accept that you'll get lost. Accept that you're already lost. Explore. Try stuff. Because the more that you try stuff, the more you'll be forced to *figure it out*. And the more you figure it out, the more confidence you'll gain in your ability to figure it out.

Exploration is not just about going to new places but about a profound process of identity reconstruction. Each time we step outside our comfort zone, we're not merely collecting experiences; we're actively rewriting our internal narrative.

When you allow yourself to become temporarily “lost”—whether in a foreign city, a new skill, or an unfamiliar social context—you suspend the rigid definitions of who you believe yourself to be. You become malleable. Adaptable. Your sense of self is no longer a fixed point but a fluid landscape of potential.

### Where Challenge Meets Enjoyment

What if uncertainty isn't something to fear but a resource to be cultivated? An exploration mindset is less about having all the answers and more about becoming comfortable with not knowing. Here are a few reframes:

- Uncertainty is an opportunity. The unexpected isn't

The more you figure it out, the more confidence you'll gain in your ability to figure it out.

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a threat. It's an invitation to discover something new about yourself.

- Prolonged comfort is dangerous. Stagnation grows moss.
- Failure is information. Instead of letting it get you down, consider what you learned to avoid or what you will do differently next time.
- Flexible intentions are better than rigid expectations. Set adaptive goals. View your path as a compass, not a GPS.
- “I wonder what I might discover” is more useful than “I already know.” Cultivate radical curiosity.
- Ask naive questions and drop preconceptions. Set your ego aside and embrace a beginner's mindset.

Despite the long-term benefits, we don't explore as much as we should. Instead, we exploit too much of what we already know. That's because exploiting is predictable and proximate in contrast to exploring, which is distant, uncertain, and often negative in the short term.

## The Explorer's Compass

Modern life often chains us to predictability, but exploration doesn't require scaling unmapped mountains. It starts with a simple framework I call the *Explorer's Compass*: a guide for intentionally introducing uncertainty into your life.

### 1. Instruments

Just like early mountaineers carried essential tools, you need your own personal instruments. These aren't physical objects but capabilities such as language, physical preparedness, and a mental toolkit.

### 2. Risk Spectrum

Create a personal risk assessment that helps you incrementally expand your comfort zone:

1. **Safe experiments** (low risk): try a new restaurant without checking reviews, take a new route to work.
2. **Moderate challenges** (medium risk): join a class in something you've never done, volunteer for a project at work outside of your expertise.
3. **Bold adventures** (high risk): solo travel to an unfamiliar country, start a side hustle in a new industry.

### 3. Trajectory

Exploration isn't about having a perfect map but about understanding your general direction. This means setting loose, flexible goals and remaining open to unexpected detours.

### 4. Reflection

After a bout of exploration (big or small), take fifteen minutes and ask yourself three questions:

1. What unexpected thing did I learn about myself?
2. How did I just introduce meaningful uncertainty?
3. In what way did my comfort zone just expand?

Remember: the goal isn't constant upheaval but a sustained openness to the unknown. Exploration is less about the external journey and more about your own internal willingness to be surprised.

Everywhere you turn, you are being limited. This can change. But you can't just know yourself intellectually. You must also know yourself experientially. Shake off the shackles that remind you who you are or whom you think others think you are and explore being somebody else for even the shortest bit of time.

Exploration is not a destination. It's not a checklist of experiences or a collection of passport stamps. It's a way of being—a commitment to remaining perpetually curious, perpetually uncertain, and perpetually alive.

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## CHAPTER 2

## Define Your Season

Life's too short. The moment you focus on one thing, an unshakable guilt for not doing another rears its ugly head. I offer a radical, almost unhinged, alternative to the myth of balanced improvement: a seasonal approach where focused intensity on a single priority replaces scattered consistency across many.

By embracing intense seasons of growth followed by periods of rest or maintenance, you'll make transformative progress in what matters most while keeping guilt at bay. This isn't about doing more; it's about doing less, with greater intensity, at the right time.

With each season of intensity, your old ceilings will become your new floors, continually circling each element at a higher level—a lightning strike permanently impacting the landscape versus a series of unimpactful sparks.

Whatever it is you want to excel at, whether it's your career, your family, your fitness level, a personal passion, your social life, define it and clearly prioritize it by placing it at the top of your to-do list.

This type of maniacal focus is unhinged, almost deranged. None of this is likely to be sustainable long term, either financially or temporally. It doesn't need to be. It's not possible to be in season all the time.

Intensity is for gaining. Consistency is for maintaining. You can't have one without the other.

### Ten Thousand Iterations

Success in anything isn't the result of ten thousand hours. It's the result of ten thousand iterations. That's obviously not an exact number, but the idea is correct. You don't need a perfect plan up front; you sketch. Like a folded piece of paper, the first fold is stiff and awkward, but each subsequent fold over the same crease line becomes easier and faster.

What if true consistency isn't about doing the same things every day but rather consistently honoring the natural rhythms of intensity and recovery our bodies and minds require?

What I propose is that the most sustainable approach is one that plans for both. And so, at any given time, we must be selective about which priority we want to focus on, pursue it aggressively, and be okay with just being okay at anything else—for the time being.

### We're Wired to Have Seasons

Living a seasonal life is nothing new. Our hunter-gatherer ancestors worked hard in the spring, summer, and fall to collect food, then spent the winter mostly living off their stores. During that time, they rested and, I imagine, spent more time with family and community.

The invention of the lightbulb, combined with the clock, caused natural time to take a back seat to artificial time. Every day became the same: nine to five. In the search for efficiency, we've become more machine, less human. It's mechanistic. Unnatural. No wonder we burn out.

We're wired to have seasons: stops, starts, periods of work followed by periods of rest.

It's natural to work hard and go all-in on one thing, obsess over it, and get tired. Tired is good. But then you need to rest, recover, and sketch a different line, renewing your energy like a sprouting spring flower in early May.

Whenever you enter a season, create an off-season checklist. Things that need to get done in order for you to feel comfortable committing obsessively on your priority. It keeps your fear-based brain at bay, knowing that what has to get done is getting done.

Of course, you'll miss the mark sometimes. When you get off track, when your brain jumps into fear mode, when the walls feel like they're closing in, look at your checklist, take a deep breath, and get back on track.

Every iteration gets you closer to *your* perfect. With each season, you'll become more aligned with how you work best, more focused on your priority, and more energized because you'll be doing more of what fuels you and less of the accumulated crap that inevitably builds up over time.

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## CHAPTER 3

### Make More Mistakes

The more we know, the less we tend to admit we don't know. The older we get, the less we explore, learn, and experience, and the smaller our world becomes.

That's because the older we get, the more pressure we tend to feel to optimize the life we're living for productivity, efficiency, and certainty. But what if the path to more meaning isn't found through ever-increasing productivity but through periods of strategic (un)productivity?

The more you know, and the more you've achieved, the more you'll feel pulled to move throughout the world with the self-directed expectation that you *should* have the answer. With life, there is no right or wrong answer. The best you can do is make a best guess. And so, you must program yourself to go into almost any situation where, even if you don't know everything, you won't have an unhealthy level of false confidence.

Said another way: admit your ignorance.

### Seeking Serendipity

Productivity isn't the struggle; having something worth being productive for is. Admittedly, saying yes to more isn't productive. It does, however, lead to more serendipity.

Exploration is less about the external journey and more about your internal willingness to be surprised. ”

There's an old saying that "the un-lived life is not worth living." An overly productive life isn't worth living, either. But an unbalanced life can be—because it's full of meaningful work, serendipity, exploration, and wonder.

What holds us back from embracing more serendipity? It's often our misperception of risk.

Most decisions in life are framed incorrectly. We treat small choices with the same weightiness as permanent ones. And most decisions are small. To break this pattern, we need a better framework for understanding which choices are consequential and which aren't.

### Hats, Haircuts, and Tattoos

There's a simple decision-making framework, originally popularized by author James Clear, that sorts choices into three categories based on how reversible they are:

- **Hats** – move quickly; decisions are easy to reverse
- **Haircuts** – risks worth taking
- **Tattoos** – consider carefully; decisions are hard to reverse

If the outcome risk is low, you can move quickly and try a lot of things. The harder the outcome is to reverse, the more energy, thought, and preparation should be used.

Most experiences you say yes to are merely hats to try on, yet you treat them like permanent tattoos, overcompensating with a decision-making process that's too slow, too deliberate, and too choosy. Not because it's the smart thing to do, but because you're scared of what might happen and have never stopped to consider the worst that *could* happen.

Whatever you want to try, consider whether it's a hat, haircut, or tattoo. When you recognize that most opportunities are just hats you can try on, it opens you to periods of intentional exploration.

### Seasons of Yes

*Seasons of Yes* are powerful ways to break out of routine. They're deliberate, time-limited periods, where you commit to saying yes to opportunities, invitations, and experiences you'd normally decline. It's not about reckless abandon-

ment of boundaries but rather a strategic expansion of your comfort zone to break entrenched patterns and discover new possibilities for yourself.

Specifically, Seasons of Yes work well for four types of people:

1. **Professionally stuck** – you've achieved some success but feel trapped in a routine and notice your enthusiasm for work fading.
2. **In transition** – you're going through major life changes and need to rebuild or reimagine your identity and community.
3. **Overly optimized** – you've become so focused on efficiency and productivity that you've engineered serendipity out of your life.
4. **Seeking identity** – either earlier in your journey as a recent graduate or during a major career transition.

## CHAPTER 4

### Choose Your Hard

Much of our current culture celebrates escaping work, suggesting that the goal is to earn an effortless life. But what if that's exactly backward? What if the goal isn't to eliminate hardship but to choose the right kind of hard?

There are two types of activities: finite and infinite.

Finite activities aim at terminal states. Getting married is finite: it's done when you're wed. Writing a book is finite: it's done when you tap the final key.

Infinite activities don't aim at a terminal state. It doesn't drive toward finishing. It describes the process, which never truly completes.

In our future-focused society, we're trained to be finite. Always striving to get *there*, never *here*—thinking about the past, driving toward the future, and leaving the present curiously unoccupied.

### Finding the Good-Tired Sweet Spot

When it comes to money (and your job), there's such a thing as enough. We've got to stop the goalposts of excess and desire

from moving. With work, however, the moment one project finishes, find the next to drive toward. Keep those goalposts moving so long as you find the infinite within the finite.

Don't seek an easy life. Choose your hard. If you don't, it will manifest in depression and listlessness in ways you won't expect. Doing the work makes you worth a damn, regardless of whether you get paid or how much.

Let me be clear: I'm not suggesting you should find joy in financial hardship or pretend that structural barriers don't exist. They do. But within even the most constrained circumstances, you have a critical choice about whether you maintain your agency or allow it to be stripped from you.

Here are a few choices you get to make, regardless of the hand you were dealt:

- **Approach vs. avoidance:** You can fully engage with necessary work or mentally check out while doing it.
- **Growth vs. stagnation:** You can look for learning opportunities within constraints or simply endure them.
- **Connection vs. isolation:** You can build relationships within difficult circumstances or withdraw into private suffering.

None of these choices eliminate hardship, but they change how hardship affects you. When options are limited, choosing your hard might simply mean choosing to be fully present in your current struggle rather than mentally escaping it.

Choose meaningful work over empty leisure. Choose energizing exertion over dulling comfort. Choose focus over scattered distraction. These choices won't make your life easier, but they will make it better.

People talk about work-life balance. I've never liked that. Balance is binary. Too precarious. If you're in balance, it means that you can also be in imbalance. I prefer the term "work-life harmony." A flowing state where you roll with the punches as they come. Expect the unexpected. Build tolerance to life's intolerances.

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### CHAPTER 5

## The Paradox of Abundance

Being driven to succeed can often lead to living a mediocre version of life. Workaholicism is how you lose yourself, not how you find yourself. At the time, it can feel entirely justified. Sadly, the only people who will remember that you worked late will be your kids.

It's easy to fall into the trap of marginal thinking, justifying to yourself why you should make an exception "just this once." And perhaps if it really were just this once, then that wouldn't be a problem. But it never is, is it?

The real game of life is internal. There's no big bad boss. We're *our* only enemy. It's like Tetris, where getting a high score depends on a strong foundation. Good choices divide; bad choices multiply.

None of this is to say that you should knowingly do a bad job or reduce your output. Instead, you have to stop believing that the answer lies in figuring out how to do more. The counterintuitive way to have more is to do less but to do it better by making the hard decisions about what to do with your time and accepting its trade-offs.

Money and success aren't change catalysts; they're amplification agents. If you're adventurous, money will help you go on more and greater adventures. But if you're not, it won't.

If you're a good person—moral, generous, caring, loving, and well-adjusted—money and success will amplify all that's good. If you're selfish, driven by greed, absorbed by envy, unhappy, lonely, and overworked, then no amount of money will change you.

Owning too many things doesn't enhance our lives; it paralyzes and exhausts us. Abundance, therefore, is a paradox.

### Price Versus Dignity

Philosopher Immanuel Kant framed this distinction perfectly: there's price and then there's dignity. Anything with price can be replaced. It's a means, not the end. Dignity stands above price. It's the end, not the means. Over time, wisdom lies in exchanging more things with price for things with dignity.

The longer you spend chasing things with price while postponing things with dignity, the harder it becomes to escape the trap. Every decision you make becomes evidence of who you are, creating a self-reinforcing loop through your identity, network, and habits.

### Your Plan Versus Reality

Life has a way of going well for people who do stuff and not going well for people who sit at home and plot and plan and make excuses for not doing stuff yet. Even if it goes awry, you'll learn something if you do something.

If you ever go back and do a full accounting of your life,

To maximize what matters most,  
you've got to minimize everything else.

”

you'd find that almost everything good that happened to you was the result of random things you learned and random experiences that you had that got mashed together in a way impossible to explain or reproduce.

Think about a recent mistake that you made. Surely it challenged you and strengthened your resolve, teaching you a thing or two about yourself, about others, and about how your world works. Maybe it changed your path, setting you down the road you're on now. Do you actually regret your mistake? Or, with the benefit of hindsight, are you oddly grateful for that terrible thing that happened because of what it taught you, how it strengthened you, and what it led to?

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## CHAPTER 6

### The Joy of Fewer Friends

Eighty-five years of research from Harvard University concluded that your relationships are the single greatest predictor of your happiness—not money, career achievement, the number of countries you've visited, or the size of your home. In a world obsessed with productivity, followers, and networking, we've forgotten something essential: the depth of our connections matters more than their breadth.

People come and go, living their lives and passing through yours. Don't feel guilty for letting loose friendships lapse. It's perfectly okay to enjoy a fleeting moment with another while simultaneously appreciating that almost every relationship you have had (and will ever have) is short-lived.

#### The Garden of Friendship

Think of your social life as a garden that you cultivate with grass, flowers, birds, and trees. Like any good garden, it contains different types of plants and visitors, each playing a unique role in the ecosystem:

- **Grass** – professional connections that provide basic coverage and practical support.
- **Flowers** – seasonal acquaintances who bring joy when your paths naturally cross.
- **Birds** – one-sided relationships with people you watch but who don't know you exist.

- **Trees** – true friends who remain steadfast across all seasons.

In a busy life, you can't realistically maintain too many true friendships; just a couple or, in my case, one. To that person, the highest compliment you can pay is “You are useless to me.” Perfect friendship must exist outside your job and ambition with no agenda attached.

You've got a true friend if they pass these three tests:

1. **Uselessness** – they do nothing for your professional or social ambitions.
2. **Effort** – they go out of their way for you even if it doesn't make sense, just because.
3. **Celebration** – they are genuinely happy for you when things go well.

Go ahead and maintain friendships of all types. But research from the University of Michigan indicates that the number of friends we have doesn't meaningfully impact our well-being. Instead, all you need for higher levels of life satisfaction, self-esteem, and lower levels of depression are two relationships: a spouse and one true friendship.

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## CHAPTER 7

### Find Your Missing Half

The most successful relationships aren't built on similarity but on complementarity. Differences, when respected and leveraged, create a relationship stronger than the sum of its parts. We're drawn to people like us, yet ironically, it's our differences that make relationships thrive.

The happiest couples round out each other's personality. You need compatibility, but not necessarily a great deal of it. More than anything, you need complementarity, shared values, and respect for the other person's individuality.

Complementarity isn't just about fitting together like puzzle pieces. It's about creating space for each other to grow. Strong partnerships demand that both people develop themselves independently to strengthen what they build together.

The people who love you want to celebrate with you but don't know how. Left to their own devices, they'll wait for a

positive outcome—a job promotion, the sale of a business, an award—and celebrate after the fact. But it’s the process they should be celebrating, not the outcome.

However, it’s not your loved one’s responsibility to figure out when and how to celebrate. It’s yours. A simple way to add richness to personal or professional growth is to design shared experiences at waypoints that signify process wins along the way of achieving individual goals.

These experiences follow a structured framework anyone can use I call the *4S Celebration Protocol*:

- **Shared** – involves someone you care about
- **Scheduled** – is set for a specific date
- **Sacred** – commits both people to showing up
- **Significant** – feels special, not routine

This protocol embodies intentional life design. It creates structures that align your actions with your values. It ensures the journey itself becomes rewarding. And it’s a way to celebrate the growth and differences that bring people together.

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### CHAPTER 8

## The Profound Power of Ruthlessly Editing Your Life

Every item you own demands a piece of you: your money to buy it, your space to store it, your time to maintain it, and your attention to worry about it. The career you’ve built can slowly become your prison. Your devices, designed to connect you to everything, can disconnect you from what matters.

Much of your story has already been written for you: where you were born, how you look, your natural attributes. You can’t control the start of it, and it is true that some stories are fairer than others, but you can control the end.

You are not the author of your life, but you can be the editor. Great editing prides itself on subtraction, not addition—on discipline through omission. In a world pushing you toward more possessions and more commitments, your greatest freedom comes from strategic reduction. To maximize what matters most, you’ve got to minimize everything else.

*The Three Spheres of Intentional Minimalism* is a framework for identifying where life naturally accumulates excess and where thoughtful reduction can restore focus and clarity:

1. **Physical space** – the visible stuff that fills our homes

2. **Mental bandwidth** – the invisible decisions consuming our attention
3. **Identity** – the roles and personas fragmenting our sense of self

Start small. Try the Ten-Minute Minimization Challenge. Set a timer for ten minutes and choose one small space (a drawer, a shelf, your phone’s home screen). Ask just one question: “Does this help me maximize what matters?” Not, “Might I need this someday?” That’s fear talking. Do this daily for a week. You’ll remove dozens of items from your life. More important, you’ll strengthen your minimization muscle.

### Freedom

Freedom is optionality—the opportunity to fail, the ability to do what you want, when you want, with whom you want, and the knowledge that you can move on even if you decide not to. Ultimately, freedom is control. If you want to be free, you must keep your walking costs low. Walking costs come in three forms:

1. **Financial costs** – debt, recurring payments, lifestyle inflation that requires your current income
2. **Relational costs** – obligations, social expectations, commitments to energy vampires
3. **Identity costs** – titles, status, and self-perceptions you’ve invested in but no longer serve you

For each category, ask, “What’s one thing I could eliminate that would increase my freedom without reducing what truly matters most?”

When you let yourself become owned by your belongings, your work, or your ego, you become suffocated by your own selfishness. By minimizing needless choices, unnecessary necessities, and your attachment to empty extravagances, you maximize your time, your energy, and your money to share with others. That’s how you take control.

And when you’re in control, you become free.

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## Conclusion

Books attempt the impossible task of making order out of disorder and chaos. Yet they are never the truth itself; life remains inherently unpredictable. Happiness, I’ve discovered, is not a destination but a direction—an ongoing, iterative search that requires sorrow to appreciate joy, pain to appreciate pleasure, and effort to appreciate rest.

The world hasn't changed much in the past thirteen years during which I've gotten married, had three children, and traveled for a total of almost two thousand days. If anything, it's gone farther off the rails. But I've changed. I no longer experience it in the same way.

To paraphrase David Brooks, freedom isn't an ocean to explore. Freedom is a river to cross so that you can make a home somewhere on the other side, and fully commit to someone and something.

The best use of life is figuring out a way to spend as much of it as possible with the people you love.



**Jonathan Goodman** is an entrepreneur, author, and educator who builds businesses while traveling the world with his family. Over thirteen winters, he has explored dozens of countries with his wife and three children, challenging conventional ideas about work, education, and family life. Goodman is the founder of multiple multimillion-dollar companies and is known for helping professionals build sustainable businesses that support meaningful lives. His work has been featured in *The New York Times*, *Men's Health*, *Forbes*, *Robb Report*, *Entrepreneur*, and *Inc.* Goodman lives in Toronto and continues to write, teach, and share ideas about entrepreneurship, freedom, and family-centered success.

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