

ZEN OF ERIC

DISCOVER YOUR PURPOSE IN LIFE

Dear friend,

If you want to discover more fulfillment, happiness, and creative thriving in your life, ZEN OF ERIC is for you. This book is a distillation of the life lessons I have learned over the last 10 years in sociology, psychology, cognitive science, history, business, zen and stoic philosophy, photography, entrepreneurship, spirituality, religion, and art. Consider this your personal handbook to spark new ideas and ways of thinking in your life, by subtracting the superfluous from your life, and adding more focus and power to what is meaningful to you in life.

In this book, I am only sharing with you personal life lessons which have helped me find more purpose, satisfaction, and empowerment in my life. My suggestion with reading this book is to select certain ideas which empower you, and disregard the rest.

You do not have to read this book in a linear format. Skip around, have fun, meditate on the ideas that interest you, and skim the ones that do not.

ZEN can be a guide to minimize the strife and superfluous in your life, in order to have more clarity on what is important. Through this process of reflection, I hope that you can find inspiration and focus to create freely without judgment. ZEN OF ERIC presents you different ideas and philosophies, but ultimately, it is your decision which door you decide to go through.

Let us begin our journey.
Eric, Cindy, Jennifer, Annette

SAIGON, 2018

MY MISSION STATEMENT IN LIFE

Why do I wake up in the morning?

When do I feel most fulfilled in life?

What do I think is my purpose in life?

How can I best share my purpose in life with others?

What do I want to accomplish in my life before I die?



CHAPTERS

LEARNING AND UNLEARNING

1. WHY? WHY? WHY?
2. SUBTRACT THE SUPERFLUOUS
3. CONQUER YOUR FEARS
4. CONQUER YOUR INNER CRITIC
5. HAPPINESS IS OVERRATED: IN PRAISE OF A PURPOSEFUL LIFE

THE CREATIVE ART OF PLAY

6. CREATE LIKE A CHILD
7. CREATIVE FLOURISHING
8. PUBLISH, PUBLISH, PUBLISH
9. CHANNEL YOUR EGO
10. MODERN DAY RENAISSANCE PERSON
11. MEMENTO MORI
12. SUCCESS
13. THRIVE OR DIE



LEARNING

AND

UNLEARNING

True wisdom is a combination of learning and unlearning. Learn what empowers you and unlearn what disempowers you.

In ZEN, **UNLEARNING** (via negativa) is more effective than learning, but is also more difficult. Empty your mind of distracting and negative ideas, giving you more mental space and emptiness to allow your inner voice to speak!

LEARN what you are curious and passionate about, to seek deeper wisdom and knowledge in your life.

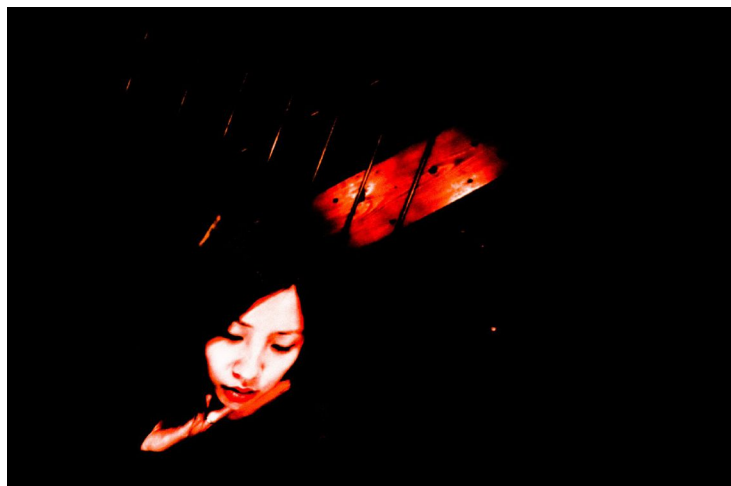


1. WHY? WHY? WHY?

The question, "Why?" is the most powerful phrase in your mental toolkit. Asking "why?" to yourself or to others, allows you to discover deeper truths in your beliefs.

When it comes to money, power, happiness, art, personal relations, or your own duty and purpose in life, ask yourself – "why?" Why is this important to me? Why do I do what I do? Why am I afraid of this? Why am I excited about this?

The more you ask "why?", the more you can override the cultural lessons that society has indoctrinated you with since childhood. I want you to build your own belief system. Do not just blindly following what we have been socialized to believe.



Assignment 1: WHY?

Whenever you face a difficult challenge in life, reflect and ask yourself the question "why?" 5 times.

Date

Location

I am stressed about _____

1. Why? _____
2. Why? _____
3. Why? _____
4. Why? _____
5. Why? _____

I am afraid of _____

1. Why? _____
2. Why? _____
3. Why? _____
4. Why? _____
5. Why? _____

_____ brings me joy.

1. Why? _____
2. Why? _____
3. Why? _____
4. Why? _____
5. Why? _____



Assignment 1: WHY?

Reflections

What did I learn about myself through this introspection assignment?

What drives me, motivates me, and inspires me in life?

From whom or where did I learn my cultural values?

Lessons Learned

TO DO

1.

2.

3.

NOT TO
DO

1.

2.

3.

2. SUBTRACT THE SUPERFLUOUS

One of the easiest ways to identify what is truly meaningful to you is to subtract the noise, distractions, and superfluous from your life.

In order to better hear your inner voice, subtract the expectations people have of you. Subtract the false desires of things you think you want to identify what you truly desire in life.

We can apply this principle to different areas in our life. For example, the best way to gain more time in life is to subtract unnecessary obligations, meetings, or social gatherings. To become richer, subtract your expenses instead of adding to your income. To have a stronger artistic portfolio, subtract your bad images. To be healthier, subtract unhealthy foods (refined sugars, starches, simple carbohydrates) rather than adding 'healthy' foods. To be more virtuous in life, subtract your anger and pettiness. To feel emotionally lighter, subtract resentment, regrets, and fear. To experience a meditative calm, focus on the negativity and then let it go.



Assignment 2: DAILY SUBTRACTION

To simplify your life, aim to subtract 1 thing every day.

Date

Location

✓

IDEAS OF THINGS TO SUBTRACT

Subtract 1 article of clothing from my closet.

Uninstall 1 app from my phone.

Unfollow 1 person on social media.

Subtract 1 resentment I harbor towards someone else.

Subtract 1 negative thought I have about yourself.

Subtract 1 snarky or snide comment I am tempted to say.

Subtract 1 electronic item, camera, or gadget from my life.

Subtract 1 negative person from my life.

Subtract 1 expectation others have of me.

Subtract 1 photograph from my portfolio.





Assignment 2: DAILY SUBTRACTION

Reflections

After subtracting _____, I now feel _____.

After subtracting _____, I now feel _____.

After subtracting _____, I now feel _____.

After subtracting _____, I now feel _____.

After subtracting _____, I now feel _____.

After subtracting _____, I now feel _____.

Was it difficult for me to subtract things from my life?

What are some fears that I had of subtracting? How did I feel overall after subtracting more things from my life?

Lessons Learned

TO DO

1.

2.

3.

NOT TO
DO

1.

2.

3.

3. CONQUER YOUR FEARS

Fear often holds us back in life. How many times have you wanted to attempt something, but you let fear of failure hold you back?

There are several types of fear:

- Fear of being judged negatively by others (social stigma fear)
- Fear of going bankrupt or broke (economic fears)
- Fear of losing respect, power, or influence (ego fear)
- Fear of disappointing ourselves (fear of failure)

Fear makes us human. Fear can also be a helpful guide, as long as you do not let fear paralyze you from action.

EXAMPLE: While shooting street photography, if I see a scene or person that scares me, my fear signals that the subject is interesting and pushes me to take a photo.

I best conquer my fear by staring it straight in the eye, inspecting it, and familiarizing myself with it. I try to identify what my fear stems from, which usually subsides it.

What fears hold you back in life? If you let fear motivate you rather than get in your way, how could you live a more fulfilling and empowered life?

Assignment 3: CONQUER YOUR FEAR OF REJECTION.

Approach strangers and ask for permission to take their photo. Keep asking until you get 10 people to reject you.

The purpose of this assignment is to overcome the fear of social rejection because the assignment *is* to get rejected. Make rejection a fun social experiment. Allow yourself to be rejected and then depersonalize the rejection. Then, use your boldness to confront other fears you have in your life.

Date	
Location	
Reflections	
How did I first feel getting rejected?	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
How did I feel once I got the 10th rejection?	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	
In what other areas of my life can I conquer my fears of rejection to empower myself?	
<hr/> <hr/> <hr/> <hr/>	

Reflections

How did I first feel getting rejected?

How did I feel once I got the 10th rejection?

In what other areas of my life can I conquer my fears of rejection to empower myself?

4. CONQUER YOUR INNER CRITIC

Many of us lack confidence in ourselves, or we fear criticism from others. But why do we lack confidence, and what does it mean to be confident?

To be confident is to know that you are on the right path in life, that you are building your own skills, and that your work is important and meaningful.

However, we often let our inner critic inhibit us from living life to its fullest.

How do we turn off our inner critic, that annoying little voice in our head that tells us that our work is not good enough and that we are not good enough?

My inner critic is a manifestation of the nay-saying I was bombarded with as a child, as a student, and as a young office worker. My inner critic is not my own inner-voice, but rather a combination of voices superimposed externally by society.

How much happier, more fulfilled, and more creative could you be if you created without letting your inner critic hold you back? What if you could create without hesitation and self-censoring, like a child?

Write the criticisms from your inner critic, stare at the responses, and simply ask yourself: "Is this true or not?" Inner criticisms are often false and irrational, based on fears of judgment from others rather than logic.

Never let the inner critic hold you back.

Assignment 4: FACE YOUR INNER CRITIC.

Date

Location

What does my inner critic tell me before I start an artistic project?

What are some insecurities I have about myself as an artist and creator?

Is this true or false? _____

Does this evaluation originate internally or externally?
In other words, is this judgment based on my own self-evaluation or the perceived criticism of myself by others?



Assignment 4: FACE YOUR INNER CRITIC.

Reflections

After confronting my inner critic, what are concrete, specific things I can change in my life to address those criticisms?

If I could create like a child, without letting my inner-critic hold me back, what projects would I pursue?

MY PROJECT IDEAS:

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

Lessons Learned

TO DO

1.

2.

3.

NOT TO
DO

1.

2.

3.

5. HAPPINESS IS OVERRATED: IN PRAISE OF A PURPOSEFUL LIFE

I believe that we all want to live a happy life. The problem is we confuse and conflate happiness with pleasure. I do not think that happiness is pleasure (feeling good). Rather, I see happiness as living a **PURPOSEFUL** life: a life dedicated to empowering ourselves and empowering others.

What if we do not know our purpose in life?

My solution: **Dictate your own purpose in life.**

You can have many different purposes in life, such as learning knowledge and wisdom for the sake of sharing this information with others. Your purpose in life is to be a great artist, and to create artwork which inspires and motivates your viewer. Your purpose in life is to be a mentor, a good friend, a good listener, a problem-solver, and to pursue anything in life that gives you fulfillment.

To have purpose is to share your skills, talents, and strengths with others. Whatever your passion in life, do not hoard it for yourself. Share your knowledge, wisdom, and love with others. The more you share your passion, the more satisfaction and fulfillment you will feel in life. The more satisfaction and fulfillment you feel in life, the happier and more motivated you will be to continue to pursue your life's passions.

Assignment 5: REFLECT ON YOUR PURPOSE(S) IN LIFE.

Date

Location

Instructions

Purpose = Talents + Interests + Empower others

Step 1: Identify my strengths and talents:

We all have gifts or talents, whether it be teaching, public speaking, writing, photography, drawing, sculpture, the art of business, the art of negotiation, being a good listener, or offering useful life advice to our friends, family, and others. Skills can be “soft” skills (marketing, interpersonal skills, problem solving skills) or “hard” skills (knowledge of web design, graphic design, mathematics, computer science, etc).

My skills, talents, and strengths:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Assignment 5: REFLECT ON YOUR PURPOSE(S) IN LIFE.

Instructions

Step 2: The next step is to “**cross pollinate**” skills, by adding, combining, and mixing different skills and interests to make something unique:

Example: My skills include sociology and photography. I also love to teach.

Sociology + photography + teaching = Street photography workshops.

Fill out the form below: Interest 1 + Interest 2 + Interest 3 = New Idea.

1. _____ + _____ + _____
= _____

2. _____ + _____ + _____
= _____

3. _____ + _____ + _____
= _____

4. _____ + _____ + _____
= _____

5. _____ + _____ + _____
= _____

Assignment 5: REFLECT ON YOUR PURPOSE(S) IN LIFE.

Reflections

Step 3: The last step is **empowering others** by sharing these talents and gifts:

How I can use my talents and gifts to empower others:

Ways in which I can help others on a daily basis:

Lessons Learned

TO DO

1.

2.

3.

NOT TO
DO

1.

2.

3.



THE

CREATIVE

ART

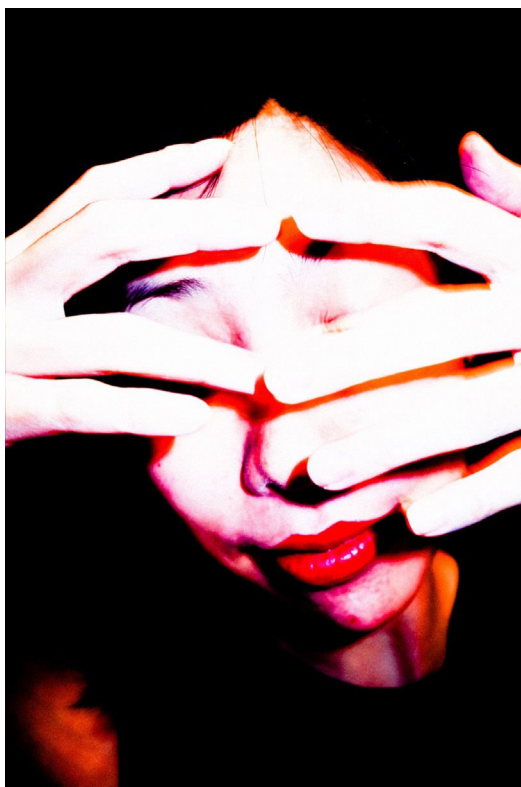
OF

PLAY

We are all born as artists. As we grow older, however, the childlike instinct of creating, exploring, and playing is beaten out of us.

If you desire more artistic empowerment in your life, you must rediscover your inner child and tap into that creative instinct of play. Like any child, you must follow your curiosity without fear or judgement.

ZEN is all about embracing your 'child's mind' in photography, art, and life. Seek to see the world from the eyes of a child and create with no hesitation every day!



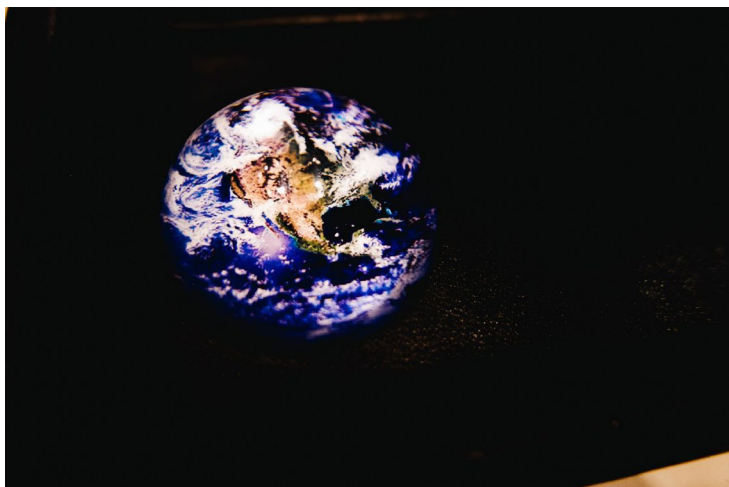
6. CREATE LIKE A CHILD

Perfectionism holds many of us back from creating. We get too worried about the details of our artistic projects. We are so overwhelmed with choices that we fall victim to “paralysis by analysis” (too many choices paralyze us).

My suggestion: **Create like a child.**

Take judgment words like “good” or “bad” out of your vocabulary. Simply redefine your art as “fun” or “boring.” The more fun you have creating, the more authentic and genuine your art will be. The more authentic and genuine your art, the more you will satisfy your own inner-artist and child.

Whenever you have an idea for a creative project, do not always meticulously plan it out. **Create without hesitation!** Analyze the meaning after you create your art.



Assignment 6: OVERCOME PERFECTIONISM

Date

Location

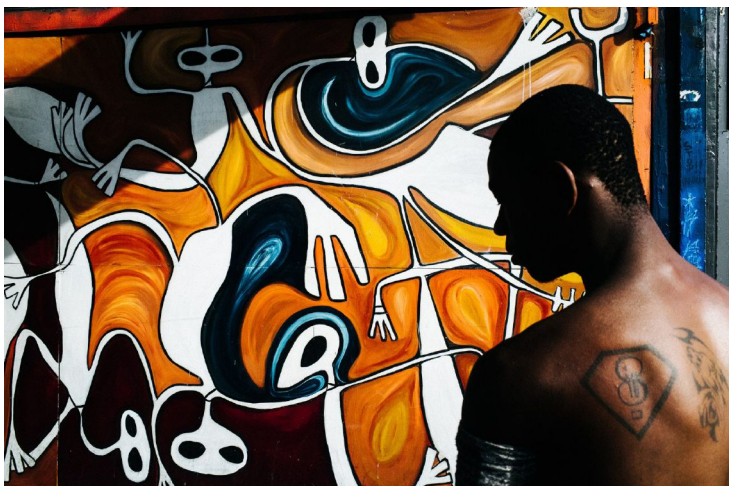
Reflections

Why do I censor myself?

In what ways does perfectionism hold me back?

Do I have a personal definition for 'perfect?' What would 'perfect' look like in my eyes?

Who is my ultimate audience? Who am I trying to please?



Assignment 6: MAKE SOMETHING, TODAY!

Instructions

What did I like to make, play, and do as a child? What interested me?

List of creative projects I would like to pursue in the near future:

- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---
- ---

Rank my top three important creative projects:

1.

2.

3.

If I were to die in the next three years, which ONE project would I work on starting today?

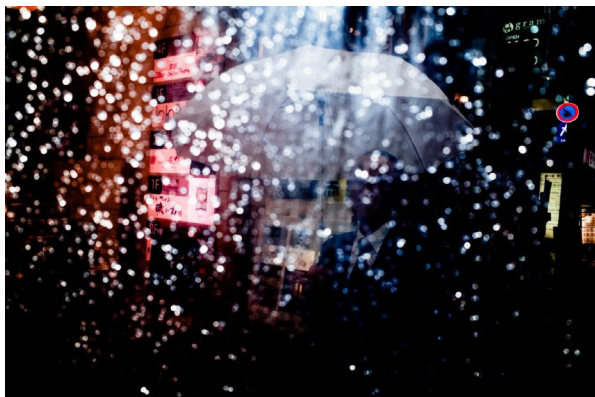
7. CREATIVE FLOURISHING

As an artist, the best way to be productive is to get into a creative flow and enter that state as often as possible.

In a state of creative flow, we are focused, confident, and lose a sense of time and ourselves. We create without thinking and judgment.

To get into a creative flow, we must have a creative project that we find challenging and fun. We must then pursue this project without getting distracted ('focusing').

To attain an 'optimal' state of creative flow, choose an artistic project that challenges you 25% more than you think your abilities are capable of. Challenging artistic projects help you avoid boredom and push you to the next level. By pushing your limits, you build more confidence in your abilities and will experience more fun and excitement in life.



	QUICK TIPS TO CREATIVELY FLOURISH
1. FOCUS	<p>ELIMINATE DISTRACTIONS</p> <p>To focus on getting into a creative state of flow, remove distractions. For example, turn off your phone, turn off your email, turn off your notifications, and turn off the Internet. Listening to music helps me get started and block out the rest of the world as I do my artistic pursuits.</p>
2. PRIORITIZE	<p>PURPOSEFUL PROCRASTINATION</p> <p>Avoid working on projects that you will procrastinate on. Instead, work on the projects that are effortless and fun.</p>
3. TURN OFF YOUR INNER CRITIC	<p>A child does not self-censor; they simply create and make art without hesitation. If we are able to turn off or ignore our inner critic, we will be able to flow creatively and artistically.</p>
4. YOU JUDGE YOU	<p>Make something that pleases you. Turn off the voice inside your head that says your work is not good enough and do not fear judgment by others. Do you like your work?</p>
5. DISCONNECT	<p>Disconnect for certain periods of time from the outside world to focus on production rather than consumption. Try going a month without using Instagram, Facebook, Snapchat, or other forms of social media. Make art for yourself, focus on yourself, and ignore the news, media, magazines, and other forms of "doom and gloom" and negativity in the outside world.</p>



Assignment 7: GET INTO A CREATIVE FLOW.

Reflections

Things that get in the way of me starting or working on my creative projects:

Difficulty #1: _____

Potential solution #1: _____

Difficulty #2: _____

Potential solution #2: _____

Difficulty #3: _____

Potential solution #3: _____

Lessons Learned

TO DO

1.

2.

3.

NOT TO
DO

1.

2.

3.

8. PUBLISH, PUBLISH, PUBLISH

I believe life is about publishing. We must constantly innovate, evolve, and create new things.

The more I publish, the more confidence and faith I build in myself. By publishing and sharing your work, you also share your joy and progress with others.

We often let perfectionism get in the way of us sharing and publishing our art. My suggestion: make something 80% 'good enough' and publish it. The philosophical concept of 'perfect' is nonsense. You cannot call a piece of art "perfect" the same way we would call an apple "red". All art is subjective. No matter how talented you are as an artist, you will never be able to get 100% consensus that your work is perfect.

The secret is to allow yourself to publish works in progress, experiments, or beta tests. Keep creating and iterating!



Assignment 8: PUBLISH 1 THING EVERY DAY.

Date(s)

Location(s)

For this assignment, publish 1 new thing every day. Publish it to social media, my own website or blog, or share it with my friends and family.



IDEAS OF THINGS TO PUBLISH

Publish 1 photograph every day.

Publish 1 poem every day.

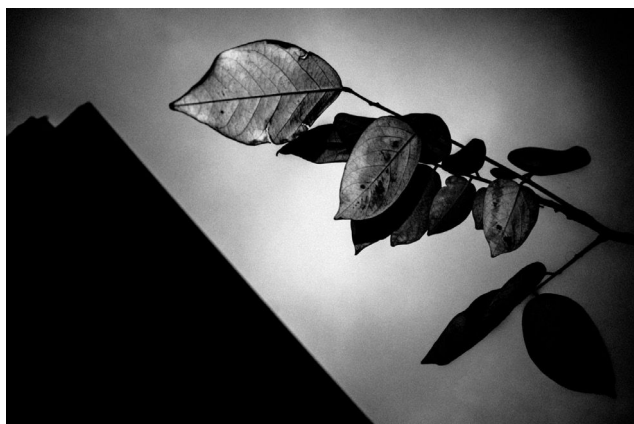
Publish 1 sketch or drawing every day.

Publish 1 blog post, poem, or short story every day.

Publish 1 short video every day.

Publish 1 song or photo slideshow every day.

Publish 1 idea every day.





Assignment 8: PUBLISH 1 THING EVERY DAY.

Reflections

Publish 1 thing every day for 30 days. At the end of the 30 days, reflect:

How does it feel publishing 1 new thing every day?

What are some unexpected new artistic works or ideas that I created during the last 30 days?

What is 80% 'good enough' in my own eyes?

Lessons Learned

TO DO

1.

2.

3.

NOT TO
DO

1.

2.

3.

9. CHANNEL YOUR EGO

We all have an 'ego'— a sense of self, of who 'I' am. Our ego comprises of our past life experiences, our memories, our relationships, and the things that we create and do.

I think the ego can be both helpful and harmful.

The ego is harmful when we become too attached to it. If we are always negative and critical of ourselves, this prevents us from doing, creating, and helping others — then, our ego is harming us.

The secret is to channel your ego in a positive and constructive way. We can use it to create authentic art that empowers ourselves and others. For example, use your personal aesthetic taste and life experience to make and do stuff that inspires others.

For example, I have suffered a lot of pain, self-doubt, and difficulties in my life. When I write, I draw from my personal experiences and my ego in order to face my inner demons. I then use this information to empower others.

The funny thing about the ego is, do not take it too seriously. If someone criticizes us or our artwork, we often feel like our ego is bruised. Why? Our ego is not a physical thing that exists in 'real life'. Our ego is just neurochemical and electronic impulses in our brain and bodies. Our ego will disappear and evaporate once we die, so why let ourselves be slaves to it?

Assignment 9: KILL THE EGO.

Let us kill our ego for a week. When referring to your artwork, do not call them "my" photos or art, call them "the" photos or art. Allow yourself to detach from what you produce. You are simply the channel or the vessel that produces the art. You are not your artwork.

In what ways does my ego empower me?

In what ways does my ego harm me?

How can I channel my ego in a positive way?

Lessons Learned

TO DO

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

NOT TO
DO

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

10. MODERN DAY RENAISSANCE PERSON

Seek to become a modern day renaissance person by leveraging our modern digital technologies and the Internet. Leonardo da Vinci was able to master many different disciplines in his life, including painting, engineering, science, mathematics, and visual arts, without access to the modern tools we have today.

To become a modern day renaissance person, aim to become fully formed in the humanities, the sciences, and the arts. Here are some ideas of things to study:

Humanities:

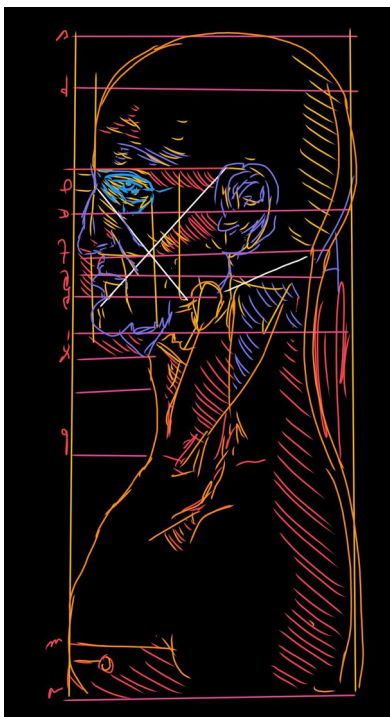
- History
- Psychology
- Sociology
- Literature
- Poetry

Sciences:

- Physics
- Engineering
- Mathematics
- Computer science

Arts:

- Photography
- Painting
- Sculpture
- Painting
- Performance art
- Music
- Film/cinema



Assignment 10: ASSUME YOU CAN LEARN ANYTHING.

Study something you think you are not good at. The easiest way to learn any field is to Google "Topic 101 Free PDF" or use YouTube.

Only study topics that interest you. Do not feel like you need to master all the concepts; the more general your personal erudition, the more innovative and motivated you will be in life.

✓	A LIST OF THINGS I WOULD LIKE TO STUDY

11. MEMENTO MORI

In Latin, “*memento mori*” means “remember you will (and must) die.”

By contemplating death and the transience of life, we are better able to focus on what is truly meaningful in life.

For example, we cannot take our money, possessions, or fame with us when we die. We can, however, leave behind our own legacy to others – our gifts as manifested through children, ideas, and art that can empower current society and future generations.



Assignment 11: WHAT IF I DIED TONIGHT?

There are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers. Be honest with yourself and use this opportunity to reflect on your own personal values, morals, and ambitions for yourself.

What if I knew with 100% precision that I would die when I sleep tonight? How would I use today to its fullest extent?

What would I do today, and more importantly, what would I *not* do?

What is important to me?

THINGS
TO DO

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

THINGS
NOT TO
DO

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

12. SUCCESS

What does success mean to you and how do you define it?

To me, success is going to sleep knowing that you put in a good day of creative and artistic work. You are able to sleep well, knowing that you utilized the day well, and you can die without regrets.

We often make the mistake of 'crowd sourcing' our self-esteem, which means allowing our notion of success be defined by the opinions of others.

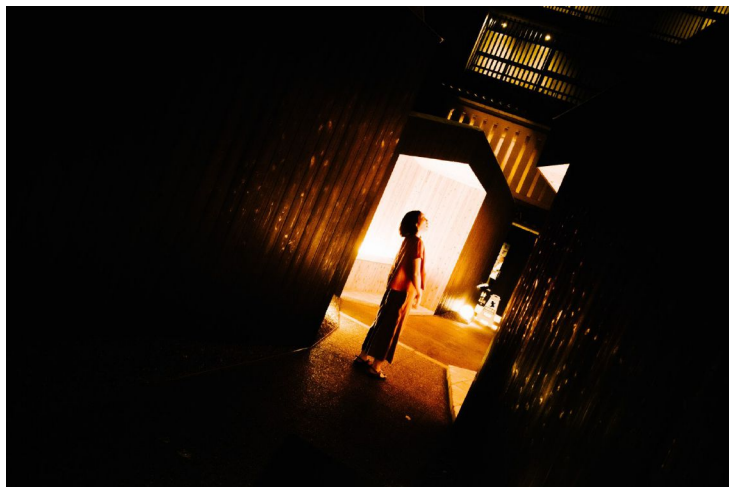
Do not let the crowd (social media, your peers, parents, or colleagues) define success for you. Never define success based on the 0's in your bank account, by the number of social media followers you have, or by whether 'successful' people consider you 'successful'.



Assignment 12: DEFINE SUCCESS FOR YOURSELF.

What are the traditional definitions of 'success' in my society and culture?

I define success as _____



13. THRIVE OR DIE

A final thought I want to leave you with:

We are blessed to live in a modern world where we will not die or starve to death. Life is short and limited. At best, we will live to be around 90. At worst, we might die tonight in our sleep.

Many individuals simply work to survive and take the safe route in life. I say, do the opposite. Treat your life as an adventure. Take bigger risks in life, embark on more ambitious creative projects, and seek to **THRIVE** in life.

Thrive by broadening your horizons, by unchaining yourself from self-imposed limits, and by being childish and foolish. Too much rationality in our lives will harm our inner child and prevent us from experimenting, playing, and having fun.

You were born with a great destiny. Reach your personal potential every day by striving to subtract 1 fear a day, and achieve 1 (great) small win every day.

BE STRONG,
ERIC



Assignment 13: 30 DAILY WINS

MY DREAM IS _____

I will work towards my dream in life, by achieving a small 'daily win' for 30 days:

- Day 1 Win: _____
- Day 2 Win: _____
- Day 3 Win: _____
- Day 4 Win: _____
- Day 5 Win: _____
- Day 6 Win: _____
- Day 7 Win: _____
- Day 8 Win: _____
- Day 9 Win: _____
- Day 10 Win: _____
- Day 11 Win: _____
- Day 12 Win: _____
- Day 13 Win: _____
- Day 14 Win: _____
- Day 15 Win: _____
- Day 16 Win: _____
- Day 17 Win: _____
- Day 18 Win: _____
- Day 19 Win: _____
- Day 20 Win: _____
- Day 21 Win: _____
- Day 22 Win: _____
- Day 23 Win: _____
- Day 24 Win: _____
- Day 25 Win: _____
- Day 26 Win: _____
- Day 27 Win: _____
- Day 28 Win: _____
- Day 29 Win: _____
- Day 30 Win: _____

LEARN MORE

Always treat yourself like a beginner, and retain your innocent 'child's mind.' Keep learning and stay curious!

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HAPTIC

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Written by Eric Kim

Edited by Cindy Nguyen & Jennifer Nguyen

Illustrated by Annette Kim