**THE POWER OF REGRET—How Looking Backward Moves Us Forward**

**Daniel Pink**

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**Part 1: REGRET RECLAIMED**

1. **The Life-Thwarting Nonsense of No Regrets**

*Regret Is not dangerous or abnormal, a deviation from the steady path to happiness. It is healthy and universal, an integral part of being human. Regret is also valuable. It clarifies. It interacts. Done right, it needn’t drag us down; it can lift us up.*

1. **Why Regret Makes Us Human**

*In other words, the inability to feel regret—in some sense, the apotheosis of what the “no regrets” philosophy encourages—wasn’t an advantage. It was a sign of brain damage.*

1. **At Leasts and If Onlys**

*Two decades of research on counterfactual thinking exposes an oddity: thoughts about the past that make us feel better are relatively rare, while thoughts that makes us feel worse are exceedingly common. Are we all self-sabotaging masochists?*

1. **Why Regret Makes Us Better**

*Don’t dodge emotions. Don’t wallow in them either. Confront them. Use them as a catalyst for future behavior. If thinking is for doing, feeling can help us think.*

**Part 2: REGRET REVEALED**

1. **Regret on the Surface**

*Human life spreads across multiple domains—we’re parents, sons, daughters, spouses, partners, employees, bosses, students, spenders, investors, citizens, friends, and more. Why wouldn’t regret straddle domains, too?*

1. **The Four Core Regrets**

*What’s visible and easy to describe—the realms of life such as family, education, and work—is far less significant than a hidden architecture of human motivation and aspiration that lies beneath it.*

1. **Foundation Regrets**

*Foundation regrets begins with an irresistible lure and end with an inexorable logic.*

1. **Boldness Regrets**

*At the heart of all boldness regrets is the thwarted possibility of growth. The failure to become the person—happier, braver, more evolved—one could have been. The failure to accomplish a few important goals within the limited span of a single life.*

1. **Moral Regrets**

*Deceit. Infidelity. Theft. Betrayal. Sacrilege. Sometimes the moral regrets people submitted to the surveys read like the production notes for a Ten Commandments training video.*

1. **Connection Regrets**

*What gives our lives satisfaction are meaningful relationships. But when those relationships come apart, whether by intent or inattention, what stands in the way of bringing them back together are feelings of awkwardness. We fear that we’ll botch our efforts to reconnect, that we’ll make our intended recipients even more uncomfortable. Yet these concerns are almost always misplaced.*

**11. Opportunity and Obligation**

*The four core regrets operate as a photographic negative of the good life. If we know what people regret the most, we can reverse that image to reveal what they value the most.*

**Part 3: REGRET REMADE**

**12. Undoing and At Leasting**

*But with regrets of action, I still have the chance to recalibrate the present—to press Ctrl + Z on my existential keyboard.*

**13. Disclosure, Compassion, Distance**

*Following a straightforward three-step process, we can disclose the regret, reframe the way we view it and ourselves, and extract a lesson from the experience to remake our subsequent decisions.*

**14. Anticipating Regret**

*As a universal drug, anticipated regret has a few dangerous side effects.*

**Coda. Regret and Redemption**

James Baldwin—*Though we would like to live without regrets, and sometimes proudly insist that we have none, this is not really possible, if only because we are mortal.*

**Part 1: REGRET RECLAIMED**

**Chapter 1—The Life-Thwarting Nonsense of No Regrets**

3—Edith Piaf story—44 years old, addiction, accidents, hard living ad ravaged her body. Song about “no regrets.”(page 7—this song popular with many others). Page 9, more about her tragic life. pg. 26 too.

5—Tattoos stories—“no regrets”

6—A delightful but dangerous doctrine—that regret is foolish, that it wastes our time and sabotages our well0-being. “Forget the past; seize the future. Bypass the bitter; savor the sweet. A good life has a singular focus (forward) and an unwavering valence (positive). Regret perturbs both. It is backward-looking and unpleasant—a toxin in the bloodstream of happiness.”

7—Many popular celebrities and influencers…saying “I don’t believe in regrets.”

7—US Library of Congress contains more than 50 books with the title “No Regrets.”

8—Embedded in songs, emblazoned on skin, embraced by sages, the anti-regret philosophy is so self-evidently true that it’s more often asserted than argued. Why invite pain when we can avoid it? Why summon rain clouds when we can bathe in sunny rays of positivity? Why rue what we did yesterday when we can dream of the limitless possibilities of tomorrow?

8—This worldview makes intuitive sense. It seems right. It feels convincing. But it has one not so insignificant flaw. It is dead wrong.

8—Regret is not dangerous or abnormal, a deviation from the steady path to happiness. It is healthy and universal, an integral part of being human. Regret is also valuable. It clarifies. It instructs. Done right, it needn’t drag us down; it can lift us up.

8—This book is about regret—the stomach-churning feeling that the present would be better and the future brighter if only you hadn’t chosen so poorly, decided so wrongly, or acted so stupidly in the past.

9—Regret—often outer expressions (tattoos) and inner experience (truth) diverge.

9—Regret—don’t minimize it, optimize it.

10—Examples of regret—woman and her marriage illustrated.

11—More on tattoos—the tattoo removal business is $100 million a year industry in the US alone.

12—The Positive Power of Negative Emotions. Harry Markowitz story (mutual funds—modern portfolio theory). Powerful as Markowitz’s insight is, we often neglect applying its logic to other parts of our lives. “We stuff our portfolios with positive emotions and sell off the negative.”

13—Positive emotions (love, pride, joy, gratitude) are vital, of course, and we should have more of them then negative (shame, frustration, sadness). But overweighing our emotional investments with too much positivity brings its own dangers. The imbalance can inhibit learning, stymie growth, and limit our potential.

13—Because negative emotions help us survive. Fear propels us out of burning buildings and makes us step gingerly to avoid a snake. Disgust shields us from poisons and makes us recoil from bad behavior. While too much negative can be debilitating, too little can be destructive.

13—Regret seen as one of the biggest of negative emotions. But we need to reclaim regret. We must reclaim regret as an indispensable emotion.

14—70 years of research distills to two simple yet urgent conclusions. a) regret makes us human; b) regret makes us better.

14—2020—largest analysis of American attitudes about regret ever conducted—The American Regret Project. And then the World Regret Survey. Collected more that 16,000 regrets in 105 different countries.

15—Most academic categories of regret fall into the domains of people’s lives—work, family, health, relationships, finances, and so on. Pink recognizes 4 categories: Foundation regrets, boldness regrets, moral regrets, and connection regrets.

15—This book helps you understand our most misunderstood emotions.

**Chapter 2—Why Regret Makes Us Human**

17—Regret defined. More of a process than a thing, says Pink.

17—Human beings are both skilled time travelers and skilled fabulists (human superpower). These two capabilities twine together to form the cognitive double helix that gives life to regret.

20—Interesting, we are unable to feel or imagine regret until around age 6-8. In this way, regret is a marker of a healthy, maturing mind.

21—Illustration of not feeling regret=brain damage. Wow. “In short, people without regrets aren’t paragons of psychological health. They are often people who are seriously ill.

22—Two abilities that separate humans from animals (time travel and storytelling), followed by two steps that separate regret from other negative emotions (compare and blame).

23—How often do you look back on your life and wish you had done things differently? Only 1% said never. And less than 17% said rarely. 43% do it frequently or all the time. In total, 82% say they do it at least occasionally which makes Americans more likely to experience regret than floss their teeth.

24—Most people regret. 1984 social scientist study. Most common emotion…regret. 2nd only to love.

24—List of 9 negative emotions and the most experienced…regret.

25—Regret is common—constitutes an essential component of the human experience. (Rob—so how can it be recaptured and recalibrated for good.)

26—Regret can and must become fuel for future advancement. Rob

27—Everything you do can be used as fuel—the good and bad—painful and joyful—if understood and seen correctly—and can make us better. Rob

**Chapter 3—At Leasts and If Onlys**

29--Story—women’s Olympics cycling race story. Interesting illustration of regret—between ecstasy of gold, thrill of bronze, and just missing the gold…silver. Plus page 34 chart…agony to ecstasy…bronze more ecstatic.

30—We often try to conceal our feelings—to display humility instead of pride or resolve instead of heartbreak—but our faces can betray us.

33—Our ability to mentally travel through time and to conjure incidents and outcomes that never happened—enables what logicians call “counterfactual thinking.” Split the adjectives in two and its meaning is evident. We can concoct events that run counter to the actual facts.

33—“Counterfactuals” are a signature example of the imagination and creativity that stand at the intersection of thinking and feeling (says leading scholar on the subject). Counterfactuals permit us to imagine what might have been.

34-35—Those finishing 3rd (bronze) happier than those finishing 2nd (silver). Illustrates “if only” (silver) vs. “at least” (bronze—at least I didn’t finish 4th).

34-35—Downward counterfactuals—how an alternative could have been worse=At Least. Upward counterfactuals—how an alternative could have gone better=If Only.

36—Study—gold medalists smiled the most. But bronze smiled more than silver.

37—The paradox of pain and the pain of paradox. At Leasts=makes us feel better, giving us comfort and consolation. If Only=makes us feel worse, giving us discomfort and distress.

38—Study found that 80%of the counterfactuals people generate are IF ONLYs. (some report higher than 80%). That’s how our brains and minds work. (Rob—looking at the negative vs the positive—line here where the drive to get better and negative joylessness meet.)

38—Thoughts about the past mostly make us feel worse, not better.

39—Good quote—Regret is the quintessential upward counterfactual—the ultimate If Only. The source of its power, scientists are discovering, is that it muddles the conventional pain-pleasure calculus. It’s very purpose is to make us feel worse—because by making us feel worse today, regret helps us do better tomorrow.

**Chapter 4—Why Regret Makes Us Better**

41—“There is a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.” Leonard Cohen, 1992

41—The First Law of Holes—“When you find yourself in a hole, stop digging.” We often compound bad choices by continuing to invest time, money, and effort in losing causes instead of stanching our losses and switching tactics.

41—This psychological concept is known as “escalation of commitment to a failing course of action.” It is one of the many cognitive biases that can pollute our decision making. It is also something experiencing regret can help us fix. Good!

41—Gillian Ku, London Business School, found that getting people to think about previous a escalation of commitment, and then to regret it, decreased their likelihood of making the error again.

42—Inducing this unpleasant feeling of IF ONLY improved their future behavior.

42—THE THREE BENEFITS OF REGRET

42--#1—Regret can improve decisions. (Learn from the past but don’t live in it.)

45--#2—Regret can boost performance. (This is one of the central findings of regret: it “can” deepen persistence, which almost always elevates performance. It can improve future deliberations with more strength, speed, creativity.)

48--#3—Regret can deepen meaning. (Counterfactual reflection endows both major life experiences and relationships with greater meaning.)

49—GOOD--For instance, conducting a “mid-life” review focused on regrets can prompt us to revise our life goals and aim to live afresh.

50—Says one woman, “my life is more flavorful because of my regrets…I remember the bitterness of the taste of regret. So when something is sweet…it is really sweet.”

51—WHAT ARE FEELINGS FOR?

51—William James (considered the father of American Psychology)—on man’s ability to think—how we think, what we think…depends on our situation.

51—James’ big idea—“My thinking is first and last and always for the sake of doing.” We act in order to survive. We think in order to act. Feelings are more complicated.

52—Inaccurate opinions about feelings—

a. Feelings aren’t important. Ignore them.

b. Feelings mess things up and delay progress.

c. Feelings need to be blocked or buried.

d. Feelings need to be minimized.

53—Another view is that feelings are for feeling. But too much regret can be bad. Always ruminating and being stuck in the past vs. using it as fuel to move forward.

53—The third view is the best—Feelings are for thinking. Don’t dodge emotions, but don’t wallow in them either. Confront them, ponder them, and then leverage them. If thinking is for doing than feelings can help us think.

54—Good and Bad—Framing regret as a judgment of our underlying character—who we are—can be destructive. Framing regret as an evaluation of a particular behavior in a particular situation—what we did—can be instructive.

54—Like stress—some good and some bad.

54—Regrets that hurt deeply but dissolve quickly lead to more effective problem sovling and sturdier emotional health. When regret smothers, it can weigh us down. But when it pokes, it can lift us up.

54—The key to use regret to catalyze a chain reaction: the heart signals the head, the head initiates action. All regrets aggravate. Productive regrets aggravate, then activate.

55—THREE OPTIONS FOR RESPOND TO REGRET

#1—Feeling is for ignoring—bury or minimize it. That leads to delusion.

#2—Feeling is for feeling—wallow in it. That leads to despair.

#3—Feeling is for thinking—address it. Thinking is for doing. This leads to better decisions, improved performance, deeper meaning.

55—THESIS--When feeling is for thinking and thinking is for doing then regret is for making us better.

56—Great Story—15th Century. Kintsugi (“golden joinery”). The bowls aren’t beautiful despite their imperfections, they are beautiful because of their imperfections. The cracks make them better.

57--Another story—lost race. “Because of the pain, she sees the rest of her life with greater urgency and purpose. If you have a broken heart, it means you have done something big enough and important enough and valuable enough to have broken your heart. As Mora Abbot suggests, the cracks are how the light gets in. And peering through those cracks offers a glimpse of the good life.

**PART 2: REGRET REVEALED**

**Chapter 5—Regret On The Surface**

61-63—Gallup Poll—1949—“don’t know.” 1953—“wouldn’t change a thing.” But 4 out of 10 would do things differently. 15% said get more education. 1965 that number jumped to 43% (get more education). 1989 even more regretted not getting more education.

64—Most Common Regrets (2005)—12 Categories—Very interesting. 12 life domains from Education (highest) to community (lowest). Study flawed since it occurred mostly on school campuses. If in a hospital, health would have been top.

67—Most Common Regrets (2011)—12 Categories with Romance (relationships) #1, then family, then education. But still a bit incomplete. Conclusion on regret study? People regret lots of stuff and the reason has something to do with opportunity…but still more that needs to be learned. Thus the Pink study.

69—American Regret Project. Recent and better. People asked—“Regrets are a part of life. We all have something we wish we had done differently—or some action we wish we had taken or not taken. Please look back on your life for a moment. Then describe in 2 or 3 sentences one significant regret you have.”

69—www.danpink.com/surveyresults

70—Most Common Regrets (2021)—8 Categories this time with Family #1 followed by partners and education. Interesting categories—Family, partners, education, career, finance, other, health, friends.

Family 22%.

**Chapter 6—The Four Core Regrets**

73-74—Interesting illustration—two men with educational regrets. One not taking it seriously…the other not taking a risk. Look similar, but different regrets.

74—Regret=most misunderstood emotion (and his study opened up a gigantic online confessional…ha)

75—Common roots—even though different stories, wrong choices and regrets collide.

76—Regrets--Similarities and Differences.

78—FOUR CATEGORIES OF HUMAN REGRET

#1—Foundation Regrets—Failure to be responsible, make good choices, be disciplined, etc.

#2—Boldness Regrets—Failure to risk more, try more, do more, attempt more.

#3—Moral Regrets—Behaving poorly, make bad moral choices, doin the wrong thing.

#4—Connection Regrets—People relationships matter greatly and failure to prioritize them…

80—Above 4 also speak to what we need to live a fulfilling life.

**Chapter 7—Foundation Regrets**

84—Aesop Fable illustration. Consider the Ant (Proverbs & Aesop’s Fable). Ant and the Grasshopper. Ant works and preps for winter. Grasshopper does not (“fiddling around”). (Aesop authored believed to have lived in Greece 620-563 BCE.) The fables started as oral tradition.

85—Foundation regrets arise from our failures of foresight and conscientiousness.

86—Foundation regrets sound like this: “if only I’d done the work.”

86—Foundation regrets begin with an irresistible lure and end with an inexorable logic.

87—The grasshopper succumbed to what economists call “temporal discounting”—he overvalued the now and undervalued (discounted) the later. When this bias grips our thinking, we often make regrettable decisions. The grasshopper prized fiddling in the moment more than eating in the future.

88—To identify a foundation regret listen for the words “too much” and “too little.”

89—Ernest Hemingway story—good one. How did you go bankrupt? Two ways. “Gradually and then suddenly.” That’s how people discover their foundation regrets (health, education, $$, etc). Slowly building force of all those poor decision can arrive suddenly like a tornado—gradually and suddenly.

90—Compounding illustration. Want $1million today or one penny that will double in value every day for a month. After one month the penny would be worth $5million. In the medium run it accelerates. In the long run it explodes. And the principle applies well beyond finance—small choices about eating, exercising, studying, reading, and working produce explosive benefits or harms over time.

90—Page 90 and 87 charts—temporal discounting and compounding—play a trick on our brains. There is a compounding effect of choice.

91—Foundation regrets are not just difficult to avoid but they are also difficult to undo.

91—Foundation regrets are more prevalent among older because weaknesses in one’s foundation take time to develop and recognize.

93—Chinese Proverb—“The best time to plan a tree is twenty years ago. The second-best time is today.”

94—What distinguishes regret from disappointment is personal responsibility. (Disappointment=outside your control. Regrets=your fault.)

94—One of the most prevalent cognitive biases—in some ways the uber-bias—is called the “fundamental attribution error.” When we try to explain someone’s behavior, we too often attribute the behavior to the person’s personality and disposition rather than to the person’s situation and context. For example—when another driver cuts us off on the highway, we immediately assume the person is a jerk. We never consider that the person might be speeding to the hospital. We load too much explanatory freight onto the person and too little on the situation.

96—The lesson reaches back 2.5 millennia. Think ahead. Do the work. Start now. Help yourself and others to become the ant.

**Chapter 8—Boldness Regrets**

100—If foundation regrets arise from the failure to plan ahead, work hard, follow through, and build a stable platform for life, boldness regrets are their counterpart.

101—Sometimes boldness regrets emerge from an accumulation of decisions and indecisions; other times they erupt from a single moment. But whatever their origin, the question they present us is always the same: Play it safe or take a chance?

101—With boldness regrets, we choose to play it safe. Boldness regrets sound like this: “If only I’d take that risk.”

102—Introversion and extroversion are fraught topics, in part because popular belief and legitimate science often depart. The conventional view, reinforced by the ubiquity of assessments like the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, olds that we’re either introverted or extroverted. But personality psychologists—the scientists who began studying the subject a hundred years ago—have long concluded that most people are a bit of both. Introversion and extroversion are not binary personality types. This trait is better understood as a spectrum—one where about 2/3 of the population lands in the middle.

103—As a card-carrying ambivert who prefers the company of quiet people, I’ve cheered from the sidelines when others have decried the “extrovert ideal” in Western culture. Yet the evidence shows that modest efforts to move slightly in that direction can be helpful…and increase well-being.

104—The pain of boldness regrets is the pain of “what if?” Studies show that people regret “inaction” more than “actions”—especially in the long term. Regrettable failures to act…have a longer half-life than regrettable actions. (2 to 1 in World Regret Survey). Reason—we know what happened next.

104—But when we don’t act—we can only speculate how events would have unfolded.

104-5—Poet Ogden Nash writes about the differences between regrets of commission and regrets of commission. “It is the sin of omission, the second kind of sin, that lays eggs under your skin.”

105—The consequences of actions are specific, concrete, limited. The consequences of inaction are general, abstract, and unbounded. Inactions, by laying eggs under our skin, incubate endless speculation.

105—Boldness regrets endure because the counterfactual possibilities are so vast.

106—At the heart of all boldness regrets is the thwarted possibility of growth. The failure to become the person—happier, braver, more evolved—one could have been.

107—Settling.

107—Interesting top regret from survey—turning down opportunities to travel.

111—With boldness regrets, the human need is growth—to expand as a person, to enjoy the richness of the world, to experience more than an ordinary life.

**Chapter 9—Moral Regrets**

115—Moral regrets make up the smallest of the four categories in the deep structure of regret, representing only about 10% of the total regrets. (rob—surprising)

115—But they ache the most and last the longest. And…more complex than other core regrets.

115—Moral regrets sound like—“if only I’d done the right thing.”

117-8—Moral Foundations Theory—5 pillars

#1—Care/harm

#2—Fairness/cheating

#3—Loyalty/disloyalty

#4—Authority/subversion

#5—Purity/desecration

119—Five regretted sins—deceit, infidelity, theft, betrayal, sacrilege.

119—Harm—Most reported moral regret.

122—Cheating from marital infidelity to academic cheating and more. Harm and cheating overlap. Trust shattered. Integrity blown. Lying and cheating.

125—Disloyalty—loyalty vs. being a traitor. Benedict Arnold. Judas Iscariot. Serve others not self.

127—Subversion—represented fewest moral regrets in survey. Dishonor. Disrespect.

127—Desecration—those regrets emotionally intense, eg abortion. (almost ½ agree acceptable and ½ morally reprehensible)

129—French sociologist Emile Durkheim, “the division of the world into 2 domains, one containing all that is sacred and the other all that is profane.” We don’t always agree on the boundaries between these two domains. But when we forsake what we believe is sacred for what we believe is profane, regret is the consequence.

129—Moral regrets are a peculiar category. They are the smallest in number, yet the greatest in variety. They are the most individually painful. With moral regrets the need is goodness. The lesson, which we’ve heard in religious texts, philosophy tracts, and parental admonitions is: when in doubt, do the right thing.

**Chapter 10—Connection Regrets**

133—Connection regrets are the largest category in the deep structure of human regret. They arise from relationships that have come undone or that remain incomplete.

135—People often talk about regrets in terms of doors. “Closed doors” (someone dies, etc). “Open doors” (still time to reach out). Closed door regrets bother us because we can’t do anything about them. Open door regrets bother us because we can, though it requires effort.

136—Study concluded that regrets about social relationship are felt more deeply than other types of regrets because they threaten our sense of belonging. A sense of belonging (lost).

137—While the connection regrets that people reported in the surveys numbered well into the thousands, the specific ways their relationships ended numbered only two: rifts and drifts.

137-8—Rifts and drifts—Rifts usually begin with a catalyzing incident—an insult, disclosure, betrayal. Drifts—drifting apart (almost imperceptibly sometimes). Rifts are more dramatic. Drifts are more common. Drifts can be harder to mend. Rifts generate emotions like anger and jealousy, which are familiar and easier to identify and comprehend. Drifts involve emotions that are subtler and that can feel less legitimate.

142—Harvard Gazette article 2017—“Close relationships, more than money or fame, are what keep people happy throughout their lives.”

143—2017, Robert Waldinger, psychiatrist and current director of the study—“Taking care of your body is important, but tending to your relationships is a form of self-care, too.”

144—Study referred to here is ongoing. Recent statement by one on human flourishing—“Happiness is love. Full stop.”

146—The lesson of closed doors is to do better next time. The lesson of open doors is to do something now.

**Chapter 11—Opportunity and Obligation.**

149—Photography/Negatives illustration—When photographers printed that negative on paper, the light and dark would be reversed and the original color tones restored. Regret works much the same way. The four core regrets operate as a photographic negative of the good life. If we know what people regret the most, we can **reverse** that image to reveal what they value the most. Key idea, applicable.

150—The Deep Structure of Regret

**4 Core** **What It Sounds Like** **The Human Need It Reveals**

Foundation If only I’d done the work Stability

Boldness If only I’d take the risk Growth

Moral If only I’d done the right thing Goodness

Connection If only I’d reached out Love

150—We seek a measure of stability—a reasonably sturdy foundation of material, physical, and mental well-being. We hope to use some of our limited time to explore and grow—by pursuing novelty and being bold. We aspire to do the right thing—to be, and to be seen as, good people who honor our moral commitments. We yearn to connect with others—to forge friendships and family relationships bonded by love. A solid foundation. A little boldness. Basic morality. Meaningful connections.

🡪The negative (photo illus) emotion of regret reveals the positive path for living.

151—3 Selves: (Tory Higgins, Columbia Univ social psychologist)

#1—Actual self—bundle of attributes we possess (“what we are”)

#2—Ideal self—hopes and dreams (“could be”)

#3—Ought self—duties, commitments (“should be”)

151—What fuels our behavior and directs which goals we pursue, are discrepancies between these 3 selves. For ex: “not exercising” = should or ought self. Thus the discrepancy between actual and ought.

151—People regret their failures to live up to their ideal selves more than their failures to live up to their ought selves. Regrets of “coulda” outnumbered regrets of “shoulda” by 3 to 1. Wow!

151-2—Discrepancies between: Actual and ideal leave us dejected. Actual and ought leave us agitated (and therefore more likely to act—we feel a greater sense of urgency). “Couldas” bug us longer than “shouldas” because we end up fixing many of the “shouldas.”

152—Failures to become our ideal selves are failures to pursue “opportunities.” Failures to become our ought selves are failures to fulfill obligations. (good thought here)

152—Opportunity and obligation sit at the center of regret, but opportunity as the more prominent seat.

152—Regrets of inaction last longer than regrets of action in part because they reflect greater perc’d opportunity.

155—Dreams and duties—We regret foregone opportunities more often than unfulfilled obligations.

155—A life of obligation and no opportunity is crimped. A life of opportunity and no obligation is hollow. A life that fuses opportunity and obligation is true. How to build that life by transforming your existing regrets and anticipating your future regrets is the subject of the rest of this book.

**PART 3: REGRET REMADE**

**Chapter 12—Undoing and At Leasting**

159-60—“No regrets” tattoo story and its removal. (Fort Bragg, Green Beret, regrets about school, divorce, not pursuing love of acting, terrible tattoo, bad font.) “Regret is a thing. I do have regret. It fuels me.

161—Action regrets vs. Inaction regrets.

162—For action regrets, our initial goal should be to change the immediate situation for the better (this is the UNDO IT part). While we can’t always do so, we must when and where we can. Make amends, reverse our choices, erase the consequences (like tattoo removal illustration). The other approach is to AT LEASTS it to help us feel better about our circumstances. Neither tack does much to prepare us for later, but both can help us realign now.

161—Two Steps for Action Regrets: 1)UNDO IT and 2)AT LEAST IT.

161--#1 UNDO IT

161-2—TV show—in English… “I Am Sorry.” They found that people are more likely to undo regrets of action than regrets of inaction.

163—But undoing a regret is not quite the same as erasing it (Tattoo removal illustration—can’t read it but can see a mark).

164--#2 AT LEAST IT

164—At leasts don’t alter our behavior or boost our performance in the future, but they do help us reassess the present. Ex--“Going to law school was a mistake but at least I met my wife.”

164—Finding a silver lining doesn’t negate the existence of a cloud. But it does offer another perspective on that cloud.

165—At leasts can turn regret into relief.

165—Funny on tattoo—“at least he didn’t choose a larger font.”

**Chapter 13—Disclosure, Compassion, and Distance**

167—The optimal response to most regrets, action and inaction alike, is to use the regret to improve the future.

167—If we move backward with the specific intent of moving forward, we can convert our regrets into fuel for progress.

167—They can propel us toward smarter choices, higher performance, and greater meaning. And science shows us how.

167-8—Rather than ignoring the negative emotion of regret—or worse, wallowing in it—we can remember that feeling is for thinking and that thinking is for doing.

168—Following a straightforward three step process, we can disclose the regret, reframe the way we view it and ourselves, and extract a lesson from the experience to remake our subsequent decisions.

168—STEP #1—SELF-DISCLOSURE: RELIVE AND RELIEVE

169—Benefits of self-disclosure. Don’t deny. Declare.

169—The first step in reckoning with all regrets, whether regrets of action or inaction, is self-disclosure. We are often hesitant about revealing negative info about ourselves. But self-disclosure is intrinsically rewarding. An enormous body of literature makes clear that disclosing our thoughts, feelings, and actions—by telling others or simply by writing about them—brings an array of physical, mental, and professional benefits. Such self revelation is lined to reduced blood pressure, higher grades, better coping skills, and more.

170—Self-disclosure is especially useful with regret. Denying our regrets taxes our minds and bodies. Gripping them too tightly can tip us into harmful rumination. The better approach is to relive and relieve. By divulging the regret, we reduce some of its burden, which can clear a path for making sense of it.

170—The reason self-disclosure is so crucial for handling regret, is that language, whether written or spoken, forces us to organize and integrate our thoughts.

170—…when feeling is for thinking and thinking is for doing…

170-171—Instead of those unpleasant feelings fluttering around uncontrollably, language helps us capture them in our net, pin them down, and begin analyzing them.

171—Write it out…can be good.

171—With all forms of regret, the initial step is to disclose the regret.

172—Self-disclosure is intrinsically rewarding and extrinsically valuable. It can lighten our burden, make abstract negative emotions more concrete, and build affiliation. Harness your emotions to improve your future.

172—STEP #2—SELF-COMPASSION: NORMALIZE AND NEUTRALIZE

173-4—Self-compassion over self-esteem. Self-compassion=normalize negative experiences and neutralize them. Self-esteem=participation trophies and false positives—need some but too much can be bad.

174—Self-compassion encourages us to take the middle road in handling negative emotions—not suppressing them, but not exaggerating or overidentifying with them either.

174—Self-compassion is something we can learn and when mastered the benefits can be considerable. Including—increased optimism, happiness, curiosity, wisdom, enhanced personal initiative and emotional intelligence, etc. And protects against unproductive mind wandering, drepression, anxiety, stress, perfectionism, and shame.

175—It can insulate us from the debilitating consequences of self-criticism, while short-circuiting self-esteem’s need to feel good through vanity and comparison.

175—Self-compassion helps one overcome and learn from their regrets.

175—The people who addressed their regret with self-compassion were more likely to change their behavior than those who approached their regret with self-esteem.

176—A self-compassionate approach does not foster complacency, as some might fear. Self-flagellation seems good, but produces helplessness. Self-compassion, by contrast, prompts people to confront their difficulties head-on and take responsibility for them, researchers have found.

176--Be compassionate to self as you would to others.

177—STEP THREE—SELF-DISTANCING: ANAYLZE AND STRATEGIZE

177—Talking about ourselves in the 3rd person (Like Julius Caesar and Elmo).

178—When we are beset by negative emotions, including regret, one response is to immerse ourselves in them, to face the negativity by getting up close and personal. But immersion can catch us in an undertow of rumination.

178—Zoom out vs. Zoom in.

178—After self-disclosure relieves the burden of carrying a regret, and self-compassion reframes the regret as a human imperfection rather than an incapacitating flaw, self-distancing helps you analyze and strategize—to examine the regret dispassionately without shame or rancor and to extract from it a lesson that can guide your future behavior.

178—People who self-distance focus less on recounting their experiences and more on reconstructing them in ways that provide insight and closure.

178—Self-distancing strengthens thinking, enhances problem-solving skills, deepens wisdom, and even reduces the elevated blood pressure that often accompanies stressful situations.

178—We can create distance in three ways.

#1—Space (fly on the wall/neutral observer)

#2—Time (mentally visiting the future) (When we simulate looking at the problem retrospectively, from the binoculars of tomorrow rather than the magnifying glass of today, we’re more likely to replace self-justification with self-improvement.

#3—Language (3rd or 2nd person) (Can destigmatize negative experiences and help people pull meaning from them.)

181—Looking backward can move us forward, but only if we do it right.

182ff—7 Other Techniques You Won’t Regret

**Chapter 14—Anticipating Regret**

189—Victor Frankl, 1946—“Live as if you were living already for the second time and as if you had acted the first time as wrongly as you are about to act now!”

189—Alfred Nobel obit—“merchant of death”. Mistook his bro him. Alfred however was a different person. Spoke 5 languages. Accomplished inventor. Yet the obit didn’t tell his story but a sorry one. When he did die, however, 8 years later, he surprised all by establishing the Nobel Prizes.

190—Turning regret into reward.

190—If the previous two chapters were about regret through the rearview mirror, this chapter is about regret through the front windshield. Regret is a retrospective emotion. It springs into being when we look backward. But we can also use it prospectively and proactively—to gaze into the future, predict what we will regret, and then reorient our behavior based on our forecast.

191—Upside of Anticipation.

191-192—Regret lotteries—in general, we find the pain of losing something greater than the pleasure of gaining the equivalent thing—so we go to extraordinary lengths to avoid losses.

192—Anticipating our regrets slows our thinking.

193—Regret prompts future good action.

193-4—Obit parties—interesting. People write their own obits and use the written pieces to inform their remaining years. (Like Nobel bros illustration.)

194—Bezos—minimize regrets. “Regret Minimization Framework.”

195—Downside of Anticipation.

196—Overestimating regret can cloud our decisions.

198—Regret can freeze us into indecision.

198-9—“Stay w/ first answer” illustration. (which is wrong—like frog in kettle illus in Adam Grant).

200—Anticipated Regret may cause decision paralysis, risk aversion, first instinct fallacies, and lower test scores.

200-1—Nobel winner—Herbert Simon—Economics. Sometimes “good enough” is good enough. Sometimes we maximize and other times we satisfice.

202—Having to always “maximize” can lead to regret and despair.

202—OPTIMIZING REGRET.

203—Regret optimization framework. Decide if you are dealing with one of the four core regrets. If not, satisfice.

204—If the decision does involve one of the big four, spend more time deliberating.

205—WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR REGRETS: A RECAP

1. For An Action Regret

a. Undo it. Apologize, make amends, or try to repair the damage.

b. At Least it. Find the silver lining: think a gout how the situation could have turned out worse and appreciate that it didn’t.

2. For Any regret (Action or Inaction)

a. Self-disclosure. Relive and relieve the regret by telling others about it—admission clear the air—or by writing about it privately.

b. Self-compassion. Normalize and neutralize the regret by treating yourself the way you’d treat a friend.

c. Self-distancing. Analyze and strategize about the lessons you’ve learned from the regret by zooming out in time, in space, or through language.

3. To Use Anticipated Regret in Your Decision Making

a. Satisfice on most decisions. If you are not dealing with one of the core four regrets, make a choice, don’t second guess yourself, and move on.

b. Maximize on the most crucial decisions. If you are dealing with one of the four core regrets, project yourself to a specific point in the future and ask yourself which choice will most help you build a solid foundation, take a sensible risk, do the right thing, or connect with others.

**Coda—Regret and Redemption**

209—Contamination sequences—events go from good to bad. Redemption sequences—events go from bad to good.

210—Story illustration—move back to move forward.

211—Regret—most misunderstood emotion. Regret makes me human. Regret makes me better. Regret gives me hope.