

LIMITED KEEPSAKE EDITION

THE ART OF FOCUS



DAN KOE

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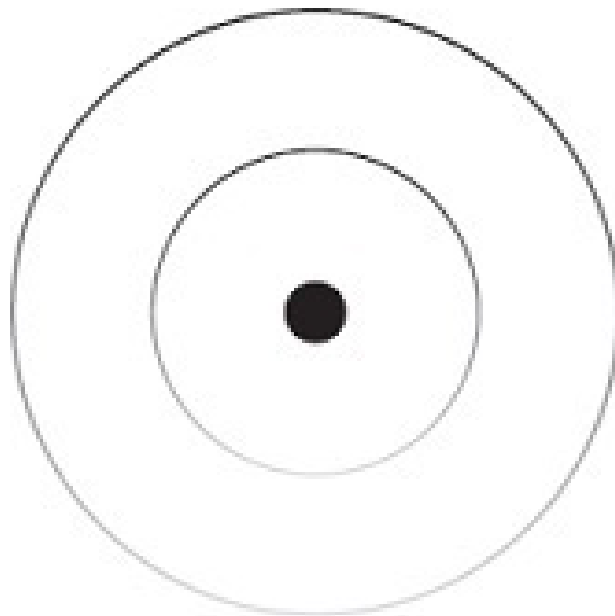
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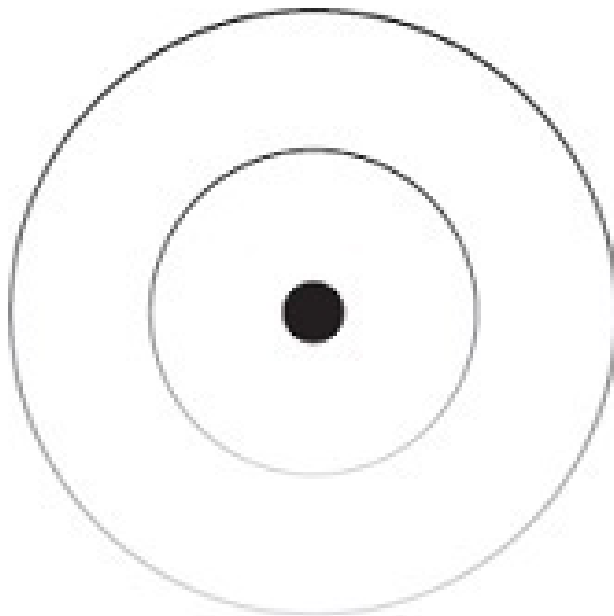
DEDICATION

To the students, readers, and critics that allowed these ideas to come into existence. Thank you for the praise, attention, and feedback that has allowed my words to spread and change lives for the better.

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FOREWORD

I met Dan Koe in between chapters of my life.

Everything seemed to be on the right track. Graduating from a top engineering university, landing a software engineering job with decent pay, benefits, and time flexibility, and finally being able to start my adult life.

But all the while, something inside me kept wondering when my life would actually begin.

I always imagined my life would “begin” after I finished college and started my career. But something still felt wrong. I still felt unfulfilled. My emptiness led to an identity crisis, a deep depression, and a search for meaning.

One day, I had the idea of creating internet content based on the psychology, neuroscience, and personal development knowledge I had been gaining over the past 2 years. My mission was to synthesize science-based, self-improvement guides to help people overcome similar problems I’ve faced.

That decision led me to Dan.

Dan was the first person to reach out to me on social media. We were in a networking group chat, and that group chat eventually dissolved as many do, but Dan and I kept in touch. Many people have come and gone from my professional network, but Dan is one of the few I talk to almost every day. I’m proud to call him a mentor, a business partner, and a close friend.

I didn’t agree with some of Dan’s perspectives when I first met him. I came from an engineering background and had been self-educating in cognitive science for a few years. Dan was, in a way, the opposite of me, with

perspectives rooted in philosophy and spirituality. I believed the science I had studied was more reliable than the seemingly woo-woo nonsense Dan was interested in.

I can't recall a specific disagreement we had, but I do remember at first thinking Dan was just another spirituality bro like the many I had encountered in passing at electronic music concerts. I knew he was exceptionally intelligent and he was skilled at eloquently explaining his perspectives, but a part of me harbored a quiet sense of superiority due to my scientific approach to productivity, fulfillment, and self-actualization.

Over time, as I listened to Dan and dipped my toes in the waters of the "other side," I began to see that what I had learned was not an opposite or necessarily superior perspective, but instead, it was merely a different one. Dan and I had similar goals for both ourselves and our audiences we simply had different ways of going about achieving those goals.

The major catalyst of this perspective shift came during a conversation we were having along with our mutual friend, Justin C. Scott (who was also deep into philosophy and spirituality). I asked the question that bothered me most: *How else could a recommendation be made to another person if it was not proven to be replicable by rigorous studies in the traditional scientific sense?*

The discussion that followed helped me realize that I wasn't a blind fanatic of Science™; I was, instead, an enthusiast of the scientific method, a never-ending trial and error, something Dan and I agreed on. Since that discussion, I've invested time into studying what I thought was the "other side" so that I could become more well-rounded for myself, those close to me, and my online audience.

Thanks to Dan's friendship, support, and guidance, I've been able to grow a business that has finally provided a feeling of fulfillment in my life. If I had the book you hold in your hands back then, I would've seen that it was possible years earlier.

This book is a synthesis of years of Dan's learnings, experiences, and reflections. The first time I read the draft of the book, I was dumbfounded by the simultaneous depth and simplicity of its teachings. I'm not ashamed to admit I needed to read it a second time in its entirety before I felt like I grasped it enough to write this foreword.

Here's one of my favorite quotes from this book:

“Once you understand the game, you begin completing a series of quests – that form a storyline – to gain experience. As you gain experience, new opportunities become available to you. You unlock dungeons. You can join a guild. You can travel to new locations to complete different quests. In the real world, we often aren't aware of what these opportunities can be, so we choose to remain stagnant, comfortable, and ignorant.”

This gamification approach speaks to me. As a former video game addict (and current Dungeons & Dragons Dungeon Master), I've enjoyed finding ways to think of my life more like some sort of a game — not to be won, which is impossible, but instead to be explored, enjoyed, and experienced as much as possible in the life we have now.

The book begins by painting a bleak picture of the average person, a picture of the person I was in the chapter of my life before I had the idea of becoming a creator, sharing my ideas, and starting a business. Though it may feel like criticism, this is a necessary wake-up call so that we might be better prepared for the lessons that come next.

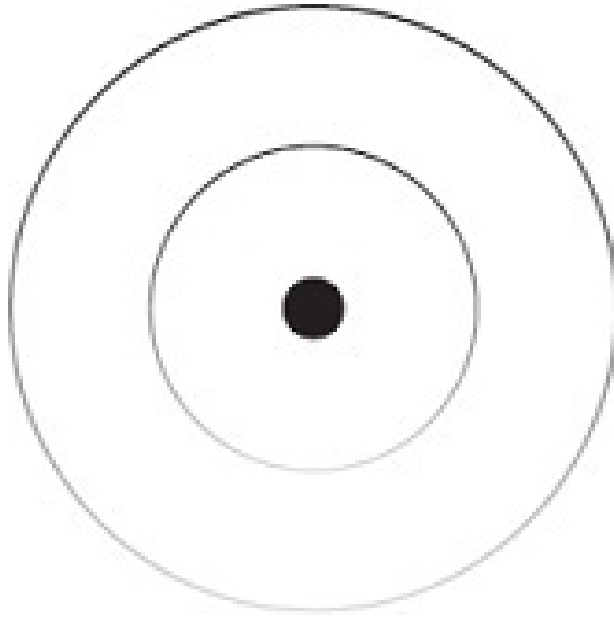
Of course, the journey can be difficult. I've found myself battling sleepless nights, food and drink binges, and moments of seemingly hopeless despair. But I've found that, almost always, those challenges arise not because of the nature of the "game," but instead, a lack of clarity about our next move. Many of us feel trapped. We aren't happy, we aren't fulfilled, and we aren't progressing, just like I was a few years ago. This book gives you insights that can take years (or decades) to fully integrate through trial, error, and frustration.

You may need to read this book multiple times for its lessons to sink in. But that's okay. The greatest books always have something new to offer you each time you return to them. As you read, apply, and reflect, you'll find your perspective changing. You'll begin to find a path that will lead to freedom, happiness, and fulfillment for yourself and those you care about.

My friendship with Dan changed my life. The book you're about to read will change yours.

Joey Justice

Co-Founder of Kortex & Performance Consultant



INTRODUCTION

We are at a pivotal moment in human evolution. Attention spans are shrinking. Bodies are getting softer. Minds are growing weaker. Some pockets are being drained while others are being filled a bit more than usual. Technological advancements are threatening the mindless, comfortable, and mechanical lives of the masses. It's becoming difficult to tell if I'm the crazy one or if everyone else is.

Wake up. Hit snooze 4 times. Stare at your phone. Roll out of bed. Make coffee. Sit in traffic. Eight hours of unfulfilling work. Sit in traffic . . . again. Argue with your "significant" other. Walk the pet. Watch TV. Pass out. Repeat.

Get offended. Blame everyone but yourself. Tie your self-worth to radical ideologies. Accept everything at face value and question nothing. Expect free handouts for simply existing, no effort. Do what the authorities tell you. Go to school, get a job, retire at the ripe age of whatever it may be, no guarantees, with just the right amount of currency to survive until death.

Go through a painful experience. Find the light. Identify with it. Demonize anyone who questions that identity. Avoid the thought of any meaning, love, and consistent presence you had the potential of achieving in your life because that would require you to change.

What a life. A life I have lived multiple times, each one being shorter than the next. Many people say they enjoy this lifestyle, that they are fine living out the same day like an experimental TV drama. It seems like a peaceful existence, but one that I could never live. The thought of something more would eat me alive.

If the lifestyle illustrated above made you want to jump off a building, good. You picked up the right book. This is for those that hate the thought of ending up like everyone else. This book is for those that feel an internal sense of despair at the thought of an unlived life. This book is for those that know there is something more, but aren't sure what, when, where, why, or how. This book is for those that will not surrender the little sovereignty they have left to the default path that too many people accept and follow without question.

Who's to blame for this default path? You. We are not going to start this off by acting as if you can't make a conscious personal choice to change who you are, what you do, and how you do it. I do not believe that modern life is the result of bad intentions from government officials, corrupt politicians, mega-rich founders, and the outdated school system. You know, the people whose products fill your house, mind, and allow you to opt out of life's minor inconveniences, but only for a bit.

Instead, I believe we are right where we're supposed to be at this point in civilization. The turning point that separates the lions from the sheep. But this does not mean that the people, organizations, and institutions above do not have a bit too much influence over our daily actions. What's worse is how

they can condition a population to think in black and white, when the magic happens in the gray, the unknown.

When it comes to the default path, I am here to give you a new perspective, a positive one. I am not proposing that you need to get rid of all electronics, quit all of your “bad” habits, or move out to the woods to live like a monk. Instead, I am here to bring clarity in a time of external chaos, distraction, and opportunity overwhelm. I am here to help you join the rich. The New Rich. The rich that don’t care to be rich, and that’s why they’re rich in more domains than money.

My biggest fear with writing this book is that I will make it all about me, and less about you. So, for the sake of establishing perspective, I will talk about myself, but not for long.

My name is Dan Koe. I started this journey when I was twelve years old. I was gifted with the specific programming that led to me questioning how the world worked. Questioning how I could game the system. Questioning how I could get miles ahead of everyone else with minimal, focused effort. Questioning why everyone lived out their lives unfulfilled, unhappy, overweight, and with an underwhelming amount of energy. Like their life force had been sucked out of them before they had a chance to pursue their gifts like I have mine.

I wanted autonomy above all. I was hyperobservant of my environment and how it impacted those residing in it. Friends. Family. Acquaintances. Colleagues. Grocery store shoppers. Corporate professionals. All of them put off this sense of unease. A subtle projection of their deep internal state of unhappiness. They seemed to let momentary inconveniences turn into lifelong problems.

Telling my story is important because it shows that it is just like every other story: it has its ups, downs, lefts, and rights. The point wasn't to eradicate or amplify any emotional direction by force. The point was to become aware of experience as feedback and focus those resources toward the good life.

When I was forced to go to church and accept a belief system as law, that was strike 1. Strike 2 was when my peers told me what not to do, but when I questioned their logic, they danced in circles, regurgitating the same statements their parents and teachers had filled their minds with. Religion was the catalyst to my questioning but went on to fuel my pursuit of truth in the immaterial, material, and everything that lies between.

At the same time, my parents had picked up a new fitness routine, one of those DVD sets where you work out in front of your TV, and bought the required equipment. I would sneak this equipment into my room at night with high hopes of creating the physique of a golden-era bodybuilder.

At some point along this journey, probably due to my obsession with fitness self-education, I became aware that the education system wasn't going to save me; that institutionalized education was a necessary evil that we should evolve away from.

I realized my curiosity and intuition were going to be the source of my potential success. I could not rely on a preset path to make an income doing something I enjoy. Nor could I rely on it to teach me how to live a fulfilling, healthy, or worry-free life. The state of the modern world was the only evidence I needed to see this truth.

It started with being a silent observer. My parents would get home late, tired, ready to bicker at each other while watching the same show over and over until their marriage came to an end. This is not a dig at my parents. I am grateful that they stuck together for as long as they did to provide my

siblings and me with an incredible childhood filled with adventurous vacations and their desire for us to succeed. I admire the people they have become despite their relationship struggles that I will never understand because I didn't, and never will, have access to their state of mind. The point is this: everyone seemed bitter. I understood that the average individual has their struggles, but they never seemed to try to solve the problems that were a detriment to more than their own well-being. Go to school, get a job, let whatever happens in that multi-decade time period happen, and retire in a way where you have no meaningful work to balance the eternal rest you craved for so long. That was the depressing song that played on repeat in the minds of the masses.

Taking matters into my own hands was the process that stemmed from my rebellion. I wanted quick results. If I could learn everything myself, what was stopping me from doing it in a fraction of the time it took compared to taking the conventional path? This is when the power of the digital world made itself apparent to me.

My eyes were glued to my computer screen for weeks, months, and years on end. I'd take breaks, of course, but all I could think about was all of the knowledge I lacked. Especially after feeling cheated by the conventional resources that were supposed to secure my future.

I spent my days absorbing all the information my focus could handle on fitness, finance, attraction, and perspectives of meaning, happiness, and fulfillment. Consciously experimenting with the best teacher I could find – my own mind, body, spirit, and business.

Through countless bouts of trial and error, a decade of compounding returns on focus, and eliminating the possibility of failure from my mind, I have built something I am proud of: a life of meaning, money, and mastery.

At the age of twenty-six, I fill my days with activities I enjoy, I have created a sizeable income pursuing my life's work, and I have attained a degree of freedom that other millionaires of the world would die for. Some of them have said this to my face.

This did not come in an instant, of course. It took a decade of failures, minor successes, feeling hopeless and lost, with a nagging voice in the back of my mind whispering, "It's possible . . . you don't have to end up like the rest." This self-taught path brought me to success much faster than the traditional route would have, without the money cap.

On many occasions, I have met individuals who are quick to fill in the blanks of my story with theirs. When I mention my lifestyle and associated income, they are quick to favor coping over curiosity. Closing their minds off to the thought of their potential. I'm relieved to inform you that what I've achieved is not the product of an inheritance, nepotism, a wealthy family, random luck, or a benefactor.

I'm an average guy that came from a middle-class, single-income family. There is nothing special about what I have accomplished. I am not living in a different reality from the rest of the population. Even if I grew up on the other side of the world, I would still have access to the information, human experience, and mental ability to maneuver my way to this position. It may have taken more time, yes, but that isn't a valid excuse. There doesn't seem to be a more worthwhile endeavor to dedicate your life to than to see what you are capable of.

The journey you are about to embark on is not for the faint-hearted. It is not an external journey, but an internal one. Not a material journey, but immaterial. Not a physical journey, but spiritual. If all I had was a socially accepted definition of a beautiful person of the opposite sex, an abundance of American currency, a nice machine on wheels, and an aesthetic form of

my physical body, my life would be all looks and no depth. It would mean nothing. It would serve nothing. It would continue existing as nothing of true value.

I am writing this book as a map with faint lines. A map to getting paid for doing what you love, traveling the world, and doing whatever you want. A map to mental peace, meaningful pursuits, and fulfilling relationships. A map to becoming a self-sustaining, self-reliant, and sovereign individual. Dualistically free. I want to give you the tools to a better life, let you crash and burn, and watch you create the light at the end of your own tunnel.

I cannot make this change for you. I cannot promise you a better life. I cannot make you do these things. I can only give you the lessons I've learned through living unconventionally. It is your job to take these lessons, experience them for yourself, and make your own decisions. Do not by any means outsource your thinking, decision-making, or potential success to these teachings. I will be one of the first to tell you to quadruple your expectations for how long you think it will take. It will take your entire life, because that's the point of it. This is a tool, a guide, an art and should be treated as such.

A WORLD OF DISTRACTIONS

Do you want your time, attention, and life-changing experiences stolen from you? Are you okay with sitting by, being a slave to modern distractions that have been laid out like breadcrumbs, leading to a life of drained pockets, zapped neurochemistry, abysmal energy levels, and the gradual destruction of anything meaningful in your life? Are you okay with continuing the never-ending search for “safe,” “secure,” and “pleasurable” experiences that leave you with the opposite feelings?

This is the life of the modern human. Walking down an undefined path with mouths open, minds off, and shopping carts – physical and digital – filled with doses that should be considered poison. All while playing a character operating on inconducive and unfiltered information, playing the role they've been molded to play.

As a collective, we are suppressing our choice to improve so we can continue being spoon-fed pleasurable, numbing, and artificial experiences. Some may think that there is a puppet master hiding behind the state of the modern world, conspiring to create hell on Earth. In reality, it is the individual's inability to understand their nature and use it to adapt to the rapid advancements of our time.

The modern world – more so Western society – is designed not by man, but by years of evolution to keep you in chains. A slave to the system. A drooling bag of bones that craves instant gratification, free handouts, and constant stimulation. This is what our psyche craves, and never has it been so available. Mental mastery must become a top priority so that you can adapt to the times.

Our choices are not our own, and our choices create who we are. The familiarity we have adopted into our lives digs us deeper into the hole of mediocrity. Those that dare challenge this narrative carry the heaviest burden. If you choose to embark on this path, you will be criticized, mocked, and cut off.

Your beliefs will be challenged. Your transformation will be painful. However, this is the only worthwhile path. I am being dramatic here, and there is a reason behind that. Exaggeration is useful to get the essence of the situation across, because that indeed can be more dangerous than my bold assumptions. I am going to make mediocrity so repulsive that you have no choice but to use your gift of creation.

Everywhere you turn, there are distractions that lead you further away from who you are and who you want to become. Processed food is dangled in front of your face like you are a lab rat. People with misaligned goals flood you with invitations to test how important your own are.

Our souls are being sucked out of us from fluorescent-lit cubicles. We have no sense of meaning and little drive to pursue our life's work. We stick to short-term goals just to free up enough space for us to return to the activities that are killing us, not in an absolutely physical manner, but a holistic one. Mind, body, spirit, and business under the lens of your life's work.

My intention is not to paint these things as bad. Bad is relative, and oftentimes these modern "poisons" are useful, necessary, and fun, but not as an eternal day-to-day lifestyle. The ability to moderate is cultivated with experience, but moderation is difficult without awareness, education, and forward progress.

Illnesses are being diagnosed within the fifteen-minute time frame you are given to describe your symptoms. Pills are handed out like candy because people don't have the patience to implement simple lifestyle changes.

"Trusted" information is paid for, marketed, and perfectly designed to grab your attention, polarize you, and keep you in a state of negativity, even if it is not their intention.

Mainstream advice encourages you to do everything but improve your life. And if they encourage you to do so, it is in the form of attaching to and defending their ideology. Few people are questioning said information or looking where the money *isn't* flowing. Everybody has access to the internet and the ability to spread their negative opinion like wildfire.

We tap into our innate negativity bias, fry our dopamine receptors, and tie ourselves to our lightboxes, straying further from what is. Those that have the ability to think for themselves quickly realize that they are being manipulated.

When people hear the word “work,” they cower in fear, hoping that the weekend will extend a few days so they can cuddle up on the couch until further notice. When people hear the word “rest,” they grab an unhealthy snack, pour some fermented grape juice, and fall into a vegetative state, hoping that they never have to come out.

The concept of one’s “life’s work” has been lost by all but those who learn to focus. Everyone has been made to believe that their life is out of their control, that there is a set path to follow that will result in eventual happiness.

They think that if they stick it out long enough, they will reach what everyone is searching for: freedom. Even then, the general perception of freedom is to avoid all work, immerse themselves in “rest,” and live out their days as if they were fulfilled by creating nothing by their own desire. This is backwards. You cannot understand freedom if you do not conquer what made you a slave.

I do not believe people are miserable. Maybe at times, like everyone else, but I do believe that the majority of people are on a perpetual spectrum of dissatisfaction with their lives. There is a deep, inner voice calling out that is suppressed by a veil of responsibilities, excuses, and perceived uncertainty.

Due to this, the masses remain unaware of their potential, and I am aware that I cannot save them all. They have not taken that first step into the unknown, and who knows if they ever will. The difference between you and

them is this book. If you do not have the awareness of the possibility of a better life, it is impossible for such a future to actualize.

I am not saying this to destroy all hope you had for a better life. The system may be rigged against you, but that's the thing. With the advancements in technology, medicine, and decentralization, anybody can build wealth, leverage, and an overwhelming sense of satisfaction in life. All they need to do is learn how to focus in this beautiful black hole of distractions.

WHY FOCUS?

Humans can process 10–50 bits of information per second with their conscious attention. The what, how, and why behind that information we choose to process will determine our quality of life. That is, what we hold in our attention, how we interpret that information, and why we gave it our attention in the first place is of utmost importance. Focus is attention with intention.

Your mind is a set of complex systems, like a supercomputer. Even though I do not believe this is a metaphor that can explain the full complexity of consciousness, it helps illustrate a point. Like how a computer can slow down when you have too many tasks, tabs, apps, or other programs running, so can your mind. When your attention is split, or your focus is fragmented, suffering increases in potentiality.

When our mind is not engaged with being or doing, we allow random thoughts to register in our awareness. “Random” in this case does not mean half good thoughts and half bad thoughts. For every one good thought, there are a hundred bad ones. When you think of good health, there is one outcome: good health. But when a random negative thought about your heavy heartbeat sneaks in, chaos ensues.

One thought about your heart can lead to thoughts about heart disease, incorporating a time-consuming exercise routine, and all the food choices you make that splinter into 10 more negative thoughts about the side effects of each. Controlling the information that you hold in your focus is the key to overcoming the anxiety, boredom, stress, and overwhelm that plague today's society.

While the conscious mind can focus on a limited set of thoughts and actions, the unconscious mind can manage eleven million bits of information per second. This includes our habits, reactions, breathing, chewing, walking, and everything else that we don't have to "pay" attention to, because we've practiced those skills.

While much of our unconscious is a result of our mental programming and centuries of evolution, our conscious mind still plays a large role in forming what information our unconscious mind can manage. The depth, wholeness, and state of your focus will determine the entirety of your life. The enjoyment, the suffering, the progress, and the success.

After a decade of trying to form good habits, instill energizing routines, become a social savant, make money outside of a conventional job, calm the thoughts in my head, and anything else that would result in a higher quality of life – I realized there was something missing.

There was a flaw in the modern methods that people were using to improve their lives. Forming good habits is powerful, but what is the resistance behind forming good habits? Putting yourself in social situations to bust out of your nervous shell is solid advice, but what would make that process seamless? Making money in a creative, leverageable fashion sounds like a dream even when many have done it, but what is the catalyst?