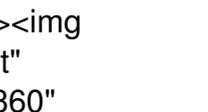


[Time](https://www.flickr.com/photos/abesselink/53078591849)  The cost is significant. A lot of energy and effort gets wasted trying to be someone or something else we're not. Angst builds up a lot from not meeting someone else's expectations or being overly concerned about how someone sees or thinks of us. Frustration simmers when you feel like you're not being heard or seen. But there's a simple solution: just do you.

Much of this comes down to an inherent perceptual flaw, I think, of why we are on the planet. We quantify our existence and base our value on material things and how that compares us to others. We are socialized to believe that we must have x, y, and z to be considered successful. We are never enough, but we always think we will be as soon as we have this or that. The problem festers into an ongoing and toxic comparison to others by using a reference point that isn't relevant.

Are there times when a comparison to others is implicit to the task? Sure. We see it all the time in sports. But that doesn't equate to your value in being you. Finishing second might mean that you have more work to do, and not that you are not good enough to do the work or are just not good enough, period. Are there times when we are wrong? Sure. However, the fear of being wrong is overwhelming to some. Being wrong might mean that you have more to learn. Both scenarios signify that in this moment, on this measure, you are not as skilled as you aspire to be. The task at hand is to learn from the experience. The beauty of life is in owning who we are and aspiring to be better.

I've seen the struggle with patients, with colleagues, with students, and within myself. I am the first to say that I want to be the best version of me. I am the only person that is me and the only person that can be me, so I need to use my reference points to establish what a good version of me looks like. I am the one that defines what success looks like - to me. It's my path, I get to define my journey. However, I also need to live with some grace - I can't always be that version of me, and in not doing so, I am not failing, I am just on a journey that has its good days and its bad days.

Many of these truisms have their roots in the words of the great Stoic philosophers like Marcus Aurelius and Epictetus. They were talking about this stuff long before it appeared in a self-help book or a TED Talk circa 150 AD, a mere 1873 years ago.

Our life is what our thoughts make it. (Marcus Aurelius)

He who lives in harmony with himself lives in harmony with the universe. (Marcus Aurelius)

There is only one way to happiness, and that is to cease worrying about things which are beyond the power of our will. (Epictetus)

No man is free who is not master of himself. (Epictetus)

I wish I'd known these things earlier in life. I wish I'd truly understood what reference points were relevant and which weren't. And I wish I knew, had been taught, or both, that we all have a superpower - and it is within us. Don't forget that your superpower is that you are you - and you, dear reader, are unique.

Just. Do. You.

Be strong in your convictions. Define what success looks like - to you. Learn from the journey. Amazingly enough, everything will work out just fine, and the people around you will be ecstatic that you did. And those that don't, well, they don't matter anyway.

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