

I hate nixsen.  
I can only do it when  
I've "earned" it, which  
means that I first have to  
do an awful lot of work.

*hans dorrestijn\**



*\* Dutch comedian and writer*

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## TOPICS

- What is *niksen*?
- Why is it so hard?
- How to teach yourself

# PREFACE

**W**elcome to *The Lost Art of Doing Nothing*—also known as *niksen*.

*Niksen* is not just any old art; it's a higher art. It's almost impossible to do nothing at all. To show you just how hard it is—and also to show you we have some street cred—we open with a quote by Blaise Pascal, a seventeenth-century French influencer. Hardly anybody is good at doing nothing, and no one can keep it up for long. Before you know it, existential questions start bubbling up that spell the end of any aimless chilling. Because the answers are probably not forthcoming, you start looking for distraction again, something to fill the time.

Nothing is so insufferable to man as to be completely at rest. . . . He then feels his nothingness.

—Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*

If not these important life questions, then your growling stomach sends you scuttling to the fridge. Suddenly you find yourself preparing a snack instead of doing nothing.

Our whole lives, Lona (who did the illustrations) and I (Maartje) have been trying to come to grips with the hustle and bustle of modern life. We listened to Oprah, who told us to live our “best life,” which is easier said than done. It implies that there is a menu, such that with hindsight you can be accused of not making the best choices. You have only yourself to blame for the fact that it hasn't all been Instagrammable. Nobody sets out to mess up, or to live their worst life. We're all searching for ways to become better people, cope with setbacks, and fight the demons in ourselves and our past. For centuries, we've been sharing our tips and tricks to do just that—including, these days, neat winning formulas: Twenty steps to happiness! Ten reasons to embrace your imperfections! On the face of it these popular lists are clear and attainable, but in reality they only add to your already overcrowded schedule. You're supposed to emerge stronger from a breakup, learn more effectively, relax more, create more me-time, exercise, eat well, do community service, have a meaningful job, start a family, and on and on. This is why Lona has been teetering on the edge of burnout since kindergarten and why I have to conquer my towering fear of failure day in and day out.

We have searched for ways to calm our churning minds and to master our sad feelings by trying all kinds of things: therapy (heartily

# 1



**Niksen  
and time**

emerge stronger and more creative. The goal is not to optimize our experience, like previous trends. Instead, we must learn to remain close to *niksen* itself.”

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## BUT WHAT ABOUT MY SCHEDULE?

**Schedules** are a necessary evil. You can't be expected to memorize every single one of your appointments. But the good news is that you're the one responsible for planning your calendar. Angela Maas, a cardiologist, says we must learn to “park” our commitments so our heart doesn't give out. One of her tips is to write down all of your tasks so you're not constantly running through them in your head. Checking tasks off your to-do list is a great feeling—it's even rewarding to list a few you've already completed, so you can cross them out right away. Green checks for the win!

Georgia Holt, the mother of singer, Oscar-winning actress, and overall icon Cher, gave her daughter this useful tip: “If it doesn't matter in five years, it doesn't matter.” Many of your problems are temporary and virtually forgotten tomorrow or next week. You may wonder whether a colleague at work hates you. It may even give you sleepless nights. But once you know that she's short-tempered with everyone, you stop thinking about it. Many worries disappear naturally, and you find that all the energy you put in is wasted.

Man often suffers most  
from the adversity he fears  
but never actually appears.  
Thus has he more to bear  
than God in His wisdom thinks fair.  
—Nicolaas Beets, nineteenth-century  
Dutch theologian

