

## BOOK

*The Power of Regret: How Looking Backward Moves Us Forward*

## AUTHOR

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## SYNOPSIS [From the publisher]

“Everybody has regrets, Daniel H. Pink explains in *The Power of Regret*. They’re a universal and healthy part of being human. And understanding how regret works can help us make smarter decisions, perform better at work and school, and bring greater meaning to our lives.

“Drawing on research in social psychology, neuroscience, and biology, Pink debunks the myth of the “no regrets” philosophy of life. And using the largest sampling of American attitudes about regret ever conducted as well as his own World Regret Survey – which has collected regrets from more than 15,000 people in 105 countries – he lays out the four core regrets that each of us has. These deep regrets offer compelling insights into how we live and how we can find a better path forward.”

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“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.” *James Baldwin, 1967*

“Four people living on three continents, each with tattoos that bear the same two words: no regrets.”

“Some beliefs operate quietly, like existential background music. Others become anthems for a way of living. And few credos blare more loudly than the doctrine that regret is foolish – that it wastes our time and sabotages our well-being.”

“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.”

“The U.S. Library of Congress contains more than fifty books in its collection with the title *No Regrets*. Embedded in songs, emblazoned on skin, and 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?”

“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.”

“Negative emotions are essential, too. They help us survive. Fear propels us out of a burning building and makes us step gingerly to avoid a snake. Disgust shields us from poisons and makes us recoil from bad

behavior. Anger alerts us to threats and provocations from others and sharpens our sense of right and wrong. Too much negative emotion, of course, is debilitating. But too little is also destructive.”

“The purpose of this book is to reclaim regret as an indispensable emotion – and to show you how to use its many strengths to make better decisions, perform better at work and school, and bring greater meaning to your life.”

“Nearly all regrets fall into four core categories – foundation regrets, boldness regrets, moral regrets, and connection regrets.”

“If the precise definition feels elusive, the reason is revealing: regret is better understood less as a thing and more as a process.”

“Human beings are both seasoned time travelers and skilled fabulists. These two capabilities twine together to form the cognitive double helix that gives life to regret.”

“It takes a few years for young brains to acquire the strength and muscularity to perform the mental trapeze act – swinging between past and present and between reality and imagination – that regret demands. That’s why most children don’t begin to understand regret until age six.”

“People without regrets aren’t paragons of psychological health. They are often people who are seriously ill.”

“The emotion becomes regret only when she does the work of boarding the time machine, negating the past, and contrasting her grim actual present with what might have been. Comparison lives at regret’s core.”

“As two Dutch scholars, Marcel Zeelenberg and Rik Pieters, put it, “People’s cognitive machinery is preprogrammed for regret.”

“When researchers reviewed competitors’ post-event television interviews, they found the bronze medalists happily humming *At Least*. “At least I didn’t finish fourth. At least I got a medal!” Silver medalists, though, were wracked with *If Only*. And that hurt.”

“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.[10] Its very purpose is to make us feel worse – because by making us feel worse today, regret helps us do better tomorrow.”

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

“Reducing cognitive biases like escalation of commitment to a failing course of action is just one way that regret, by making us feel worse, can help us do better. A look at the research shows that regret, handled correctly, offers three broad benefits. It can sharpen our decision-making skills. It can elevate our performance on a range of tasks. And it can strengthen our sense of meaning and connectedness.”

“This is one of the central findings on regret: it can deepen persistence, which almost always elevates performance.”

“Regret offers us the ultimate redemption narrative. It is as powerful and affirming as any positive emotion. But it arrives on our doorstep wearing a disguise.”