



# If Only: How to Turn Regret Into Opportunity

*Neal Roese Ph.D.*

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## **If Only: How to Turn Regret Into Opportunity** Neal Roese Ph.D.

If you spend a lot of time thinking about “what might have been,” you’re not alone. In *If Only*, Neal Roese, Ph.D., one of the world’s top scientists studying regret, shows us that thoughts about what might have been are practically unavoidable. In fact, they are produced spontaneously by the brain with a very practical goal—to guide us toward improvement. But the same thoughts can bring the pain of regret. Is it worth the pain to get the improvement? Or should you live life with no regrets?

Luckily, it’s not a package deal. The surprising message of *If Only* is that we can manage our regret style to maximize the gain and minimize the pain. In an entertaining and upbeat book that weds lively science writing to practical self-help, Dr. Roese mines the research and shares simple strategies for managing your life to make the most of regret. You’ll learn:

- **Don’t Over-react.** You may react to a regrettable situation by taking many fewer chances. Don’t. This only ensures that you will miss out on new opportunities.
- **Think Downward.** Consider the downward alternatives. How could a bad situation have gone even *worse*? This makes you feel appreciative of what you have.
- **Do It.** If you decide to do something and it turns out badly, research shows that it probably won’t haunt you down the road. (You’ll reframe the failure and move on.) But you *will* regret the things left undone.
- **Regrets are Opportunities Knocking.** Our brains produce the most “if only” thoughts about things in our lives that we can still change. So consider regret as a signal flashing: *It’s not too late!*

*If Only* also shows that “if only” thinking plays a huge role across our lives, from how best to buy, to why we enjoy movies, how juries decide, and the way we choose someone to love. *If Only* opens a new window into the way our minds work and offers clear lessons for living more happily with the past.

“Fifteen years of research have been combined into a list of the top four biggest regrets of the average American:

- not getting more education
- career regrets
- regrets in love
- not spending enough time with kids

The list is essentially a summary of the biggest traps, pitfalls, and mistakes into which people like you might blunder. Look over the list and try to identify areas of your life that represent the greatest vulnerability to future regret. And act now to avoid regret later.”

—from *If Only*

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