

# The Preparation, by Maxim Smith, Matt Smith and Doug Casey

## Introduction

Co-author Maxim Smith is the centerpiece of this book. By his telling he arrived at the age of 18 without having much of a plan of what to do in life. He was convinced that university did not make sense, but what was the alternative?

Maxim had several strong assets. He is smart, fit, handsome and has the backing of two self-made millionaires – Matt Smith, his father and Doug Casey, his father’s mentor.

While he may not have exactly been at sixes and sevens two years ago, the claim makes a nice lead-in to a pretty extraordinary story. Maxim recognized that the modern American university is overpriced, woke and politicized, and overpopulated with unimpressive midwit students. Wasting four years and blowing a quarter of a million dollars to get an American diploma would be a stupid thing to do.

## My interest as a reviewer

Many people share their view, as do I. I bought this book to educate myself about the alternatives that will be available to my own 14-year-old son.

I have a very relevant background. I was a top 300 Amazon reviewer before they deleted me for having impolitic (but, it turns out, absolutely correct) views on Covid. Among the 500 or [so reviews that I have recovered](#) are several on education:

[Disrupt this - MOOCs and the promise of technology](#)

[Exceptional Children How to raise independent, motivated kids who learn with excellence](#)

[Hacking your Education](#)

[Academically adrift limited learning on college campuses](#)

[An underground history of American education](#)

[Crash Course](#)

[The Death and Life of the Great American School System](#)

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[The dumbest generation](#)

[The nearly free University](#)

[The Overachievers](#)

[The self propelled advantage](#)

[Deutschland is auf keinem guten weg](#)

I put three millennial children through American universities in the first years of this century, encountering the shortcomings that Smith describes. After that, I took advantage of a policy of free tuition for citizens over sixty to enroll myself in a PhD program at the University of Maryland. After experiencing extreme prejudice against me as a white man in the college of education, I segued over into the statistics department, where I would have gotten my PhD had I not gotten divorced and moved to Ukraine.

Here is a [video about that career as a grad student](#), and how it incidentally brought me to Argentina, to which I considered emigrating and the Smith family lived for a while before buying their ranch in Uruguay.

### The co-authors

Maxim's father Matt Smith is a self-made man, one of four boys raised in a poor household by a single mother. Matt felt obliged to work from the age of nine just to put food on the table. He was a natural entrepreneur, and along the way taught himself the social graces needed to mix with the wealthier strata of society.

Doug Casey was born into that wealthier stratum, son of a multimillionaire real estate developer. Casey became a professional investor and 50 years ago wrote "International Man" about the benefits of living abroad. Matt Smith bumped into Doug Casey and the upscale Recoleta district of Buenos Aires several years ago. They hit it off; Matt now produces the ["Doug Casey's Take"](#) series on YouTube.

Maxim himself is handsome and well spoken. Several months ago, when this book was only a glimmer of an idea, he [showed himself well in this interview](#) on YouTube, outlining the thoughts for the book as it stood then.

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The co-authors' birth years are evenly spaced over the post-war half century. As the book describes, they follow the Roman model of patron-client, intergenerational partnerships in which both parties make a substantial contribution. Blood relative or not, the client must be worthy of the patron's attention.



I the reviewer do not come from a wealthy family and never attracted a patron. I never developed the networking skills so well described in this book, relying on luck and my analytical ability to identify good career and investment prospects. I recommend this book to my son Edward among other things because it will teach him valuable skills, especially about networking and finding a patron, that I never mastered myself.

### Dangerous?

Maxim asks “What would a young man need to do to become competent, educated, valuable, fulfilled, dangerous...” Those are all good adjectives. The last one may seem out of place. Why does one want to be dangerous?

Maxim provides a somewhat satisfying answer later in the book: “A dangerous man isn't merely able to defend himself (important as that is), but to think for himself: to critically assess and question any information he receives and even his own built-in beliefs. He is resourceful and independent. A dangerous man can chart his own course and doesn't rely on the herd for protection.

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A dangerous man is thus a man who is his own master, not dependent on income, approval, or anything else from outside. Specifically, a man who cannot be bought or cajoled into supporting something that goes against his principles.

Physical self-defense is something else. As you can see in the photograph above, none of the authors are big men, with young Maxim the smallest of the bunch. A small man has to work harder to project physical presence, which makes fitness all the more important. Whether or not he is dangerous, his bearing should be such that nobody wants to find out.

All three authors, in their individual chapters, stress a classical Greek notion of what the ideal man should be. He should be expert at several things, and familiar with many others.

### Expertise?

As part of the preparation the authors list being good at chess, poker and bridge. I see this as a romantic ideal, but not one that is likely to be realized. Except for an absolute genius, it would take many years' experience before one could sit at the table with experts in these games. I the reviewer know all three, can do all right with amateurs, but have enough sense never to mess with real experts.

My children, attending Ukrainian schools, are all exposed to chess. Though I'm not fond of the game I can beat them every time. I know what it would take to be good. The schools do not offer it. Specifically, to be good at chess you have to know the standard checkmate procedures, from king and queen through king, knight and bishop; standard combinations and maneuvers such as the fork, uncovered check, zugzwang and the like; and most importantly, the standard openings. A player should know what terms like fianchetto, King's Indian, Ruy Lopez and such mean. After years of instruction my children do not even know what they don't know. Bottom line – it takes more time than a dilettante is likely to find, among the perfection of more remunerative talents.

Moreover, bridge is a game for people of my generation, poker and chess only somewhat less so. Before investing in learning them, I would recommend that Maxim conduct a market survey. Who would he play against?

Maxim is well-situated to learn a language. He works with a Spanish-speaking foreman on his father's ranch. Just do it! You need it. But don't do it on a deadline!

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Even with such an advantage, relatively few people can master even Spanish in a matter of a just months. I could do Portuguese quickly only because I had a good knowledge of Spanish and French. And I used it, leading homebuilding projects for Habitat for Humanity in Portugal and Brazil.

On the other hand, it took me a year living in Germany to learn that language, and a year working in a Russian-speaking office to get good at that language. Absent work experience, my Ukrainian still sucks. I don't know anybody in Ukraine who speaks more languages than I. I'm neither dumb nor lazy. Learning a language is not trivial. Language absolutely belongs within The Preparation, but as an ongoing task, not a checklist item.

### Purpose of Life

Maxim writes "That goal [financial independence] can be achieved through The Preparation, but as you'll see, financial independence is a byproduct of being a man of substance and doing things that create value."

The most important message in the book is one of self-mastery. A person becomes financially independent through self-discipline. On both ends – controlling wants as well as developing the means to earn money.

The three authors propose a Stoic purpose of life. Be something, achieve something. They write very well on the differences among being, doing and having. The credo is summarized as be, do, have.

In short, if you learn to be the right kind of man, you will do productive and virtuous things, which will lead to having the kinds of things you want. The having is incidental. Get things out of order – stressing first having – is wrong. Good things will come to a good man.

The book does not address the formation of women or the question of finding, marrying and creating a family with a woman.

Another sage, speaking on the same theme, observed that "Men do. Women are." Throughout our primate history females have served as a prestigious possession. A beautiful woman **is**, and we men

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do what we have to to acquire them. In our savage past the tribal warfare rule was “Kill the men, rape the women.” Women survived, but as possessions. Men either learned how to do, or died.

Throughout history successful women have gotten what they have primarily by pleasing their mates. For women, doing and being are more or less the same. It has always been true that men earn most of the money, but women control how it is spent. Given that children are the most frequent beneficiaries of that spending, it made sense. But we should not begrudge the successful woman her gowns, massages, make-overs and such. For her, being leads to having. For men, having results from doing.

Per The Preparation, the purpose of life is to be a highly moral, highly productive and hence highly respected person. The authors do not address the biological purpose of life. Per Wikipedia, “Evolutionary fitness is the ability of an organism to survive and reproduce in its environment, thereby passing on its genes to future generations. It is measured not just by the number of offspring produced, but by the proportion of those offspring that survive to reproduce themselves.”

Per the book of Romans, “Man lives not to himself alone.” However, The Preparation only minimally addresses man’s relationship to society. These authors are not religious. Even leaving God out of the discussion, the purpose of life must be to succeed as social animals in an intact society.

These authors have dealt with a crumbling society. Matt Smith and Doug Casey fled America, a land of fractured families, for Uruguay, which remains traditional. That is a good first step. Will they let themselves become Uruguayan? Will they be content with Uruguayan grandchildren? They must recognize that they are exceptional men living in societies of ordinary mortals. At some point, via regression to the mean, their descendants will once again be ordinary people living in an ordinary society, choosing mates from among those around them. What society will that be? Will they ever form clans and tribes, to carry on the genome?

The authors write that becoming wealthy may be the easiest thing that the reader does. “We want you to become a virtuous, competent, and educated man.” With regard to ambition, “Great achievements can come to anyone, anywhere, in any situation – if they have the ambition.” “It’s up to you to decide who you want to be.”

The emphasis is on being the right kind of man, from which will flow doing the right things and having the things you need. This reviewer would add a couple of things that transcend the individual: “Be a

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credit to your society, and the parent of a rising generation within that society.” It is a question of emphasis. This book emphasizes individual improvement, like the ancient Greeks whom it consistently quotes. It does not emphasize the individual’s place in society, debt to society, or obligation to perpetuate the society through family.

### College Education

The stated theme of the book is alternatives to college education. The thesis is that a man can do a much better job of educating himself than entrusting the task to educational institutions. In this reviewer’s mind that is a given. It is a theme that runs throughout the several books on university education cited above.

The Preparation goes beyond the others in advocating learning a large range of nonacademic skills. Some are physical, such as building a home, welding and operating heavy equipment. Some are physical and mental, such as archery, marksmanship, and martial arts. The sixteen specific skills chosen for this work – they are somewhat arbitrary, and recognized to be so – are addressed in the section below entitled The Cycles.

The authors have a great appreciation for Robert Pirsig’s “Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance,” which does a wonderful job of sketching the continuum connecting very physical acts such as torquing the head bolts of a motorcycle to the rules of physics to metaphysics. Pirsig himself was echoing Herrigel’s “Zen and the Art of Archery,” a short but elegant book that limned the holistic, integral nature of the connections among an archer’s vision, muscle tone, breathing, mental state, bow, arrow, and target. The insight of the Japanese masters is that it is all one, rather like Oriental medicine is all one when compared to allopathic Western medicine.

Mastering any craft requires a Zen like integration of mind and body, subject and object. Such mastery, in turn, has as a prerequisite mastery of self. This perspective, the importance of self-mastery, is the central message of the book.

The authors show a familiarity with the canon of self-help books, works such as Napoleon Hill’s “[Think and grow Rich](#).” They do a uniquely excellent job of applying the concepts to the very real question of preparing a young man for life.

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Smith, Smith and Casey's contempt for contemporary American university education is not a matter of ignorance but out of familiarity and disdain. "However, non-STEM courses often fill minds with harmful ideologies requiring years to unlearn. Formal college courses like gender studies, sociology, government, and psychology usually amount to indoctrination, with approximately zero value in the real world." They acknowledge that there was a day when "colleges were generally small, serious, and selective. That's no longer the case."

They write that "If you do go to a college surrounded by the smart, connected, and rich— and get to know them— great. Some might become friends for life. But you don't need to go to college to meet those kinds of people." They observe that for the most part such people will just be drones from well-to-do families. "In other words, the second biggest reason for going to college— making connections— is as much of a chimera and delusion as the main reason: getting an education."

As a reviewer I add that nobody I met in three stints in the University has been useful to me in my life.

"In college you'll gain only a limited amount of knowledge and very few skills with direct application in the real world."

"School is the central experience of the first 22 years of your life. For some people the first 24 or 26 years— a third of your life. Sure, you gain some basic knowledge, at least via osmosis, through logging many hours sitting behind a desk. But it's a painfully suboptimal way to prepare for life. The fact of the matter is that once you're competent at reading, writing, and arithmetic, the whole world of knowledge is open to you."

The advantages of charting your own course, advocated by The Preparation, are "One, you'll be learning from some of the very best teachers in the world. Two, you won't suffer the distractions of being surrounded by teenagers. Most of them have little knowledge, experience, or wisdom, but lots of bad habits."

*Blogger Chris Irons, known on YouTube as Quoth the Raven, has a contempt for education that is so delicious it is worth sharing. About his blog, he writes: "You are on your own. Do not make decisions based on my blog. I exist on the fringe. If you see numbers and calculations of any sort, assume they are wrong and double check them. I failed Algebra in 8th grade and topped off my high school math accolades by getting a D- in remedial Calculus my senior year, before becoming an English major in college so I could bullshit my way through things easier."*

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*“The publisher does not guarantee the accuracy or completeness of the information provided in this page. These are not the opinions of any of my employers, partners, or associates. I did my best to be honest about my disclosures but can’t guarantee I am right; I write these posts after a couple beers sometimes. I edit after my posts are published because I’m impatient and lazy, so if you see a typo, check back in a half hour. Also, I just straight up get shit wrong a lot. I mention it twice because it’s that important. “*

*IMHO he is one of the few bloggers who understands what is happening as the financial world collapses. It is obvious from the disclaimer here that he figured out early on what a sham the educational system was. He educated himself about investing in the course of a decade working as a barista and such. He knows himself.*

### Be, Do, and Have.

The authors again stress their “Be, do, have” credo. “It’s great to have lots of things, as long as you don’t let them capture you.”

On doing: “Verbs (there are thousands of them) include thinking, working, creating, traveling, and enjoying. Verbs are more important than nouns in life.”

Being is at the core: “The result, the end phenomenon, should be serenity, confidence, strength of character, self-actualization, and a sense of inner power.”

This is a Greek philosophy of the individual, atomistic. To this reviewer, the goal of life is the perpetuation of one’s genome, within one’s own society. We are only links in the chain, not the end product. Frank Salter authored my touchstone book, [“On Genetic Interests”](#), reviewed [in this video](#).

The authors summarize the theme of be, do, have in a few sentences. “We can’t promise that all the Have and Do elements of the Preparation will get you to Be.” “Having things is only a consequence of doing.” “Do” is what is in your control right now. Doing things results in having things. And having things makes it easier to do more things: a positive feedback loop.

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They might add that "Do" includes being a responsible spouse and father, raising the next generation to be "evolutionarily fit," i.e. having their own families.

They write "We believe parents should— ideally— homeschool their children. Does it make sense to shunt them off to an institution manned by employees for eight hours a day?" My answer, from personal experience, would be that this is true in the USA because schools are such a disaster. I have been a teacher and had [planned to homeschool](#) my children in Kyiv.

I am happy to say that it turns out my children are better off in Ukrainian public schools. They are among peers, able to mature as individuals. Most remarkably, the technical education my 9<sup>th</sup>-grade son is getting - and being encouraged to acquire on his own - is better than what I was able to offer him when during Covid, when homeschooling was forced on us.

I agree when the authors ask of the university "Is it worth four years of time and a quarter million dollars? I think not." But there are changes in latitude, changes in attitude. In Ukraine it will cost much, much less. The greatest costs will be opportunity costs.

American universities are infused with a heavy-handed Marxist, anti-male, anti-white bias. This bias exists as well in Western Europe, but not in Ukraine. While American Universities do all they can to disrupt old-boy networks, and male bonding, here it is quite the opposite.

Much of the leadership of the rising generation that will be rebuilding the country is funneled through three Kyiv universities: Shevchenko, Kyiv Mogilyanska and Kyiv Polytechnic. Connections will be many and valuable. We can still weave in The Preparation, but not in such strong preference over classroom work.

The authors write that "The idea of paying an institution for an education is foolish. Education is something that you do for yourself." This is of course true. In Ukrainian and Russian the verb to learn is to "teach yourself." The professor is only a catalyst, sometimes effective, often not. The Preparation makes it clear that a young man cannot place the responsibility for his own education on anybody but himself.

As the philosopher, Epictetus said, "The world turns aside for the man who knows where he is going."

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On the subject of knowing where you are going, the authors quote René Girard: ““Man is the creature who does not know what to desire, and he turns to others in order to make up his mind. We desire what others desire because we imitate their desires.” This is profound. Our actual needs are simple and easily satisfied. If we can control our wants, we are the masters of ourselves.

Continuing on this theme, “As a good rule of thumb, don’t ever climb someone else’s ladder. If you’re going to climb, build your own ladder, one that leads to where you know you want to go.” In particular, don’t climb somebody else’s corporate ladder just because it is there. Make your own. It will lead to someplace you want to go, probably a lot further up. “Forget jobs for a moment. A job is just a way to make money. The real question is: What kind of man do you want to become?”

### Finding a Mentor

The authors write “If there’s one truth about achieving everything you want in life, it’s this: you can’t do it entirely alone.” While not totally true, it is true enough. You might win at Powerball and be smart enough not to waste the billion dollars, but don’t count on it!

I the reviewer have been successful without a mentor. As my online biography relates, I was lucky on many counts; my son should not trust to luck. I bought this book in the hope that my he will be motivated to find a mentor. Or rather, per these authors, a Roman-style patron.

The authors are absolutely right about debt: “With no savings you’ll always be dependent on the next paycheck just to keep going. You’re trapped, subject to the whims of your boss. Whether you love or loathe your job, you must keep it to assure the next fix.” “What’s worse is going into credit card debt, spending more than you earn. This isn’t just irresponsible. It’s theft.” It is a lack of self-discipline.

The authors do give credit to speculation and well-informed luck. “That said, buying Bitcoin is not an investment. It generates no cash flow. When we buy Bitcoin, we do so speculating that the price will go up. I bought Bitcoin in early 2016 for under \$ 500. “ “The price of Bitcoin surged 40x to nearly \$ 20,000 by the end of 2017 before entering a major correction– something normal for speculative assets. Speculative assets go from deeply undervalued to way overpriced and back again all the time. This wild mispricing is where a speculator finds his opportunity. As I write this now, Bitcoin is knocking on the door of \$ 100,000 a 200x from February 2016.”

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The authors make it clear that even if one has been so lucky as to have bought Bitcoin a decade ago, or won at Powerball, it does not absolve him of the obligation to be a man in full, and to do something of value in society. A person is defined by his character, not his possessions. The kernel of their message remains that self-discipline is essential if a person is to retain the benefit of whatever luck comes his way.

“Wealth isn’t an accident; it’s the result of deliberate choices. Make yourself valuable. Invest aggressively in learning practical skills that create value for others. Your time and energy are your greatest assets right now— use them to build capabilities that the market rewards. More valuable means more productive. The next section in this book we’ll provide a specific framework to guide you, including lists of courses, books, and activities. If you take The Preparation seriously, you’ll not only know much more than your peers, you’ll be able to do things they can’t imagine. Your productive capacity will dwarf others, as will the benefits you accrue. Live with the future in mind; with a low time preference. Avoid debt, it’ll trap you. Save like your future depends on it. Because it does. Begin with whatever you can— 10%, 30%, 50% of your income. Store it in real money like gold that can’t be printed away. Don’t ever gamble with your savings. But, remember that rational speculations and intelligent investments can help you get ahead.”

### The Cycles

The ostensible subject of the book is the program of sixteen cycles of activity. These are the 16 that Maxime has chosen for himself in this book.

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### Maxim's 16 cycles

Cycle 1: Medic – become the one who can save a life

Cycle 2: Pilot – take to the skies and learn to command

Cycle 3: Cowboy – master the grit of the old West

Cycle 4: Builder – build a house, build your confidence

Cycle 5: Chef – taste history and cook like a pro

Cycle 6: Heavy equipment operator – move mountains (literally)

Cycle 7: Work cycle – seize the opportunity and dive into real-world work

Cycle 8: Welder – forge your future with fire and steel

Cycle 9: Fighter – train like a warrior (Muay Thai in Thailand)

Cycle 10: Sailor – conquer the high season find true North

Cycle 11: Survivalist – thrive in the wild and toughen up

Cycle 12: Farmer – cultivate the land and reap hard-won wisdom

Cycle 13: Entrepreneur – launch a venture and learn the art of bringing new possibilities into profitable reality

Cycle 14: Investor – make your money work for you

Cycle 15: Hacker – build the future without writing code

Cycle 16: Maker – Fablab mastery.

One glance will tell you that this is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Whereas every young man will benefit from pursuing a number of cycles similar to these, this particular list will probably not be appropriate for anybody but Maxim himself. So what? As he writes in the introduction of the book, a man should have his own plan, and not simply mimic somebody else's.

Maxim would budget about two months per cycle. His description indicates that there is quite a bit of overlap and what he plans. He will be satisfying several other named objectives as he goes through the cycles. He will be learning Spanish as he develops his skills as a farmer, entrepreneur and cowboy. He will be playing poker and bridge for fun.

Every software coder or homebuilder knows that there is always a discrepancy between "as designed" and "as built." Maxim's plan will certainly evolve as he goes through it... and for the better. It would be silly, should he prove successful as an entrepreneur, call it quits just when his business becomes successful just because two months are up!

His entrepreneurial plan, by the way, involves the use of aerial drones to survey ranchland to determine the requirements for fertilizer and such, then use drones again to apply what is needed to the land. Agricultural robotics are a very promising field. It would not be a failure were he to decide that applying fertilizer was better done via wheeled robots, or that weeding would be better done via

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laser robots than pesticides, or that commercially available satellite images would be cheaper than those captured by drones? Absolutely not! You continue to improve as you go!

He could well decide that it would make sense to design and build his robots rather than buy them, or have them manufactured abroad, or whatever. An entrepreneur's mind should always be weighing alternatives.

It would appear highly likely that his entrepreneurial ambitions would verge into investment opportunities. He is very likely to investigate purchasing robotic equipment from companies that it would make sense to invest in. I write from experience, having invested in Oracle and Cisco after working with their products in the 1990s as a computer consultant.

Maxim is not offering a blueprint, only the observation that a young man needs his own blueprint. His message, in fact, is to reject other people's blueprints and make your own.

### Keeping a log

Maxim [writes a weekly summary](#) of his accomplishments. This discipline serves several purposes, among which are:

1. It keeps him focused on his objectives
2. It forces him to reflect on whether or not he is making progress
3. It forces him to express himself in writing, something many young men find difficult to do
4. It is an efficient means of remaining in contact with his network of supporters
5. It provides a historical reference.

The virtue of keeping a diary has been recognized since the days of the Greeks. Maxim is simply using modern tools.

### Conclusion

This is an essential book for a young man. The central message is that he must take control of his life. Make your own plans. Don't adopt other people's notions of success, but rather define your own. From this, Maxim expects that you will conclude, as he did, that you are far better off to plan to educate yourself rather than mindlessly follow the herd, slogging through the expensive, stultifying course proposed by American academia.

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