

Ghostbusters

Procrastination, and postponing important things is common for law enforcement officers. We tell ourselves “I’ll do that later... after this assignment, after this unit, after retirement.” We start to suspect that we are setting ourselves for a lot of regret... We are, in this article I talk about the tool that prevents the biggest regret of all “wasting your life”.

Whether you believe in them or not, ghosts are a big part of our culture. Every tourist destination seems to have a “ghost tour.” You can’t flip through TV channels without seeing at least one ghost hunting or paranormal investigation show.

Have you ever thought about what ghosts represent? What the real fear or dread is behind the spooky ghost stories? What is it that simultaneously makes them so interesting and the idea behind them so chilling?

Ghosts, poltergeists, and ill-tempered spirits almost universally share the same origin story. It doesn’t matter if they are haunting a swamp down south or an apartment building in New York City. They were all once people who died. When they came to their end, they had unfinished business. Sometimes their demise occurred in some unfair way, and they seek revenge. Sometimes they are searching for something or someone that has been lost. Other times they are just lost and can’t seem to find their path to the other side, clinging to objects or locations that they knew in life. While they scare us and manifest in terrifying ways, they are also sympathetic characters. Something bad happened to them; usually, they were victims in some way. We feel bad for them, we pity them, but we also fear them.

We don’t fear ghosts because of what they might do to us; instead, we worry about becoming one of them—living an incomplete life and facing eternity in an unresolved state. The worry is that our lives will finish before we are done living. That is the unnamed fear and existential dread that keeps many people awake at night and what ghosts represent that we find so horrifying. If it happened to them, it could happen to us.

Luckily we have the original Ghostbusters to help us out. The ancient Stoics wrote a lot about this fear and the weapons that you can use against the ghosts. Sorry, they didn’t issue young philosophers proton packs and ghost traps. Their weapons were ideas and practices that can fend off what these spooky ghosts represent.

Memento Mori (contemplation of your own mortality) is the main weapon in this arsenal. This involves spending some time each day thinking about how short life is and that we all die at some point. Instead

of looking away, cowering in fear, or refusing to acknowledge it, the Stoics suggest looking it in the eye, accepting it, and understanding that death is part of life. The idea isn't to dwell on death or be morbid. The idea is to face it, since once you really look at something it becomes less scary. It is also a powerful motivator. Realizing that you don't have an unlimited amount of time to accomplish your goals pushes you to get busy working toward them. Realizing that you don't have forever with the people that you care about motivates you to spend time with them, be grateful for them, and love them while you still have time.

Those motivating factors that Memento Mori provides are the same things that keep us from becoming ghosts or spirits with unfinished earthly business. When we get serious about our lives and do the things we are here to do, we generally accomplish those things. When we love and appreciate the people in our lives on a daily basis, there is nothing left unsaid, no feelings left unexpressed.

By using this Stoic weapon against ghosts, you can ensure that you have zero chance of becoming one yourself. Not only will you reach the afterlife with no unfinished business, but your life will be much more enjoyable in the process.

“Let us prepare our minds as if we'd come to the very end of life. Let us postpone nothing. Let us balance life's books each day. The one who puts the finishing touches on their life each day is never short of time.”

— Seneca

“It is not death that a man should fear, but rather he should fear never beginning to live.”

— Marcus Aurelius

“Don't behave as if you are destined to live forever. What's fated hangs over you. As long you live and while you can, become good now.”

— Marcus Aurelius

Amor Fati
- Sgt. Steve