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No Impact Man: The Adventures Of A Guilty Liberal Who Attempts To Save The Planet, And The Discoveries He Makes About Himself And Our Way Of Life In The Process



Synopsis

What does it really take to live eco-effectively? For one year, Colin Beavan swore off plastic and toxins, turned off his electricity, went organic, became a bicycle nut, and tried to save the planet from environmental catastrophe while dragging his young daughter and his Prada-wearing wife along for the ride. Together they attempted to make zero impact on the environment while living right in the heart of Manhattan, and this is the sensational, funny, and consciousness-raising story of how they did it. *With No Impact Man*, Beavan found that no-impact living is worthwhile--and richer, fuller, and more satisfying in the bargain.

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Customer Reviews

I found it incredible that he was in a tailspin right from the start over a runny nose! That "normal" for him was eating take-out or restaurant food every meal, or that his wife was well into the year before she stopped her constant buying--and never did stop drinking coffee. How about a book for the rest of us--those of us who already buy used, and cook our own meals? In a way, this book does a disservice to the environment movement. By making the assumption that it's an "all or nothing" process, he glosses over the hundreds of millions who could use some guidance in real decisions that may be smaller than reading by beeswax candlelight, but are tremendously important. For example, those of us who don't live in New York City, where things are within walking or bicycling (or scootering) range, probably could use a little more discussion of transportation. I live in a suburb of Houston. Every morning schoolbuses roll by half empty, while the kiddies ride in gas guzzling

SUVs. Every afternoon, there's a 2-block-long lineup of those SUVs along the streets around every school in the area, engines idling to keep the air conditioning going most months of the year. Why not exchange some of his endless soul searching for a little prodding to change this scene? And why does he get so offended when people continue to ask what he uses instead of toilet paper? He's proud of his increased sex life when the television is switched off for the year; what's so terrible about saying that he uses a bidet, or the phone book, or whatever? Still, I didn't rate it lower because he DOES get points for trying, and for doing his best to make it work. And for trying to make others think about their own impacts.

To be fair, there were parts of this rambling part-memoir, part lecture on environmental impact. But ultimately, the book amounts to little more than a false bill of goods. When you sit down with a book called "No Impact Man," you expect to see... well, a little bit of "no impact" -- or at least an honest attempt at it. But here we have Mr. Beavan immediately breaking his own arbitrary rules. Despite a seven-phase roll-out, we find him breaking rules immediately on the first day, blowing his nose on disposable tissues and changing his daughter's disposable diapers. And then there are the endless compromises. They still take the train to see family, but only two times instead of four. They don't go out to eat in restaurants -- except when friends invite them out. They never give up certain creature comforts that can't be sourced locally (like coffee). They achieved some big successes, but I chalk a lot of that up to circumstance and location. As New Yorkers, they are able to walk/bike to work, the nanny, the grocery store, etc. While I don't wish for anyone to suffer, this project demands some creative workarounds, and I don't feel like we really get a taste of that until "Phase 7" (no electricity), when the family has to put some real effort and innovation into living life off the grid. And when the project concludes, Breavan informs us that his wife and daughter immediately book a cross-country plane trip to see her parents (after lecturing multiple times throughout the book that one flight like this creates a larger carbon footprint than an entire year of driving). The overall effort is to be applauded at times, but ultimately we are left with "Lower Impact Man Who Tries Really Hard Most of the Time." He further muddles the narrative with his patchwork religious philosophy (he claims to be Jewish but spends most of the time quoting "zen masters") and recounting family tragedies that are heartfelt but don't really belong in this story. Too much navel gazing and not a big enough "no impact" lifestyle attempt, in my opinion.

While this book had its interesting point, I thought the writer was forcing meaning out of simple changes. It took him a full day to realize that the reusable replacement for a tissue was a

handkerchief, and he spent entirely too much time soul-searching, at least for my taste. The simple fact of the matter is that no one can have no impact, it's just not possible to live like that. But instead of finding the healthiest, easiest ways to be environmentally friendly, the author wastes pages on questioning the world's methods, people's sanity, and where our values have gone. The book felt preachy and slightly self-righteous. I also thought the author was unable to face all the facts of life, especially as he never addresses what he uses instead of toilet paper. An immature topic, but one that is necessary. Overall the book was too long, too detailed in things I had no interest in, and not detailed enough in actual life-style changes. I also found it a little frustrating that by the end of the book the author feels guilty taking mass-transit and keeping more than one light on. I'm all in favor of reducing one's impact, but at a certain point it just seems silly to completely ignore modern technology, especially as that technology becomes more earth-friendly.

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