



READING GROUP GUIDE

1. *Please Unsubscribe, Thanks!* begins in 2020, when the world was brought to a standstill due to the coronavirus pandemic, a period during which many people were forced to sit still, reevaluate, and rebuild.

What was your experience during those months? Immediately after? Did you step back from certain aspects of your life, or question your habits or outlooks? Did you feel stress? Did you feel relief? What did you learn about yourself? What did you feel you wanted to change in your life and/or in that of your family?

2. In this book, Gambuto takes us through the process of “unsubscribing” from the various commitments, relationships, and ideas that keep us and our lives on autopilot and that block us from sources of true satisfaction—but acknowledges that it’s not easy. In fact, it may take a while, or be a practice that you have to return to from time to time.

What makes you nervous about unsubscription? What anxieties or fears does the idea provoke? What doubts do you have? How easy or difficult do you think it would be to do this? Are there certain ideas that are easier and more doable for you?

3. The idea of modern life being “relentless” appears frequently throughout *Please Unsubscribe, Thanks!* and becomes one of the main reasons why Gambuto feels compelled to make a change in his life.

What in your life feels relentless? It can be as simple as the number of email newsletters in your inbox, or the amount you are expected to travel for work, or the numerous daily demands of having a family.

4. Gambuto was inspired to write his *Medium* piece, “Prepare for the Ultimate Gaslighting” after sensing an emerging narrative of “going back to normal”—but, he thought, what is “normal”? What is “normal” to you? Think about (and list, if you’d like) what you consider to be the “normal” responsibilities you have and/or expectations to which you are held. What does “normal” life feel and look like to you?

Now, consider that list. Which responsibilities or expectations did you create? Which ones were put upon you? By whom? Which are carried out with joy? Which out of obligation? How do these different categories make you feel, and how do you approach them? If you could get rid of any of the expectations or responsibilities you have on those lists, which would they be?

5. In the opening chapter of the book, Gambuto explains that the American idea of “the pursuit of happiness” is central to our modern struggles with finding balance and getting ourselves off autopilot, because our idea of “happiness” changes as we participate more and more in capitalism and consumerism.

Think about what your idea of “happiness” was at different stages of your life, and what it is now. Has it changed? Have different or new factors been introduced? And what larger forces may have influenced that vision? Where do you get your ideas about what constitutes happiness?

6. Another big theme in *Please Unsubscribe, Thanks!* is our relationship with technology, and how individual interactions add up to influence balances of power. We live in an age, the author says, of “click-up economics,” a process in which our spending is accelerated and our needs are immediately met, but at the cost of putting disproportionate power in the hands of those governing those systems.

Consider your relationship with technology—what it might offer you and how it might improve your life. Then, consider what power and information you may be giving away through those interactions. Do you agree that there is a larger issue at play, or that it is just the price of living in a modern information age?

7. “The Big Forces”—Big Tech, Big Banks, Big Brands, Big Media, and the Big Parties, which interacts with all of them—are the entities we fight against when we decide to unsubscribe. They rely on our automated behaviors and subscriptions to survive and grow, ultimately keeping us in loops that don’t serve us, or make us happy.

Which big force, in your opinion, is the most problematic, or holds the most outsized influence, in today's world? What are some ways that we can take power back?

8. How we define and sustain relationships, Gambuto argues in this book, has also been impacted by the language and outlooks of the Big Forces. Dating and marriage is an “investment”; people online are “brands” that we follow; colleagues become “work spouses” who know personal details of our home lives. These blurred lines and misapplied definitions have turned human bonding into its own kind of subscription, with terms and conditions of commitment—and it usually means we are spending time and energy on the wrong people.

Turn to page 132 in your book, where there is a diagram of “The Dartboard.” Organize your various interpersonal relationships by the categories it outlines, as they exist now, and organize the rings to reflect their level of importance and influence in your life. Then, create a second dartboard, with the ideal distribution and categorization of those same relationships. What are the similarities between the two? The differences?

9. Our subscriptions within a work environment is a huge part of *Please Unsubscribe, Thanks!*—and certainly, all of our daily lives. Work is likely the most difficult space to unsubscribe in, because (unless we are a manager or boss or business owner) we don't always have power as an individual, and work is a financial necessity for many.

What options laid out by Gambuto in the work chapter felt helpful and realistic? What are ways that you can adjust your relationship to your job (if that is something you would like to do) without going to extremes? And at what point do you think an extreme might be necessary?

10. Gambuto argues that ideas, notions, personal philosophies, and beliefs are also all subscriptions, and they, perhaps more than anything else, shape our experience as we move through the world. In chapter twelve, Gambuto introduces the “sticky story,” a narrative that stays with you and becomes a central part of your outlook, and the author en-

courages a repositioning of those stories to understand which might be helpful and which might be harmful.

What is your stickiest story? How has it motivated you, helped you, formed you—or maybe held you back? And what subtle or significant changes can you make to that narrative to make sure it's serving you well?

11. “The Dark Well” is the period after the unsubscribe, a time of transition and realignment when everything settles in. Whether or not you have embarked upon your unsubscribe process yet, or reached the Dark Well, what seems to you like it would be the hardest thing to lose and/or sit without? What could you replace it with? How might you best cope with not having it?

12. There is great opportunity for individual renewal in “The Great Unsubscribe,” but Gambuto explains that, if everyone came together in that experience, we could create collective change as well. What do you think we are most in need of as a family, school, work, local, national, global community, and how do you think unsubscribing could help?

13. If you have gone through a process of unsubscribe: how do you feel now? What were the hardest parts, and what surprised you as being perhaps a little bit easier to let go of? If you haven't embarked on the journey quite yet, what are you hoping to accomplish?

