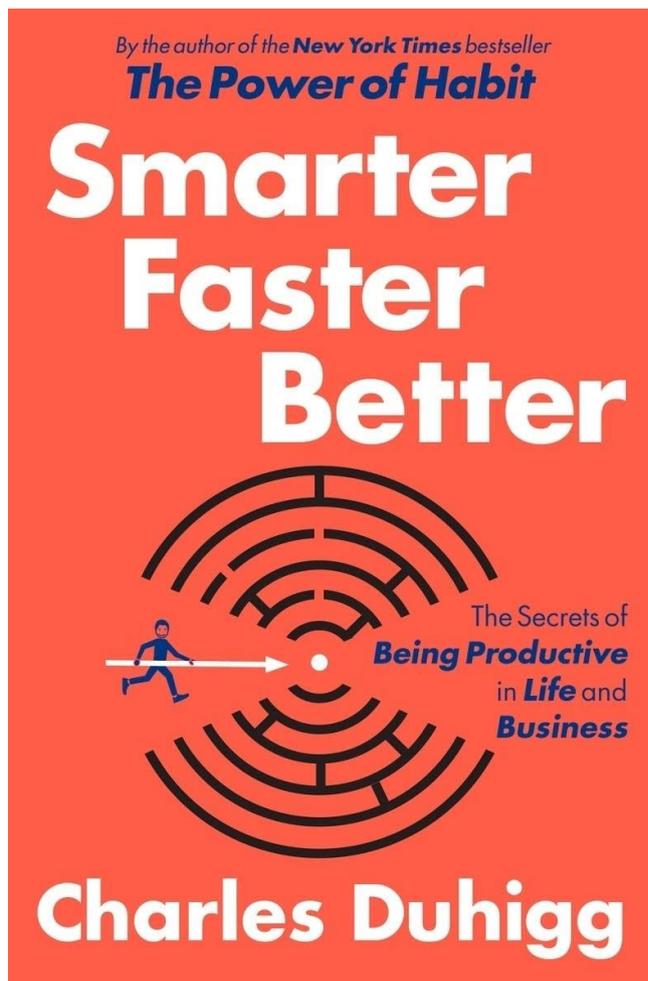


Charles Duhigg: Smarter Faster Better Book Summary



Written Summary <http://bestbookbits.com/charles-duhigg-smarter-faster-better-book-summary/>

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- “Productivity put simply, is the name we give our attempts to figure out the best uses of our energy, intellect, and time as we try to seize the most meaningful rewards with the least wasted effort.”
- “Motivation is more like a skill, akin to reading or writing, that can be learned and honed.”
- “The trick [to motivation], researchers say, is realizing that a prerequisite to motivation is believing we have authority over our actions and surroundings. To motivate ourselves, we must feel like we are in control.”
- “When people believe they are in control, they tend to work harder and push themselves more.”
- “One way to prove to ourselves that we are in control is by making decisions.”
- “The first step in creating drive is giving people opportunities to make choices that provide them with a sense of autonomy and self-determination.”
- “This is a useful lesson for anyone hoping to motivate themselves or others because it suggests an easy method for triggering the will to act: Find a choice, almost any choice, that allows you to exert control.”
- “Motivation is triggered by making choices that demonstrate to ourselves that we are in control. The specific choice we make matters less than the assertion of control.”
- “Researchers have found that people with an internal locus of control tend to praise or blame themselves for success or failure, rather than assigning responsibility to things outside their influence.”
- “People with an internal locus of control tend to earn more money, have more friends, stay married longer, and report greater professional success and satisfaction.”
- “Studies show that someone’s locus of control can be influenced through training and feedback.”
- “The students who had been praised for their intelligence—who had been primed to think in terms of things they could not influence—were much more likely to focus on the easier puzzles during the second round of play, even though they had been complimented for being smart. They were less motivated to push themselves. They later said the experiment wasn’t much fun. In contrast, students who had been praised for their hard work—who were encouraged to frame the

experience in terms of self-determination—went to the hard puzzles. They worked longer and scored better. They later said they had a great time.”

- “If you can link something hard to a choice you care about, it makes the task easier. Make a chore into a meaningful decision, and self-motivation will emerge.”
- “If you give people an opportunity to feel a sense of control and let them practice making choices, they can learn to exert willpower. Once people know how to make self-directed choices into a habit, motivation becomes more automatic.”
- “Moreover, to teach ourselves to self-motivate more easily, we need to learn to see our choices not just as expressions of control but also as affirmations of our values and goals.”
- “The choices that are most powerful in generating motivation, in other words, are decisions that do two things: They convince us we’re in control and they endow our actions with larger meaning.”
- “An internal locus of control emerges when we develop a mental habit of transforming chores into meaningful choices when we assert that we have authority over our lives.”
- “When we start a new task or confront an unpleasant chore, we should take a moment to ask ourselves ‘why.’”
- “Once we start asking why, those small tasks become pieces of a larger constellation of meaningful projects, goals, and values. We start to recognize how small chores can have outsized emotional rewards because they prove to ourselves that we are making meaningful choices, that we are genuinely in control of our own lives.”
- Self-motivation flourishes when we realize that replying to an email or helping a coworker, on its own, might be relatively unimportant. But it is part of a bigger project that we believe in, that we want to achieve, that we have chosen to do.
- Self-motivation is a choice we make because it is part of something bigger and more emotionally rewarding than the immediate task that needs doing.
- “Self-motivation becomes easier when we see our choices as affirmations of our deeper values and goals.”
- “Teams succeed when everyone feels like they can speak up and when members show they are sensitive to how one another feels.”
- “Cognitive tunneling can cause people to become overly focused on whatever is directly in front of their eyes or become preoccupied with immediate tasks.”

- “Once in a cognitive tunnel, we lose our ability to direct our focus. Instead, we latch on to the easiest and most obvious stimulus, often at the cost of common sense.”
- “Reactive thinking is at the core of how we allocate our attention, and in many settings, it’s a tremendous asset.”
- “Reactive thinking is how we build habits, and it’s why to-do lists and calendar alerts are so helpful: Rather than needing to decide what to do next, we can take advantage of our reactive instincts and automatically proceed. Reactive thinking, in a sense, outsources the choices and control that, in other settings, create motivation.”
- “The downside of reactive thinking is that habits and reactions can become so automatic they overpower our judgment.”

People who are particularly good at managing their attention share certain characteristics:

1. They create pictures in their minds of what they expect to see
 2. They tell themselves stories about what’s going on as it occurs
 3. They narrate their own experiences within their heads
 4. They are more likely to answer questions with anecdotes rather than simple responses
 5. They say when they daydream, they’re often imagining future conversations
 6. They visualize their days with more specificity than the rest of us do
- “Psychologists have a phrase for this kind of habitual forecasting: ‘creating mental models.’”
 - All people rely on mental models to some degree. We all tell ourselves stories about how the world works whether we realize we’re doing it or not. But some of us build more robust models than others. We envision the conversations we’re going to have with more specificity and imagine what we are going to do later that day in greater detail. As a result, we’re better at choosing where to focus and what to ignore.
 - People who are particularly good at managing their attention are in the habit of telling themselves stories all the time. They engage in constant forecasting. They daydream about the future and then when life clashes with their imagination, their attention gets snagged.
 - “Cognitive tunneling and reactive thinking occur when our mental spotlights go from dim to bright in a split second. But if we are constantly telling ourselves stories and creating mental pictures, that beam never fully powers down. It’s always jumping around inside our heads. And, as a result, when it has to flare to life in the real world, we’re not blinded by its glare.”

- “By developing a habit of telling ourselves stories about what’s going on around us, we learn to sharpen where our attention goes.”
- “If you want to make yourself more sensitive to the small details in your work, cultivate a habit of imagining, as specifically as possible, what you expect to see and do when you get to your desk. Then you’ll be prone to notice the tiny ways in which real life deviates from the narrative inside your head.”
- “Narrate your life, as you are living it, and you’ll encode those experiences deeper in your brain.”
- “It is easier to know what’s ahead when there’s a well-rounded script inside your head.”
- “Mental models help us by providing a scaffold for the torrent of information that constantly surrounds us. Models help us choose where to direct our attention, so we can make decisions, rather than just react.”
- “To become genuinely productive, we must take control of our attention; we must build mental models that put us firmly in charge.”
- “Get in a pattern of forcing yourself to anticipate what’s next.”
- “Experiments have shown that people with SMART goals are more likely to seize on the easiest tasks, to become obsessed with finishing projects, and to freeze on priorities once a goal has been set.”
- “Numerous academic studies have examined the impact of stretch goals, and have consistently found that forcing people to commit to ambitious, seemingly out-of-reach objectives can spark outsized jumps in innovation and productivity.”
- “For a stretch goal to inspire, it often needs to be paired with something like the SMART system.”
- “The reason why we need both stretch goals and SMART goals is that audaciousness, on its own, can be terrifying. It’s often not clear how to start on a stretch goal. And so, for a stretch goal to become more than just an aspiration, we need a disciplined mindset to show us how to turn a far-off objective into a series of realistic short-term aims.”
- “Stretch goals can spark remarkable innovations, but only when people have a system for breaking them into concrete plans.”
- “The problem with many to-do lists is that when we write down a series of short-term objectives, we are, in effect, allowing our brains to seize on the sense of satisfaction that each task will deliver. We are encouraging our need for closure and our tendency to freeze on a goal without asking if it’s the right aim. The result is that we spend hours answering unimportant emails instead of writing a big, thoughtful memo—because it feels so satisfying to clean out our in-box.”

- “Come up with a menu of your biggest ambitions. Dream big and stretch. Describe the goals that, at first glance, seem impossible, such as starting a company or running a marathon. Then choose one aim and start breaking it into short-term, concrete steps. Ask yourself: What realistic progress can you make in the next day, week, month? How many miles can you realistically run tomorrow and over the next three weeks? What are the specific, short-term steps along the path to bigger success? What timeline makes sense? Will you open your store in six months or a year? How will you measure your progress? Within psychology, these smaller ambitions are known as “proximal goals,” and repeated studies have shown that breaking a big ambition into proximal goals makes the large objective more likely to occur.”
- “When Pynchon writes a to-do list, for instance, he starts by putting a stretch goal—such as ‘conduct research that explains goal/neurology interface’—at the top of the page. Underneath comes the nitty gritty: the small tasks that tell him precisely what to do. ‘Specific: Download grant application. Timeline: By tomorrow.’”
- “Many of our most important decisions are, in fact, attempts to forecast the future.”
- “Good decision making is contingent on a basic ability to envision what happens next.”
- “Making good choices relies on forecasting the future. Accurate forecasting requires exposing ourselves to as many successes and disappointments as possible.”
- “How do we learn to make better decisions? In part, by training ourselves to think probabilistically.”
- “To [make better decisions], we must force ourselves to envision various futures—to hold contradictory scenarios in our minds simultaneously—and then expose ourselves to a wide spectrum of successes and failures to develop an intuition about which forecasts are more or less likely to come true.”
- “There are numerous ways to build a Bayesian instinct. Some of them are as simple as looking at our past choices and asking ourselves: Why was I so certain things would turn out one way? Why was I wrong?”
- “Innovation becomes more likely when old ideas are mixed in new ways.”

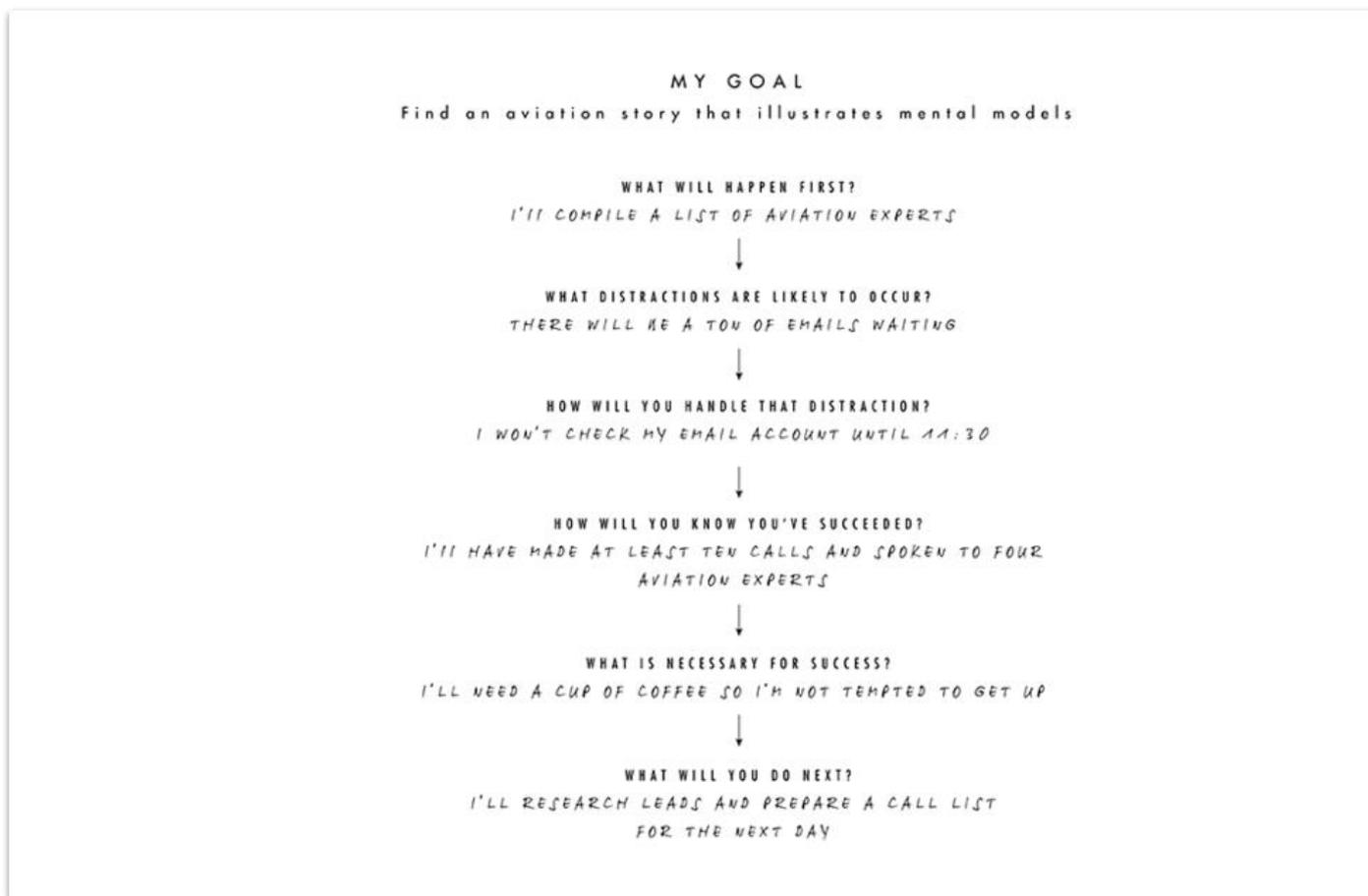
If you want to become an “innovation broker” and increase the productivity of your own creative process, there are three things that can help:

1. **First, be sensitive to your own experiences.** Pay attention to how things make you think and feel. Look to your own life as creative fodder, and broker your own experiences into the wider world.
2. **Second, recognize that the panic and stress you feel as you try to create isn’t a sign that everything is falling apart.** Rather, it’s the condition that helps make

us flexible enough to seize something new. Creative desperation can be critical; anxiety is what often pushes us to see old ideas in new ways. The path out of that turmoil is to look at what you know, to reinspect conventions you've seen work and try to apply them to fresh problems. The creative pain should be embraced.

3. **Finally, remember that the relief accompanying a creative breakthrough, while sweet, can also blind us to seeing alternatives.** It is critical to maintain some distance from what we create. Without self-criticism, one idea can quickly crowd out competitors. But we can regain that critical distance by forcing ourselves to critique what we've already done, by making ourselves look at it from a completely different perspective.

How to Stay Focused on Stretch and SMART Goals



How Charles Duhigg focused on his stretch and SMART goal when writing the book.

Key Terms

- **Bayes' rule.** The probability of an event, based on conditions that might be related to the event.
- **Cognitive tunneling.** An inattentional blindness phenomenon in which you are too focused on instrumentation, task at hand, internal thought, etc. and not on the present environment.
- **Proximal goals.** Short-term goals.

Recommended Reading

<https://www.samuelthomasdavies.com>