

# SUMMARY

## INDISTRACTABLE

NIR EYAL



# **Summary of «Indistractable» by Nir Eyal**

Written by Lea Schullery

Become the most productive person you know as you learn how to tackle distractions, from emails and social media to chatty colleagues, and figure out how you can become indistractable.



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# Introduction

In a world where we are constantly connected, our distractions in this modern world have become greater than ever. However, by learning to deal with discomfort and monitoring the triggers that distract you, you can learn to become undistractable. By exploring the psychology behind distraction, Nir Eyal offers solutions on how to reimagine your thinking and identify yourself as undistractable. By focusing on some of our largest distractions like smartphones, chatty colleagues, emails, and unproductive meetings, Eyal offers actionable advice on how to overcome these. Through planning and organization, you can use Eyal's tips to make you more productive at work, tackle your tasks, and improve yourself and your relationships.

# **Begins From Within**

We all experience it. We attempt to start something, but we find ourselves unable to finish in time because we end up becoming distracted by something else. You sit down to read the book you've been meaning to get to, but end up scrolling through your social media feed instead. You begin cleaning out that garage you've let go, but find yourself reminiscing on past times when you find old pictures and toys you haven't seen in years. So what is the cause of all this distraction? Many believe that our distractions are worse than ever since the introduction of technology, but before cell phones, people found other ways to distract themselves through doodling or daydreaming. Our minds are masters of distraction.

When it comes to distraction, you must first understand our internal and external triggers. For instance, external triggers will come in the form of outside forces that work to distract us like our cell phones or our friends. However, internal triggers are those found inside of us that prevent us from being productive like anxiety and depression. Both kinds of triggers lead to what Eyal considers traction and distraction. Traction is what moves us forward while distraction holds us back.

So why do we find ourselves blaming technology for our distractions? In reality, our minds are made for distractions, whether we want to escape an uncomfortable situation or escape the everyday stresses we encounter. Nowadays, we find ourselves turning immediately to our phones to avoid confrontation or distract ourselves from making eye contact with others around us, whether we are riding the subway or sitting in a waiting room. We turn to technology for comfort, but when we turn to our cell phones, we fail to look at the root of the problem.

As a whole, humans are meant to be uncomfortable. Being uncomfortable is what makes us learn about ourselves and grow as a person. No one became successful from staying comfortable their entire life, just take a look at our ancestors. If people centuries ago were comfortable with the way they were

living, they never would've worked so hard to achieve the advancements we have today. Behind every success is a person who left their comfort zone. However, as we have turned to technology for comfort, we have failed to learn proper coping mechanisms and we begin to dwell on the negativity and painful experiences of our lives. This, in turn, opens us up to distraction.

# Overcome Your Internal Triggers

No matter the job you have, you've certainly experienced distraction at some point. Whether it's sitting at your desk, or standing behind a counter, you're likely to fall victim to boredom or anxiety. If you find yourself becoming bored, you might pull out your cell phone and begin playing your favorite Candy Crush Saga game or scrolling the feeds of your favorite influencers. If you experience anxiety, you might reach out to a friend and start a conversation to calm your nerves. These are common internal triggers, but luckily, there are ways you can overcome them.

Why do you think you reach for your phone? Why do you choose to play that game or scroll through social media? Well, the reason is surprisingly simple. The apps on our phones are designed to be engaging, they're meant to be enticing so you are tempted to immerse yourself inside a different world. Interactive-computing expert, Ian Bogst, tells us that apps utilize a remarkably effective system that uses rewards and challenges to keep the user engaged. So why not think about your everyday tasks as an app on your phone? Make it fun! Give yourself a challenge by setting a time limit, or reward yourself after completing a task. By applying the techniques that apps use into your everyday life, you'll find yourself becoming distracted less and less.

The next key is to begin thinking about your internal triggers differently. You can do this by recognizing the urge to pick up that cell phone or spark that conversation. When you feel that sense of boredom or anxiety begin to creep out of the darkness, write it down! What triggered this feeling? Was it an encounter with your boss? A rude customer? Take note of when the feeling surfaced and try to identify when and how it occurred.

Once you begin to track your feelings, you'll be able to identify the internal triggers that aim to distract you. Another technique to calm your anxiety, as suggested by psychologist Jonathan Bricker, is to use visualization to imagine yourself sitting by a stream. Listen to the calming trickle of the

water and imagine your distractions floating away on the leaves down the stream. Visualizing your distractions being carried away will help you regain focus and tackle the task at hand.

Finally, you'll need to overcome those internal triggers like boredom and anxiety by believing in yourself. If you think that you can't keep off your phone, then chances are you won't be able to overcome the temptation. If you tell yourself that you are just lazy and can't get anything done, then you'll likely never get anything done. Words are powerful and the way you speak to yourself is key to becoming undistractable. Think about how you would speak to a friend when they become anxious, now use those same techniques to speak to yourself. You'll find that you'll be much kinder to yourself and that you have the power to overcome those distractions.

# Have a Plan

How do people achieve their goals? For instance, people that choose to lose weight. How do they overcome the temptation of distraction and hit their goal weight? They plan. They plan their workouts, their meals, and even plan their time. Once you set a plan, it becomes much easier to achieve your goals. This holds true when seeking to become undistractable as well. You must set a plan, but how should you do that?

Eyal advises that you timebox your schedule, in other words, set aside slots of time in your schedule for the completion of certain tasks. You might think that to begin timeboxing your schedule, you'll just show up to work and begin planning out your daily tasks. However, this is not the best way to begin. Instead, you should start planning out quality time with yourself. Think about it, are you doing your best at work or in your relationships if you aren't your best? To become your best self, you must set aside time for the activities you enjoy and allow you to feel your best. Whether that's setting time for yoga, therapy, hanging out with friends, or taking a painting class, schedule time for yourself. Working on yourself also means setting time aside for quality meals and a good night's sleep, both of which are important for keeping yourself mentally and physically healthy.

After you've timeboxed for yourself, it's time to schedule the time for your relationships. The people we surround ourselves with are important to who we are, so we should stop giving them our leftover time. Instead, put them at the forefront of your schedule, they deserve quality time with you. Perhaps schedule a monthly date night with your spouse, a bi-monthly outing with friends, and block out time to spend a few hours a day with your kids. Once you work on yourself and your relationships, then it's time to focus on your work.

Jobs look different to everyone. Some work the 9-5 grind for a company while others have the luxury of setting their own hours. No matter what your job looks like, you can still timebox your schedule to ensure you use

your time wisely at work. Once you set your schedule, you'll be less likely to fall prey to your distractions. Schedule some solo time in the morning, and perhaps again after lunch to catch up on the emails you were sent throughout the day.

Now that you've timeboxed your weekly schedule, you must remember that flexibility is key. While you may want your schedule to pan out perfectly each day, the reality is that there are going to be hiccups that affect your plan. It's important to recognize that interruptions will happen, and each day might look a bit different than the previous, but follow your schedule as best as you can and you'll see how indistractable you'll become.

# Tackle the External Triggers

Back in the 1980s, countries began to adopt new regulations that forbade cabin crew from speaking to the pilot about personal topics during take-off and landing. Such conversations could become a distraction during what is undoubtedly the most important part of the flight. But why is this important? Well, you can begin to tackle your external triggers by thinking about your day in this way. What parts of your day are like take-off and landing? In other words, which hours of the day are the most important? It's during these times that you must become completely undistractable, but how?

Well, in 2019, a popular meme began circling the internet. The meme was a picture of a man at his desk with a sign on his back stating "Please do not talk to me. I have no self-control and will talk to you for two hours and get no work done." Additionally, the author's wife suggested he wear a specific hat during times he doesn't want to be bothered! While both of these ideas might be a bit eccentric, you can still take away a key element: come up with a signal that lets others know that you don't want to be distracted. Maybe it's something as simple as putting your headphones on or putting a sign on your door. No matter the symbol, make it visible and make your colleagues aware of what it is. Your colleagues and those around you are external triggers, you can't control their actions and you never know when you'll get sucked into an hour-long conversation about your weekend. But you can limit these interactions with a simple symbol similar to a "Do Not Disturb" sign on a hotel room door.

Another external trigger that many of us deal with is the number of emails we receive. An office worker nowadays can receive up to 100 messages a day! Emails are a source of distraction because, like the apps on our phone, they provide an element of surprise in our day. Similar to why we enjoy scrolling apps like Facebook and Instagram, we never know what we're going to see and we crave that sense of the unexpected. You never know

when an email is going to change your day, so you may find yourself refreshing your inbox waiting to see what's new.

Eyal suggests sorting your emails into separate piles to help limit the distraction of constantly checking them. For emails that need a response by the end of the day, he puts them into a folder labeled "today." All other emails go into another folder that he gets to throughout the week. With timeboxing slots of time to respond to emails, Eyal goes through his "today" folder first and attempts to get through as many of the second folder as he can in his time allotted. Once you begin separating your emails, you'll find that emails will take up less time in your day and you become more productive at the tasks at hand.

# Office Distractions

While you may have a plan to tackle your emails and a “Do Not Disturb” symbol, sometimes that’s not enough. Offices nowadays are plagued with distractions like meetings, group chats, and online news articles that are constantly being published and shared throughout the day. How can one combat all these distractions? It seems impossible to overcome these external triggers, but there is one key: organization.

How many times have you sat through a meeting wondering, “this could’ve been an email” or “wow, that was a waste of time.” Unfortunately, it happens all the time. Employees may hold meetings for the sake of holding a meeting and nothing gets accomplished. To limit these types of meetings, Eyal suggests a company policy stating that a meeting can only be held once a detailed agenda and a digest of how to solve the problem has been submitted. An agenda and a digest will require more planning, which means a more productive meeting.

Offices nowadays also have become more connected than ever, as companies use platforms like Slack and Basecamp to chat with colleagues at any time. So now, not only are emails a source of distraction but group chats become a new source of distraction as well. It’s important to timebox your schedule to respond to chats, let your colleagues know that you may not get back to them ASAP but that you will answer them by the end of the day. This will limit your time spent on these kinds of platforms.

Does your job require you to stay up to date with the latest news and trends? In a world that is constantly changing, it’s becoming more and more important to stay relevant to today’s trending topics. But constantly scrolling through your news feed and reading articles can become a source of distraction throughout your day as well. Luckily, several apps can help you organize your cell phone and limit your time spent on these apps. For instance, apps like the Pocket app allow you to save interesting articles that you can come back to later. Todobook replaces your Facebook feed with a

news feed of your to-do list, while DFTube removes the ads and video suggestions on YouTube so you can use the app without distractions.

The organization of your apps becomes important as well as you try to limit your distractions. When you unlock your phone, what do you see first? If you're seeing apps like Snapchat, Facebook, Instagram, and Candy Crush then you are more likely to use those apps upon unlocking your phone.

Instead, put those distracting apps on a separate page of your phone. Keep those you use often but aren't distracting like Google Maps, Venmo, or Lyft and Uber on your main screen. These apps are useful, but can't distract you like games and social media can.

# The Three Pacts

Speaking of apps, many can become useful to you throughout your journey to becoming undistractable. From organization to finding people to become productive with, there are plenty of apps that are meant to actually increase your productivity.

The first step in downloading these apps is making an effort pact. Make a pact with yourself to make the effort to become undistractable. The app SelfControl blocks your access to distracting websites and creates “timeout” periods for checking your emails, which is a great resource to help you make that effort. Maybe you are one of those people who works better in groups. You need a study buddy to keep you on task. Well, apps like Focusmate pair you with a study buddy from anywhere in the world!

The next pact is a price pact. This one suggests downloading an app that takes money away from you when you fail to accomplish a task. For example, Eyal made a pact that each time he failed to go to the gym, the app would take \$100 from his bank account. This pact could certainly carry you into debt, but if you know you will incur a fine for failing to do something, then you’ll be more likely to do it! In the three years since Eyal made this insane price pact, he hasn’t had a single dime taken from his account, now that’s productive.

The final pact is an identity pact. This pact suggests that you see yourself in a positive light versus a negative one. For instance, a person who decides to give up meat might struggle to keep this pact because they haven’t yet made the full transition to becoming vegetarian or vegan. However, the identity pact suggests that you identify yourself to make yourself less likely to fall back into your old habits. If that person immediately identifies themselves as “vegetarian” then they are more likely to keep their plant-based diet since they have made it a part of their identity. Similarly, if you call yourself “undistractable” then you will be more likely to limit the distractions in your daily life.

# Raising Indistractable Kids

Nowadays it's become the norm to walk into a restaurant and find a family enjoying dinner together, but the kids are glued to a cell phone or a tablet completely distracted from the conversation at hand. Of course, parenting is hard and sometimes a quiet kid glued to a screen is easier to handle than a crazy child that won't sit still. But still, let's dig into the root of why kids enjoy becoming glued to their screens.

Human behavior researchers Richard Ryan and Edward Deci suggest that becoming reliant on technology is an indicator of psychological undernourishment. Simply put, this means that kids these days are no longer getting the stimulation they need to thrive. Children need autonomy, the ability to make uncoerced decisions; competence, the ability to learn and improve; and relatedness, the ability to relate meaningfully to others. Unfortunately, many children are no longer receiving these three elements of life as they move through the stresses of school. With increased testing and higher expectations, children are under more pressure than ever to succeed. So, to cope with these stresses, children are turning to their online world to escape.

Our kids need tools, just like us, to nurture their imaginations. Studies show that having unstructured playtime is vital to a child's development; therefore, it's important to schedule regular playdates with other kids. Additionally, children should have a say in how they spend their time. Communicate with your children about the dangers of technology and ask them what they think is a good amount of screen time. Once you come to a solution, you can help your child manage their external triggers as well and nurture the pacts they make with themselves. For instance, Eyal's daughter learned to set the kitchen timer to track the amount of time she spent watching Netflix, all on her own at just five-years-old!

Many of us might think our children are too young, but they are capable of learning the dangers of technology at a young age, and once you open that

line of communication, your child will see the importance of setting boundaries.

# Final Summary

As our world becomes more technology-driven, we find ourselves blaming said technology for increasing our distractions and hindering us from completing tasks. But to understand why we become easily distracted is to dive into the psychology behind distraction. With internal and external triggers, it's important to find out what sparks your boredom and anxiety to overcome your internal triggers of distractions. External triggers can be just as difficult to overcome as it becomes increasingly difficult to get work done in an age of constant connectivity. However, with the advice from Nir Eyal, you can conquer your external triggers through simple techniques like planning and organization. Additionally, once you tackle your own distractions, you can teach others and your children how to ultimately become undistractable.



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