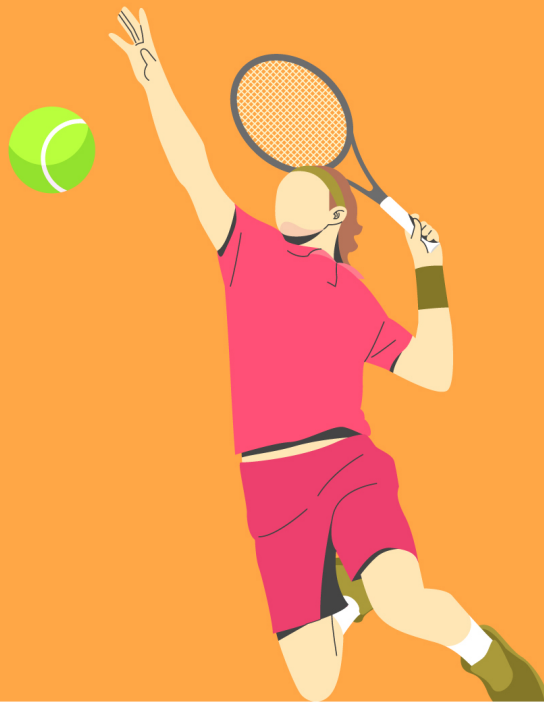


# SUMMARY

## THE INNER GAME OF TENNIS

W. TIMOTHY GALLWEY



# Summary of “The Inner Game of Tennis” by W. Timothy Gallwey

Written by Alyssa Burnette

You’ve heard how life is like a box of chocolates-- now get ready to learn how life is really like a game of tennis.

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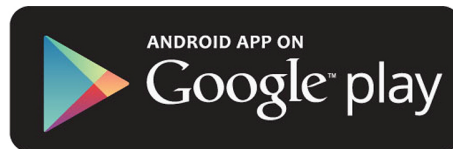
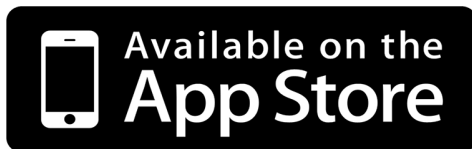


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# Introduction

What makes you feel like a winner? If you've ever played a sport-- especially tennis-- then you know that that winning feeling can't be achieved without hard work. And (to an extent) that's true, whether you're trying to win in sports or at life. But there's another secret to success out there and it's one we often discount to our detriment. That's because trusting our instincts can be more beneficial than we might imagine, especially when it comes to defeating our inner battles. And although that battle might look different for everyone, it's driven by the same core conflict: our struggle to keep our doubts and anxieties from overwhelming us so much that we can't function. So, through the course of this book, we're going to take a look at Gallwey's top tips to help you rise above that chatter in your head. We'll learn about his theory that life is like a game of tennis and we'll unpack the logic behind his belief that trusting your instincts can help you win at the game of life.

# Win the Internal Fight

Do you ever feel like there's two of you? Like there are two selves-- a logical, rational one and one filled with doubt and negativity-- in your head battling for control of your mind? If you do, you're not alone! Everybody feels that way and everybody fights that battle. But it gets even more intense when you're trying to do something important, especially if it's something competitive and disciplined like playing a professional game of tennis. The author argues that tennis matches are a perfect example of this inner battle in action, because unless you win the fight in your head, you'll never win the game on the court.

So, how do you beat that negative internal opponent? Many players might tell you that it can only be accomplished by finding a good coach, one who can give you the right training and tell you the right things. However, Gallwey disagrees. In these cases, he argues that being told what to do is often counterintuitive. Advice like, "Chill out! Relax!" or "Don't be so nervous!" is rarely helpful because, for an anxious person, it's the equivalent of, "Don't think of a white elephant!" In fact, the more advice is lobbed at you, the harder it will be to cut through the noise and focus on what you truly need to do.

Instead, the author suggests learning to let your thoughts come and go without judgment. Rather than criticizing your doubtful self or telling it to go away, he argues that we need to accept both of our internal selves and learn how to control them instead of trying to squash or drown one out. In fact, he believes that you can even teach your two selves to work together in harmony! And through the next few chapters, we'll take a look at how that's done.

## Just Let it Go

The hit song from Frozen definitely gets stuck in our heads more often than we'd like! But as annoying as it is, the lyrics do offer a good message that we all can apply in our lives from time to time. Unfortunately, however, letting it go is often the hardest thing to do, especially when we're in the heat of the moment. Because when we feel ourselves failing or we can see that we're messing up, our first instinct is usually to dig our heels in and keep fighting. We might try to keep ourselves on track with little reminders like, "Actually, you need to do it this way!" or "You know how to do that, what's wrong with you?!" But as we discussed in the previous chapter, sometimes that's the least helpful thing we can do.

Instead, we need to simply let it go and that can be accomplished by switching selves. Here's how it works: let's think of Self 1 as our "conscious mind," the part of our brain that focuses on making decisions, remembering things, and taking control. All of these are great traits and we need them to be successful in our everyday life, but unfortunately, they're also the reason why we get stressed, anxious, and confused. That's why we have Self 2-- or the unconscious mind-- to counteract them. So, when we're feeling lost and frustrated and we're trying to remind ourselves of the practical steps necessary to improve our performance, that's precisely the moment when we need to back off and let Self 2 take control.

That's because Self 2 doesn't overthink. It doesn't get bogged down in the finer details of consciously remembering, "When you're playing tennis, you grip your racket like this and swing like that..." Rather, Self 2's specialty is tapping into your passion and flow: the two reasons you do anything you love. If you're not familiar with the concept of flow, it can best be defined as the psychological state you reach when you're completely immersed in a task that is both challenging and engaging. When you're in your state of flow, that's when you feel the most alive. But sometimes, our conscious brains can cause us to overthink things and overthinking is an instant flow-killer.

So, just take a step back and let your instincts (or Self 2) take over. With Self 2 at the wheel, you won't be engaged in a conscious overanalysis of every moment. Instead, your movements will be fluid and instinctive; you'll rely on muscle memory and relinquish judgments. This last step is particularly important because judgment belongs completely in the realm of Self 1. A conscious criticism of your value and performance, judgment is almost always negative and it's also closely related to overthinking. Not only is it not constructive, it can even get you so worked up that you make careless or awkward mistakes that are perfectly avoidable if you just don't get lost in your own head.

So, if you want to win at tennis or at life, here's a visual trick you can try. Close your eyes and imagine yourself on the court (or in the boardroom or wherever your inner and outer battles occur). Think about it as if you're watching yourself on TV. This can be helpful because when we watch someone else play a live sport on TV, we can see the bigger picture. So, try to give yourself this big-picture vision by concentrating on the movements of the ball and racket. As you think about these simple movements, Self 2 will be free to wander around and imagine different things you can try. And most importantly, Self 2 will be free of the nagging internal monologue constantly narrated by Self 1.

In this respect, you can see how distracting Self 1 with something like imagining your visual movements can help to free up your unconscious mind. But your work doesn't stop there. In addition to distracting your conscious mind, you'll also need to learn how to give your unconscious mind a good workout.



## A Watched Pot Never Boils

We're all familiar with that old cliché, right? We know it means that when we micromanage or over analyze something, it will take even longer and be harder to get the results we want. And the same is true of micromanaging our own thoughts. So, if it helps you to visualize what's going on in your head, think of Self 1 as that annoying boss who's always micromanaging. Self 1 is the guy who keeps looking over your shoulder while you work, asking why you did it this way instead of following his suggestion (which would surely be much better). Self 1 is the guy who never stops offering unsolicited advice and loves the sound of his own voice, even-- or perhaps especially-- when it's getting on everyone else's nerves.

And as annoying as this would be to you in real life, it's actually even more annoying to Self 2. That's because Self 2 literally controls your body and the thousands of involuntary things you do every day. Because Self 2 handles things like muscle memory and the habits that form when we engage in behaviors so often they become unconscious decisions, this part of your brain doesn't benefit at all from micromanagement. To put that into perspective, let's imagine what your life would be like if you had to think about every single decision you ever made.

Can you imagine how crowded your thoughts would be if you actively had to think about tiny tasks like, "I'm going to reach out my fingers and type on that keyboard now," or "I'm going to stretch out my arm and get the coffee pot and then I'm going to pick up a mug..." You would be overwhelmed all the time! That's why Self 2 takes care of all those thoughts for you by converting them into unconscious decisions. It's also why Self 2 will literally never benefit from Self 1 popping in with intrusive questions like, "Are you sure you're pouring that coffee right? Do you even really know how to pour coffee? Do you know how to hold a mug?" That's the equivalent of what's happening every time your conscious brain causes you to doubt your ability to do something-- especially if it's something you're good at. And, unsurprisingly, that's one of the big reasons why you get stressed!

So, in short, the key take-away from this chapter is that your unconscious brain doesn't need to be micromanaged by your conscious mind. Self 2 is fully capable of doing lots of things on its own. In fact, when you let Self 2 take the wheel, you'll actually do a better job of writing, speaking, thinking, or even engaging in complex sports! Because instead of overanalyzing your every action, you'll be able to loosen up and simply exist. So, how can you put that into practice in your own life? Although Gallwey acknowledges that it can be tricky to do so, ultimately, the key is to just let it go and accept that you know more than you think.

It can also be helpful to remember that sometimes, we overthink because we just want so badly to get things right. We're afraid that if we don't constantly remind ourselves of the pressure we're under or of the necessary steps we have to follow, we'll mess up. But chances are, we've all had a moment where that micromanagement has overridden our instincts and caused us to freeze up during a question we definitely knew the answer to or suddenly forget how to swing a tennis racket. Therefore, we have only to consult our own experience to realize that micromanagement is often more counterproductive than anything. So, learn to simply relax. Stop trying so hard and rest in the knowledge that you know more than you think and you're more capable than you give yourself credit for.

## Final Summary

Whether we're playing a tennis match or the game of life, it's easy to feel like our minds are being smacked back and forth between the tennis rackets of two bitter opponents. These are the moments when we're ping-ponging between the directions of our two inner selves: Self 1 (our conscious brain) and Self 2 (our creative, unconscious brain which governs our instincts). It can be difficult to drown out the conflicting cacophony in our heads, but the author argues that doing so is vital for success in life and on the tennis court.

Thus, to achieve success and peace, Gallwey recommends getting rid of our "coach" or our micromanaging conscious brain. Instead of constantly telling yourself what to do, let Self 2 take the wheel. By thus removing the tendency to overanalyze your every move, you'll be able to tap into your instincts, which are more powerful than you think. And if you trust yourself and give yourself a little bit of credit, Gallwey believes that you can free yourself of the nervous pressure which often causes us to freeze up. As a result, when you simply trust your instincts, you'll find that your movements will be more fluid, more natural, and more likely to generate success.



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