

# SUMMARY

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## THE OUTWARD MINDSET

BY THE ARBINGER INSTITUTE



# **Summary of “The Outward Mindset” by The Arbinger Institute**

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Transform your mind, transform your life.

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# Introduction

“You gotta look out for Number One.”

We often hear this phrase thrown around in popular culture. It is, of course, another way of saying that you should only look out for yourself. And although this sounds like an incredibly selfish mentality, the truth is that many people live by it with no regard for the welfare of others. Although most people probably wouldn't come right out and say it, actions really do speak louder than word, and this attitude can be seen through the selfish choices that people make. For example, when you take the last piece of fried chicken for yourself without checking to see if anyone else wants it, or when you use up the last of the hot water on your shower, leaving someone else with all the cold water that remains. Although these decisions are minor acts of selfishness, they affect the lives of those around us and they speak volumes about your attitude towards life.

This is especially true in the workplace. Because although every company is fond of using the “team” analogy and insisting that co-workers are all part of a team, this analogy rarely holds water in practical application. After all, there is no “I” in “Team” and no team can function when every player is only in it for themselves. That's why, over the course of this summary, we're going to learn how to change that mentality. The Outward Mindset is the emotional equivalent of “turn that frown upside down” and we're going to use it to see how you can transform your life and your workplace.



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# Do You Make Your Decisions or do Your Decisions Make You?

This question might come as a bit of a surprise, but it's a question that every single human being should ask themselves. That's because the answer could literally change your life. So, let's start by unpacking that question and what it means for you. To lay some groundwork, we'll use my personal experience as an example. I suffer from Obsessive Compulsive Disorder. That means that I frequently receive unwanted signals from my brain which identify certain thoughts, things, or circumstances as threats to me. And because my brain believes that those threats are real, I respond by feeling as though I need to take appropriate action to mitigate those threats. That's how the Obsessive Compulsive cycle works: unwanted intrusive thoughts produce an unshakable fear. This fear in turn creates a desperation to do anything that will make that anxiety go away. And when my brain is besieged by these fears and the intense need to get rid of them, it's easy to feel as though I don't control my decisions. Because it's impossible to out-log OCD with rational thought, it's also easy to get stuck in a cycle of continually giving into compulsions, seemingly without hope of escape.

Fortunately, however, time and therapy have helped me to understand that I am capable of controlling my brain and that I have the power to decide which actions I take, rather than living as though these decisions have already been made for me. And although this realization can be uniquely difficult for someone with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder, the truth is that everyone needs to accept this, whether they have OCD or not. Because even if you don't suffer from unwanted intrusive thoughts telling you to do things, each and every one of us can fall into a lazy cycle of thoughtlessness. For example, maybe you always tell yourself you're going to diet. At the start of every year, you make a New Year's Resolution and swear that this year, you're going to eat healthy. But on January 2nd, you suddenly find yourself in the drive-through line at McDonald's.

How did that happen? No one put a gun to your head and forced you to come to McDonald's. Aliens didn't pick you up and drop you down right in the drive-through line. Of course not! You ended up at McDonald's because you made the choice to get in your car and drive there. Even if you made a resolution to the contrary, the truth is that you went to McDonald's because you wanted to. You went because you decided that a Big Mac is preferable to honoring your resolution. Now, that's not to hate on McDonald's or say that everyone who likes to eat there is a failure. Far from it! Instead, this is simply an example to illustrate the fact that although we often think our choices are unavoidable side-effects of circumstances or our brains' wiring, the truth is that we always have a choice. For better or worse, at the end of the day, we are in control of our actions. But one powerful thing does determine the choices we make and that's our mindset.

Another word for your mindset is your "worldview." It's exactly what it sounds like: your worldview governs the way you see the world, how you believe the world works, and how you make choices in response to that. For example, people who subscribe to the Christian faith believe in Jesus and assume that Jesus' word is law. As a result, they would align their morality and decision making processes to fit with what Jesus says is right and wrong. Therefore, Christian people might be inclined to avoid lying, stealing, or mistreating others because they believe that's the right thing to do. Because they're viewing the world through a Christian or "Christ-centered" lens, this perspective controls their mindset. And whether you subscribe to a certain religion or not, the same is true for you: everyone has a mindset that governs their behavior. For example, if your worldview has caused you to believe that everyone is out to get you, then you might believe that taking care of yourself is your number one priority. After all, no one else is looking out for you. So, your objective is to get what you can for yourself and do unto others before they can do unto you.

These are only a few examples, but you get the idea; everybody has a mindset and a bias that motivates your actions, whether you're aware of that bias or not. However, you might notice that I said your mindset motivates your actions. I didn't say that it controls them. That's because

you're still in control of your actions; you just run everything through the filter of your mindset and use this filter to decide what to do. And that's why changing your mindset is key to improving any area of your life. For example, let's think about the guiding mindset at play in the McDonald's illustration we just used. In this case, your mindset might be that of a person who's often in a rush. Maybe you work long hours and you're rarely home long enough to prepare a healthy, home-cooked meal. As a result, you've grown accustomed to grabbing something in a drive-through on your way from work. And when you continue to make that decision in spite of your resolution, it's because you haven't changed your mindset. Even though you'd like to eat healthy, your worldview is still that of someone who's tired, stressed, and just needs to grab something instead of prioritizing your health.

The same is true for every other facet of your life. Which means that if you want to change any aspect of your behavior, you have to change your mindset. And it all starts with asking yourself the question, "Do I make my decisions? Or do my decisions make me?" (Here's a hint: you want to be able to genuinely choose the first answer).



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## Always Be a SAM

So, now that you know changing your mindset is the key, it's time to learn more about how to do that. But before we dive in, we'll first take a look at the difference between the mindset you want and the kind you don't want. These are called outward and inward mindsets. An inward mindset is you-focused. As we saw in the previous chapter's example, an inward mindset is all about looking out for number one. And unfortunately, that also means that an inward mindset is often about excuses. Because it's not fun to admit when we're wrong, an inward mindset invites us to put the blame on someone else. For example, if your classmate is awarded the internship you wanted, an inward mindset might say, "It's because she's a teacher's pet!" or "They just can't see how good I really am!" But of course, the truth might be that you simply didn't study enough or that your classmate is a better fit for the job. The trouble is that admitting this would require you to accept a share of personal responsibility. And our inward mindsets usually aren't a fan of that.

By contrast, outward mindsets are open-minded and others-centered. An outward mindset motivates you to look for the good in others, see the positives in every situation, and accept responsibility by seeking ways to improve yourself. And that's where the acronym SAM comes in. If you spend your life striving to be a SAM, you can cultivate an outward mindset and embrace a much more fulfilling life! Here's how to do it. You start with the S, which stands for "seeing the needs of others." This step necessitates taking the focus off of yourself. Rather than thinking only about what you can get out of a situation or about looking out for yourself, the S in SAM asks what others need. This step is perfect for any situation you could face in life, whether it's in your romantic relationships, your family, or your professional relationships. If you always start by asking what others need, you'll automatically be an open and unselfish person. (Just remember that it takes constant work to cultivate that trait!)

Once you've identified the needs of others, that brings you to step A: adjusting your efforts. When you know what others need, your next step should be to determine how you can help them get what they need. What can you do to help other people reach their goals? Should you adjust the amount of effort you're putting in? Should you take different steps? Answering these questions will help you move forward and make the right decision. And lastly, we come to M: "measuring the impact." This final step occurs once you've implemented the first two and it allows you to gauge the impact of your help. Once you identified the need and adjusted your efforts, how did the other person's life improve? Are they better off because of your help? Did they get what they needed? Measuring your impact is crucial for assessing the value of your efforts and for identifying your next steps. Because if you ask yourself these questions and the answer is "no," then it's time to go back to the drawing board and re-assess your actions. If you didn't get it right this time, what could you do differently? Were you giving help that was focused on the needs of the other person? Or were you giving the kind of help you wanted to give?

To put this into perspective, let's take a look at this example. I have a cat and I love her very much. And in my opinion, showing I love my cat means that I spend a lot of time with her, give a great deal of physical affection, and generally make her feel loved. But here's the thing: my cat hates hugs! In fact, she's actually happiest when everyone leaves her alone and she can relax by herself in a quiet corner. So, in that case, showing my cat that I love her actually means respecting her space. If I were to continue hugging and cuddling her, I wouldn't be doing the things that make her happy-- I would be showing love in the way that I think I should be showing it. And when that isn't what says love to her, that means my help is ultimately self-serving and therefore unhelpful.

From this example, you can see that everyone's primary objective should be to give the help that is most helpful to others. Because that's what it really means to put the principles of SAM into action. And the best part is that you can apply these principles in any area of your life! In fact, you can work to change your mindset about anything from your relationship with your

kids to the way you do your job. And if everyone applies these principles in their personal lives and in the workplace, we can eradicate that “looking out for number one” attitude and replace it with genuine kindness and thoughtfulness.



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## Final Summary

Every workplace and every family tends to think of themselves as a team. But teams only work if everyone pulls together to achieve a common goal. And when people give into the selfish inward mindsets that consume so many of us, it's impossible to work as a team. That's why we need to shift our focus and cultivate an outward mindset. When we shift to an outward mindset and apply the three-pronged principles of the acronym SAM, everyone can work together to make the world a happier, more harmonious place.



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