

Smarter Faster Better

As human research progresses, and new ways are discovered to get the best value for any endeavour, disruptive innovations and fresh approaches can lead to increasing our forward momentum. This applies to both personal and organizational efforts. Sometimes these innovations seem counter-intuitive to the ways and habits with which we are accustomed. Smarter Better Faster provides profound insight into some of the most important skills for life and business, backed by a voluminous amount of scientific study and meta-analysis. A read through this book will catalyze new thinking and habits in the reader that will lead to increased productivity and better outcomes.

The author, Charles Duhigg, offers a chapter-by-chapter analysis of productivity issues. Weaving real-life examples into the thesis of each topic, Duhigg holds the reader's interest quite well with the following chapters.

Motivation
Teams
Focus
Goal Setting
Managing Others
Decision Making
innovation
Absorbing Data

As with most fresh books on leadership and productivity, some of the concepts go against what we've come to accept as traditional wisdom. For example, studies have shown that students who hand-write notes retain far more information from lectures than those that use laptops to record their notes. In the same way, teachers who manually handled data regarding student progress and weaknesses understood more and had more positive influence on students' progress than if they had used automated systems like spreadsheets. It seems that handling data in a manual manner is a significant aid in the understanding and application of that data.

When it comes to focus, Duhigg discusses two airliner incidents; one in which the plane ultimately crashed, and another in which the pilots' focus led to safely landing the most damaged Airbus ever to land safely. The linchpin for the successful aircrew lay in their habit of rehearsing emergency scenarios before the flight began. By doing so, their focus during the emergency was directed to more reliable and relevant information. They had successfully prevented cognitive tunneling and saved their plane.

The chapter on teams reveals a rather counter-intuitive concept; putting together a team of superstars rarely, if ever, results in better performance than a team of average performers. There are of course, several reasons for this, but one of the key concepts laid out is that of psychological safety. Psychological safety exists when team members each have a voice, believe others are on their side, and can express themselves without fear of being shot mercilessly down or ridiculed. As concepts go, this one is key in most organizations and a serious impediment to productivity. Putting the organizational effort above personal agendas and egos is key to well-functioning teams. It seems to be a message that is having a tough time sinking in to leaders and team members alike.

(Credit to Charles Duhigg , Smarter Faster Better, Random House, 2016)