

# Trying Not To Try Summary

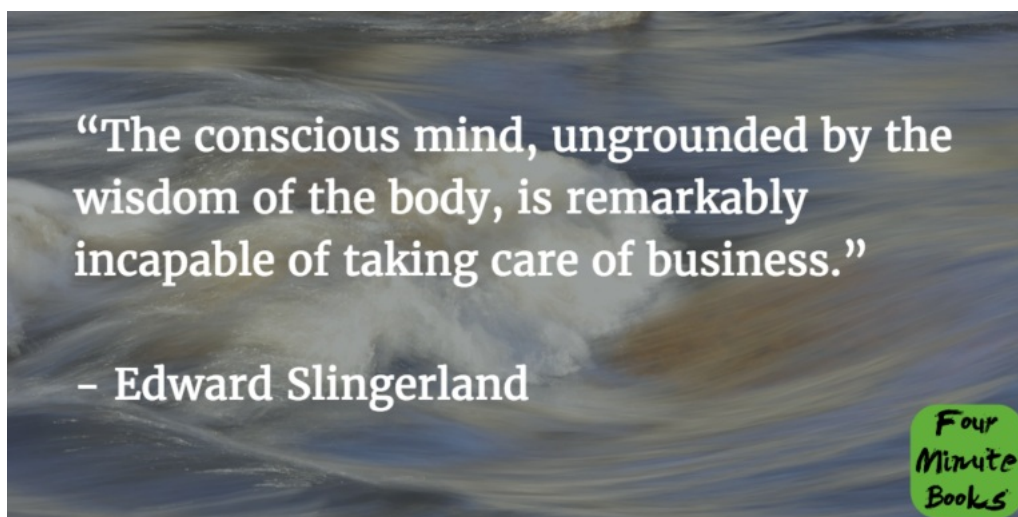
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 [fourminutebooks.com/trying-not-to-try-summary](https://fourminutebooks.com/trying-not-to-try-summary)

**1-Sentence-Summary:** *Trying Not To Try explores ancient, Chinese philosophy to break down the art of being spontaneous, which will help you unite your mind and body, reach a state of flow, and breeze through life like a leaf in a river.*

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



It's been almost five years since I started my journey into self-improvement and for the first three of those, I was all about the latest hacks, the newest science and the most up to date research. But over the past two, I've realized that tactics come and go.

What works for productivity one month, might not work the next. Even the greatest morning routine eventually gets old. How you save and invest money will change over time.

So for the last 24 months, I've started looking closer and closer at...philosophy! If science provides the tactics, then philosophy complements them with strategy. Two philosophies I'm particularly drawn to are stoicism and ancient, Eastern schools of thought.

Hence, this book felt like a very natural next pick for me, when it caught my eye on Blinkist. The author, Edward Slingerland, is a professor of Asian studies, a global authority on Chinese thought and a keen observer of the relationship between the humanities and cognitive science.

From his book, *Trying Not To Try*, I learned these 3 lessons:

1. The concept of "flow" has long existed in traditional Chinese philosophy, and is called "wu-wei".
2. Wu-wei is directly connected to "de" and together, the two lead you towards a good life.
3. To attain wu-wei, you must be honest, especially with yourself and then relentlessly act on

it.

You may not like their beards, but you'll sure benefit from their wisdom, so let's hear what the ancient, Chinese philosophers have to say!

## Lesson 1: What we know as “flow” has long been described in ancient, Chinese scripture as “wu-wei.”

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Have you ever experienced flow? It might have been during a video game, a sports event or even at work. In this state, you feel effortless. You don't notice time passing. You're completely in sync with whatever you're doing. Your mind and body flow as one entity.

This concept has been investigated by psychologists since the 1980s, but the idea has been around for way, *way* longer. Ancient Chinese philosophers call it wu-wei (pronounced ooo-way) and it can be translated as “effortless acting.”

Wu-wei was one of the highest goals in these old philosophies, as it united the body and the mind. Usually, we treat these two as separate entities, but **during wu-wei, your mind doesn't consider your body as a separate part of you.** This lets you act completely in the moment, naturally choosing the right next step.

For example, there is a story in Taoism, which explains how a woodcarver creates beautifully crafted bell stands: He fasts for seven days, until his mind doesn't even notice his body. Then he goes into the woods and quickly sees which tree will get the best result, so he can then get to work.

This isn't a coincidence: a typical symptom of being in wu-wei is forgetting to eat!

## Lesson 2: Together with “de,” wu-wei puts you on “The Way,” the journey towards becoming the best human you can be.

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Have you seen or read Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince? At one point, Harry drinks a special potion, which briefly turns him into the “luckiest person in the world.” For the next few hours, it seems like Harry can do absolutely nothing wrong, completely deciding in the moment, yet somehow making the perfect decision each time.

In this situation, the Chinese would consider Harry to be on “**The Way**,” which is their concept of heaven: it's not about the afterlife, but about **becoming the best human you can possibly be while you're on earth.**

The Way is the result of wu-wei combined with something else: **de.** **De** is an automatic consequence, a side effect, of wu-wei and resembles **power, virtue and charisma.** Because you spontaneously know exactly what to do through wu-wei, you confidently follow through on your decisions and seem to charmingly implement them to the outside world.

This is because you're connected with your unconscious mind: you act based on your true values, not some rationally conceived plan. The result is someone who acts decisively, with charm and integrity.

No wonder the Chinese encourage trying to reach this state as much as possible! There's one difference to our Western idea of flow though: we emphasize the fact that we have to leave our comfort zone to attain it, whereas Eastern philosophy suggests letting go and moving through life with ease.

## Lesson 3: The most important aspect of finding wu-wei is being honest, above all with yourself, and then taking action daily.

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So how can you spend as much time in wu-wei as possible? Step 1: **be honest with yourself and others**. That might sound counterintuitive at first, but it makes perfect sense.

**To reach a state where you completely get lost in your work, you really have to love it!** This only happens to people who can take a good, hard look at themselves and figure out what it is that gets them the most meaning.

For example, it'd be hard to be a children's fiction author if you don't genuinely love kids. Living your values like this is something you can and must practice on a daily basis, until you find the craft that will become your gateway to wu-wei.

This is why there are several different philosophies about how to attain wu-wei, which all focus on different, but action-oriented strategies, like meditation, visualization or exercise – it's about finding your purpose and then doing, doing, doing, not which particular path you follow.

## Trying Not To Try Review

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It's kind of cool to learn that what's a fairly new idea in modern psychology has been around, analyzed and taught for thousands of years. I think this adds exactly the kind of extra validation to modern science and tactics I was looking for when I started turning more towards philosophy. After all, what's stood the test of time for thousands of years must be solid knowledge!

A very refreshing read, will try to get my hands on *Trying Not To Try* as soon as I can!

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## What else can you learn from the blinks?

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- Why Confucius relied on strict rules to reach a state of wu-wei

- How wu-wei makes its way from practice into your brain
- Which other Chinese thinker proposed the exact opposite of what Confucius was doing
- What strategy lies right in between the former two
- Why it might be a good idea to stop thinking in terms of wrong and right altogether

## **Who would I recommend the Trying Not To Try summary to?**

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The 15 year old skateboarder, who loves his hobby, but has a hard time justifying it in front of his parents, the 37 year old task force leader, who wants to be a great manager for his team, and anyone who's tasted the power of flow once before.