You Are Not Your Brain Summary

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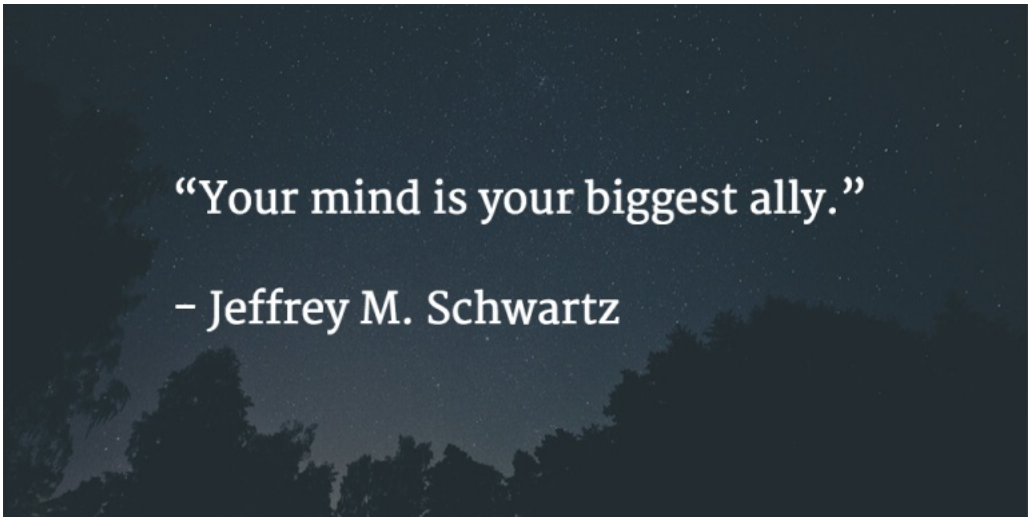
1-Sentence-Summary: *You Are Not Your Brain educates you about the science behind bad habits and breaking them, giving you an actionable 4-step framework you can use to stop listening to your brain's deceptive messages.*

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



After something that argued the case for mindlessness yesterday, I'm back to the opposite end of the spectrum again. Published in 2012, *You Are Not Your Brain* is a psychiatrist's take on how to break bad habits.

Jeffrey Schwartz works at the UCLA School of Medicine, focusing mainly on people with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD).

Published in 2011, his latest book combines the newest research around neuroplasticity (a term you're about to learn more about) with his already known 4-step framework.

Here are my 3 main take-aways:

1. Self-directed neuroplasticity is your go-to weapon to change your habits.
2. Hebb's law and the quantum zeno effect.
3. There are 4 steps you can take to break a bad habit.

Let's go!

Lesson 1: To change your habits, use self-directed neuroplasticity.

How cool does that sound? Almost like a weapon from Star Wars VII. But what the hell is it?

If you break down the term, it comes down to this: **self-directed** means you exert neuroplasticity on yourself. So you're the one who's using it, and who it's being used on.

Neuro– stands for your neurons, or nerve cells, in your brain, which are the pathways where feelings and thoughts flow.

Plasticity means something is like plastic – it is firm initially, but can be formed and changed by using the right tools.

Let's pull it all together.

You can change the pathways in your own brain – and you can do it yourself.

This means even if you're stuck with a couple of bad habits right now, you can change them. Just because your brain is wired in a certain way does not mean that this wiring defines you.

By coming to the conclusion that **you are not your brain** you can start changing the physical structure inside it, so that it works more in your favor and less against you.

This is what happens when you hear stories like the one of Christopher Reeve, famous Superman actor, who changed his mindset after becoming paralyzed until eventually moving again.

Note: I've explained the concept of neuroplasticity here, including a great video and a little device to help you remember it.

Lesson 2: Hebb's law and the quantum zeno effect.

So how do you start to direct some neuroplasticity at yourself? By learning about two more cool concepts with funky names.

Number one is called Hebb's law and is summed up in one beautiful rhyme: **Neurons that fire together, wire together.**

The more often one of the neural pathways in your brain is used, the stronger it gets. For example, let's say you have a new job, and have to catch the bus every morning at 8 am to make it there on time.

You're doing fine the first week, but on Tuesday in week 2, you arrive at 8:01 am and **miss the bus**. This causes you stress and anxiety, because you'll be late and might get yelled at.

While you're waiting for the next bus, **you have a cigarette to combat the stress**, and it helps. The nicotine and activity give you a sense of relief and calm you down.

Now **you've forged a new pathway in your brain**, that links stress from missing the bus to the relieve a cigarette offers. This is then reinforced with every time you miss the bus and have a cigarette again. What was a one-time thing becomes a habit and the quick fix becomes a permanent, painful, problem.

The second concept is called the quantum zeno effect. Based on ancient Greek philosopher Zeno's arrow paradox, this important notion from quantum physics says that **a system can be frozen in its state, if continuously observed**.

What does that have to do with your brain? If you are mindful of your bad behavior, and **observe it as it happens often enough**, it will stop Hebb's law in its tracks and give you enough time to counteract it.

Then, by consciously changing your thoughts and behavior, you can **rewire your brain with a better habit.**

Lesson 3: Take these 4 steps to break a bad habit.

As much as I love this, enough with the scientific mumbo-jumbo, let's get to the actionable part. The 4-step framework is the main point of the book and summary, so I'll only touch on it briefly.

Step 1 is to **be aware of your negative thoughts as they occur**. This requires mindfulness, which you can learn through meditation, for example.

Step 2 is to **relabel those negative thoughts**. You have to alienate them to draw a line between you and your brain. I like James Altucher's take on this: Just label your thoughts into one of two categories: **useful or not useful**.

Step 3 is to **refocus your attention on a positive activity**, like writing, talking a walk, or calling a friend, to show you you can proceed as normal, even when the bad thoughts show up.

Step 4 is to **revalue your situation from a loving and caring perspective** to eventually change your beliefs about yourself.

You Are Not Your Brain Review

The terminology this book uses is brilliant, I'm glad Blinkist picked up on it in the summary. If you're into science, you'll love this.

Even if not, everything is explained simply enough to understand the ideas behind it, and while the 4-step framework isn't groundbreaking, it works.

I knew Hebb's law, but the quantum zeno effect was big news. I feel well-informed and the summary does a perfect job at giving you enough to know whether you want to get a copy of *You Are Not Your Brain*.

What else can you learn from the blinks?

- Where these deceptive brain messages originate from
- How shockingly far self-directed neuroplasticity can get you, according to one woman's brain scans
- What the 4 steps are NOT meant for
- More details on each step
- The best way to make sure you can always refocus when you need to

Who would I recommend the You Are Not Your Brain summary to?

The 21 year old smoker, who picked up the habit before knowing about its harmfulness, and now wants to change, the 34 year old recent graduate with a curiosity for science, and anyone who struggles with overthinking things.

Learn more about the author

Read the full book summary on Blinkist

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