

The Hidden Life of Trees Summary



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1-Sentence-Summary: *[The Hidden Life of Trees](#) describes how trees can communicate, support each other, learn from experience, and form alliances with other inhabitants of the forest.*

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:

A dark, aerial photograph of a dense forest with many green trees.

“When you know that trees experience pain and have memories and that tree parents live together with their children, then you can no longer just chop them down and disrupt their lives with larger machines.”

– Peter Wohlleben



There is so much more to the forest life than what meets the human eye. As you walk through the woods, you may get an impression that the surrounding trees are all very individual, passive entities.

Trees are still. Their growth is invisible to a naked eye. They don't communicate. You may sometimes even forget the fact that they are living beings!

In *[The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate—Discoveries from A Secret World](#)*, Peter Wohlleben shows us that these are all but appearances. Having worked as a forester for over 30 years, he has accumulated plenty of observations that the life of the trees is much more elaborate than we can perceive at a first glance. Most of his observations are also backed up by scientific research.

Over the course of their [evolution](#), trees have developed sophisticated [communication](#) and cooperation systems that are similar to human ones. On top of that, Wohlleben suggests that they may even have their own version of consciousness and [wisdom](#).

But I am getting ahead of myself. Let me first share with you 3 lessons about the hidden life of trees that I learned from this book:

1. Trees can have their own personalities.
2. Trees form communities in which they support one another.
3. Humans could learn a lot from the trees when comes to teamwork.

Are you eager to discover some of the forest secrets? This is exactly what this book is for – so let's go!

Lesson 1: Each tree has a unique combination of experiences and traits which add up to its “personality.”

For an amateur who only visits the forest every once in a while, trees may seem mindless. Most people assume that whatever is encoded in their genetics simply conditions the entirety of the trees’ lives.

Wohlleben has been observing individual trees doing for years. If you did the same, you would inevitably notice that each and every one of them is unique. **This is because trees are able to “remember” experiences and learn from them – which, over time, forms their unique “personalities.”**

Any tree needs to make a multitude of decisions over the course of its lifetime. These include important resolves, such as how long to keep the leaves on, or in which direction to grow roots. If a tree makes a mistake, like shedding leaves after the first frost, it won’t make the same one again.

How differently individual trees [interpret their experiences](#) is illustrated by an example of the three oaks that grow very close together on Wohlleben’s land. Observing them over the years, the author has realized that one of them always sheds leaves two weeks earlier than the others.

Since all of them experience exactly the same weather conditions, the explanation needs to be something else. That oak tree has grown to simply be more “careful” than its companions.

Lesson 2: Trees hugely depend on community life for growth and survival.

Although it may seem like it, trees aren’t loners. Actually, just the opposite is true – most of them evolved to be [committed, team players](#). They each care a whole lot about their fellows in the forest.

Not being able to move and run away, trees developed alternative systems of protecting themselves against various threats. **Most of these systems are founded on communication and mutual support within the forest community.**

One example is the communication network trees develop by connecting their roots through a system of underground fungi. Thanks to certain fungi species, that grow over areas of many miles, trees can “stay connected” by transmitting electrical impulses through that root-fungi network. This is useful, for example, to warn other trees about an invasion of pests or upcoming drought.

There are also other warning mechanisms – for example, based on scent. In African savannas, umbrella acacias’ leaves often get eaten by giraffes. When that happens, the tree starts producing a toxic substance that stops the herbivores from munching on their branches within minutes. Simultaneously, that same substance produces a “warning scent” that other acacias around immediately pick up on – and so, they can prepare for the giraffes’ attack in advance.

Another form of support trees give to one another is sharing nutrients through the roots. When one specimen struggles to photosynthesize enough energy or is under the attack of insects, other trees around may decide to help it by sharing their own food.

How awesome is that?

Lesson 3: Trees can teach us a lot about cooperation and solidarity.

At this point you may be wondering: but why would a tree do that? Why would it share its own food with the neighbor, risking that there may not be enough left for itself? Are trees altruists that care for the well-being of others more than for their own?

Not quite. The point here is that trees seem to understand very well – probably better than humans – that **supporting the whole forest is in their own best interest.**

The tree knows that it is simply better together. It relies on its immediate neighbors, as well as the whole forest's ecosystem, for its own survival. Living in the woods protects it from storms and other extreme weather conditions – as well as secures the precise microclimate it needs to thrive.

Besides, if a tree is “helpful” to those around – it can also count on the support of others later.

It seems so logical and straightforward – but how often do we, humans, fail to grasp these simple rules of community living? How often do we treat [social life](#) as a zero-sum game, where it is *either* us *or* the other person who wins?

Maybe by observing the hidden life of the trees, we can get inspired to bring more kindness and cooperation into our own lives. This would allow us to create more situations where *everyone is a winner.*

The Hidden Life of Trees Review

[The Hidden Life of Trees](#) really changed my perception – not only of trees but of the natural world as a whole. We often assume that if an organism can't talk and walk, it's as if it wasn't living at all. This book will show you that trees are a form of life just as valid as the human one – and therefore, deserving of respect.

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Who would I recommend The Hidden Life of Trees summary to?

The 30-year-old hiking enthusiast who wants to find a deeper sense of connection with Nature, the 50-year-old local state officer who cares about establishing sustainable policies in their region, and anyone interested in environmental protection.