

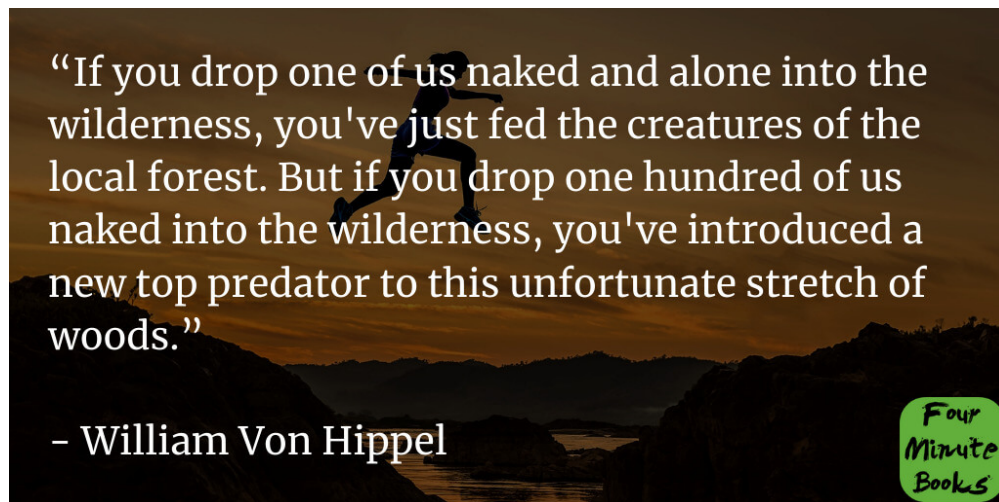
The Social Leap Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Social Leap* will help you understand human nature better by explaining the most significant event in our species' evolutionary history and looking at how we adapted socially, emotionally, and psychologically to survive.

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



In the last few years, we've seen the rise of digital technology take mankind to a whole new level. But what major breakthroughs got us to this modern age in the first place?

If you were a chimp-like ape seven million years ago, you'd be living large on the plentiful rainforests. Fast-forward a million or so years and environmental changes have put your ancestors in a much different world.

This new situation meant less food and more predators. To survive, you had to adapt to have new abilities like walking and throwing. But making it in these difficult circumstances was a lot easier if more of your kind were walking and throwing.

That's where the importance of community came from, and when communication and emotional skills suddenly became much more vital. This was one of the most important changes in our species' history and it still affects the way you act today.

What that means for all of us now is the subject of William Von Hippel's book *The Social Leap: The New Evolutionary Science of Who We Are, Where We Come From, and What Makes Us Happy.*

Here are the 3 greatest lessons I've learned from this book:

1. Everything that helped your ancient ancestors survive is still part of your behavior today.
2. The purpose of joy reveals why so many people are so miserable.
3. If you follow your evolutionary needs you will become happier.

Are you ready to finally understand some of your strangest quirks? Let's dig in!

Lesson 1: Your behavior is still dictated by every way that your ancient ancestors had to evolve to survive.

Have you ever wondered what would happen if you were suddenly transported to the middle of a forest with nothing? Do you think you could pull a Bear Grylls and survive? The unfortunate truth is that it's unlikely you'd make it very long.

But let's say there were 99 other people there with you, all in the same situation. You're probably feeling at least a little more confident about things now, right?

With the help of others, it's much easier to make predators your dinner instead of becoming their meal. But none of this works unless everyone learns to work together. Thankfully for us, our ancient ancestors did cooperate to survive and build our civilization.

Because of those changes as the forefathers of homo sapiens had to adapt to a new environment, we still value and seek connection with others.

Consider how useful emotions are when you're trying to help others avoid getting eaten by a tiger on the savannah. You could just say the words to reveal the animal's location, but insert fear into the equation and suddenly, they start to pay attention.

We also value persuasive stories and confidence today because of their role in the survival of our progenitors. Your chances of survival would go up significantly if you could confidently persuade others to help you hunt a mammoth or build an irrigation system, for example.

Lesson 2: If you want to find out where misery and joy come from, look to the purpose of happiness in our evolutionary history.

I've always thought that winning the lottery would be one of the worst things that could happen to me. It seems strange, but I feel this way because I know how it usually goes and I don't want that for myself.

Most lottery winners have a short boost to their happiness, but a year or so later are right back to where they were before. Often they're even less fulfilled than before! So why doesn't an increase in money like this make people permanently happier?

Again, we can find the answer by looking at our history. More specifically, how the comings and goings of joy actually increase people's chances of survival.

To begin, we need to understand that everything that makes us happy does so because it's evolutionarily advantageous. Finding an ideal mate, sleeping at the right times, and eating sweets all helped our ancestors survive, so we still do them today.

If you wanted to survive five million years ago, it wouldn't help if you became happy forever just by one successful hunt. You wouldn't have the motivation to keep getting food so you could live!

This balance of satisfaction and motivation is still a major part of your behavior today. We'll look at how to take advantage of this in our next lesson!

Lesson 3: You will be happier when you understand and satisfy your evolutionary requirements.

If you're a squirrel, life is simple and you only have a few options to become content. Just like most other animals, all you have to do is act so that you can live longer and pass on your genes. Eating, avoiding predators, and getting good at mating rituals are your ticket to a good life.

We humans don't have it so easy. While we also have this evolutionary rule that we're happiest when doing things that promote longevity and passing on genes, we've also given ourselves so many options that it's difficult to know which is best.

And the big problem is that most of these options don't give us true fulfillment.

So if evolution has made it so we're happiest when we reach our full productive potential does that mean we should all have a ton of kids? Not necessarily, as everyone can still play a role in building the community regardless of parental status.

Becoming a contributing member of society will make you happy, but how can you do that? Get healthy, for one, as it's easier to help others when you feel good yourself. Exercise, sleep enough, and eat well. Oh, and have a social life, too!

You'll also feel better when you find and utilize what makes you special. For our early ancestors, finding a mate was easier when you could offer something uniquely valuable. This is why you're happiest when you work on your strengths!

The Social Leap Review

I really enjoyed *The Social Leap*. It reminded me a lot of *Sapiens*, but focused more on psychology and sociology, which I thought was a great take on our history. I was hoping that there would be more on how to use these parts of our past to our advantage though.

Who would I recommend The Social Leap summary to?

The 49-year-old that loves to learn about evolution, the 22-year-old who is curious about human behavior, and anyone that's curious to know how we got into the social situations we find ourselves in today.