

CLEANED indistractable-with-nir-eyal

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SPEAKERS

Nir, Aidan

Aidan 00:00

Stay hungry stay foolish. We are living through a crisis of distraction. Friends get sidelined, family gets ignored and work never seems to get done. Our guest is a behavioral designer and author of the previous best selling book hooked. Today he shares his new book 'Indistractable: How to Control your Attention and Choose your Life'. He is a multiple-time guest on the innovation show, and friend of the show. It is a great pleasure to welcome back Nir Eyal. welcome to the show.

Nir 00:36

Thanks so much Aidan. Great to be back.

Aidan 00:38

And good news for Innovation Show listeners, you can win a copy of that book by signing up to theinnovationshow.io newsletter. Pay attention to when the newsletter comes out. In there, we will ask you, do you want to win a copy. Simply reply to be in the hat to win a copy of that book. Nir I mentioned in the introduction, your previous best selling book hooked. We talked about that previously on the show. But you use that as a platform on which to build on this book Indistractable. Perhaps we'll start by sharing about that.

Nir 01:10

That's exactly right. That after writing Hooked, which is a book about how do we build habit-forming products so that we can build good habits in people's lives? The next thing I wanted to explore was, what about the bad habits? Right? What about products that are designed to be so good, so engaging, that sometimes we use them too much? What happens when they become distractions? And so what I thought would be originally a book about technology, actually turned out to be a much deeper exploration around the psychology of why do we go off track, why do we do things that we didn't intend to do? And why don't we do the things that we know we should do?

Aidan 01:41

One of the things I loved about the book, was how you used the book and all the research you did, in order to write the book in the first place.

Nir 01:49

That's right. Yeah, there's a lot of that in the book, from the fact that it took me five years to write the book. And the reason was, because I kept getting distracted. I was very, very distracted. And that's why I wanted to figure out how to become Indistractable because, you know, I really do believe that this is the skill of the century, that it doesn't matter what area of your life, you're trying to work on every area of your life, every facet of your wellbeing requires you to be able to sustain your attention, whether it's your physical health, your mental health, your professional career, your relationships, all of these things require us to be able to do whatever it is we say we're going to do with our time and our attention. This is ultimately what becomes of our life.

Aidan 02:34

Let's share a little allegory, the Greek allegory that you mentioned in the book, I love that. So something that's just slightly out of reach that we can barely get to we call a tantalizing and there's a Greek story behind that, but also a moral that's quite hidden in there, perhaps you'll share this as a way to introduce the idea.

Nir 02:53

Yeah, my daughter had a book of Greek mythology. And, you know, I'd heard pretty much all the stories before you know, of Hercules, and Sisyphus and you know, all these characters that we've heard in one place or another, and I saw this one guy that I hadn't heard of before, called Tantalus. And Tantalus is cursed by, not like Sisyphus is cursed - remember, he was rolling the boulder up the hill. And he has to do that for all eternity. Well, Tantalus his curse is that he has to wade in a puddle of water. And whenever he gets thirsty, he bends down to drink from the puddle, and the water recedes. He so he can never drink. And when he gets hungry, he notices that there's a branch of fruit right above his head, and he reaches for the fruit, but he can't get it. And so this is where the term as you mentioned, tantalizing come from - something just out of reach that we can never attain. And I think that there's an interesting moral message here, the obvious messages that we're kind of cursed with these temptations, right, that we're cursed to want more and more and more, there's definitely a lesson there. You know, the Greeks have this wonderful way of, of displaying our mortal flaws. And so we do all have this endless desire for more - more entertainment, more money, more food, more stuff, right. We're all tantalized but there's also a deeper message, which is if you think about it, below the surface, you know, Tantalus is banished to the underworld. He's already dead. Right? So what would happen if he stopped desiring those things? He doesn't need water - he's dead. People don't need a drink. He doesn't need food - Dead people don't need to eat. So the ultimate folly of Tantalus is not that he keeps wanting, it's that he doesn't realize he doesn't need those things in the first place. And so that's the deeper message. And I think the message for us is that if we don't control these desires, if we don't master what I call these internal triggers, they become our master. And as tantalizing as distractions seem like television, the news, social media, delicious food, all these tantalizing distractions that can take us off course, as tantalizing as they might be, we need to realize, we don't need those things, we want them, but we don't need them. It's all in our heads. It's all about this desire that we can actually learn to control. Because if we don't learn to master them, they do become our masters.

Aidan 05:24

So that's something that you look at in this book, which I love as well. You look at every aspect of becoming indistractable. But you mentioned your daughter there, and she was a huge influence there. And I thought about the Tantalus story even that, so many of us are like, well, I'll work hard in order to provide for my family. But in the meantime, your family's growing up, and the story of your daughter tugged at my heartstrings, when she asked you what your superpower was.

Nir 05:51

And that was pretty much the inspiration for this book. And why I knew I needed to write it was I was with my daughter one afternoon. And we had a beautiful day planned - just some daddy-daughter time in the afternoon, get some quality time together. And I remember we had this book of activities that dads and daughters could play together. And it was full of all kinds of activities, you know, make a paper airplane and have a contest to see who could throw the farthest, make some origami, you know that all kinds of different activities. And one of the activities was to ask each other this question, if you could have any superpower, what superpower would you want? And I remember that question verbatim. But I can't tell you what my daughter said. Because in that instance, for whatever reason, I don't remember what it was, something got my attention on my phone, I started check my phone for just a quick sec. And before I knew it, my daughter was gone. She left the room to go play with some toy outside because I was sending her a very clear message that whatever was on my phone was more important than she was. And I blew it. I blew this perfect daddy daughter moment. And I felt really bad about this. And it kind of haunted me and actually told a friend of mine, about what had happened. We have daughters of similar ages. So he actually asked his daughter, what superpower she would most want. And she said that she would want the power to talk to animals. He said, "huh, power talk to animals. Why is that honey?" So that when you and Mommy on your phones, I'll have someone to talk to. And so it really, you know, brought home that I wasn't living up to my values, that I wasn't being the kind of father that I wanted to be. And if I'm really honest with you Aidan, it wasn't just with my daughter, it was when I would tell myself, I'm definitely going to exercise today, I'm definitely going to eat right. And I didn't and I wouldn't. It would happen when I would say okay, I'm going to get to work and I'm going to work on that big project. I'm not going to get distracted, I'm not going to procrastinate, here I go, I'm going to get started. And yet I'd procrastinate for another 20-30 minutes doing God knows what. And so at some point, I just decided enough, you know that if I wanted to have a superpower, I would want the power to be Indistractable, the power to simply live with this integrity to be as honest with myself as I am with other people. You know, nobody wants to be a liar. That's kind of one of the worst put downs you can call somebody, to call them a liar. But if I'm honest with you, I would lie to myself every day, I would say I was going to do one thing or another. And I didn't do it, not because I didn't know what to do - I always knew what to do. Who doesn't know that if you want to lose weight, you have to eat right and exercise. Does anybody not know that? Who doesn't know that to have better relationships with your family, you have to be fully present with them. Who doesn't know that if you want to do better at your job, you have to do the work, especially the hard stuff that other people don't want to do. We know this stuff. And if you don't know how to do something, Google it. It's all right there, there's no excuses. The problem is not that we don't know what to do. The problem is that we don't know how to stop getting in our own way. We don't know how to stop getting distracted.

Aidan 08:50

But the story really I mentioned, it towed on my heartstrings for a personal reason as well. I had my own tipping point, like that. I remember it so clearly. It was when I decided actually to give up that role I had at the time, a very stressful job. And this will resonate with so many of our listeners - very stressful job, sitting there with my son at the time, probably two or three. He's sitting there waiting for me to come home from work. I come home from work, and I'm checking email, just to make sure that there's nothing urgent at the office after 6pm, 7pm, something like that. And he turns to me and he's like, he holds my hand, the hand I was holding the phone in, and he said Dad, being on your phone isn't playing with me. And it just shot right through the armor, straight in and I actually decided I was a huge tipping point in my life. I decided, like you, I'd start by looking for a career that could enable me to be present and I'm still working on that. I mean, we still need to work on being mentally present.

Nir

We all do, I still do right? It's actually it's a daily effort hugely.

Aidan

And then the other thing was just to look after myself as well because I could be no use to them if I wasn't healthy. So really resonated and so does this book. It will speak to so many of our listeners. But one of the things you mentioned there, was that the first stepping point for many people is to replace the tech or look at Tech as the distraction. But you say, that's a folly in itself. That's not the real way to start. Perhaps you will start by telling us about this.

Nir 10:17

Sure. So let's start with what is distraction? Maybe we should even define that term because it's I think it's one that I certainly didn't understand until I got involved in this line of research. So the best way to understand what distraction is, is to understand what distraction is not. Okay, what is the opposite of distraction? If you ask most people, what is the opposite of distraction, they'll tell you the opposite of distraction is focus. But that's not exactly right. The opposite of distraction is not focus. If you look at the origin of the word, the opposite of distraction is traction, that both words traction and distraction come from the same Latin root 'tirare', which means to pull. And you'll notice they both end in the same six letters ACTION, when that spells action. So traction, by definition is any action that pulls you towards what you say you're going to do, things that you do with intent, things that move you closer to your goals, things that move you closer to your values, and help you become the kind of person you want to become - those are acts of traction. The opposite of traction is of course, distraction. Distraction is any action that pulls you further away from what you plan to do, further away from your goals, further away from becoming the kind of person you want to become. So now we have this dichotomy between traction and distraction. I would argue that any action can be either attraction or distraction based on one word, and that one word is intent, okay, forethought. 'The time you plan to waste is not wasted time', as Dorothy Parker said. So let me give an example. Many people think that well, as long as I'm being productive, as long as I'm doing work stuff, that's not a distraction. And I would argue that's the worst kind of distraction. Let me tell you, my daily routine, my daily routine used to be for years, walk into the office, sit down at my desk, say, Okay, I'm going to get to work. Now there's the first thing on my to-do list. By the way, we're going to talk later about why to-do lists are the absolute worst thing you can do for your personal productivity. We'll talk about that later on. But I would look at my to-do list, it's

okay, that big project that I have to do, a task that's been staring at me, that I've been procrastinating on, here I go, I'm not going to get distracted. Nothing's going to get in my way, I'm going to get started right now. But first, let me check some email. Right, let me just check those Slack channels. Let me do a few of those to-do items on my to-do list, some of the easy stuff. Let me just check that off first, just to get started here, just to get some momentum. And what I didn't realize that I had given into the most dangerous, the most pernicious form of distraction, it is the distraction that tricks you into prioritizing the urgent and the easy work at the expense of the important and difficult work, that we have to do to move our lives and careers forward. So just because it's a work related task, doesn't mean it's not a distraction. In fact, that's the most dangerous kind of distraction because you don't even realize you've got distracted. So anything can be a distraction. Conversely, anything can be traction. So as you mentioned, you know, lots of people these days think, "oh, it's the technology's fault, that technology is distracting us". No, I am not one of these Chicken Little tech critics that tells you technology is hijacking your brains, addicting everybody, rubbish, silly. It is non-scientific garbage. It's totally disempowering and not true. If you want to go on social media, go for it. Enjoy. You want to go watch YouTube videos, or Netflix or scroll the internet, reddit, I don't care, enjoy it, do it. But do it according to your values and your schedule, not someone else's. If it's something that you plan to do with intent, doesn't matter what it is, it is traction. Anything else would be a distraction. So now we have this dichotomy between traction and distraction.

Now the question is, what prompts us to these actions? What triggers us? Well, there are two kinds of triggers. We have what we call external triggers, which are the usual suspects, right. The pings, the dings, the rings - this is what we tend to blame when we get distracted, we blame the things outside of us. But studies find that that is only 10% of the reason we get distracted. 10% of time that we get distracted, is it because of an external trigger. So what's the other 90%? 90% of time that we go off track, 90% time that we get distracted, we get distracted because we are triggered not by something that happens that happens outside of us, but rather something that happens inside of us. These are called internal triggers. Internal triggers are uncomfortable emotional states - boredom, loneliness, fatigue, uncertainty, anxiety, stress - these internal, uncomfortable sensations, that we seek to escape from. Because all human behavior, all human behavior is about a desire to escape discomfort, even the pursuit of pleasurable sensations is itself psychologically destabilizing, which must therefore mean that time management is pain management. I'll say it again, Time management is pain management. If you do not deal with the deeper reason why you are not doing what you said you will do, why you get distracted, you will always get distracted by something, whether it's too much news, too much food, too much football, too much Facebook - you are going to find something to take you off track if you don't know the deeper reason, the feeling you are trying to escape from. So that's why we have to start with the real cause of distraction, not just blame the tech devices because we'll always find a distraction and distraction is nothing new. Plato talked about distraction 2500 years ago, right? If Plato was complaining about how, how distracting the world was 2500 years before the internet, before iPhones, before Facebook, that can't be the source of the problem. This is an endemic part of the human condition - this desire for distraction. So luckily, if we use this model of traction, distraction, internal external triggers. Now we have a framework. Now we can work through these four points, like the four points of a compass, to utilize these four key strategies that anyone can use to become Indistractable.

Aidan 16:05

Love to dig into that a little bit more, because you tell us that 18th century poet Samuel Johnson said, "my life is one long escape from myself". And here you reveal how time management is actually pain management, like you said, the Zoe chance story, which is really revealing, but also you tell us about boredom, negativity, bias, rumination, and worst of all, hedonic adaptation.

Nir 16:29

So these are all the reasons why you are designed for distraction. Why evolution actually gave us this predilection for distraction. And it really does start from these uncomfortable emotional states that, you know, I take issue with a lot of self-help these days, a lot of books tell you about how the goal should be to be happy, all the time, that if you're not contented, and satisfied and euphoric all the time, something's wrong with you. And nothing could be further from the truth. That in fact, evolution has given us this gift of disquietude. If you think about it, right, from an evolutionary basis, if there was ever a group of Homo sapiens, who were happy all the time, who were contented, all the time, what would have happened to them. I'll tell you what would have happened to them - our ancestors had they met this group of people, would have killed them and eaten them, okay? They would not have survived. Because it is our disquietude, it is that discomfort, it is all these internal triggers that drive us forward, that get us to invent and to create, and to and to shoot for the moon. It's all about that desire to escape discomfort. Now, that's a good thing. We want to use that discomfort. Many people will tell you to escape it. And sometimes look, if you can't change the source of the discomfort, sometimes the solution is to learn ways to cope with it, right. So that's where tactics like mindfulness and meditation can be handy. But I think we've gone way over the deep end with with all this mindfulness stuff, although it is a great tool. Far too many people think it's the only tool, right? That meditation, that you can meditate all your problems away. No, sometimes you have to figure out what's causing you the discomfort and frickin get up off your butt, stop meditating and fix the problem if it's fixable. If it's not fixable, then we need coping tactics to deal with that discomfort. But it's not that every discomfort, you know, has to be escaped. And look, meditation is an escape, it can be a way to get out of that present circumstance to learn to master your emotions, which can be very, very healthy. Of course, there can be unhealthy distractions as well, many unhealthy distractions, whether it's, you know, a drink that people take, whether it's turning on the news, whether it's all these things that people use to get their mind off of that discomfort.

Aidan 18:39

There's the four things I mentioned there. And I think these were really eye-openers for me to understand why you mentioned about, you know, if we were there, if we lived in paradise, essentially we atrophy, but there was, you mentioned boredom, negativity, bias, rumination and hedonic adaptation. And that one in particular was fascinating.

Nir 19:01

Hedonic adaptation is this tendency that we have to go back to our baseline levels of happiness and satisfaction. We see this when great things happen to people, right. We know that when people win the lottery, a few years later, they're just as happy or miserable as they were before they won the lottery. When people have terrible accidents, right, amputee victims, they also go back to their baseline level of happiness even after such a terrible thing happens. So hedonic adaptation says that we tend to revert back to our base level of happiness, which means it's kind of a kick in the face if you think about it, it

means that if you accomplish your goals, right, even if you have what you want, you achieve multimillion dollar success and whatever you're looking for in life, you get - you're probably going to be just as happy or miserable. Because that's what hedonic adaptation does. Of course, there is some wiggle room there. But that's one of those reasons why we, you know, I was making the case with these four points around why you will never escape this discomfort. You have to learn to deal with it or fix the source of the problem. So hedonic adaptation is one. Boredom is another. We know that boredom is something that's endemic to everyone on earth, every culture, every civilization, we all struggle with a sense of boredom. And in fact, there was a really remarkable study done by Timothy Wilson at Harvard, where he put people in a room. And he gave them nothing in the room, except for a band on their arm and a button to press on that, he told them - if you press on this button, you will receive a painful electrical shock. Okay, so all you have to do is sit in this room until we come back. That's all he said. Two thirds of men, 1/3 of women preferred to shock themselves with what they were told would be a painful electrical current, just to avoid the sensation of doing nothing. Right. So boredom is a big one. Another one is rumination, our tendency to chew on these ideas again, and again, to go over thoughts in your head, if you've ever woken up in the middle of night, 3am, you're thinking about a problem, you can't stop thinking and thinking and thinking. This is another way that Mother Nature has, has hard coded in us this this constant desire for more, this constant source of internal triggers. And then negativity bias. Negativity bias says that we tend to remember the bad more than the good, that people remember negative events from their childhood, even though they had a wonderful childhood, they tend to remember the bad stuff, many, many areas of life do we tend to have a negativity bias.

Aidan 21:24

So you mentioned triggers earlier on. And by the way, if you haven't read Hooked, Nir's first book, which is a best selling book, you got to read that as well. It was a brilliant read for me and a great precursor to this book as well, because you build on those concepts as well, although they can be read separately. But you introduce the concept of reimagining an uncomfortable internal trigger, so that we can disarm it, this is catching yourself in the act. I thought this was really, really helpful. And for those of you who don't have a copy of the book, when you buy a copy of the book, you also get a link on the website where you can download many different sheets, many different resources there. And one of them is this sheet where you can catch yourself in the act. And then disarm yourself so Nir, perhaps you'd bring us through these four steps.

Nir 22:11

Sure, sure. So so what we'll start with, with what you imagine, what you mentioned, the first step is mastering these internal triggers. And within mastering the internal triggers, there's a few things we can do. One thing we can do is to reimagine the trigger itself. And this has to do with our with our dialogue that we that we use to talk to ourselves, that in many ways, the dialogue we have with ourselves is incredibly important. I mean, I'll give you an example, in my own life. So my profession before COVID was to do a lot of public speaking in front of big crowds. And that, I was, I was surprised to find that when I started doing this seriously, many times I had terrible stage fright, right. I was about to get on stage. And I remember wishing and praying that the AV system would crash. So I wouldn't have to go on stage. I remember my my palms getting sweaty, my armpits getting sweaty, sometimes I would shake even. I used to get very, very nervous. And I would take that to mean that I wasn't the real deal.

That here I am a faker. I don't even know what I'm talking about. They're gonna think I'm terrible. I'm going to stumble over my words, I'm going to do a horrible job. Nobody's gonna find this interesting. And I'm going to be a laughing stock. Because you see, look, if I was a real public speaker, I wouldn't feel this way. And then I decided to reimagine those internal triggers. I was feeling those internal triggers. And now it's up to me about how I would, what I would do with those sensations. And so when I read this research about how we can reimagine these internal triggers, I decided to change the narrative. And I changed the narrative to instead of saying, oh, you know, when my heartbeat races, and when I start getting sweaty palms, it means that some that I'm not doing it right. Instead, I reimagine that conversation I was having myself, and reimagine it to something that served me as opposed to me serving the internal trigger. So now before I'm about to go onstage or do any kind of public speaking, and I feel my heart racing, I say to myself, "Ah, You see, this is my body, getting me ready to meet the challenge by pumping more oxygen to my brain so I can deliver the best possible talk". So I started reimagined those internal triggers and many of us have these misinformed points of view when it comes to internal triggers like stress, right? We've been told so often that stress is bad, you can't feel stress. And so how many of us are stressing about being stressed, which leads us down this terrible rumination cycle. Instead, we can see these things as a positive thing. If something is boring, if something is difficult, if something is stressful, that's a good thing. You know why? Because that means that if you can power through this, you're a scarce commodity. You're precious because you have a skill to power through. Everybody feels bored and everybody feels stressed. Everybody feels anxious. It's the people who can power through those sensations who can leverage them like rocket fuel to move them forward, who actually achieve great things. So it's all about, that's one of the techniques we talked about. It's about reimagining the triggers, we can also reimagine the task, we can also reimagine our temperament.

Aidan 25:08

One of the last steps you talked about then in the internal triggers is one that can lead to distraction is to reimagine our capabilities, as well. So this was really useful, I thought, again, you know, I was thinking about the many habits people have one of them, for example, the fear of public speaking, others could be like, I want to give up drinking so much coffee or even alcohol. And I talked about this where you're actually catch yourself in the - Why do I want that? Is it boredom? Is it because I'm trying to distract myself from thinking about something, whatever it might be. I thought that was really useful. But the reimagining of capabilities was also a positive step forward.

Nir 25:46

Absolutely. So this comes down to reimagining your capabilities, your temperament. And this has some pretty profound impacts. You know, one of the one of the most prevalent pop psychology myths is what we call ego depletion - this idea that you run out of willpower, right? We've all heard this idea that you run out of willpower. Willpower is like a muscle, it's like fuel in a gas tank. It's like energy in a battery. Once you run out of it, you're done, you're depleted. And there was actually a quite a bit of research that came out of one research lab - one researcher proposed that this is a real phenomenon, he called the ego depletion. And when something sounds too good to be true, the social sciences, we what do we always do, as scientists? We rerun the research, and this is what researchers did, they re ran the studies, and they found they could not replicate them. And as far as we know, ego depletion isn't real. It doesn't really exist, except, except in one group of people. So after people did these meta analysis

studies of studies, we concluded that ego depletion probably doesn't exist, it isn't actually a real phenomenon. You don't spend willpower, like you would spend gas in a gas tank, except for one group of people and those people, and only those people, are people who believe that willpower is a limited resource. So only if you believe it's true, is it the case, and we see this repeated time and time again, with alcoholics, for example. You mentioned the alcohol. We know that the number one determinant of whether an alcoholic will stay sober after rehab is not their level of physical dependency, it's not what's happening in their blood. It's what's happening in their brain. It's the number one determinant of whether an alcoholic will relapse after treatment, is their belief in their own power to change. And so this leads me to kind of what I think is a very toxic and very prevalent mindset these days, which is 'technology is hijacking your brain'. Your kids can't stop playing video games, because they're addicting that right, this narrative that we keep hearing so much, we just accept it to be true. And it's not true. Unless we believe it. You know, I think maybe - I know this isn't true - but if I was a conspiracy theorists, I would think that maybe the tech industry wanted people to believe that there's nothing they could do about these technologies that it's, you know, that it's addicting them and it's hijacking their brain. Because what do people do when they think there's nothing that can be done? Nothing. It's called learned helplessness. When we believe there's nothing we can do, we don't do anything. And so it's a very disempowering perspective to think that technology is hijacking your brain, that's addicting everyone. It's silly. It's rubbish. Don't believe that crap. It's only true if you believe it's true, because of how we shape our temperament. So what I advise is to reimagine our temperament. We don't have to believe this nonsense. You know, you hear people saying all day, "oh, I'm no good with time management. I have a short attention span. I'm a Sagittarius", you know, fill in the blank, whatever you want. And many times these beliefs are self-defeating. And we don't need to believe them. We can believe whatever we want. And so later in the book, I talk about what's called an identity pact, where we decide. We don't just let people decide for us and label us. We decide for ourselves what kind of labels we want and so that's why the book is titled Indistractable. Indistractable is meant to sound like a superpower, right? The superpower I always wanted. Indistractable sounds like indestructible. And so we can choose that as our moniker. We can be that, just like someone would call themselves a vegetarian or you know a vegan or something. You can call yourself Indistractable - it is who you are. And we know the studies find that when you have a moniker, when you have a certain noun that you use to describe yourself as that, you become more likely to conform to that belief for good or for bad.

Aidan 29:35

One of the roles I have is an executive coach and I have only a certain amount of coaches, Nir, and one of the things I always ask those coachees to do, is create a to-be list rather than a To-Do list. So who do you want to be? vision yourself in the future. What are your values etc. And I was so delighted to see that you also peel the onion here, to go, it's more than just having traction and then getting towards your goals, but you have to actually understand your values. And you say, if we chronically neglect our values, we become something we're not proud of, our lives feel out of balance and diminished. So let's share more about values. And this is where you introduce the idea of time-boxing, a core components a core skill in becoming indistractable.

Nir 30:21

Absolutely. Okay, so we talked a little bit about all the skills we can, we can build for ourselves around mastering those internal triggers, we just touched the tip of the iceberg, there's a lot more we could do in terms of mastering those internal triggers. That's step one, the most important step.

The next step is making time for traction. Because here's the thing, you can't say you got distracted, unless you know what you got distracted from. How can we say we got distracted? If we don't know what we got distracted from, if your calendar is blank, okay, if you've got lots of whitespace in your day, you have no right to say you got distracted, because what did you get distracted from? So if we don't plan our day, somebody is going to plan it for us. You know, there's no coincidence that we use the same terminology to describe money as we do with time, right? We make money, just like we make time; we spend money just like we spend time; we pay attention, just like we pay with dollars and cents. But here's the thing - most people are stingy with their money, right? They click coupons, they split lunches with their friends, they, you know, look for deals, they won't spend 99 cents on an app because it's too expensive. They're cheap with their money. But they give time to anybody who wants it. Right? The news wants your time sure, your boss, your kids, Facebook, Twitter, every rubbish in the media, sure, give it the time that they want from you. But when it comes to our money, we're very, very cheap. And it should be exactly the opposite. We should be generous with our money, and cheap with our time. Why? Because you can't make more time. I don't care if you're Jeff Bezos or Bill Gates, you have the same 24 hours in a day, you cannot manufacture more time; you can always make more money, right? So be generous with your money, but stingy with your time. So what we have to do is to ask ourselves how can we turn our values into time, that's what we have to do. You know, if you want to see what someone's values really are, don't, don't listen to what they say, don't look at what's coming out of their mouth, look at what's coming out of their wallet, and what's in their calendar. That's how you will know what someone's real values are. What are values? Values are attributes of the person you want to become; values or attributes of the person you want to become. So what you got to do is to sit down and ask yourself, "how would the person I want to become, spend their time?". So you're going to turn your values into time. And here's how you do it. You look at these three life domains, starts at the center of these three life domains is you.

You are at the center these three life domains, so you can't take care of others if you can't take care of yourself. So what you have to do is to take out your calendar and ask yourself "how much time would the person I want to become, spend on taking care of what's important to you". So prayer, meditation, reading, learning, sleep, exercise, video games, I don't care, it can be any of those things. It's not up to me to tell you what your value should be. But whatever is important to you, put it in your calendar, even the fun stuff, video game, sure, put it in your account. Or social media, put it in your calendar. Remember, the time you plan to waste is not waste of time. It's in your calendar. It's instantly traction, not distraction. If you do anything but that, it's a distraction. So that's the first step - ask yourself "how much time would the person you want to become spent on taking care of themselves?".

The next step your relationships. Part of the reason in the industrialized world that we have such a loneliness epidemic, and we know that loneliness is as detrimental to our health as smoking and obesity. It is this hidden crisis that we are facing right now, that many people will report having fewer friends, fewer close contacts that they can confide in than ever before. And part of the problem is that we don't hold time for our closest relationships. We give them whatever scraps of time are leftover-

“yeah, let's get coffee some time”, or “yeah, son, I'll play with you some time”, or “Yeah, we will go on a date at some time”. But we don't plan that time. And if we don't plan that time, it tends not to happen. So make sure that you hold that time in your calendar for the most important relationships in your life. Your siblings, your parents, your kids, your friends, your mates, doesn't matter. Put that time on your calendar, put it on repeat. You know, I have several very, very close friends. We know... third Thursday of the month, we're going to have a conversation from now until forever. It's on the calendar. We don't have to go back and forth scheduling that time, it will be there for us.

The next thing you want to do is the work domain. You want to ask yourself “how would the person I want to become, spend their time at work?”. And this is probably where most people spend most of their time. Now, there are two kinds of work. We have what we call reactive work and reflective work. Reactive work is how most low performers spend their entire day - reacting to stuff reacting to emails, reacting to Slack notifications, reacting to meetings, constantly reacting to things. And many low performers are low performers, because they get comfortable doing that. What do I need to do? Let me just check my inbox, my email inbox will tell me what to do. Right? My messages will tell me what to do. Because low performers hate thinking, low performers don't like to ask themselves, wait a minute, what's important? A high performer, in order to figure out what is important, has to make reflective time a priority. A high performer is the kind of person who sits down and says, Wait a minute, am I running real fast in the wrong direction? And how do I change course, if that's the case? But you can only do that, you can only become a high performer if you put time in your schedule to think. And the vast majority of people don't do that. They don't make time to think because it's uncomfortable. People don't like to think, they don't like to think critically about “Hey, am I living the kind of life I want, professionally, personally, is that time scheduled to make sure that I'm on track?”. So make sure at least some time in your day, I'm not saying all day, some time in your day, 20 minutes, half an hour, maybe 45 minutes or an hour is reserved for reflective work. So now that you've done that, you'll have a time box calendar and time box calendars blow the traditional to-do list method out of the water. You know, I used to be a to-do list devotee, you know, I used to run my life on to-do lists. And by the way, just to be very, very clear, I am all for taking things out of your head and putting them down on paper or in an app, that's very healthy. But what people don't do, and this is the critical mistake, they don't turn those items into time. And so here's what happens. Here's what I used to do, I get home from work with a to-do list that's still a mile long, because to-do lists have no constraint, right, you can always add more to it to-do lists, there's no bottom. So I'd get home from work. I feel like I've been busy all day. And yet, I still have a million things on my to-do list that I haven't done. And here's where it gets really pernicious is that when this happens, day after day, week, after week, month, after month, year after year, you are telling yourself, you know, we talked about self image earlier, you are proving to yourself that, look, you still didn't do this thing, all these things you said you were going to do, you didn't do = Loser! And we start internalizing this narrative of you see, I must not be good at time management, look at all the unfinished tasks that I didn't do. And so that's a big reason why to-do lists are so terrible for our productivity, is that, we begin to believe this narrative - I must not be very good at time management, look at this stuff I can't finish and we begin to internalize that instead. What I want you to do, instead of doing that, don't measure your life based on how many little cute boxes you checked off. Because we know what tends to happen is that people tend to do the easy stuff. That's why these to-do list, another reason why to-do lists don't work, is that, or I should say, running your life on a to-do list doesn't work, is that people tend to do the easy fun stuff first, as opposed to the hard work. Stop

measuring your life based on how many cute little boxes you checked off, and instead, measure yourself based on how many times you did what you were said you were going to do without distraction. That's your only metric of success. Notice I didn't say what you finish, okay, it's not about finishing anything. What do you mean, don't finish anything? How am I going to get my work done? Here's the kicker, the people who measured themselves based on that one metric of "did I do what I said I was going to do, for as long as I said I would, without distraction?" - those people finish more, they actually get more done, than the people who measure themselves based on how many, you know, boxes on their to-do list they checked off. So that's a that's a kind of a 30,000 foot overview of how to turn your values into time, to make time for attraction by using this this time-boxing technique. And then the the more advanced lesson is about - how do we synchronize our schedule with the stakeholders in our life, like our family, our boss or coworkers? That's when it really becomes life changing and incredibly powerful.

Aidan 38:55

You mentioned there about the high performer. And I don't know any high performer who doesn't develop themselves in reading or advancing themselves in some way. Perhaps it's going to the gym in order to train the body, to train the mind, to train the workplace. And I thought about something. So you mentioned about the reflective person, the high performer. And I always have this image where, imagine you walk into your boss's office, the boss is looking out the window and you asked her, you know, what are you doing? You know, well for you, you have loads of time. But actually she's doing the right thing. And what that's often reflective of, is actually a dysfunctional organization. So if I'm being rewarded more for my busyness in regard, regardless of what I'm focusing that busyness on - that's a sign of a greater dysfunction. And you shine a light on this in the book as well.

Nir 39:49

Yes, yeah, there's a whole section on how to build an indestructible workplace. And this is an area I think is a really important because I think we tend to think that distraction at Work is caused by the technology we use, right? That it's email and slack and these notifications that, that cause distraction. But what I discovered in my years of research, was that it actually isn't the technology, if that distraction is a symptom of a larger dysfunction - that distraction really is about company culture. That in fact, there's a couple of case studies in the book where I went to companies who make this technology. I went to the second-most distracting technology in the research I did for the book. The second most distracting technology after email - email was number one. Number two was slack, or some other kind of group messaging platform. So actually went to Slack headquarters in San Francisco. And I went, went to see them and I wanted to see, okay, who's this company that makes people so distracted with this is very distracting technology. And I was shocked to find that, at Slack they don't have this problem, that it's not something they struggle with that which didn't make any sense. If the technology was causing the distraction, well, nobody uses slack more than slack. They should be the most distracted company on Earth. But that's not the case. Because slack as well as several other companies I profile in the book, exhibit these three qualities of an indestructible company.

Number one, they give people psychological safety. Psychological safety is the ability to talk about a problem without fear of repercussion. So if you can raise your hand and say, "Hey, this isn't really working for me, can we talk about this problem", you have psychological safety. If you can't, right, if you

can't raise this problem of "Hey, I am constantly interrupted every five minutes, I cannot get my work done. Because I'm constant expected to be on and available". If you can't raise your hand and say, "Hey, this isn't working. For me, this is a problem". That is the problem - that you can't talk about the problem. So that's number one, you have to give employee psychological safety to talk about this as well as several other problems.

Number two is a forum to talk about the problems - do be employees have a place to talk about this. At Slack, it was fascinating. They have chat rooms on Slack, dedicated to talking about these kinds of problems. And they use emoji for the senior management to show their staff that they're that their voices are heard. They'll use the eye emoji to show people that 'yep, that's been seen, that concern has been seen' or check emoji to show people 'it's been solved'. So it's not necessarily about agreeing with every employee's gripe. It's about having employees know that their concerns are heard. So that's number two - a forum to talk about these problems.

And number three, management has to exemplify what it means to be Indistractable. Culture is like water, it flows downhill. And so people look to their bosses, right? Well, I can't tell you how many workshops I've given, where I'm asked to come in to give this big, expensive workshop on how a company can become Indistractable, and I get to the meeting, and guess who's on their phone in the back of the room? Is it, Is it the junior staff, the millennials, who are apparently all, you know, tech addicted? No. It's the old guys, right? It's the senior management. The older people who are on their devices, the big boss wants to show everyone how important they are - they have to check email all the time on their phone. People see that. And so we have to show people, we have to lead by example. And so it's fascinating. If you go to Slack headquarters, this blew me away. If you go to Slack headquarters, you will see in bright pink neon letters, in the company canteen, you will see this sign - you can't miss it - it says work hard and go home. Not something you'd expect to see in a hard charging Silicon Valley company. But that is part of their values, from Stewart Butterfield, the CEO on down, they believe in this ethos that to do our best work, we have to be able to work without distraction.

Aidan 43:43

Let's build on that because I thought about how you talk about in the book - Make calling a meeting actually kind of difficult. And in a similar way, on a personal level, make distracting you difficult, because it's actually it's quite difficult to get an email to you - you know, so you don't respond straight away, you respond in batches. So maybe we'll share both of these together. Because being difficult to reach isn't a bad thing. Like I've made myself difficult to reach over time. And at the start, you kind of feel oh, people be looking for me. They're not really and a lot of the time, they'll just they'll forget about you and then move on. And if it's really urgent, it will come back. But I loved the little tips you shared, for example, on one stream, the personal stream, managing email in batches, for example, and then in the work stream, making meetings actually difficult to call and have another bit of structure about them. Maybe we'll handle both of those.

Nir 44:39

Sure, sure. So I don't know if I would say that I would make emailing you difficult per se. I pretty easy to reach anybody can go to my contact page and send me an email and it comes straight to me. So it's not that I think I'm difficult to reach. If that I don't reply to every email every 30 seconds. I don't let my

email inbox guide what I do in the day. I have email time boxed right in my calendar time for that email. And there's a wonderful technique that I developed that can reduce the amount of time you spend on email dramatically. I mean, email is kind of the bane of everyone's existence these days. And what we discovered in the research is that, the time you waste on email is not the reading or replying. It's the checking, and specifically the rechecking. That's the problem. So what happens with most people when it comes to email is they open a message, they read it, they put it away? They forget about it, they open it again, what's in the email - let me check it, read it, put it away. And they do that three or four times per email. So that's the biggest time waster when we come to email. So what do we do instead? Then the methodology that I talked about Indistractable goes like this. So whenever you get an email, you commit to only touching each email two times. The first time you open it, and you label it, you tag it, according to when it needs a reply. Okay, if you don't know how to tag it, just every email program can do this, just Google it. So you tag it based on when it needs a reply. If it never needs a reply, just delete or archive it. If it needs a reply right now - "oh, my god, your house is on fire, you have to contact me right this minute" - that's about 1% of your emails; it does happen. Okay, fine, you can take care of that email immediately. The other two kinds of, the other emails will batch themselves into two kinds of messages. 80% of the remaining emails will be emails that you can reply to sometime this week. Okay, so tag it as 'this week'. The other 20% are emails that should be replied to today, okay, things that are relatively urgent, not immediate, you know, most of the times if your house is on fire, nobody's going to email you - they'll call you, they'll text you, they'll find another way to reach you, they're not gonna email you. But so 20% of emails or emails that can be returned sometime today, okay. First time, all you do is batch them into 'today' or 'this week'. Then you have time in your time box calendar that you will devote to returning only the emails that require a response today, okay. What you want to avoid is when you don't know what to do, let me just check some email. That's a big mistake, because you should have things on, you what people do is, when things get hard, when a project is difficult, when I'm not sure what to do next, let me just check email for a quick minute. And that's when it becomes a huge distraction. So only check those emails during that time in your time box calendar where you know, you have time devoted to only doing the 20% of emails that need to reply today. Well, then what about the 80%? Right? Aren't I just kicking the can? Okay, here's the thing. You want to book time in your calendar to flush through those 80% of emails that need to reply sometime this week. So I call it 'Message Mondays'. On 'message Mondays', I have a three hour block, where I go through all those emails that weren't urgent. But now you say okay, well, how have I saved any time? This hasn't saved me any time? Here's where the magic happens - when you let people wait a little bit, okay? When those non urgent messages are allowed to simmer, there's something beautiful that happens. Emails, decay, emails decay. How does that happen? People realize that they solved their own problem, they don't need you to answer the question, somebody else took care of it, some priority got crushed under the weight of some other priority. And I think that what was important back then, it's actually not that important; there's something else that's more important. So by letting those emails just marinate for a little while, you will find that about half the messages that will be returned sometime this week, don't even need to reply. Whereas if you had processed them how most people do it, right people, low performers, who work in reactive work all day - they just process whatever email comes in, if it's in, it's out, it's in, it's out. And they play what we call email ping pong. What they don't realize is if you want to get fewer emails, you have to send fewer emails. And so by slowing down this email ping pong game, by only replying to messages that need a reply today, and then delaying the ones that don't need to reply today, and it can wait a little longer, that's one of the techniques. Now there's many, many other

techniques that you can do - delay delivery - there's all kinds of other things you can do. But that's a big one. Now, you mentioned meetings, meetings are the epitome of these tasks that we don't think about as necessarily super distracting; we tend to blame phones and things like that, you know, apps. Meetings are a huge source of distraction. Right? How many pointless meetings do we attend? And a big reason why meetings are so pointless is because of these internal triggers we talked about earlier. The number one reason people call a pointless meeting is because they want to hear themselves think, okay, they want to hear themselves talk, they want to float an idea by people. And this tends to be a huge waste of time. Because meetings today are just too easy to call. I used to be - we ought to be in the same place, you know, to have a meeting same place and time. Well, today, I can call a meeting and you can be, you know, in different parts of the world. Doesn't matter where you are. We just have that meeting over zoom, and it's become too easy to call these meetings. And the reason why, again, back to these internal triggers, we know that when there's a workplace environment, and we talk about some of this research in the book, there's a workplace environment that we know literally leads to, it is a causal relationship with depression and anxiety disorder, okay, a certain type of workplace. What type of workplace causes depression, anxiety disorder? A workplace environment with high expectations, coupled with low control, okay. If you have high expectations and high control, no problem, people flourish. But when you have high expectations and low control, that's the kind of workplace environment that leads to, leads to depression and anxiety disorder. So what do people do when they feel anxious, when they feel depressed? Well, guess what they do. They look for control. They send more superfluous emails, they call more stupid meetings, because that helps them feel controlled. It helps them feel like they have agency. But of course, that distracts the hell out of everybody else. So what you want to do instead is to increase the friction associated with calling a meeting. Okay, first thing you can do, right off the bat, this is such common sense, I'm almost embarrassed to say it. But it turns out that 90% of meetings, 90% of meetings have no agenda. What? We learned this in high school student council, come on people, if there's no agenda, there's no meeting, period. Okay, the person calling the meeting, in order to call it, has to sit down for 10 minutes and type out what are we talking about here? What's the point of the meeting? What is the point of a meeting? Let's get this straight. The point of a meeting is for one thing only - unless it is a social engagement - the point of a business meeting is one thing to gain consensus. That's it - to gain consensus. It is not for brainstorming. Do not brainstorm in a meeting - bad idea! Studies have found the best way to brainstorm is in groups of two, or even better, by yourself. Any more than that, the most dominant, the loudest, the highest paid, the most male person, is going to dominate that brainstorm session. So do not brainstorming groups, brainstorm on your own. And then send those ideas to the stakeholder, to the person who is responsible for that project or meeting etc. Then that person's job is to this synthesize the input, do their research, do the homework, don't be lazy, do your job, come back to us, print out what we call a briefing document. And I didn't invent this, this comes straight from Amazon. When they start a meeting at Amazon, they sit down and they read a document, sometimes 15-30 minutes, they read a document together when they're all in that room or in the virtual room. They read this document to get on the same page about, okay, what did you learn? You did your homework - What decision are we making here? And then we use that meeting to gain consensus over what the stakeholder says that they think we should do next. And if we have any disagreements, we hash it out. We can either have them go do more research and homework or we make a decision. We we decide and we commit. So it's really important to make sure we add that bit of friction to each meeting to make it a little bit harder to call. And that we have this, we know what the real purpose of those meetings are.

Aidan 53:02

It was obvious you were reading that book on the on the Greek myths during writing Indistractable because some of that leaked through into the book, including the story of Ulysses passing by the island with the sirens, but you used that to emphasize the importance and the efficacy of pre-commitments, perhaps we'll share this.

Nir 53:23

Sure, sure. So this is step four, we kind of bounced around a little bit, which is great, but just to kind of reiterate. So step number one is mastering the internal triggers. There's lots of tools we can use to get control over those internal triggers or we'll always be distracted by something. Number two is make time for traction. Number three is hack back the external triggers. Step number four is the failsafe. This is the last line of defense, the firewall against distraction. And so one of the techniques we can use is called a pact. Now a pact this - this technique is over 2500 years old - It comes to us from the story of Ulysses written by the philosopher Homer. Homer tells us the story of this Greek hero Ulysses who has to sail his ship past the island of the sirens, and the sirens are these magical creatures who sing this mythical song that, any sailor who hears the siren song, crashes his ship onto the shore of the sirens Island and dies. Now, Ulysses in the story, knows this is going to happen. Okay. So in order to prevent getting distracted, he takes a precaution, he does something today. He enters into a pact to make sure he's not distracted tomorrow. What does he do? He tells his crew members to put bees wax in their ears, so they can't hear the siren song. And he also instructs them to bind him to the mast of the ship and he tells them "no matter what I do, no matter what I say, do not let me go". And you know what the plan works. He's able to sail his ship right past the shore of the sirens Island and return his crew and ship safely home. So we can make these pacts in our own life, right, as the last line of defense. Do not jump this technique, by the way. This is very important. If you jump straight to this technique, you will fail, you have to do the other three steps. First making sure that you master those internal triggers, make time for traction, hack back external triggers, then, then, use this four step of making a pact. And there's three kinds of pacts - there are effort packs, where we put some bit of friction in between us and something we don't want to do, kind of like Ulysses binding himself to the mass of the ship. We can have a price pact, which has some kind of financial disincentive to going off track. So for example, when I wrote my book, after four years of research, I made a bet with my friend Mark that if I didn't finish my book on a certain date, I would have to pay him \$10,000. Okay, now that \$10,000, I did not want to lose, that was going to be very painful for me. And so what did I do? Did I lose the money? Of course not. I kept my money. And I had my finished manuscript, because I made a pact. Now, it's very hard to make these pacts, you know why? Because that means you'll have to actually do it. But there's very few behaviors that you know, when all else fails, there are very few behaviors that you can't get someone to actually do if there's some kind of price pact at the other end. So that's the, there's a caveat here. Again, make sure you read the book, because this absolutely can backfire if you don't use it properly. And then the final pact is what we call an identity pact, which is actually something we talked about earlier about having a moniker or having a new identity that you can use to help you stay on track.

Aidan 56:22

I'm just, I'm picturing people tied to their chairs in front of their, their office for their computers, and I'm saying Nir Eyal told me to do this.

Nir 56:33

Make sure you read the book, there's caveats, okay. You can really screw this up for yourself.

Aidan 56:36

Yeah, and it's brilliantly charted. Everything's laid out very helpful for you. Nir, we're running out of time. Last thing for you is you devoted a section to raising Indistractable children. And you devoted another section to being an Indistractable partner, as well, which are both core aspects of the entire book, perhaps we would just give one tip on each. And that might be the same tip for both. Perhaps we'll share this again, caveat, read the book for the deeper meaning here as well.

Nir 57:05

I'll say real quick, with raising Indistractable kids, we have to get to the deeper reason why kids are overusing technology or any distraction for that matter that I think a lot of parents, we like to blame, you know, rock and roll, or sugar or, you know, television or video games, we blame stuff outside of ourselves. But really, if you, if you know...I do a deep dive into, this was probably the chapter that researching it most changed my mind as a parent of a 13 year old. I was sure the world was one way, that parenting worked one way and now I've completely changed my mind on things, so that it's very important to understand the deeper drivers, what we call psychological nutrients, that when kids are deficient in these psychological nutrients, then they look for those psychological nutrients. If that they can't find offline, they look for them online. So that's very important. And then in terms of having an indestructible relationship. This is really about what we call social antibodies. What do you do when you go out with friends, and maybe you're Indistractable, but they're not. So how do we spread those social antibodies? So it reminds me of when I was a kid, we had ashtrays in our living room, my parents didn't smoke. But look in the 1980s when people came to your house, they just expected to smoke. That's what people did. They just smoked in your living room. And they didn't ask. Now today that seems crazy, right? Nobody would ever walk into someone's living room, and just assume they can smoke a cigarette. But the back then that's the way we did things. What changed what changed? It wasn't a law. It was manners, right? People learn these new ways of being; we spend what we call social antibodies - these behaviors that we use to inoculate society, from these antisocial, unhealthy behaviors. And that's exactly what we see happening today with distraction - that there's a bifurcation in the world today. It's just like people said, "I'm a nonsmoker. If you want to smoke, go outside", right? That's how we change society. That's how we change these norms. There's a new group of people who say "look, I decide how to control my attention. I decide how I will control my life. I am Indistractable" and that's really the mission I'm on, is to form this movement of people who say "look, I can use technology I can get the best out of these tools without letting them get the best of us, because I am Indistractable!".

Aidan 59:22

beautiful, Nir, brilliant way to finish but before we do, where can people find you? There's a wealth of resources on your website, your blog, I subscribe to your newsletter I've been for years, and let's share where people can find you.

Nir 59:37

Sure, absolutely. So my blog is Nirandfar.com, near spelt like my first name, and far.com. and there's actually a free workbook that we couldn't fit into the final edition of the book so you can check that out. It's totally complimentary at my website nirandfar.com and the book is called Indistractable, how to control your attention and choose your life. And that's available wherever books are sold.

Aidan 59:58

Brilliant and just a note for you, our listeners, sign up to the innovationshow.io newsletter and you can be in win a chance to win this brilliant book. Author of 'Indestructible: how to control your intention and choose your life', Nir Eyal, thank you for joining us.

Nir 1:00:14

thank you so much, it's a pleasure