

# SUMMARY: The Innovation Show – Interview with Nir Eyal

## SHORT SUMMARY BY AIDAN

We are living through a crisis of distraction. Plans get side-tracked, friends are ignored, work never seems to get done. Why does it feel like we're distracting our lives away?

In "Indistractable", behavioural designer Nir Eyal reveals the hidden psychology driving you to distraction. Empowering and optimistic, this is the book that will help you design your time, realise your ambitions, and live the life you really want.

## SUMMARY BELOW IS BY MIM = SUB-HEADINGS ADDED/INSERTED BY MIM

### INTRODUCTION

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? To be able to do whatever it is we say we're going to do with our time and our attention is ultimately what becomes of our life. It's about the desires that we can learn to control because if we don't learn to master them, they do become our masters.

### TRACTION AND DISTRACTION

The opposite of distraction is traction - both come from the Latin word 'trejore' which means 'to pull'. Traction is any action that pulls you towards what you say you're going to do, things that you do with intent that move you closer to your goals & values. Distraction is any action that pulls you further away.

Any action can be either a traction or distraction based on **intent** – "the time you plan to waste is not wasted time" as Dorothy Parker said.

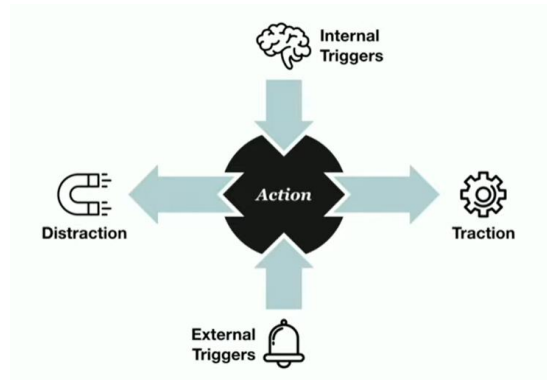
The most dangerous form of distraction is prioritizing the urgent and easy work at the expense of the important and difficult work. You don't even realize you got distracted.

Anything can be traction - if you want to go on social media or watch Netflix, 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 - it doesn't matter what it is - it is traction. Anything else is a distraction.

### EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL TRIGGERS

What prompts us to these actions? External triggers are the pings, the dings and the rings from our phones and elsewhere but they are only 10% of the reason we get distracted. For 90%, we are triggered by something inside of us. Internal triggers are uncomfortable emotional states – like boredom, loneliness, fatigue, uncertainty, anxiety, stress - that we seek to escape from.

Time management is pain management, if you do not deal with the deeper reason why you don't do what you said you will do, you will always get distracted by something.



## FRAMEWORK

Part of the human condition is the desire for distraction. Using the model of traction, distraction, internal and external triggers, we can use a four-step framework to tackle distraction and become indistractable.

### Step 1: mastering these internal triggers.

It's important to understand that internal triggers are designed to make us feel uncomfortable, so that we react, get creative, invent and move forward as a species. As humans, we can't escape this discomfort, so we have to learn to deal with it or fix the source of the problem. Internal triggers include boredom, negativity bias, rumination and hedonic adaptation. We all struggle with a sense of boredom at times. Negativity bias says that we tend to remember the bad more than the good. Rumination is our tendency to go over thoughts in our head, while hedonic adaptation says that we tend to revert back to our base level of happiness.

Reimagining the triggers, the task, and our temperament can help us to master the internal triggers.

- The trigger: change the dialogue with yourself. If something is boring, difficult or stressful, that's a good thing because it means that if you can leverage those sensations like rocket fuel and power through it, you're a scarce commodity.
- Our temperament: The first example given is about ego depletion; this is where you believe you run out of willpower to fight these negative internal triggers. But studies show that willpower is not like a battery, it doesn't run out. The second example - learned helplessness - includes beliefs like 'technology is hijacking my brain, it's addictive and there's nothing I can do about it' or 'I'm terrible at time management'. These beliefs are not true unless you believe they are true. Make an 'identity pact' with yourself by deciding what kind of labels you want to put on yourself.

### Step 2: making time for traction

Is your calendar blank? You can't say you got distracted, unless you know what you got distracted from. If we don't plan our day, someone will plan it for us, and we end up giving time to anybody who wants it. You cannot make more time, but you can always make more money, so be generous with your money and stingy with your time. Ask yourself - how can you turn your values into time? Values are attributes of the person you want to become. How would that person spend their time?

Consider the 3 life domains and schedule time for each in your calendar:

- yourself - meditation, learning, video games, exercise and so on.
- your relationships - friends & family. Tips are provided for how to create indistractable kids also.

- your work.

### Step 3: Hack back external triggers

Most low performers spend their time on reactive work e.g., my email inbox or Slack will tell me what to do. They hate thinking. High performers prioritise reflective work in order to figure out what is important. Put time in your daily schedule to think for 20-60 minutes.

Approaches to tackle other work-related distractions include:

- Company: create an indistractable workplace by giving people psychological safety and a forum to talk about the problems. Lastly, ensure management exemplifies what it means to be indistractable. At Slack headquarters for example, a bright pink neon sign reads “work hard and go home!”
- Email: minimise inbox distractions by tagging emails as follows: ‘urgent’ (~1% of emails) – reply to these immediately, 20% may need a reply ‘today’ – schedule time later in the day to action these, and 80% are ‘this week’ – schedule a single block of time for these weekly.
- Meetings: do not allow meetings to take place unless there is a clear agenda.

Don't measure your life based on ticking off to-do lists. Instead, **measure yourself on how many times you did what you were said you were going to do without distraction. That is your only metric of success.** It's not about whether you finished the task, it's about whether you stuck to it. People who work without distraction get more done than those using to-do lists.

### Step 4: Reduce distractions with pacts

The last line of defence is to create a pact with yourself to prevent distractions. It can be an effort pact, where you put friction between yourself and the thing you don't want to do, a price pact which is a financial disincentive to going off track or an identity pact which is having a new identity that you can use to help you stay on track.

