

“Being indistractable is the essential skill for our time.”

—GREG McKEOWN, author of *Essentialism*

indistractable



How to Control Your Attention
and Choose Your Life

NIR EYAL

Wall Street Journal bestselling author of *Hooked*

WITH JULIE LI

Praise for Indistractable

“If you value your time, your focus, or your relationships, this book is essential reading. I’m putting these ideas into practice.”

—**Jonathan Haidt, author of *The Righteous Mind***

“Indistractable is the most practical and realistic approach to balancing technology with well-being. A must-read for anyone with a smartphone.”

—**Mark Manson, author of The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck**

“This book is full of insights, stories, cutting-edge research and—most helpful—concrete, manageable strategies for becoming indistractable.”

—**Gretchen Rubin, author of The Happiness Project**

“In a world filled with noise, Indistractable provides a framework that will deliver the focus you need to get results.”

—**James Clear, author of Atomic Habits**

“Success and happiness belong to people who can control their attention. Nir Eyal is on a mission to protect you from distraction—and his lively book is full of actionable ideas”

—**Adam Grant, author of Give and Take and Originals**

“In the future, there will be two kinds of people in the world: those who read and apply the principles in Indistractable and those who wish they had read it sooner.”

—**Kintan Brahmhatt, global head of product at Amazon Music**

“Being indistractable is the essential skill for our time. Skip this book at your peril! My advice is this: Read it. Live it. Repeat.”

—**Greg McKeown, author of Essentialism**

“This is such an important book. Indistractable is the best guide I’ve read for reclaiming our attention, our focus, and our lives.”

—**Arianna Huffington, founder and CEO of Thrive, Global and founder of The Huffington Post**

“I can think of no more important skill than focus and no better teacher than Nir Eyal. Being indistractable is the skill of the century.”

—**Shane Parrish, founder of Farnam Street**

“As a lifelong procrastinator, I’m painfully aware of how much productivity-related advice there is out there and how little of it is actually helpful. Indistractable is an exception.”

—**Tim Urban, author of WaitButWhy.com**

“This book has done more to change the way I see the world than anything I’ve read in the past several years. The actionable insights from Indistractable have helped me reduce my daily time spent on email by 90%.”

—**Shane Snow, author of Smartcuts**

“Indistractable puts humans back where we belong when it comes to distraction: in the cockpit of our own lives.”

—**Anya Kamenetz, author of The Art of Screen Time**

“Indistractable will help you make the most of your time and find peace and productivity in an increasingly distracting world.”

—Charlotte Blank, chief behavioral officer at Maritz

“Dive headfirst into this book. Indistractable is a fascinating, visual, and profoundly helpful guide to overcoming distraction. The deeper you dig into this book, the more productive you’ll become.”

—Chris Bailey, author of Hyperfocus

“Indistractable is filled with both wisdom and humor. This is a valuable read for anyone navigating our modern world.”

—Richard M. Ryan, cofounder of self-determination theory

“Nir Eyal understands the modern technologies of attention from the inside, and in this practical and timely book, he shares the secrets to regaining and sustaining the capacity to focus on what matters. Your brain (not to mention your spouse, your kids, and your friends) will thank you for reading it.”

—Oliver Burkeman, columnist for The Guardian

“An essential book for anyone trying to think, work, or live better.”

—Ryan Holiday, author of The Obstacle Is the Way and Ego Is the Enemy

“Indistractable is priceless. You can’t afford to ignore this book.”

—Eric Barker, author of Barking Up The Wrong Tree

“By following Eyal’s four-step, research-backed model, you’ll be able to gain

control of your attention and leverage the incredible benefits of modern

technology without feeling scattered and drained. Indistractable is an essential book for people looking to make big things happen in the digital age.”

—**Taylor Pearson, author of The End of Jobs**

“Indistractable helped me realize technology was not the real reason I got distracted and struggled to get things done. It changed how I manage every part of my day, and I cannot recommend it highly enough. Everybody should read this book!”

—**Steve Kamb, founder of Nerd Fitness and author of Level Up Your Life**

“Indistractable is a masterclass in understanding the root cause of distraction.

Recommended for anyone looking to do more deep work.”

—**Cal Newport, author of Deep Work**

“Indistractable was an ‘ah-ha moment’ for me. Eyal distills academic research without ignoring the nuances and he values the readers’ time with a Goldilocks amount of detail, relevant examples, and practical strategies.”

—**Jocelyn Brewer, founder of Digital Nutrition**

“Indistractable is the most complete guide I’ve ever read on being focused. This book is a gift for anyone looking to free up time so that they can live a better, more fulfilling, and less hectic life.”

—**Dan Schawbel, author of *Back to Human***

indistractable

Also by Nir Eyal

Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products

indistractable

How to Control Your Attention
and Choose Your Life

Nir Eyal

with Julie Li



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The identities of some individuals in this book have been changed. Some sections have previously

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For Jasmine

An Important Note

Before you start reading, make sure to download the supplementary materials

from my website. You'll find free resources, downloads, and my latest updates at:

NirAndFar.com/Indistractable

Most important, you'll want to use the accompanying workbook, which I designed with exercises for each chapter to help you apply what you learn to your own life.

Also, please note that I do not have a financial interest in any of the companies mentioned unless specifically stated and my recommendations are

not influenced by any advertisers.

If you'd like to get in touch personally, you can reach me through my blog at NirAndFar.com/Contact.

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[**From Hooked to Indistractable**](#)

There's a certain yellow book you'll find on the shelves of most major tech companies. I've seen it at Facebook, Google, PayPal, and Slack. It's given out at tech conferences and company training events. A friend working at Microsoft told me the CEO, Satya Nadella, held up a copy and recommended it to all the company's employees.

[The book, *Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products*, was a Wall](#)

[Street Journal best seller and, at the time of this writing, still ranks as the](#)

number one book in the "Products" category on Amazon. It's a cookbook, of

sorts. The book contains a recipe for human behavior—your behavior. These tech companies know that in order to make money, they need to keep us coming back—their business models depend on it.

I know this because I've spent the past decade researching the hidden psychology that some of the most successful companies in the world use to make their products so captivating. For years, I taught future executives at both the Stanford Graduate School of Business and at the Hasso Plattner Institute of Design.

In writing *Hooked*, my hope was that start-ups and socially concerned companies would use this knowledge to design new ways of helping people build better habits. Why should the tech giants keep these secrets to themselves? Shouldn't we use the same psychology that makes video games and social media so engaging to design products to help people live better lives?

Since *Hooked* was published, thousands of companies have used the book to empower their users to build helpful and healthy habits. Fitbod is a fitness app that helps people build better exercise routines. Byte Foods seeks to change people's eating habits with internet-connected pantries that offer locally made fresh meals. Kahoot! builds software to make classroom learning more engaging and fun. [1](#)

We want our products to be user friendly, easy to navigate, and yes, habit-forming. Companies making their products more engaging isn't necessarily a problem—it's progress.

But there's also a dark side. As philosopher Paul Virilio wrote, "When you invent the ship, you also invent the shipwreck." In the case of user-friendly products and services, what makes some products engaging and easy

to use can also make them distracting.

For many people, these distractions can get out of hand, leaving us with a feeling that our decisions are not our own. The fact is, in this day and age, if you are not equipped to manage distraction, your brain will be manipulated by time-wasting diversions.

In the next few pages, I'll reveal my own struggle with distraction, and how I, ironically, got hooked. But I'll also share how I overcame my struggle and explain why we are much more powerful than any of the tech giants. As an industry insider, I know their Achilles' heel—and soon you will too.

The good news is that we have the unique ability to adapt to such threats.

We can take steps right now to retrain and regain our brains. To be blunt, what other choice do we have? We don't have time to wait for regulators to do something, and if you hold your breath waiting for corporations to make their products less distracting, well, you're going to suffocate.

In the future, there will be two kinds of people in the world: those who let their attention and lives be controlled and coerced by others and those who proudly call themselves “indistractable.” By opening this book, you’ve taken the first step toward owning your time and your future.

But you’re just getting started. For years you’ve been conditioned to expect instant gratification. Think of getting to the last page of *Indistractable* as a personal challenge to liberate your mind.

The antidote to impulsiveness is forethought. Planning ahead ensures you will follow through. With the techniques in this book, you’ll learn exactly what to do from this day forth to control your attention and choose your life.

1 I loved the way Kahoot! and Byte Foods used my book so much that I decided to invest in both

companies.

[Chapter 1](#)

[What’s Your Superpower?](#)

I love sweets, I love social media, and I love television. However, as much as I love these things, they don’t love me back. Overeating a sugary indulgence after a meal, spending too much time scrolling a feed, or indulging in a Netflix binge until 2 am were all things I once did with little or

no conscious thought—out of habit.

Just as eating too much junk food leads to health problems, the overuse of devices can also have negative consequences. For me, it was the way I prioritized distractions over the most important people in my life. Worst of all

was what I let distractions do to my relationship with my daughter. She's our only child and, to my wife and me, the most amazing kid in the world.

One particular day, the two of us were playing games from an activity book designed to bring dads and daughters closer together. The first activity involved naming each other's favorite things. The next project was building a

paper airplane with one of the pages. The third was a question we both had to

answer: "If you could have any superpower, what would it be?"

I wish I could tell you what my daughter said at that moment, but I can't.

I have no idea because I wasn't really there. I was physically in the room, but

my mind was elsewhere. "Daddy," she said, "what would your superpower be?"

"Huh?" I grunted. "Just a second. I just need to respond to this one thing."

I dismissed her as I attended to something on my phone. My eyes were still glued to my screen, fingers tapping away at something that seemed important

at the time but could definitely have waited. She went quiet. By the time I looked up, she was gone.

I had just blown a magical moment with my daughter because something on my phone had grabbed my attention. On its own, it was no big deal. But if

I told you this was an isolated incident, I'd be lying. This same scene had played out countless times before.

I wasn't the only one putting distractions before people. An early reader of this book told me that when he asked his eight-year-old daughter what her superpower would be, she said she wanted to talk to animals. When asked why, the child said, "So that I have someone to talk to when you and mom are too busy working on your computers."

After finding my daughter and apologizing, I decided it was time for a change. At first, I went extreme. Convinced it was all technology's fault, I tried a "digital detox." I started using an old-school flip phone so I couldn't be tempted to use email, Instagram, and Twitter. But I found it too difficult to

get around without GPS and the addresses saved inside my calendar app. I missed listening to audiobooks while I walked, as well as all the other handy things my smartphone could do.

To avoid wasting time reading too many news articles online, I purchased

a subscription to the print edition of a newspaper. A few weeks later, I had a stack of unread papers piled neatly next to me as I watched the news on TV.

In an attempt to stay focused while writing, I bought a 1990s word processor without an internet connection. However, whenever I'd sit down to

write, I'd find myself glancing at the bookshelf and would soon start flipping through books unrelated to my work. Somehow, I kept getting distracted, even without the tech that I thought was the source of the problem.

Removing online technology didn't work. I'd just replaced one distraction with another.

I discovered that living the life we want requires not only doing the right things; it also requires we stop doing the wrong things that take us off track.

We all know eating cake is worse for our waistlines than having a healthy salad. We agree that aimlessly scrolling our social media feeds is not as enriching as spending time with real friends in real life. We understand that if

we want to be more productive at work, we need to stop wasting time and actually do the work. We already know what to do. What we don't know is how to stop getting distracted.

In researching and writing this book over the past five years, and by following the science-backed methods you'll soon learn, I'm now more

productive, physically and mentally stronger, better rested, and more fulfilled

in my relationships than I've ever been. This book is about what I learned as I

developed the most important skill for the twenty-first century. It's about how I became indistractable, and how you can too.

The first step is to recognize that distraction starts from within. In [part one](#), you'll learn practical ways to identify and manage the psychological discomfort that leads us off track. However, I steer clear of recommending well-worn techniques like mindfulness and meditation. While these methods can be effective for some people, they have already been written about ad nauseam. If you're reading this book, my guess is you've already tried those techniques and, like me, found they didn't quite do the trick for you. Instead, we'll take a fresh look at what really motivates our behavior and learn why time management is pain management. We'll also explore how to make just about any task enjoyable—not in the Mary Poppins way of “adding a spoonful of sugar,” but by cultivating the ability to focus intensely on what we're doing.

[Part two](#) will look at the importance of making time for the things you really want to do. You'll learn why you can't call something a “distraction” unless you know what it is distracting you from. You'll learn to plan your

time with intention, even if you choose to spend it scrolling through celebrity

[headlines or reading a steamy romance novel. After all, the time you plan to waste is not wasted time.](#)

[Part three](#) follows with a no-holds-barred examination of the unwanted external triggers that hamper our productivity and diminish our well-being.



While technology companies use cues like the pings and dings on our phones

to hack our behavior, external triggers are not confined to our digital devices.

They're all around us—from cookies beckoning when we open the kitchen cabinet to a chatty coworker keeping us from finishing a time-sensitive project.

[Part four](#) holds the last key to making you indistractable: pacts. While removing external triggers is helpful in keeping distractions out, pacts are a proven way of reining ourselves in, ensuring we do what we say we're going to do. In this part, we'll apply the ancient practice of precommitment to modern challenges.

Finally, we'll take an in-depth look at how to make your workplace indistractable, raise indistractable kids, and foster indistractable relationships.

These final chapters will show you how to regain lost productivity at work, have more satisfying relationships with your friends and family, and even be a better lover—all by conquering distraction.

You're welcome to navigate the four steps to becoming indistractable

however you like, but I recommend you proceed in order through parts one to

four. The four modalities build on each other, with the first step being the
most foundational.

If you're the kind of person who likes to learn by example, and you want to see these tactics in action first, feel free to read parts five and on, then come back through the first four parts for a deeper explanation. Also, there's no requirement to adopt each and every technique right away. Some might not fit your current situation and only become useful in the future when you're ready or your circumstances change. But I promise you that by the time you finish this book, you will discover several breakthroughs that will change the way you manage distraction forever.

Imagine the incredible power of following through on your intentions.

How much more effective would you be at work? How much more time could you spend with your family or doing the things you love? How much happier would you be?

What would life be like if your superpower was being indistractable?

REMEMBER THIS

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We need to learn how to avoid distraction. Living the lives we want not only requires doing the right things but also necessitates not doing the things we know we'll regret.

-

The problem is deeper than tech. Being indistractable isn't about being a Luddite. It's about understanding the real reasons why we do things against our best interests.

-

Here's what it takes: We can be indistractable by learning and adopting four key strategies.

[Chapter 2](#)

[Being Indistractable](#)

The ancient Greeks immortalized the story of a man who was perpetually distracted. We call something that is desirable but just out of reach

[“tantalizing” after his name. The story goes that Tantalus was banished to the](#)

[underworld by his father, Zeus, as a punishment. There he found himself](#)

wading in a pool of water while a tree dangled ripe fruit above his head. The curse seems benign, but when Tantalus tried to pluck the fruit, the branch

moved away from him, always just out of reach. When he bent down to drink

the cool water, it receded so that he could never quench his thirst. Tantalus's punishment was to yearn for things he desired but could never grasp.

You have to hand it to the ancient Greeks for their allegories. It's hard to portray a better representation of the human condition. We are constantly reaching for something: more money, more experiences, more knowledge, more status, more stuff. The ancient Greeks thought this was just part of the curse of being a fallible mortal and used the story to portray the power of our incessant desires.



[Tantalus's curse—forever reaching for something.](#)

TRACTION AND DISTRACTION

Imagine a line that represents the value of everything you do throughout your

day. To the right, the actions are positive; to the left, they are negative.

On the right side of the continuum is traction, which comes from the Latin trahere, meaning “to draw or pull.” We can think of traction as the actions that draw us toward what we want in life. On the left side is distraction, the opposite of traction. [Derived from the same Latin root,](#) the word means the “drawing away of the mind.” Distractions impede us from making progress toward the life we envision. All behaviors, whether they tend toward traction or distraction, are prompted by triggers, internal or external.

Internal triggers cue us from within. When we feel our belly growl, we look for a snack. When we're cold, we find a coat to warm up. And when we're sad, lonely, or stressed, we might call a friend or loved one for support.

External triggers, on the other hand, are cues in our environment that tell

DISTRACTION



Actions that move us **away from** what we really want

TRACTION



Actions that move us **toward** what we really want



us what to do next, like the pings, dings, and rings that prompt us to check our emails, open a news alert, or answer a phone call. External triggers can also take the form of other people, such as a coworker who stops by our desk.

They can also be objects, like a television set whose mere presence urges us to turn it on.

Whether prompted by internal or external triggers, the resulting action is either aligned with our broader intention (traction) or misaligned (distraction). Traction helps us accomplish goals; distraction leads us away from them.

The challenge, of course, is that our world has always been full of things designed to distract us. Today, people find themselves attached to their mobile phones, but they are only the latest potential hindrance. People complained about the brain-melting power of television since its inception. Before that, it was the telephone, comic books, and the radio. Even the

written word was blamed for creating “forgetfulness in the learners’ souls,”

according to Socrates. Though some of these things seem dull in comparison to today’s enticements, distractions have and always will be facts of life.

Today’s distractions, however, feel different. The amount of information available, the speed at which it can be disseminated, and the ubiquity of access to new content on our devices has made for a trifecta of distraction. If it’s a distraction you seek, it’s easier than ever to find.

What is the cost of all that distraction? In 1971 the psychologist Herbert

A. Simon presciently wrote, “The wealth of information means a dearth of

something else . . . a poverty of attention.” Researchers tell us attention and

focus are the raw materials of human creativity and flourishing. In the age of

increased automation, the most sought-after jobs are those that require