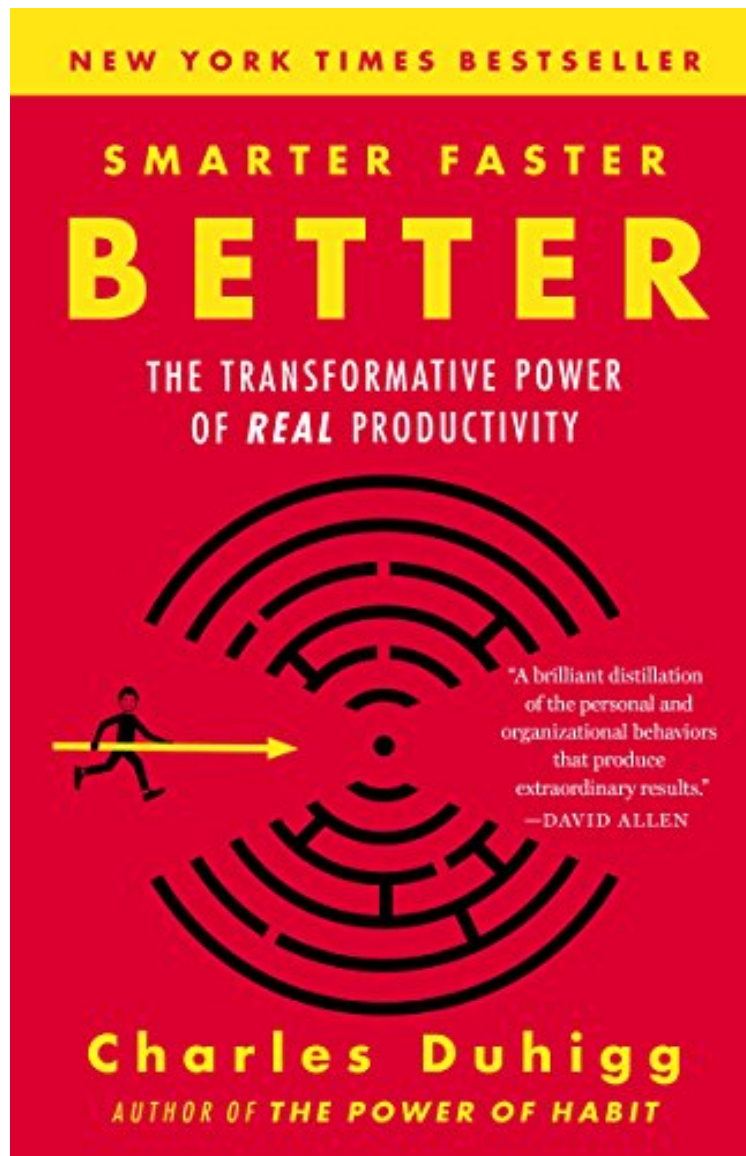


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Smarter Faster Better: The Transformative Power of Real Productivity

Charles Duhigg

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Charles Duhigg : Smarter Faster Better: The Transformative Power of Real Productivity before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Smarter Faster Better: The Transformative Power of Real Productivity:

986 of 1072 people found the following review helpful. Too much reliance on anecdote to prove its points By Etiam si omnes, ego non Charles Duhigg is a good journalist (his share of a Pulitzer Prize proves that), and his book Smarter

Faster Better is a good read. I enjoyed reading it. It's inspiring and insightful. But the book promises to be more than just entertainment. The title takes off the Olympic motto: Citius Altius Fortius (Faster Higher Stronger), and its cover shows a runner smartly running directly to the center of a maze. A self-help, self-improvement type of book, it promises "the secrets of being productive in life and business". That I don't think the book delivers. Why not? The book is full of stories. Anecdotes. Case studies. Whatever you want to call them. Charles Duhigg researches a lot of disparate incidents involving various people, and tries to bring them together to show us how to draw on other people's experiences to be more productive. But he fails. That's because you can pull out of anecdotes pretty much anything you want to. I can find an anecdote to support any argument I want to make. Anecdotes are like statistics. As Simpson's paradox says, often the same statistics can be used to show something and its exact opposite. The same with anecdotes. Take Charles Duhigg's use of the life of Rosa Parks in his book *The Power of Habit*. He says that she shows the power of social habits. He tells of how her husband said she was so social she rarely ate dinner at home, instead eating at the home of friends. That gave her the social strength to start a movement. But Susan Cain (a blurber for this book) in her book *Quiet*, tells the story of Rosa Parks to support her argument of the power of introverts. While extroverts tend to gain their energy in social situations, introverts typically recharge through solitude and feel drained from too much stimulation. The same person, but one author sees her as a social butterfly and another as an introvert who sought solitude. That's not to say that Charles Duhigg or Susan Cain is wrong. And I don't want to push this example too strongly. But I do think that many authors, and most TED talk speakers, depend too much on anecdote and story telling to persuade, while they would do better to just entertain. I have no problem using anecdotes to pump people up. But to try to derive secrets from them seems a step too far. Take another example, this one from this book. Charles Duhigg uses the example of the 2009 Air France Flight 447 jetliner crash in the Atlantic as an example of "cognitive tunneling" and poor mental models. In that tragic accident, the Airbus A330 plane was flying from Rio de Janeiro to Paris and ran into bad weather. The plane was flying fine, but its pitot tubes apparently froze up and gave the pilots the wrong speed information. They acted on that wrong information, put the plane into a stall, and fell into the ocean. But does that anecdote unequivocally show cognitive tunneling? And can one take from that anecdote a lesson about how not to cognitively tunnel? I don't see how. I've read several other accounts of that Air France accident, and none of them blamed it on cognitive tunneling (although one did mention tunnel vision as one of many factors). The Air France accident seems to me more like what Charles Perrow described in *Normal Accidents: Living With High-Risk Technologies*. Just like with the nuclear accident at Three Mile Island, people do not do well when their instruments lie to them about situations they cannot see with their eyes. Another account blames the Air France accident mainly on over-reliance on automated systems in the Airbus planes. (William Langewiesche's article in *Vanity Fair* is fascinating reading.) My point is that any anecdote can, by its nature, be interpreted in many different ways. Just like in the old fable six blind men saw six different things in an elephant. None were wrong, yet none were right. Rather than books like this one, I prefer my anecdotes in the form of biographies. When I read a good biography, or a good history, the author presents a life or a series of stories in a way that the reader can draw their own conclusions. I'm sure the author's slant comes through to some extent. But when I read a book by someone like David Halberstam or David McCullough, I usually feel as though I read a gem that provides lessons for my life. I didn't get that with this book. To me, at least, it seemed too shallow, too broad, and too pushy. Not deep, focused, and subtle.

53 of 56 people found the following review helpful. Mastering what separates "the merely busy from the genuinely productive"; By Robert Morris Mastering what separates "the merely busy from the genuinely productive"; In *Smarter Faster Better*, Charles Duhigg sets the table: Various advances in communications and technology are supposed to make our lives easier. "Instead, they often seem to fill our days with more work and stress. In part, that's because we've been paying attention to the wrong innovations. We've been staring at the tools of productivity — the gadgets and apps and complicated filing systems for keeping track of various to-do lists — rather than the lessons those technologies are trying to teach us. This book is about how to recognize the choices that fuel true productivity. This is a book about how to become smarter, faster, and better at everything you do. He focuses on — and devotes a separate chapter to — a handful of key insights shared by hundreds of poker players, airline pilots, military generals, executives, and cognitive scientists who kept mentioning the same concepts again and again and again. In this book, he explores "the eight ideas that seem most important to expanding productivity." Here they are, accompanied by my own annotations:

1. Motivation: Make choices that place you in control of a situation. If empowered, you will speak and act more decisively and accelerate gaining the respect and trust of others.
2. Teams: Manage the *how* of teams. Send messages that empower others. Keep in mind this passage from Lao-tse's Tao Te Ching: "Learn from the people. Plan with the people. Begin with what they have. Build on what they know. Of the best leaders, when the task is accomplished, the people will remark, 'We have done it ourselves.'"
3. Focus: Envision what will probably happen. What will happen first? Obstacles? How to avoid, preempt, or overcome them?
4. Goal Setting: Choose a stretch goal (a BHAG), then break that into sub-goals and develop SMART objectives.
5. Managing Others: Employees work smarter and better when they feel they have the power (see #1) to help make the right decisions about what to be done and how best to do it. They will be more motivated if

convinced that others recognize and appreciated what they think, feel, and do.6. Decision Making: Envision multiple futures as well as their potential implications and possible consequences. Obtain a variety of different (and differing) perspectives from those closest to the situation. Although this 360-degree process is helpful, you must be prepared to make the given decision.7. Innovation: Combine new ideas in old ways and old ideas in new ways. Constantly challenge assumptions and premises. If they are sound, they will survive. Incremental innovation makes disruptive innovation even better.8. Absorbing Data: When encountering new information, do something with it. Write it down. Read it aloud. Formulate questions that it evokes. Put it to a small test. Ask others "Did you know that?" Most new information is really unfamiliar information. These are among the dozens of passages of greatest interest and value to me, also listed to suggest the scope of Duhigg's coverage: Motivation (Pages 13-21 and 33-47) U.S. Marine Corps boot camp (22-31) Teamwork at Google (41-46, 50-51, and 65-68) Mental Models (88-93, 97-98, 101-102, and 277-279) Qantas Airways flight 32 and mental models (93-101 and 277-278) Prelude to Yom Kippur War (103-106 and 109-112) Stretch goals (125-128) Frank Janssen (134-139 and 161-165) Rick Madrid (139-144, 150-151, and 154-155) James Baron (145-150) Categories of culture (146-148) Productivity and control (153-155) Bayesian psychology (192-193) How Idea Brokers and Creative Desperation Saved Disney's Frozen (205-215) West Side Story (210-212, 216-220, and 223-224) Information blindness (243-247) Debt collection (247-252) Stretch goals paired with SMART goals (274-279) In addition to his lively as well as eloquent narrative, I commend Duhigg on his provision of the most informative annotated notes that I have as yet encountered. I urge everyone who reads this brief commentary to check them out (Pages 293-368). They enliven and enrich his narrative in ways and got an extent that must be experienced to be believed. The best journalists as well as the best leaders are terrific storytellers and that is certainly true of Duhigg. He anchors his reader in hundreds of real-world situations to illustrate key points. Dozens of poker players, airline pilots, military generals, executives, and cognitive scientists that he interviewed learned valuable lessons with regard to the dos and don'ts of being productive in life and business, especially when under severe duress. I highly recommend Smarter Faster Better as well as Charles Duhigg's previously published book, The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business, also published by Random House. 188 of 210 people found the following review helpful. The book's good points get buried and forgotten in an epic flood of words By Mark GA brief warning to busy and smart people: the book contains some interesting insights and pieces of valuable advice. But, in the tradition of most self-help books, its worthwhile points could be communicated in a book 70 to 80 percent shorter. It is just unbelievably tedious with runaway background information and stories. It contains so much superfluous material that it is actually painful to listen to. And the good points get buried and forgotten in a flood of words. I normally prefer unabridged versions of books but this one begs for a most severe abridgement.

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER From the author of The Power of Habit comes a fascinating book that explores the science of productivity, and why managing how you think is more important than what you think—with an appendix of real-world lessons to apply to your life. At the core of Smarter Faster Better are eight key productivity concepts—from motivation and goal setting to focus and decision making—that explain why some people and companies get so much done. Drawing on the latest findings in neuroscience, psychology, and behavioral economics—as well as the experiences of CEOs, educational reformers, four-star generals, FBI agents, airplane pilots, and Broadway songwriters—this painstakingly researched book explains that the most productive people, companies, and organizations don't merely act differently. They view the world, and their choices, in profoundly different ways. A young woman drops out of a PhD program and starts playing poker. By training herself to envision contradictory futures, she learns to anticipate her opponents' missteps—and becomes one of the most successful players in the world. A group of data scientists at Google embark on a four-year study of how the best teams function, and find that how a group interacts is more important than who is in the group—a principle, it turns out, that also helps explain why Saturday Night Live became a hit. A Marine Corps general, faced with low morale among recruits, reimagines boot camp—and discovers that instilling a "bias toward action" can turn even the most directionless teenagers into self-motivating achievers. The filmmakers behind Disney's Frozen are nearly out of time and on the brink of catastrophe—until they shake up their team in just the right way, spurring a creative breakthrough that leads to one of the highest-grossing movies of all time. What do these people have in common? They know that productivity relies on making certain choices. The way we frame our daily decisions; the big ambitions we embrace and the easy goals we ignore; the cultures we establish as leaders to drive innovation; the way we interact with data: These are the things that separate the merely busy from the genuinely productive. The Power of Habit, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Charles Duhigg explained why we do what we do. In Smarter Faster Better, he applies the same relentless curiosity, deep reporting, and rich storytelling to explain how we can improve at the things we do. It's a groundbreaking exploration of the science of productivity, one that can help anyone learn to succeed with less stress and struggle, and to get more done without sacrificing what we care about most—to become smarter, faster, and better at everything we do. Praise for Smarter Faster Better "A pleasure to read . . . Duhigg's skill as a storyteller makes his book so engaging to read."—The

New York Times Book Review "Not only will Smarter Faster Better make you more efficient if you heed its tips, it will also save you the effort of reading many productivity books dedicated to the ideas inside." —Bloomberg Businessweek "Duhigg pairs relatable anecdotes with the research behind why some people and businesses are not as efficient as others." —Chicago Tribune "The book covers a lot of ground through meticulous reporting and deft analysis, presenting a wide range of case studies . . . with insights that apply to the rest of us." —The Wall Street Journal

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[He's] an effective storyteller with a knack for combining social science, fastidious reporting and entertaining anecdotes." —The Economist "Engagingly written, solidly reported, thought-provoking and worth a read." —Associated Press "Charles Duhigg is the master of the life hack." —GQ "A gifted storyteller, Duhigg . . . combines his reporting skills with cutting-edge research in psychology and behavioural economics to explain why some companies and people get so much done, while some fail. Almost all books written in this genre are full of case studies and stories, but Duhigg's storytelling skills make this book memorable and persuasive. Duhigg succeeds in challenging our mindsets and existing thought processes. It is not just another productivity book. It is about making sense of overwhelming data we live with." —The Financial Express "There are valuable lessons in Smarter, Faster, Better. . . . Duhigg is a terrific storyteller, and a master of the cliffhanger." —Financial Times "As he did in The Power of Habit, Charles Duhigg melds cutting-edge science, deep reporting, and wide-ranging stories to give us a fuller, more human way of thinking about how productivity actually happens. He manages to reframe an entire cultural conversation: Being productive isn't only about the day-to-day and to-do lists. It's about seeing our lives as a series of choices, and learning that we have power over how we think about the world." —Susan Cain, author of Quiet "A brilliant distillation of the personal and organizational behaviors that produce extraordinary results. Duhigg uses engaging storytelling to highlight fascinating research and core principles that we can all learn and use in our daily lives. A masterful must-read for anyone who wants to get more (and more creative) stuff done." —David Allen, author of Getting Things Done "Charles Duhigg has a gift for asking just the right question, and then igniting the same curiosity in the rest of us. In Smarter Faster Better he finds provocative answers to a riddle of our age: how to become more productive (by two times, or even ten times) and less busy, how to be more effective in the world and more in control of our lives. Duhigg has rendered, yet again, a great service with his sharp, lucid prose." —Jim Collins, author of Good to Great "A pleasure to read . . . [Charles] Duhigg's skill as a storyteller makes his book so engaging to read. "The New York Times Book Review" "Not only will "Smarter Faster Better" make you more efficient if you heed its tips, it will also save you the effort of reading many productivity books dedicated to the ideas inside. 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He manages to reframe an entire cultural conversation: Being productive isn't only about the day-to-day and to-do lists. It's about seeing our lives as a series of choices, and learning that we have

power over how we think about the world. Susan Cain, author of "Quiet" "" A brilliant distillation of the personal and organizational behaviors that produce extraordinary results. Duhigg uses engaging storytelling to highlight fascinating research and core principles that we can all learn and use in our daily lives. A masterful must-read for anyone who wants to get more (and more creative) stuff done. David Allen, author of "Getting Things Done" "" Charles Duhigg has a gift for asking just the right question, and then igniting the same curiosity in the rest of us. In "Smarter Faster Better" he finds provocative answers to a riddle of our age: how to become more productive (by two times, or even ten times) and less busy, how to be more effective in the world and more in control of our lives. Duhigg has rendered, yet again, a great service with his sharp, lucid prose. Jim Collins, author of "Good to Great" "From the Hardcover edition." "About the Author Charles Duhigg is a Pulitzer Prizewinning investigative reporter for The New York Times and the author of The Power of Habit and Smarter Faster Better. He is a winner of the National Academies of Sciences, National Journalism, and George Polk awards. A graduate of Harvard Business School and Yale College, he lives in Brooklyn with his wife and two children.