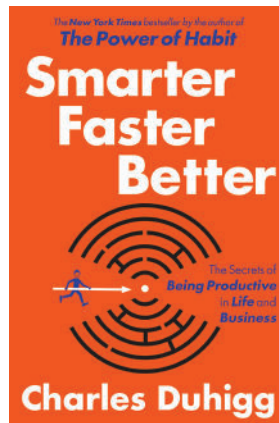




SMARTER FASTER BETTER
BY CHARLES DUHIGG



THE BOOK

**Smarter Faster Better**
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INTRODUCTION

With his book *Smarter Faster Better*, New York Times best seller and author of *The Power of Habit*, Charles Duhigg tackles the biggest questions around productivity. By breaking things down into key concepts, Duhigg doses out easily consumable and applicable knowledge to help you become smarter, faster and better.

With each chapter focusing on one concept, Duhigg uses compelling real-world anecdotes and scientific examples that share tips for genuine improvements in productivity. As entertaining as it is life-changing, *Smarter Faster Better* is an eye-opening look at how to succeed in life and in business. Each chapter serves up life advice along with stories to back up Duhigg's claims.

With charm and wit, Duhigg uses *Smarter Faster Better* to guide you through basic methods that allow you to achieve more each day. Equally useful for home life and study as in the workplace, *Smarter Faster Better* is a must-read for anyone who is tired of wishing they had more time.



5 BEST QUOTES

"Every choice we make in life is an experiment."

"No one can predict tomorrow with absolute confidence. But the mistake some people make is trying to avoid making any predictions because their thirst for certainty is so strong and their fear of doubt too overwhelming."

"When people believe they are in control, they tend to work harder and push themselves more. They are, on average, more confident and overcome setbacks faster."

"When you ask creative people how they did something, they feel a little guilty because they didn't really do it, they just saw something. It seemed obvious to them after a while. That's because they were able to connect experiences they've had and synthesize new things. And the reason they were able to do that was that they've had more experiences or they have thought more about their experiences than other people."

"Self-motivation becomes easier when we see our choices as affirmations of our deeper values and goals."



6 BIG IDEAS

1. MOTIVATION

Motivation occurs in the brain. In *Faster Smarter Better*, Duhigg recounts the story of a man who suffered a stroke that damaged a part of his brain called the striatum. This damage turned him from a go-getter into an apathetic person with no spirit or drive.

Over time this man's wife pushed him to make choices and express himself, and gradually, his motivation increased. The lesson here is that motivation can be learned.

Another example is young marine recruits. They often enter the army with little idea of what they want from life. When they graduate from US Marine training, they are driven and motivated.

One of the most integral ways to encourage motivation is to find a choice. Autonomy generates motivation, so finding even the smallest choice that you can control will help to trigger motivation. Duhigg suggests that if you are struggling with a long chain of emails, choose one from the middle and answer that first. Then you have taken control.

Another trick is the one taught to US Marines, to ask yourself, "Why am I doing this?" Having an answer as simple as earning money to support your family can make all the difference to getting on with a task that initially seems thankless. Asking "why" gives you a tangible sense of reward for what you are doing.

2. TEAMS

Duhigg says that the key to successful teamwork and better productivity is psychological safety.

At the core of psychological safety is "allowing others to fail without repercussions, respecting divergent opinions, feeling free to question others' choices but also trusting that people aren't trying to undermine you."

Without feeling safe in a team, there is little chance of genuine communication, trust and success. Ultimately, a team that fails to promote psychological safety will fall into one-upmanship, backstabbing and disarray.

In a psychologically safe team, all members are free to float their ideas and every idea is given time. Allowing for all ideas to be heard may result in many unviable ideas, but these will be easily made up for by the ideas that do work as well as the feeling of acceptance and respect that team members will feel. A team member that feels heard and respected will be more productive and, in turn, more supportive of the rest of the team.



6 BIG IDEAS

3. FOCUS

Duhigg writes that to be truly productive, you need to take control of your attention. It's vital to build mental models that put you firmly in charge.

If you fall for mental traps like reactive thinking, focus controls you and not the other way around. Reactive thinking is when you are on auto-pilot, so to speak. It can be highly beneficial if you are an athlete, for example, and you must react without thinking.

However, in many modern situations, when there are multiple points of action to focus on, falling into reactive thinking can mean you focus only on one thing. And if that thing is the wrong thing, the results can be catastrophic.

Duhigg says people who create mental images of how every situation should run have a better chance of focusing on the right things and avoiding reactive thinking. By having a mental model, you take control of your focus. Duhigg cites the example of an experienced midwife who spotted problems in a premature infant that others had missed. The little girl's symptoms, taken individually, did not add up to much, but to this nurse, the baby did not fit her mental model of a healthy baby. Her mental modelling saved the baby's life.

4. GOAL SETTING

Duhigg breaks goal setting into smart goals and stretch goals. These two forms of goals are both necessary for quality productivity.

Smart goals are immediate, short-term goals. If you write down a list of what you need to do on a given day, these will be your smart goals.

Stretch goals are long-term, ambitious goals that will take time and considerable effort to achieve. Getting a promotion, winning an award, or even flying to the moon can all be stretch goals.

The point is that you need to work with both types of goals. With only smart goals, you can soon forget the bigger picture. In the workplace, people can get so bogged down in ticking chores off their list that they don't notice when things go wrong. In an environment where smart goals are everything, team members will start to take shortcuts and even treat each other badly to complete their lists.

Stretch goals, on the other hand, shoot for the stars and push team members to move forwards. Of course, the catch is that it also takes smart goals to reach stretch goals. The magic happens when you or your workplace work with stretch goals and smart goals together.



6 BIG IDEAS

5. DECISION-MAKING

Smarter Faster Better says that one of the best ways to learn to make better decisions is to learn to think ‘probabilistically’. Thinking this way means forcing yourself to envision different possible futures and determine which ones are the most likely. When you can do this, you can make the decision that leads to the most likely result that fits your needs and desires.

Playing poker, writing down possible outcomes and working out their probability, or simply thinking through life’s possible pitfalls and successes can all help to build your probabilistic skills.

Once you can do this, as well as understand that while no one can predict the future with 100% certainty, you have a better chance of making the right decisions. By practising small predictions every day, you can hone your future-telling skills and take more strategic paths.

6. INNOVATION

The three major pieces of advice that Duhigg offers for fostering innovation are:

- COMBINING IDEAS IN NEW AND FRESH WAYS
- RECOGNISING THAT INNOVATION OFTEN HAPPENS IN TIMES OF STRESS
- REFRAMING THE SITUATION

Duhigg relates the story of the development of the famous musical West Side Story. The production was new and innovative because it took classic musical practices like ballet, spoken word and song with the newer, more experimental themes of racism and progressive thinking. The whole thing was even based on Shakespeare, probably the most tried and tested theatre in the Western world. The result changed the face of the Broadway musical.

To demonstrate how stress conditions can lead to innovation, Duhigg outlines the development of the animated Disney film, Frozen. An early cut of Frozen was screened in front of other Disney team members with only a matter of months before the film was due for release. It fell flat.

The stress felt by the creative team not only inspired innovative thinking but also inspired them to reframe the situation. The writer of the film was given co-directorial duties. This small change gave her the power to make decisions that ultimately led to one of Disney’s most successful films.

**3 ACTION STEPS****1. ASK YOURSELF, “WHY?”**

Knowing why you are doing something changes the way you perceive the task.

Having a reason behind your tasks not only gives a sense of reward, it also puts you in charge.

2. SET THE RIGHT GOALS

Productivity stems from setting the right goals. Goals should come in the form of smart goals (immediate) and stretch goals (long-term).

With only stretch goals, it is too easy to lose track of the process. Without stretch goals, the bigger picture fades away.

Smart goals keep things ticking and stretch goals promote growth and forward momentum.

3. REFRAME THE SITUATION

Don't get bogged down in problems. Learn to spot the hidden potential in every situation.

By looking for the positives or possible solutions, you can make creative connections that don't only solve problems but move things forward in innovative ways.

Combine things in unique ways and reframe the situation and solutions will present themselves.

**1 KEY TAKEAWAY**

The key takeaway of Smarter Faster Better is that productivity isn't about working more or sweating harder. It doesn't come from spending more hours at your desk or making more sacrifices.

Rather, true productivity comes from making the right choices in the right ways.

If you can recognise and implement the right choices in your everyday life, your productivity will skyrocket. The trick is to know what choices to make.



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Smarter Faster Better

by Charles Duhigg

How the most productive people think, in eight practical ideas.

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