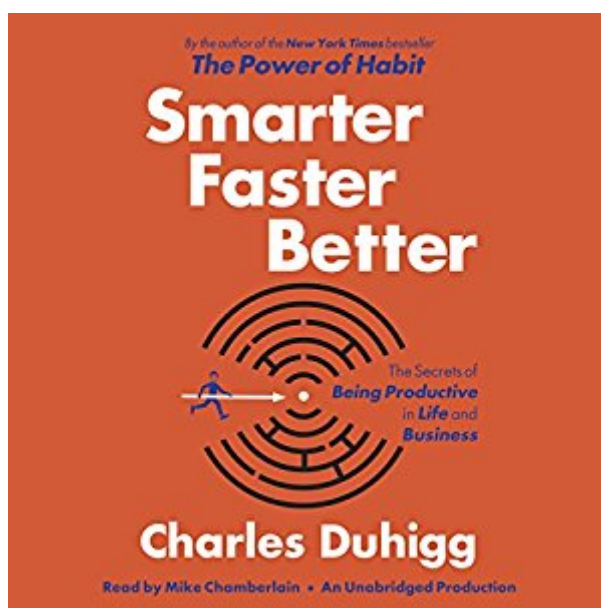


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# Smarter Faster Better: The Secrets Of Being Productive In Life And Business



## Synopsis

From the author of the New York Times best-selling phenomenon *The Power of Habit* comes a fascinating new book that explores the science of productivity, and why, in today's world, managing how you think - rather than what you think - can transform your life. 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 much 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 see ourselves and 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. At the core of *Smarter Faster Better* are eight key 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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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.

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" and devotes a separate chapter to "or" 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*, not the *who* 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, pre-empt, 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 appreciate 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° 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 Qs 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:

- o Motivation (Pages 13-21 and 33-47)
- o U.S. Marine Corps boot camp (22-31)
- o Teamwork at Google (41-46, 50-51, and 65-68)
- o Mental Models (88-93, 97-98, 101-102, and 277-279)
- o Qantas Airways flight 32 and mental models (93-101 and 277-278)
- o Prelude to Yom Kippur War (103-106 and 109-112)
- o Stretch goals (125-128)
- o Frank Janssen (134-139 and 161-165)
- o Rick Madrid (139-144, 150-151, and 154-155)
- o James Baron (145-150)
- o Categories of culture (146-148)
- o Productivity and control (153-155)
- o Bayesian psychology (192-193)
- o How Idea Brokers and Creative Desperation Saved Disney's Frozen (205-215)
- o West Side Story (210-212, 216-220, and 223-224)
- o Information blindness (243-247)
- o Debt collection (247-252)
- o 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.

A 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.

This book has more information per page and excellent examples to show how this information is used than any other book I have read. Anyone could improve their processes used in business and home. The author put a lot of effort and research in this book and it shows on every page. Reading this is like eating the best steak diner you have ever had. I wish I was 30 years younger so I could fine tune my decisions and see more positive results everyday in the future. This is a book that will pay you back far more than you invest in the book price. GOOD VALUE!!!

Nothing new in this book. The strategies that shared in this book were based on scientific studies and they have been already in public for many years. You can just google productivity habit and would be able to find some similar strategies on this book easily. Some stories were unique to this book as I have never read or seen before. Overall, it doesn't worth your money and time to learn these simple productivity concepts.

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