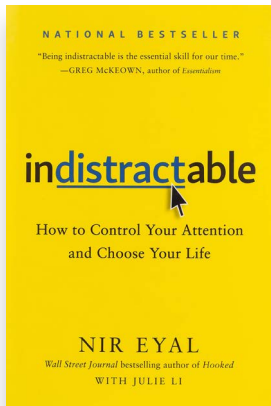


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Indistractable

THE SUMMARY

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Introduction: From *Hooked* to *Indistractable*.

I've spent the past decade researching the hidden psychology that some of the most successful companies use to make their products so captivating. Naturally they want their products to be user-friendly, easy to navigate, and, yes, habit-forming.

Companies making products more engaging isn't necessarily a problem—it's progress. But there's also a dark side. In the case of user-friendly products and services, what makes some products engaging and easy to use can also make them distracting.

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? 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." 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.

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1. What's Your Superpower?

Living the life you want requires not only doing the right things but also avoiding doing the wrong things. We need to learn how to avoid distraction. 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. Becoming indistractable will take learning and adopting four key strategies. 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 to be indistractable?

2. Being Indistractable

We call something that is desirable but just out of reach “tantalizing” after Tantalus, in ancient Greek mythology, who was banished to the underworld by his father, Zeus. There he found himself wading in a pool of water, while above his head dangled a branch ripe with fruit ready for the picking. When Tantalus tried to pluck fruit from the tree, the branch moved away from him, always out of reach. When he bent down to drink the cool water, it receded so that he could never quench his thirst. You have to give it to the ancient Greeks for their allegories. This is the human condition. We are constantly reaching for something — and we always want more.

Distraction stops us from achieving our goals. *Traction* moves you towards what you really want, while *distraction* moves you further away. Being indistractable means striving to do what you say you will do. Triggers prompt both traction and distraction. External triggers prompt you to action with cues in your environment. Internal triggers prompt you to action with cues within you.

PART 1: MASTER INTERNAL TRIGGERS

3. What Motivates Us Really?

Distraction is about more than your devices. Blaming your smartphone for causing distraction is just as flawed as blaming a pedometer for making you climb too many stairs. All motivation is a desire to escape discomfort. Even when we think we're seeking pleasure, we're actually driven by the desire to free ourselves from the pain of wanting. Distraction is always an unhealthy escape from reality. How we deal with uncomfortable internal triggers determines whether we pursue healthful acts of traction or self-defeating distractions. If a behavior was previously effective at providing relief, we're likely to continue using it as a tool to escape discomfort. Anything that stops discomfort is potentially addictive, but that doesn't make it irresistible. You must find the root causes of distraction rather than proximate ones. If you know the drivers of your behavior, you can take steps to manage them.

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4. Time Management is Pain Management

Distractions cost us time, and like all actions, they are spurred by the desire to escape discomfort. Evolution favors dissatisfaction over contentment. Dissatisfaction is responsible for our species' advancements and much of its faults. It is an innate power that can be channeled to help us make things better. Our tendencies toward boredom, negativity bias, rumination and hedonic adaptation conspire to make sure we're never satisfied for long. Feeling bad isn't actually bad; it's exactly what survival of the fittest intended. Distraction is just another way our brains attempt to deal with pain. We can master distraction by learning to deal with our discomfort rather than attempting to escape it with distraction.

5. Deal with Distraction from Within

Stop trying to actively resist or suppress urges—this only makes them stronger. Without techniques for disarming temptation, mental abstinence can backfire. The relief of wanting makes relieving it all the more rewarding, and therefore habit-forming. In a study of flight attendants who smoked, the duration of the trip (3 hours vs 10 hours) and the time since their last cigarette didn't affect the level of the flight attendant's cravings—the greatest desire to smoke in both groups occurred when they approached their destination. What affected their actual desire was not the nicotine or how much time had passed after a smoke, but how much time was left before they could smoke again. This suggests that if a craving for something as addictive as nicotine can be manipulated, we can trick our brains into mastering other unhealthy desires. We can manage distractions that originate from within by changing how we think about them.

6. Reimagine the Internal Trigger

While we can't control the feelings and thoughts that pop into our heads, we can control what we do with them. Rather than trying to fight negative urges, we need new methods to handle intrusive thoughts. We can disarm an uncomfortable internal trigger by reimagining it. Begin by looking for the negative emotion preceding the distraction. While most people can easily identify external triggers, it can take time and trials to begin noticing the all-important inside triggers. As you observe a trigger, write it down. Pay attention to the negative sensation with curiosity rather than contempt. Simply experiencing the sensation, allowing the feeling to crest and subside instead of acting on the impulse, can help. Be extra cautious during liminal moments—the transitions from one thing to another. After checking your phone while waiting for a traffic light to change, have you then found yourself still looking at your phone while driving? In the same way, there's nothing wrong with checking your social media app at any point during the day "for just a second," unless it causes you to get off-track for half an hour.

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7. Reimagine the Task

Imagine how powerful you'd feel if you were able to transform the hard, focused work you have to do into something that felt like play. Is that even possible? We can master internal triggers by reimagining an otherwise dreary task. The cure for boredom is curiosity. Turn work into play by paying attention to it. It doesn't have to be pleasurable. It just has to hold our attention. Deliberately look for novelty as deliberateness and novelty can be added to any task to make it fun. Finding novelty is only possible when we give ourselves the time to focus intently on a task and look hard for the variability, because it is breaking through the boredom and monotony of a task to discover its hidden beauty.

8. Reimagine Your Temperament

We don't run out of willpower. Your willpower runs out only if you believe it does, providing a rationale to quit when we could otherwise persist and making us less likely to accomplish our goals. Just as we don't "run out" of joy or anger, willpower ebbs and flows based on what's happening to us and how we feel. Mental energy is more like an emotion than like fuel in a tank and it can be managed and utilized as such. So self-talk matters. Labeling yourself as having poor self control is self-defeating. Avoid identifying yourself as "easily distracted" or having an "addictive personality." Talk to yourself the way you'd talk to a friend. People who are more self-compassionate are more resilient. Get rid of self-limiting beliefs. Studies show individuals who believe they are powerless to fight cravings were much more likely to fall. You don't have to believe everything you think. Thankfully, you are only powerless if you think you are.

PART 2: MAKE TIME FOR DISTRACTION

9. Turn Your Values into Time

Planning ahead is the only way to know the difference between traction and distraction. You can't call something a distraction unless you know what it is distracting you from. To be the person you want to be, you have to make time to live your values. The three domains of life — yourself, your relationships, and your work — provide a framework for planning how to spend your time. Does your calendar reflect your values? Eliminate all white space on your calendar by creating a "time box" — a schedule template — so you know how you intend to spend your time each day. You may revise your schedule regularly, but you must commit to it once it's set. It doesn't so much matter *what* you do with your time; rather, success is measured by whether you did what you planned to do.

10. Control the Inputs, Not the Outcomes

Schedule time for yourself. You are at the center of the three life domains. By not allocating time for yourself, the other domains suffer. Exercise, sleep, eating healthily, time spent reading, mindfulness, meditation, prayer and practicing a hobby are all ways to invest in ourselves. You can't always control what you get out of time you spend, but you can control how much time you put into a task.

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Essentially this involves showing up when you say you will. Although input is much more certain than outcome, plan the inputs and the outcomes will follow. When it comes to living the life you want, making sure you allocate time to living your values is the only thing you should focus on.

11. Schedule Important Relationships

Family and friends help us live our values of connection, loyalty, intimacy and responsibility. The people you love deserve more than getting whatever time is left over. If someone is important to you, make regular time for them on your calendar. Go beyond scheduling date days with your significant other. Put household responsibilities and domestic chores on your calendar to ensure an equitable split. A lack of close friendships may be hazardous to your health. Ensure you maintain important relationships by scheduling time for regular get-togethers. The time we spend with our friends isn't just pleasurable—it's an investment in our future health and well-being.

12. Sync with Stakeholders at Work

Given that work probably takes up more of your waking hours than any of the other domains, it's even more important to ensure the time spent there is consistent with your values. Using a detailed, time boxed schedule helps clarify expectations between employers and employees. Syncing your schedule with stakeholders at work is critical for making time for traction in your day. If there is not transparency about how you're spending your time, colleagues and managers are more likely to distract you with superfluous tasks. Sync as frequently as your schedule changes. If your schedule template changes from day to day, have a daily check-in. However, most people find a weekly alignment with stakeholders is sufficient.

PART 3: HACK BACK EXTERNAL TRIGGERS

13. Ask the Critical Question

Our tech devices are gaining "unauthorized access" to our brains by prompting us to distraction. It's time for us to hack back. External triggers often lead to distraction. Cues in our environment like the pings, dings, rings from devices, as well as interruptions from other people, frequently take us off-track. Of each external trigger, we must ask: *"Is this trigger serving me, or am I serving it?"* Does it lead to traction or distraction? Then, we can hack the external triggers that don't serve us.

14. Hack Back Work Interruptions

Interruptions lead to mistakes. You can't do your best work if you're frequently distracted. Although open-floor plans in office environments were intended to foster idea-sharing and collaboration, they also increase distraction. Defend your focus by finding ways to signal colleagues (or family members) when you do not want to be interrupted. Use a screen sign or some other clear clue to reduce external triggers by letting people know you are indistractable.

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15. Hack Back Email

Email is the curse of the modern worker. The average professional employee receives 100 messages per day. At just two minutes per email, that adds up to three hours and twenty minutes—nearly half the work day. Break down the problem. Time spent on email (T) is a function of the number of messages received (n) multiplied by the average time (t) spend per message ($T = n \times t$). Slay the messaging monster by spending less time on each message. When you check email, tag each message according to when each message needs a response. Reply to emails during a scheduled time on your calendar. To get fewer emails, send fewer emails.

Use the “Unsubscribe” button to reduce the number of time-wasting messages reaching your inbox. Schedule “office hours” and delay when messages are sent (to cut down on replies). Hack back at this persistent source of distraction so you can focus on what you really want to achieve.

16. Hack Back Group Chat

Group chat is “like being in an all-day meeting with random participants and no agenda.” Real-time communication channels should be used sparingly. Group chat is great for replacing in-person meetings but terrible if it becomes an all-day affair. Time spent communicating should not come at the cost of time spend concentrating. When it comes to group chat, get in and out at scheduled times. Only involve who is necessary. Be selective. Ask participants who like to ‘think out loud’ in group chat to write down their ideas to share later. Group chat is good for some topics, people and conversations and bad for others. Schedule time for group chat on your calendar. Let colleagues know when you’ll be in group chat and use the ‘Do Not Disturb’ function to let people know when you’re out. Different communication channels have different uses. Rather than use every technology as an always-on channel, use the best tools for the job.

17. Hack Back Meetings

The primary object of most meetings should be to gain consensus around a decision, not giving the meeting organizer a forum to hear themselves think. Make it harder to call meetings. To call a meeting, require the organizer to circulate an agenda and briefing document. Meetings are for consensus building rather than problem solving. With few exceptions, creative problem-solving should occur before the meeting, individually or in very small groups. Devices in everyone’s hands makes it more difficult to achieve the purpose of the meeting. They use devices during meetings to escape monotony and boredom, which subsequently makes meetings even worse. With the exception of one laptop in the room for presenting information and taking notes, leave devices outside. Following good rules of synchronous communication and encouraging people to be fully present will make meetings less awful.

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18. Hack Back Your Smartphone

It's clear that many people, myself included, are dependent on their smartphones. The good news is that being dependent is not the same thing as being addicted. We can get the best out of our devices without letting them get the best of us.

You can hack back the external triggers on your phone in four steps and in less than one hour save yourself countless hours of mindless phone time:

Remove: Uninstall the apps you no longer need. Use distracting apps on your desktop rather than your phone.

Replace: Shift where and when you use potentially distracting apps, like social media and Youtube, to your desk instead of on your phone. Get a wristwatch so you don't have to look at your phone for the time.

Rearrange: Move any apps that may trigger mindless checking from your phone's home screen.

Reclaim: Change the notification setting for each app. Be very selective regarding which apps can send you sound and sight cues. Learn to use your phone's 'Do Not Disturb' settings.

19. Hack Back Your Desktop

Anyone can find themselves drowning in desktop clutter and this digital debris costs us time, degrades performance and kills concentration. Desktop clutter takes a heavy psychological toll on your attention. Turn off desktop notifications. Disabling notifications on your computer frees the mind and ensures you won't get distracted by external triggers while doing focused work. Clearing away external triggers in your digital workspace can help you stay focused.

20. Hack Back Online Articles

Online articles are full of potentially distracting external triggers. Open tabs can pull us off course and tend to suck us down a time-wasting content vortex. Make a rule. Promise yourself you'll save interesting content to read or listen to at a scheduled time later by using an app like Pocket (which pulls the text from the web page and saves it without ads and any other superfluous content) to the app on your phone. You can multitask as long as you're not required to concentrate too much on any one channel. Use a multichannel for multitasking such as listening to articles while working out or on your commute.

21. Hack Back Feeds

Social media is a particularly devilish source of distraction. Sites like Twitter, Instagram, and Reddit are designed to spawn external triggers—news, updates, and notifications galore. The infinite scroll of Facebook's News Feed is ingenious. Feeds are full of external triggers that can drive us to distraction. They are designed to keep you engaged. Take control of feeds by hacking back. Use free browser

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extensions like News Feed Eradicator for Facebook, Newsfeed Burner, Open Multiple Websites, and DF Tube to remove distracting to external triggers. Use browser extensions and bookmarks that give you the benefits of social media without all the distractions. I still use Facebook, for example, but when I want to see updates from a certain friend or participate in a Facebook group discussion, I go straight to the page I want.

PART 4: PREVENT DISTRACTION WITH PACTS

22. The Power of Precommitments

Being indistractable not only requires keeping distraction out; it also necessitates reining ourselves in. After we've learned to master internal triggers, make time for traction and hack back external triggers, the last step to becoming indistractable involves preventing ourselves from sliding into distraction. To do so, we must learn a powerful technique called a "pre-commitment," which involves removing a future choice to overcome our impulsiveness. The antidote to impulsiveness is forethought, so we must plan ahead for when we're likely to get distracted. Pre-commitments can reduce the likelihood of distraction because they help us stick to decisions we've made in advice. They are powerful because they cement our intentions when we're clearheaded and make us less likely to act against our best interests later.

23. Prevent Distraction with Effort Pacts

You can make an "effort pact" with yourself to prevent distractions by making unwanted behaviors more difficult to do. You can use tech to stay off tech. Apps like SelfControl and Forest can help you make effort pacts with yourself by cutting off access to distractions. Another effort approach can be to make pacts with other people. In the age of the personal computer, social pressure to stay on task has largely disappeared. No one can see what you're working on, so it's easier to slack off. Working next to a colleague or friend for a set period of time can be a highly effective effort pact.

24. Prevent Distraction with Price Pacts

A price pact is a type of pre-commitment that involves putting money on the line to encourage us to do what say we will. Stick to your intended behavior and keep the cash; get distracted and you forfeit the finds. The results are stunning. I made a price pact with myself. I taped a crisp hundred-dollar bill to my calendar next to the date for my next workout. Every day I had a daily choice to make to either burn the calories or burn the hundred-dollar bill (unless I was certifiably sick). After three years I have gained twelve pounds of muscle without ever burning the hundred dollars. Price pacts are most effective when you can remove the external triggers that lead to distraction, and they work best when the distraction is temporary. Price pacts can be difficult to start. We fear making a price pact because we know we'll actually have to do the thing we're scared to do.

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25. Prevent Distraction with Identity Pacts

One of the most effective ways to change our behavior is to change our identity. Slight alterations in the way we see ourselves can have a dramatic effect on our future actions because we tend to align our actions with how we see ourselves. An identity pact is a pre-commitment to a self-image. You can prevent distraction by acting in line with your identity. Become a noun. By assigning yourself a moniker, you increase the likelihood of following through with behaviors consistent with what you call yourself. "I am a vegetarian." "I don't smoke." "I am indistractable." Repeating mantras, adopting rituals, keeping a time boxed schedule, or performing other routines, reinforces your identity and influences your future actions. It also helps to share this with others. Teaching others solidifies your commitment, even if you're still struggling. A great way to be indistractable is to tell friends about what you learned in this book and the changes you're making in your life.

PART 5: HOW TO MAKE YOUR WORKPLACE INDISTRACTABLE

26. Distraction is a Sign of Dysfunction

The modern workplace is a constant source of distraction. While learning to control distractions on our own is important, what do we do when our jobs repeatedly insist on interrupting our plans? How can we do what is best for our careers, not to mention our companies, when we're constantly distracted? Technology is not the root cause of distraction at work. The problem goes much deeper. Jobs where employees encounter high expectations and low control have been shown to lead to symptoms of depression. Depression-like symptoms are painful. When people feel bad, they use distractions to avoid their pain and regain a sense of control. A culture of "always connected" and "always available" drives people crazy because it reduces their sense of control over their time.

27. Fixing Distraction is a Test of Company Culture

Tech overuse at work and high employee turnover is a symptom of dysfunctional company culture. The root cause is a culture lacking "psychological safety." A workplace where people can't talk about technology overuse is also one where people keep other important issues (and insights) to themselves. Teams that foster psychological safety and facilitate regular open discussions about concerns not only have fewer problems with distraction, but also have happier employees and customers.

28. The Indistractable Workplace

To create a culture that values doing focused work, start small and find ways to facilitate an open dialogue among colleagues about the problem. Indistractable organizations, like Slack and BCG, foster psychological safety, provide a place for open discussions about concerns, and, most importantly, have leaders who exemplify the importance of doing focused work. Companies like these show concern and commitment to helping their employees thrive by giving them the freedom to be indistractable.

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PART 6: HOW TO RAISE INDISTRACTABLE CHILDREN (AND WHY WE ALL NEED PSYCHOLOGICAL NUTRIENTS)

29. Avoid Convenient Excuses

Many experts believe the discussion whether tech is harmful is more nuanced than alarmists let on. Techno-panics are nothing new. From the book, to the radio, to video games, the history of parenting is strewn with examples of moral panic over things that supposedly make kids act in strange ways. When kids don't act the way parents want them to, it's natural to look for answers that help parents divert responsibility. Stop deflecting blame. Tech isn't evil. Used in the right way and in the right amounts, kids' tech use can be beneficial, while too much (or too little) can have slightly harmful effects. Perhaps five hours a day on any form of media is a symptom of a larger problem. Find the root causes of why children get distracted and teach them to be indistractable. Teaching children how to manage distraction will benefit them throughout their lives.

30. Understand Their Internal Triggers

Our kids need psychological nutrients. According to a widely accepted theory of human motivation, all people need three things to thrive: a sense of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Internal triggers drive behavior. To understand how to help kids manage distraction, we need to start by understanding the source of the problem. Distractions satisfy deficiencies. When our kids' psychological needs are not met in the real world, they go looking for satisfaction—often in virtual environments. Make sure children's psychological needs, competence and relatedness are met. If kids don't get their needs met in the real world, they look to fulfill them online. Kids need alternatives. Parents and guardians can take steps to help kids find a balance between their online and offline worlds by providing more offline opportunities to find autonomy, competence and relatedness. The four-part Indistractable Model is valuable for kids as well. Teach them methods for handling distraction and, most importantly, model being indistractable yourself.

31. Make Time for Traction Together

We can't solve all our kid's troubles, and nor should we attempt to, but we can try to understand their struggles. With so many potential distractions in their lives, teaching them how to make time for traction is critical. Teach your children to time box their schedules. Just as with our own time boxed schedules, kids can learn how to make time for what's important to them. Let them make times for activities they enjoy, including time online. In the absence of making their own plans in advance, kids will turn to distractions. It's okay to let your kids fail. Failure is how we learn. Show kids how to adjust their schedules to make time to live up to their personal values.

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32. Help Them with External Triggers

After understanding the internal triggers driving kids to distraction and helping them create a schedule using the time boxing technique, the next step is to examine the external triggers in their lives. Many parents don't consider whether their child is ready for a device with potentially damaging consequences and give in to their pressure. But like swimming in a pool, children should not be allowed to partake in certain risky behaviors before they are ready. Parents should make sure their kids can swim before they dive in. A good measure of a child's readiness is their ability to manage distraction by using the settings on the device to turn off unhelpful or distracting external triggers. Kids also need plenty of sleep, and anything that flickers, beeps or buzzes during the night is a distraction. There is little justification for having screens, digital devices or other potential distractions in a kid's room overnight. Make sure nothing gets in the way of getting good rest. Sometimes as parents, we can be a source of distraction. Don't be an unwanted external trigger yourself. Respect your kid's time and don't interrupt them when they have scheduled time to focus on something, be that work or play.

33. Teach Them to Make Their Own Pacts

Explain to your children that the apps and videos on their devices were made by some very smart people and were intentionally designed to keep them hooked and habitually watching. Consumer skepticism is healthy—and is an important part of teaching media literacy. Help your kids make pacts and make sure they know managing distractions is their responsibility. Put them in charge. It's only when kids practice monitoring their own behaviors that they learn how to manage their own time and attention. Don't underestimate your child's ability to pre-commit and follow through. Even young children can learn to use pre-commitments as long as they set the rules and know how to use a timer or some other binding system. Teach them distraction is a solvable problem and that becoming indistractable is a lifelong skill.

PART 7: HOW TO HAVE INDISTRACTABLE RELATIONSHIPS

34. Spread Social Antibodies Among Friends

When we are with friends we're never really alone in their company; our phones are almost assuredly present and ready to interrupt us with a poorly timed notification. Who hasn't witnessed a friend divert their attention, mid-conversation, to reflexively check their phone? Distraction in social situations can keep us from being fully present with important people in our lives. Interruptions degrade our ability to form close social bonds. We must each do what we can to block the spread of unhealthy behaviors. We can tackle distraction among friends the same way we beat social smoking, by making it unacceptable to use devices in social situations. "Social antibodies" are ways groups protect themselves from harmful behaviors by making them taboo. We can prepare a few tactful phrases to discourage phone usage among friends. When someone uses a device in a social setting ask, "I see you're on the phone. Is everything okay?" By getting agreement from our friends and families to manage distraction and taking steps to remove external triggers that don't serve us, we can quarantine the social contagion of distraction while with the people we love.

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35. Be an Indistractable Lover

According to one survey, “almost a third of Americans would rather give up sex for a year than part with their mobile phone for that long.” Before my wife and I learned to become indistractable, the allure of notifications on our cell phones proved hard to resist. We’d fallen into an evening ritual of solitary tech checking until midnight. By the time each of us got to bed, we were too tired to talk. Our relationship, not to mention our sex life, suffered. We were among the 65% of American adults who sleep with their phones on or next to their beds. Distraction can be an impediment in our most intimate relationships. Instant digital connectivity can come at the expense of being fully present with those beside us. Indistractable partners reclaim time for togetherness. Following the four steps to becoming indistractable can ensure you make time for your partner. We decided to move our phones from our bedroom to the living room. We connected our internet router and monitors to \$7 timer outlets purchased at a local hardware store and set them to turn off at ten o’clock every evening. My wife and I still love our gadgets and fully embrace the potential of innovation to improve our lives, but we want to benefit from technology without suffering from the corrosive effects it can have on our relationship.

Now it’s your turn to become indistractable. Being indistractable means striving to do what you say will you do. It does not mean being perfect or never failing. Like everyone, I still struggle with distractions at times. Distractions still happen, but now I know what to do about them so they don’t *keep* happening. These techniques have allowed me to take control of my life in ways I never could before. I’m as honest with myself as I am with others. I live up to my values, I fulfill my commitments to the people I love, and I am more productive professionally than ever.

By becoming indistractable, we can set an example for others. In the workplace, we can use these tactics to transform our organizations and create a ripple effect both in and beyond our industries. At home, we can inspire our families to test those methods for themselves and to live out the lives they envisage. We can all strive to do what we say we will do. We all have the power to be indistractable.