Smarter Faster Better: The Secrets of Being Productive in Life and Business by Charles Duhigg

Productivity, put simply, is the name we give our attempts to figure out the best uses of our energy, intellect, and time as we try to seize the most meaningful rewards with the least wasted effort.

Productivity isn't about working more or sweating harder. It's not simply a product of spending longer hours at your desk or making bigger sacrifices.

Rather, productivity is about making certain choices in certain ways. The way we choose to see ourselves and frame daily decisions; the stories we tell ourselves, and the easy goals we ignore; the sense of community we build among teammates; the creative cultures we establish as leaders: These are the things that separate the merely busy from the genuinely productive.

Motivation is more like a skill, akin to reading or writing, that can be learned and honed.

Scientists have found that people can get better at self-motivation if they practice the right way. The trick, researchers say, is realizing that a prerequisite to motivation is believing we have authority over our actions and surroundings.

To motivate ourselves, we must feel like we are in control.

Even if making a decision delivers no benefit, people still want the freedom to choose.

"Animals and humans demonstrate a preference for choice over non-choice, even when that choice confers no additional reward.

Theory of motivation has emerged: <u>The first step in creating drive is giving people opportunities to make choices that provide them with a sense of autonomy and self-determination.</u> In experiments, people are more motivated to complete difficult tasks when those chores are presented as decisions rather than commands.

Decisions rather than commands.

Method for triggering the will to act: Find a choice, almost any choice that allows you to exert control.

If you're trying to start an assignment, write the conclusion first, or start by making the graphics, or do whatever's most interesting to you.

To start the next sales call, decide what question you'll ask first.

The most successful marines were those with a strong "internal locus of control"—a belief they could influence their destiny through the choices they made.

Most fifth graders don't believe they can choose how smart they are. In general, young kids think that intelligence is an innate capacity, so telling young people they are smart reinforces their belief that success or failure is based on factors outside of their control.

"Internal locus of control is a learned skill."

"We never tell anyone they're a natural-born leader. 'Natural born' means it's outside your control."

"I hand out a number of compliments, and all of them are designed to be unexpected."

"You'll never get rewarded for doing what's easy for you. If you're an athlete, I'll never compliment you on a good run."

Only the shy guy gets recognized for stepping into a leadership role.

We praise people for doing things that are hard. That's how they learn to believe they can do them.

Make a chore into a meaningful decision, and self-motivation will emerge.

If you give people an opportunity to feel a sense of control and let them practice making choices, they can learn to exert willpower.

The seniors who flourished made choices that rebelled against the rigid schedules, set menus, and strict rules that the nursing homes tried to force upon them.

"It's the difference between making decisions that prove to yourself that you're still in charge of your life, versus falling into a mindset where you're just waiting to die .

Among Habib's patients, the injuries in their striata prevented them from feeling the sense of reward that comes from taking control.

What's more, we need to prove to ourselves that our choices are meaningful.

Self-motivation, in other words, is a choice we make because it is part of something bigger and more emotionally rewarding than the immediate task that needs doing.

Group norms, the researchers on Project Aristotle concluded, were the answer to improving Google's teams. "The data finally started making sense," said Dubey. "We had to manage the how of teams, not the who."

The wards with the strongest team cohesion had far more errors.

It didn't make any sense. Why would strong teams make more mistakes?

Rather, it was that nurses who belonged to strong teams felt more comfortable reporting their mistakes.

People said they could suggest ideas without fear of retribution; the culture discouraged people from making harsh judgments.

She began to notice that everything shared a common attribute: They were all behaviors that created a sense of togetherness while also encouraging people to take a chance.

"We call it '**psychological safety**', how do you convince people to feel safe while also encouraging them to be willing to disagree?"

Rather, the SNL team clicked because, surprisingly, they all felt safe enough around one another to keep pitching new jokes and ideas.

I wanted everyone to hear each other, but no one to disappear into the group.

The researchers wanted to know if there is a collective intelligence that emerges within a team that is distinct from the smarts of any single member.

Individual intelligence didn't correlate with team performance.

"We find converging evidence of a general collective intelligence factor that explains a group's performance on a wide variety of tasks,

It was the norms, not the people that made teams so smart.

There were, however, two behaviors that all the good teams shared.

- First, all the members of the good teams spoke in roughly the same proportion, a phenomenon the researchers referred to as "equality in distribution of conversational turn-taking."

  "As long as everyone got a chance to talk, the team did well,

- Second, the good teams tested as having **"high average social sensitivity"**—a fancy way of saying that the groups were skilled at intuiting how members felt based on their tone of voice, how people held themselves, and the expressions on their faces.

The **secret** to making that happen, he says, is giving everyone a voice and finding people willing to be sensitive enough to listen.

The teams with the highest levels of psychological safety were also the ones with leaders most likely to model listening and social sensitivity.

They invited people to speak up. They talked about their own emotions. They didn't interrupt other people.

"The biggest thing you should take away from this work is that how teams work matters, in a lot of ways, more than who is on them,

You can take a team of average performers, and if you teach them to interact the right way, they'll do things no superstar could ever accomplish.

The data shows there's a universality to how good teams succeed. It's important that everyone on a team feels like they have a voice, but whether they actually get to vote on things or make decisions turns out not to matter much.

"What matters are five key norms:
- Teams need to believe that their work is important.
- Teams need to feel their work is personally meaningful.
- Teams need clear goals and defined roles.
- Team members need to know they can depend on one another.
- Most important, teams need psychological safety.

Leaders should not interrupt teammates during conversations, because that will establish an interrupting norm.

They should demonstrate they are listening by summarizing what people say after they said.

They should admit what they don't know. They shouldn't end a meeting until all team members have spoken at least once. They should encourage people who are upset to express their frustrations, and encourage teammates to respond in nonjudgmental ways. They should call out intergroup conflicts and resolve them through open discussion.

When people come together in a group, sometimes we need to give control to others.

"Cognitive tunneling"—a mental glitch that sometimes occurs when our brains are forced to transition abruptly from relaxed automation to panicked attention.

If you want to make yourself more sensitive to the small details in your work, cultivate a habit of imagining, as specifically as possible, what you expect to see and do when you get to your desk.

The candidates who tell stories are the ones every firm wants. "We look for people who describe their experiences as some kind of a narrative."

"I want us to envision the first thing we'll do if there's a problem," he told his copilots as they rode in a van from the Fairmont hotel to Singapore Changi Airport.

Interruptions that are part of every day, of knowing where to focus and what to ignore, get into the habit of telling yourself stories.

Get in a pattern of forcing yourself to anticipate what's next.

"The need for cognitive closure," which psychologists define as "the desire for a confident judgment on an issue, any confident judgment, as compared to confusion and ambiguity.

Making a decision and moving on to the next question feels productive.

But there are risks associated with a high need for closure.

When people begin craving the emotional satisfaction that comes from making a decision—when they require a sensation of being productive in order to stay calm—they are more likely to make hasty decisions and less likely to reconsider an unwise choice.

A high need for closure has been shown to trigger close-mindedness, authoritarian impulses, and a preference for conflict over cooperation.

Break a goal into its SMART components is the difference between hoping something comes true and figuring out how to do it.

Even the plants' senior executives, the consultants found, had fallen prey to an obsession with achievable but inconsequential goals, and were **focused on unimportant short-term objectives rather than more ambitious plans.**

Aims such as SMART goals "can cause [a] person to have tunnel vision, to focus more on expanding effort to get immediate results.

SMART goals are more likely to seize on the easiest tasks, to become obsessed with finishing projects, and to freeze on priorities once a goal has been set.

"You get into this mindset where crossing things off your to-do list becomes more important than asking yourself if you're doing the right things

If you're being constantly told to focus on achievable results, you're only going to think of achievable goals. You're not going to dream big.

Institutional commitment to audacious goals.

Aim so ambitious that managers couldn't describe, at least initially, how they would achieve it.

Train thinking.

If you do know how to get there—it's not a stretch target.

Stretch goals "serve as jolting events that disrupt complacency and promote new ways of thinking.

It can also cause panic and convince people that success is impossible because the goal is too big. There is a fine line between an ambition that helps people achieve something amazing and one that crushes morale.

We need a disciplined mindset to show us how to turn a far-off objective into a series of realistic short-term aims.

Stretch goals, paired with SMART thinking, can help put the impossible within reach.

We spend hours answering unimportant emails instead of writing a big, thoughtful memo—because it feels so satisfying to clean out our in-box.

So one solution is writing to-do lists that pair stretch goals and SMART goals. Come up with a menu of your biggest ambitions. Dream big and stretch. Describe the goals that, at first glance, seem impossible, such as starting a company or running a marathon.

Then choose one aim and start breaking it into short-term, concrete steps. Ask yourself: What realistic progress can you make in the next day, week, month? How many miles can you realistically run tomorrow and over the next three weeks?

Smaller ambitions are known as "proximal goals," and repeated studies have shown that breaking a big ambition into proximal goals makes the large objective more likely to occur.

Hands down, a commitment culture outperformed every other type of management style in almost every meaningful way. "Not one of the commitment firms we studied failed,"

"But if you're an entrepreneur and you're betting on just one company, then the data says you're much better off with a commitment-focused culture.

Because a sense of trust emerged among workers, managers, and customers that enticed everyone to work harder and stick together through the setbacks that are inevitable in any industry.

Possible to unite workers and managers around a common cause through mutual commitment and shared power.

It convinced people to swing for the fences because they knew they wouldn't be punished if they missed the ball now and then.

There has to be a system in place that makes you trust that you can choose the solution you think is best and that your bosses are committed to supporting you if you take a chance that might not pay off.

The bigger misstep is when there is never an opportunity for an employee to make a mistake.

"To be elite, you have to start thinking about bets as ways of asking other players questions."

Poker is about using your chips to gather information faster than everyone else.

The paradox of learning how to make better decisions is that it requires developing a comfort with doubt.

And most surprising, a particular kind of lesson—training in how to think probabilistically—significantly increased people's abilities to forecast the future.

Instructed participants to think of the future not as what's going to happen, but rather as a series of possibilities that might occur.

Simply exposing participants to probabilistic training was associated with as much as a 50 percent increase in the accuracy of their predictions, the GJP researchers wrote.

Learning to think probabilistically requires us to question our assumptions and live with uncertainty.

Losers, Howard said, are always looking for certainty at the table. Winners are comfortable admitting to themselves what they don't know. In fact, knowing what you don't know is a huge advantage— something that can be used against other players.

Many successful people, in contrast, spend an enormous amount of time seeking out information on failures. They read inside the newspaper's business pages for articles on companies that have gone broke.

Accurate forecasting requires exposing ourselves to as many successes and disappointments as possible.

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.

Creative papers had at least one thing in common: They were usually combinations of previously known ideas mixed together in new ways.

It was this combination of ideas, rather than the ideas themselves, that typically made a paper so creative and important.

What's particularly interesting, however, is that there isn't a specific personality associated with being an innovation broker.

If we could do anything, what would you want to see on the screen?"

"There's this moment when you start to see your sibling as a person, instead of a reflection of yourself."

That's why the Disney method is so powerful, because it pushes us to dig deeper and deeper until we put ourselves on the screen.

People become creative brokers, in other words, when they learn to pay attention to how things make them react and feel.

But if something altered the ecosystem just a little bit, then biodiversity exploded.

"Intermediate disturbances are critical."

Within biology, this has become known as the **intermediate disturbance hypothesis**, which holds that "local species diversity is maximized when ecological disturbance is neither too rare nor too frequent.

If you want to become a broker and increase the productivity of your own creative process, there are three things that can help: First, be sensitive to your own experiences. Pay attention to how things make you think and feel. That's how we distinguish clichés from true insights.

Look to your own life as creative fodder, and broker your own experiences into the wider world.

Second, recognize that the panic and stress you feel as you try to create isn't a sign that everything is falling apart. Rather, it's the condition that helps make us flexible enough to seize something new.

The creative pain should be embraced.

Finally, remember that the relief accompanying a creative breakthrough, while sweet, can also blind us to seeing alternatives. It is critical to maintain some distance from what we create.

The creative process is, in fact, a process, something that can be broken down and explained.

They were interacting with the data embodied in each conversation, turning it into something they could use.

They take data and transform it into experiments whenever they can.

When we encounter new information and want to learn from it, we should force ourselves to do something with the data.

"Most recruits don't know how to force themselves to start something hard. But if we can train them to take the first step by doing something that makes them feel in charge, it's easier to keep going."

It was easier to get motivated when that first sentence was something that made me feel in control.

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