

The Best of 2022: Books, Podcasts, and Field Notes

BOOKS

Hari, J. (2022). [Stolen Focus](#): Why you can't pay attention – and how to think deeply again.

London: Bloomsbury Publishing, Plc.

Razzetti, G. (2022). [Remote, Not Distant](#): Design a company culture that will help you thrive in a hybrid workplace. Highland Park: Liberationist Press.

Slootman, F. (2022). [Amp it Up](#): Leading for hypergrowth by raising expectations, increasing urgency, and elevating intensity. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

VandeHei, J., Allen, M., & Schwartz, R. (2022). [Smart Brevity](#): The power of saying more with less. New York: Workman Publishing.

Wyche, K. (2021). [Diversity is Not Enough](#): A roadmap to recruit, develop and promote Black leaders in America. Trinity: Kandelle Publishing.

PODCASTS

Dr. Rick Hanson and Forrest Hanson, The Being Well Podcast entitled "[Maximize Your Motivation: Dopamine, Discipline, and Acceptance](#)." May 2022.

Dr. David Sinclair, The Knowledge Project Podcast entitled "[Reversing the Aging Process](#)." May 2022.

Dr. Andrew Huberman, The Knowledge Project Podcast entitled "[The Science of Small Changes](#)." March 2022.

Johann Hari, The New York Times Podcast entitled "[It's Not Your Fault You Can't Pay Attention. Here's Why](#)." February 2022.

Katy Milkman featuring Joseph Herscher and Lauren Eskreis-Winkler, The Choiceology Podcast entitled "[Fail Better](#)." August 2022.

FIELD NOTES

[Excellence Through Persuasive Persistence](#)

[A Formula for Leadership Optimism](#)

[The Need To Be Liked Can Be a Fatal Flaw](#)

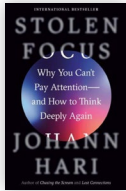
[You Can Never Be Too Good](#)

[Leave a Big Wake Behind You](#)

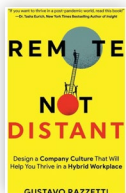
SIGN UP >



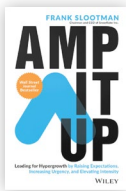
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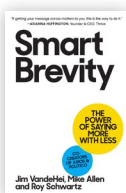
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STOLEN FOCUS

Hari, J. (2022). **Stolen Focus:**

Why you can't pay attention—and how to think deeply again. London: Bloomsbury Publishing, Plc.

The increasing and overwhelming inability to focus is not a lack of self-discipline, rather it is a result of the “attentional pathogenic culture” we live in today. Forces beyond our control are working to heighten distraction and “steal” our ability to focus deeply. British-Swiss writer, Johann Hari, interviewed numerous thought leaders, experts, and scientists in the technology and neuroscience field to explore the effects and possible solutions to our stolen focus.

The Universal Inability to Focus

“Gloria Mark, professor of informatics at the University of California, Irvine... observed how long on average an adult working in an office stays on one task. It was three minutes” (p. 10).

“A study by Professor Michael Posner at the University of Oregon found that if you are focusing on something and you get interrupted, on average it will take twenty-three minutes for you to get back to the same state of focus” (p. 13).

Human beings commonly blame themselves for their lack of focus. We can be self-critical, calling ourselves lazy, undisciplined, etc. Hari argues that “something much deeper than personal failure, or a single new invention, is happening” (p. 11).

In fact, our inability to focus is a result of “very powerful forces. Those forces include Big Tech, but they also go way beyond them. This is a systemic problem” (p. 12).

Increased Speed, Switching, and Filtering

Something as simple as how fast we move through life is threatening our abilities to deeply focus.

“If you go too fast, you overload your abilities, and they degrade. But when you practice moving at a speed that is compatible with human nature—and you build that into your daily life—you begin to train your attention and focus. Slowness, he explained, nurtures attention, and speed shatters it” (p. 36).

We sacrifice depth for speed. “Depth takes time. And depth takes reflection. If you have to keep up with everything and send emails all the time, there’s no time to reach depth. Depth connected to your work relationships also takes time. It takes energy. It takes long time spans. And it takes commitment” (p. 33).

In nature, our single-mindedness results in the inability to focus or think about multiple topics at the same time. “The myth is that we can actually think about three, five, ten things at the same time” (p. 37).

There is a cost we pay when we switch between multiple tasks too quickly called the “switch cost effect... Your brain has to reconfigure when it goes from one task to another. You have to remember what you were doing before, and you have to remember what you thought about it. When this happens, the evidence shows that your performance drops. You’re slower. All as a result of the switching” (p. 38).

Another myth is the ability to filter distractions and noise and still remain focused on the task at hand. “Yet many of us are surrounded by high levels of noise, working in open-plan offices, and sleeping in crowded cities. We live surrounded by shrieking distractions calling for our attention, and the attention of others” (p. 44).

Flow States

Flow is achieved when you mono-task, or set everything aside and solely focus on one single task. “Flow requires all of your brainpower, deployed toward one mission. To find flow, you need to choose one single goal; make sure your goal is meaningful to you; and try to push yourself to the edge of your abilities” (p. 56).

Choose flow. “We all have a choice now between two profound forces—fragmentation, or flow. Fragmentation makes you smaller, shallower, angrier. Flow makes you bigger, deeper, calmer. Flow expands us” (p. 62).

The Rise of Physical and Mental Exhaustion

Scientific investigation shows that attention suffers with lack of sleep; physical exhaustion leads to mental exhaustion (p. 66).

“Today, 40 percent of Americans are chronically sleep-deprived, getting less than the necessary minimum of seven hours a night. Only 15 percent of us wake up from our sleep feeling refreshed” (p. 66).

We are so accustomed to sleep deprivation that we have normalized the use of stimulants such as coffee, sleeping pills, etc. to medicate the effects of the loss of sleep. Relying on stimulants to mediate the loss of sleep is not a healthy way of living (p. 68).

The Collapse of Sustained Reading and the Rise of Technology

“In 2017, the average American spent 17 minutes a day reading books, and 5.4 hours on their phone” (p. 80).

Research has discovered that one of the easiest ways to reach flow state is through reading a book.

“For many of us, reading a book is the deepest form of focus we experience—you dedicate many hours of your life, coolly, calmly, to one topic, and allow it to marinate in your mind” (p. 80).

The shift from reading to using technology and social media platforms has hindered our attention.

“The collapse in reading books is in some ways a symptom of our atrophying attention, and in some ways a cause of it. It’s a spiral—as we began to move from books to screens, we started to lose some of the capacity for the deeper reading that comes from books, and that, in turn, made us less likely to read books” (p. 82).

While we have concluded that the lack of reading is detrimental to the ability to pay attention and focus, it also affects basic emotional skills, such as empathy. “When you read fiction, in particular, you imagine what it is like to be another person” (p. 88).

When humans expose themselves to hours a day of fragmented and disconnected thought patterns on social media, we adopt these thoughts accordingly. Exposing yourself to more complex stories about the lives of others for long periods of time creates a more open and empathetic perspective (p. 88).

The medium is the message. Each medium (books, TV, social media) consists of new ways for humans to communicate. While reading books calls for flow states and slowing down to absorb the message, TV teaches humans that everything in the world happens simultaneously and at a rapid pace. Be wise in choosing the medium (p. 83).

The technological world works by design. Current sites and apps are designed to train humans to crave the reinforcements and immediate rewards. “It’s not your fault you can’t focus. It’s by design. Your distraction is their fuel” (p. 114).

Tech organizations are devising ways to keep us more engaged, more focused on their technology, and less focused on anything else. “The reason we have to be so careful about the way that we design technology, is that they squeeze, they squish, the entire world into that medium—and out the other end comes a different world” (p. 114).

"But there is evidence that these sites are now severely harming our ability to come together as a society to identify our problems and to find solutions... They are damaging not just our attention as individuals, but our collective attention" (p. 135).

While the lack of focus is a systemic issue, individuals must take the first step to make the changes needed. "We should all try adopting a 10-minute rule—if you feel the urge to check your phone, wait ten minutes. Change the notification settings on your phone, so that your apps can't interrupt you and kill your focus throughout the day" (p. 146).

"We are in a race. To one side there is the rapidly escalating power of invasive technologies, which are figuring out how we work and fracturing our attention. On the other side there needs to be a movement demanding technologies that work for us, not against us; technologies that feed our ability to focus, instead of fracturing it" (p. 170).

Surge of Stress and How to Mitigate It

"Even mild levels of stress can significantly alter attentional processes. The science is so clear on this that a relevant summary explained: it is now obvious that stress can cause structural changes in the brain with long-term effects" (p. 180).

A study of over 30,000 people in over 100 workplaces produced detailed findings, showing that as work hours get longer and longer, people get more distracted and less productive. A key takeaway from this research was: "these workloads are not sustainable" (p. 184).

"Giving people more time to rest and enjoy life might mean they worked more productively when they were in the office" (p. 187).

Another organization implemented 4-day work weeks to assess whether shorter weeks would drive higher productivity by encouraging employees to slow down and take the rest as needed. Results were favorable.

"Many of us have built our identities around working to the point of exhaustion. We call this success. In a culture built on ever-increasing speed, slowing down is hard, and most of us will feel guilty about doing it. That's one reason why it's important we all do it together—as a societal, structural change" (p. 192).

People must take the time to disconnect from their work obligations. "The constantly-on-call way of working is disastrous for people's health and their ability to do their jobs... everyone should have a right to disconnect" (p. 194).

Research shows giving yourself the time to unplug, step away, and clearly define your work hours plays a significant role in overall health and the ability to focus within working hours (p. 194).

Deteriorating Diets and Rising Pollution

Sustained focus requires taking care of your mental and physical health. "Achieving sustained attention, he said, is a physical process that requires your body to be able to do certain things. So, if you disrupt your body—by depriving it of nutrients it needs, or by pumping it full of pollutants—your ability to pay attention will also be disrupted" (p. 198).

We may believe we have full control of our diet, but the research says otherwise. "As we became accustomed to food that was radically different from what had gone before, the food industry began to find more and more sophisticated ways to directly target our primitive pleasure centers. They pump our foods full of sugars in quantities that never occur in nature, and trans fats, and various unprecedented new inventions" (p. 199).

Additionally, research conducted by Barba Maher, a professor of environmental science, shows that environmental pollution also plays a role. “She has found that the worse the pollution, the worse the damage to your brain” (p. 205).

The amount of attention-damaging chemicals we encounter has rapidly increased. “Our attention and focus have been raided, pillaged, and poisoned by huge external forces—and we have been told to do the equivalent of dusting our homes and washing our hands more, when we should have been doing the equivalent of banning lead paint and petrol all along” (p. 209).

ADHD and the Confinement of Children

“Between 2003 and 2011 alone, diagnoses of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) soared in the United States by 43 percent overall, and by 55 percent among girls. 13 percent of adolescents in the United States have been given this diagnosis” (p. 213).

Research shows that parenting has a huge impact on children and their likelihood of being diagnosed with ADHD. “Parenting takes place in an environment—and if that environment floods parents with stress, it will inevitably affect their children” (p. 225).

Alan Sroufe, a professor of child psychology, believes “a clear majority of the kids who were diagnosed were not born to be ADHD. They developed these problems in reaction to their circumstances” (p. 226).

A lack of outdoor activity among children goes hand in hand with the rise of ADHD. “By 2003, in the U.S. only 10 percent of children spent any time playing freely outdoors on a regular basis” (p. 239).

The lives of children have drastically changed in recent years. They’re exposed to screens and electronics earlier than ever. They are fed food that neglects the nutrients they need and causes their energy to crash. The flaw is not among the children that they are struggling to focus and pay attention, rather it’s the flaw in the world around them (p. 246).

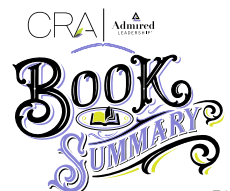
Attention Rebellion

To start gaining our attention and focus back, we must understand the four layers of attention (pp. 265-267):

- 1) Spotlight: focus on immediate actions
- 2) Starlight: focus you apply to your “longer-term goals”
- 3) Daylight: focus that makes it possible for you to remain grounded in longer-term goals
- 4) Stadium lights: our ability to see, to hear, and to work with each other towards collective goals

If we continue the path we are on, under-slept and overworked, poor diets, constantly switching tasks, technologies designed to target our weaknesses, we will continue to be a society with serious attention issues (p. 270).

“I believe that we must focus together—or face the fires alone” (p. 283).



REMOTE, NOT DISTANT

Razzetti, G. (2022). *Remote, Not Distant*:

Design a company culture that will help you thrive in a hybrid workplace.

Highland Park: Liberationist Press.

As CEO of Fearless Culture, a workplace culture consulting firm, Gustavo Razzetti facilitates his Culture Design Masterclass for organizations across the globe. With decades of experience in the marketing and innovation world, Razzetti advises Fortune 500 companies, startups, and everything in between. When the pandemic hit, he dove into research, learned from his workshop participants, and began creating tools for remote collaboration to advise leaders on how to adapt their organizational culture to an asynchronous workplace. **Remote, Not Distant** outlines top companies' best practices for generating culture in the hybrid environment.

Culture and Culture Design

Culture should be designed deliberately and built with purpose and intent. While company culture is organic, "in a hybrid environment, you need to be more intentional" (p. 28).

"One of the most critical roles of workplace culture is the process of sense-making. It creates a shared identity that generates both attraction and rejection. Culture is the glue that brings people together, protecting the system from 'wrong people' and 'wrong behaviors'" (p. 14).

Leaders can use the Culture Design Canvas to map, assess, and understand the design of their culture. It is a visual framework to codify the three areas of culture:

- 1) The Core: includes purpose, values, priorities, and outlines which behaviors are rewarded.
- 2) Emotional Culture: includes psychological safety, feedback, and rituals.
- 3) Functional Culture: includes decision-making, meetings, norms, and rituals (p. 17).

Five Principles of Culture Design

- 1) Human-centric: based on people's needs and feedback to continually improve it.
- 2) Systemic: shaped by consistent behavior.
- 3) Co-created: derived from leaders who model expected behavior and employees who follow their lead.
- 4) Experimental and iterative: adaptive, especially in a hybrid environment.
- 5) Evolving: built on what has worked in the past while improving or eliminating what has not (pp. 19-20).

Declared Culture and Observed Culture

"Culture is the behavior you reward and punish" (p. 81).

There is an observable disconnect between declared and real culture when corporate behaviors don't match words. "Almost one-third of employees in the UK feel their organization's vision or values have too much corporate jargon, and 49% can't recite their organization's values. In the U.S., more than 30% of employees believe business leaders don't behave in ways that are consistent with the company's stated values" (p. 82).

Behavioral cues provide concrete guidance on how to translate values into actions. Leaders must clarify why they matter. According to a study by MIT, less than one-fourth of companies connect values with behaviors, and a significant majority fail to link beliefs with business success (p. 86).

"To change your company's culture, seek to change which behaviors you celebrate or call out" (p. 86).

Measures of Culture

"Research by Professor James L. Heskett shows that a strong culture can increase performance by 20-30% compared to 'culturally unremarkable' competitors. According to the Organizational Health Index, companies with the strongest culture can perform 200% higher than those in the bottom quartile" (p. 14).

"Automattic, best known for its WordPress product, considers communication 'the oxygen of a distributed company.' Its employees are encouraged to communicate as much as possible, not only about work, but also about personal things" (p. 29).

Organizations can benefit enormously by shifting their focus away from traditional input measures (e.g., visibility, presenteeism, etc.) and focusing on impact, goals, and results. "Google has been using OKRs (objectives and key results) at both an organizational and team level since long before the pandemic. OKRs helped divide roles and responsibilities, encouraging people to think in terms of contribution, not input" (p. 30).

"Being a purpose-driven organization is not about having a feel-good culture; it's about creating alignment among your employees and teams and helping to solve complex problems. A shared future ensures that every member of the company is on the same page with regard to short-term and long-term business initiatives, workflow, and expectations" (p. 65).

Companies Gruner + Jahr and Future Forum both conducted research and could not find any evidence that remote work harms employee satisfaction, identification, culture, information exchange, or collaboration (pp. 235-237).

Belonging

"Strong feelings of belonging are linked to a 56% increase in job performance, better business results, and a healthier workplace culture" (p. 103).

"Belonging is a critical element for constructing high-performing teams. It's about feeling safe enough to build strong interpersonal relationships, bring your whole self to work, address well-being issues, and actively participate in meetings or conversations. This is the foundation of psychological safety" (p. 113).

"A safe culture makes it easier for quiet voices to speak up, increasing participation of introverts, women, and minority groups, the people who are interrupted or ignored the most" (p. 108).

Dr. Myrium Hadnes of Never Been Done, the largest global community for facilitators, said, "Zoom calls actually provide a safer space than in-person meetings. In an office, the CEO wouldn't talk to an intern, but breakout rooms have changed that dynamic. With one click, you pair strangers, and may start random conversations" (p. 110).

"Working from home has put team culture, and especially psychological safety, to the test for remote teams. To address the challenges of remote work, managers and team members must engage in conversations that touch on their identities, values, and personal choices" (p. 109).

Rituals are symbolic shared experiences that strengthen connections, communication, and a sense of belonging. Through repetition, they help reinforce desired beliefs and behaviors. For organizations transitioning to hybrid work, it is important to engage employees in rituals that connect them to their team. For example, before the pandemic, Zappos' employees enjoyed a company garden in their office and shared the garden's harvest. During the pandemic, Zappos sent employees an herb garden kit and encouraged them to post photos of their gardens and the food they cooked, keeping the sense of community alive. The in-person ritual was synchronous and the virtual version was asynchronous, but both contributed to a shared sense of community (pp. 166-178).

Reallocate resources to culture-building exercises. When GoTo went fully remote, they took the money they saved on office space and started funding community programs. They geo-mapped where employees lived and assigned local leaders in each area a corresponding budget. Each leader then ran local team rituals and volunteering events to bring colleagues together and support their local communities (p. 261).

Collaboration

The key to building a culture of collaboration is knowing when synchronous collaboration isn't necessary. Many types of work do not require synchronous collaboration with others (p. 190).

The author explains on pages 201-209 that for teams in a hybrid, nonoffice-centric workplace, leaders can determine if collaboration is necessary using two axes.

- 1) 'Me Time' v. 'We Time': activities performed at individual's own pace and times versus activities performed in a team setting.
- 2) 'Deep Work' v. 'Casual Work': activities that require more concentration, quality time, and focus versus activities that require less.

Work that involves 'We Time' usually involves collaboration, and where the activity falls between 'Deep Work' and 'Casual Work' decides the formality and the length of time required for an effective product to come out of collaboration. Activities that accelerate decision-making and integrating perspectives require 'We Time' and 'Deep Work,' while activities that emphasize team bonding or facilitating simple issues require 'We Time' and 'Casual Work'.

Default to Asynchronous Work

"Synchronous communication has two main benefits: speed and connection, making it ideal for one-on-one, sensitive conversations, and emergencies" (p. 211).

"Asynchronous communication is more effective for deep work as it gives us the opportunity to think things through before making a decision" (p. 211).

Default asynchronous work makes collaboration more inclusive for people across different time zones and provides a safe space for people who need to think to talk. Most importantly, it allows people to be in control of their schedules and not the other way around (p. 215).

Encourage balanced participation. At Trello, even if only one person joins a meeting remotely, everyone else joins from their desk. This creates a similar experience for all attendees, so no one feels like they're at a disadvantage. At Microsoft, all team members join via Microsoft Teams, regardless of whether they are in the room or participating from home. Everyone uses the chat function to ask questions or share additional information (p. 49).

Leaders should model asynchronous behavior if that is their expectation for their employees. They should block time for focus work, respect others' calendars, and avoid responding immediately to messages that do not require an immediate response. Employees will look to their leaders to see norms and ways of collaborating (pp. 280-281).

Create company rules that enable people, rather than limiting them. Cultures made up of employees with high identification benefit when leaders give their employees more autonomy. With autonomy, people become more accountable (p. 247).

Seven Tips to Help Teams Default to Asynchronous Work

- 1) Before a meeting, predetermine what needs to be discussed in real-time and what does not need an immediate response.
- 2) Prioritize asynchronous tools when gathering feedback. Use Slack or Microsoft Teams to pulse team members and ask colleagues to review work.
- 3) Document everything. By systematically documenting decisions, research, changes to processes, etc., all team members will have access to a single source of truth, including team members who are new and inquire about decisions that have been made prior to them joining the team.
- 4) Keep meetings small. Bob Sutton, Professor of Management Science and Engineering at Stanford, believes seven people make up the ideal team size.
- 5) Design your meetings and share the agenda, objectives, and outstanding questions with members before you meet.
- 6) As the meeting facilitator, if there is a meeting where some colleagues are in the room and some have joined virtually, ensure equal participation. Invite those joining remotely to speak first and institute rules like hand-raising to ask questions or having everyone join from their computer.
- 7) Be clear about what 'hybrid' means for your company and clarify how much flexibility teams and individuals will have (pp. 210-245).

Five Basic Types of Hybrid and Remote Work Models

- 1) Remote-friendly or office-first: employees are expected to spend most of their time in the office, but managers may grant remote work requests.
- 2) Fixed hybrid: employees are expected to conform to being in the office, remote, or hybrid based on the category of the employee's role or team.
- 3) Partly remote or collaboration days: employees are expected to work in the office most days but may choose to work remotely a few days; collaboration is structured around a schedule rather than a project or mode of work.
- 4) Flexible hybrid: employees can choose both their working hours and their location; teams can elect when and why to get together based on collaboration needs.
- 5) Remote-first: remote work is the default for all employees and leaders; office space may be retained for special occasions or collaborative and team-building spaces (pp. 238-242).

AMP IT UP

Slootman, F. (2022). *Amp It Up:*

Leading for hypergrowth by raising expectations, increasing urgency, and elevating intensity.
Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

After graduating from college, Frank Slootman landed in America with \$100. to his name, then worked his way up from making ends meet to becoming CEO of Data Domain. He then led ServiceNow to rapid expansion followed by transforming his current company, Snowflake. In his book **Amp It Up**, Slootman argues that many issues faced by organizations can be solved from within, and he suggests five key elements that all companies should purpose to do when they aim to “amp it up” in their organizations: “raise your standards, align your people, sharpen your focus, pick up the pace, and transform your strategy” (p. 6). Slootman believes that moving with urgency and intensity will result in big rewards.

Key Quote:

“Leadership changes can yield immediate impact long before you can carry out more structural changes in talent, organization, and strategy” (p. 5).

Key Points:

My Journey from Teenage Toilet Cleaner to Serial CEO. Choose wisely where you start your career. Understand that experience is invaluable and teaches you to fix what can be fixed sooner rather than later.

Make Your Organization Mission Driven. “A clear and compelling sense of mission has been one of the essential keys to our consistent growth and success” (p. 35). Once your mission is set, work on four things: “focus, urgency, execution, and strategy” (p. 41).

Declare War on Your Competitors and on Incrementalism. Have a “visceral sense of contest” and resist erring on the side of caution (pp. 46, 48).

Put Execution Ahead of Strategy. “Strategy can’t really be mastered until you know how to execute well” – and execution is a “teachable competency” (p. 56).

Hire Drivers, Not Passengers, and Get the Wrong People Off the Bus. “Maintain an active recruiting posture,” making sure the people at your company are motivated contributors and not just “passengers” (p. 70).

Build a Strong Culture. Culture and mission should be in sync. Whatever your stated values, they need to be practically lived out in the day-to-day with consequences attached for violating them.

Teach Everyone to Go Direct and Build Mutual Trust. Encourage and live out open communication between teams and departments. To build trust, “be trustworthy” as a leader (p. 88).

Put Analysis Before Solutions. Companies need to prioritize the diagnosis before launching solutions. “Slow down and critically examine situations and problems before settling on an explanation, never mind a solution” (p. 96).

Align Incentives for Customer Success. The whole company should feel responsible for customer satisfaction and success. “Customer grievances are best solved by establishing proper ownership, reducing internal complexity, and removing bureaucratic intermediaries” (p. 101).

Ramp Up Sales. Adjust your sales process to where your product line is – adjusting your sales approach as you upgrade your product. Identify who on your team is responsible for closing deals, but remember that sales will not pay off until “you’ve figured out your product, your demand and lead generation systems, and the kinds of selling motions that will convert prospects to customers” (p. 111).

Grow Fast or Die Slow. “When evaluating a young company, growth matters even more than profit margin or cost structure” (p. 113). Set your growth targets ambitiously.

Stay Scrappy as You Scale Up. No matter how large you become, “hang on to your early-stage dynamism” focusing always “on the core drivers of the company’s success” (pp. 127, 128).

Materialize Your Opportunities – the Data Domain Growth Story. Data Domain, a start-up, experienced success for a variety of reasons including attacking “weakness, not strength” betting “on the correct enabling technologies,” and nimbly transforming strategies as needed (pp. 134, 139, 140). A lesson learned was to be sure to assess the issues of “scope, expansion, and runway” from the very first day on the job (p. 142).

Open the Aperture – the ServiceNow Expansion Story. Look for openings to expand beyond a “narrow niche” of customers and functions. Avoid “the strategic dilemma of running out of markets” (p. 150).

Swing for the Fences – the Snowflake Growth Story. “You need to think well ahead of the current dynamic in your market.” Do not “take comfort in the status quo” (p. 152).

Amp Up Your Career. In terms of your career, “education matters,” “experience matters more,” “aptitude matters most,” and “personality tips the scales” (pp. 160-163).

Just for CEOs – Dealing With Founders and Boards. When you take over as CEO after a founder, “tread lightly” and remember that your success will be the thing that makes your case (pp. 173-175). Carefully build relationships with your board, but lead them, as well (pp. 177-180).

Conclusion – Great Leaders Have Great Outcomes. Make the most of your unique skills, experience, and the insights you have received from others “to become a truer, more honed, more effective version of who you already are” (pp. 181-182).

Key Concepts:

Set the Tone

Having a leader who establishes a mission, is direct about its goals, and puts a purpose to the vision will likely see buy-in from their employees and growth in their company.

“Being on a mission unlocks the X factor: an intangible that can dramatically elevate performance as people set out to achieve greatness – together. It makes your working life not just more productive but also more fun” (pp. 35-36).

In formulating a truly great mission, make sure the mission is big (“but not impossible”), “clear,” and “not about money” (pp. 36-39).

The first step of a leader within an organization is to create and establish the mission. Next, everyone involved must embrace and carry out the goals & objectives. Companies and leaders should be aware of the possible setbacks of creating mediocre standards. Getting comfortable can cause a lack of growth, performance, and success.

“Try applying ‘insanely great’ as a standard on a daily basis and see how far you get.” There is a tendency for people to “lower their standards in an effort to move things along and get things off their desk. Don’t do it” (p. 6).

Create a sense of alignment between the people and the culture, resulting in a well-rounded team. “Are we all pulling on the same oar? Are we all driving in the same direction?” (pp. 6-7).

Eliminating management by objective (MBO) will help discourage employees from becoming attached to projects or developing an “every man for himself” attitude (p. 7).

Developing and trying to grow a company with no sense of urgency will result in a lack of alignment and create opportunities for competitors to win. "Apply pressure. Be impatient. Patience may be a virtue, but in business it can signal a lack of leadership" (p. 10).

Handling Competition

It is the responsibility of leaders to understand the competitiveness of business and reiterate that message to the rest of the employees. "It's no exaggeration to say that business is war" (p. 45). The bottom line is that business is a competitive game; there will be losers and winners. The losers will no longer be in business, while the winners will (p. 46).

It should concern leaders and management when they begin to lose their top performers. "A talent drain is the best evidence that a company is in serious trouble and is losing its will to fight" (p. 48).

There are ways companies can defeat themselves, and one of them is by making advancements or positive changes only on a small, incremental scale. Companies can become scared to make big, bold decisions and instead they err on the side of caution. But making small leaps or only "inching forward" can create an even more significant risk than pushing the limits and being bold with decision-making (p. 49).

Leaders of organizations are encouraged to evaluate their growth models and ask themselves if their business can "start amping up" (p. 49). Amping up the growth model and taking bolder and bigger leaps in the right direction will drive organizations farther apart from their competitors.

It is the responsibility of leaders to effectively communicate with employees about the competitive nature of business. The employee's paycheck is not safe if the success and growth of the company are not safe. Winning and competing against other companies takes the entire organization, not just the leaders.

Changing the incremental mindset will lead to quicker growth opportunities (p. 53).

Strategy Is Important but Is Nothing Without Execution

Mastering how to **execute** a strategy is much more complex than building the strategy itself. While both are essential to growth and success, a good strategy without proper execution will always fail (p. 55).

"If you don't know how to execute, every strategy will fail, even the most promising ones" (p. 55). Sloatman adds, "As one of my former bosses observed: 'No strategy is better than its execution'" (p. 55).

Exploring different strategic approaches and understanding why some are more valuable than others is a promising start to a good plan (pp. 58-59). To formulate and maintain an effective strategy, leaders must embrace "brutal honesty" about the changes that need to be made after comprehensive due diligence and challenging discussions (p. 59).

Being honest also means admitting when you may have been wrong about a particular strategy or approach. Leaders must be careful about becoming attached to a strategy. The approach will most likely need to be changed in one way or another, sooner or later. Better to change it sooner (p. 60).

At times, it may be difficult to distinguish what is going wrong – the strategy or the execution. "Eliminate execution as a potential factor first, and then move on to evaluating the strategy" (p. 61).

Sloatman believes that hiring consultants is unnecessary and could be a waste of money.

"Develop confidence in your own authority, not somebody else's" (p. 61).

Nine Takeaways for Developing Strategy

- 1) "Attack weakness, not strength."
- 2) "Either create a cost advantage or neutralize someone else's."
- 3) "It's much easier to attack an existing market than create a new one."
- 4) "Early adopters buy differently than later adopters."
- 5) "Stay close to home in the early going."
- 6) "Build the whole product or solve the whole problem as fast as you can."
- 7) "Bet on the correct enabling technologies."
- 8) "Architecture is everything."
- 9) "Prepare to transform your strategy sooner than you expect" (pp. 133-142).

Analysis Before Solutions

Leaders should take a deep look at the problems causing the need for solutions. They should be "diagnosis centric" rather than "jumping to conclusions" and focusing on solutions first (p. 93, 98).

Allocate time to focus on problems and correctly identify them before offering a solution. Leaders can be too quick to solve problems without knowing the entirety of the issue. "But if we are wrong in understanding the problem, our solutions won't work" (p. 94).

Groupthink and confirmation bias should be avoided when it comes to "jumping to solutions." These approaches diminish "new, creative, unexpected ways of thinking" (p. 95). Setting aside bias and letting go of past experiences can be helpful tactics when focusing on identifying the problem (p. 96).

Once the problem or issue is broken down and understood to its core, one can begin to analyze how to solve the issue correctly (pp. 96-97).

The Problem With the Customer Success Department

The customer should be the focal point of every employee and every department. Naming one department "customer success" gives all other employees the notion that the customer is not their responsibility (p. 100).

With no customer success department, "everyone's incentives are aligned." The customer remains at the heart of the business and is the responsibility of every employee and department (pp. 101-102).

How to Become Big and Continue to Grow

The importance of growth is necessary to understand before trying to become prominent in the business world. "Studies have found that when evaluating a young company, growth matters even more than profit margin or cost structure. Increases in growth drove twice as much valuation increase than equivalent improvements in profitability" (p. 113).

Leaders must let go of fear to build a "growth model that stretches your goals" (p. 116). Sloatman presses leaders to set big but achievable goals within a growth model and then strive to meet them. Conservative and careful goals will not challenge the business to grow. "Goals are powerful: they change behavior" (p. 117).

Once a company gains growth, it can become harder to continue to expand that growth even more. However, "unlike the law of gravity, there's no law that momentum naturally has to slow as your revenues climb higher and higher" (p. 119).

After growing big once (“striking gold”), refer to your culture, mission, and purpose. Look deep at the core of your business and examine the areas that still have room for expansion and growth (pp. 37, 120).

“You can expand your capacity to sell while at the same time increasing your addressable market” (p. 120).

Avoid being reluctant to change. Old habits are likely not going to work in a world of constant evolution (p. 128).

Leaders who can maintain their scrappy and competitive attitudes while incorporating discipline and structure are likely to succeed in higher executive roles (p. 128). Combining the two can result in a large company growing even bigger.

Choose Drivers, Not Passengers

New hires are an enormous part of an organization's growth, success, and lack of success.

Slootman breaks down the hiring process to its core – you should aim to choose “drivers, not passengers” (p. 65).

The author describes passengers as followers who are, in simple terms, just along for the ride. “Passengers are people who don't mind simply being carried along by the company's momentum, offering little or no input, seemingly not caring much about the direction chosen by management” (p. 65). The passengers must be eliminated from the equation. The wrong people contribute to undesirable results.

Drivers are leaders. They thrive off contributing and being more than just a number in a company. They want to make a difference. “They exude energy, urgency, ambition, even boldness. Faced with a challenge, they usually say, ‘Why not’ rather than ‘That's impossible’” (p. 66).

“Ultimately, leaders are only as good as the people they surround themselves with. Once you get good at both hiring and firing, you are well on your way to great results and a thriving career” (p. 72).

Be You

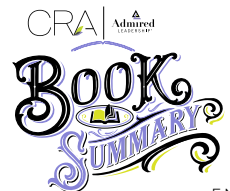
We all are “products” in the professional world. How your product looks is entirely up to you, and your product is shaped through your education, experiences, training, etc. (p. 159).

For leaders building an organization and for people seeking an organization, it is important to remember that while education matters, experience is more valuable. Aptitude and personality are essential, and communication skills are highly sought after. “Finding your own path, however long it takes, will unlock your personal power” (p. 182).

Embracing the struggle and trusting the journey is half the battle. “As time unfolds, you will appreciate the hard times the most” (p. 168).

Trusting yourself and becoming a genuine, authentic, successful leader has to come from within.

Leadership is unique; you have to find what works for you and your people. If you “amp it up,” the rest will fall into place (p. 182).



SMART BREVITY

VandeHei, J., Allen, M., & Schwartz, R. (2022). **Smart Brevity:**

The power of saying more with less. New York: Workman Publishing.

As cofounders of Axios, Jim VandeHei, Mike Allen, and Roy Schwartz developed a platform based on the idea that the world needed smarter, more efficient news coverage and audience-first messages. While at Politico, VandeHei and Allen began to analyze sticky headlines, memorable “ledes,” and concise messages about politics and the world’s leaders. They tested the foundations of **Smart Brevity** by evaluating the most effective communication methods with their newsletter subscribers. **Smart Brevity** encapsulates how to communicate more effectively in emails, during meetings, and throughout presentations.

Four Main Parts of Smart Brevity

- 1) A muscular tease: six or fewer strong words as a subject line.
- 2) One strong first sentence or “lede”: a direct, short, and memorable sentence.
- 3) Context or “why it matters”: a concise explanation with only enough background for the receiver to understand the communication.
- 4) The choice to learn more or “go deeper”: an opportunity for your receiver to ask questions or access a source that leads them to more information and provides them with the choice to uncover or not (pp. 24-25).

Foundations of Smart Brevity

“You bring more soul and salience to your writing by being direct, helpful, and time-saving. Don’t omit important facts or nuance, oversimplify, or dumb down” (p. 15).

Outline your communication with smart brevity and guiding questions. Ask: who is the smart receiver of this communication, “what is an update or other topic you’re familiar with and that they need to know about,” and “why is it significant” (p. 208).

The “Lede”

Eye-tracking studies conducted by Robert Yaros of the University of Maryland show that we spend 26 seconds, on average, reading a piece of content. This makes it even more important for a message to begin with an appropriate “lede” (p. 58).

“The most important words you type are subject lines, headlines, and the first line of tweets, notes, or papers” (p. 66).

The best subject lines contain “short, direct, and urgent” messages (p. 140).

When writing, consider your audience and what they want and need first. When you communicate with the broadest possible audience, similar to many TV networks, you include too much context, and your message is unfocused (pp. 44-46).

Start a communication by simply writing the one big idea you need your audience to remember. Communicate that message sincerely and briefly (pp. 46-50).

Three Tips to Organize Your Communication

- 1) Use bullets to organize and isolate facts or ideas. Bullets draw a reader's attention in longer messages (p. 92). "Bullets make it easy for skimmers and close readers to catch the most important data points or supporting ideas" (p. 140).
- 2) "Bold any words or figures or names you want to stand out here again, it's the perfect eye trap for those skimmers" (p. 141).
- 3) Deploy strong, one-syllable words. Use strong words to tell the story. Do not write messages that tell readers about a story (pp. 100-103).

Smart Brevity in Meetings

According to a study from Harvard Business Review Design Thinking, 90 percent of people admit to daydreaming while in a meeting, and 70 percent admit to doing other work. Make your meetings more effective by only including those who are necessary and streamlining your content (p. 148).

Always lead a meeting with an agenda. Open with your headline what needs to be resolved or debated (p. 150).

"Write down the precise outcome you want and three to five points you must make to support it." These are your supporting points and, in conjunction with your headline, your outline (p. 167).

"When 2 minutes are left, bring the discussion to an end. Summarize the takeaways and be specific about next steps." Send an email memorializing next actions before close of business (p. 151).

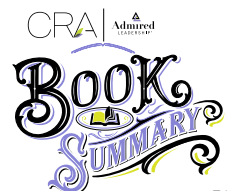
Smart Brevity in Presentations and Visuals

Limit your deck to include one message per slide and one font or common visual style (p. 168).

"Molecular biologist John Medina found that images improve lasting recall. He discovered that adding an arresting image (a striking, impressive image) can increase recall to 65 percent, compared to 10 percent if a person simply hears it" (p. 168).

To achieve smart brevity in visuals; "start with a strong concept," "edit out superfluous elements," and "always judge the work from the perspective of the viewer" (p. 183).

"Be respectful to your audience—abstraction, clutter, and confusion are the enemy" (p. 185).



DIVERSITY IS NOT ENOUGH

Wyche, K. (2021). **Diversity is Not Enough:**
A roadmap to recruit, develop, and promote Black leaders in America.
Trinity: Kandelle Publishing.

In **Diversity is Not Enough**, Keith R. Wyche provides real, actionable steps to improving the experience of Black employees, colleagues, and leaders in the workplace. His insights draw on his experience building a more diverse workforce and cultivating inclusive cultures over his tenure as a business leader and through lessons learned from serving on Boards devoted to advancing the careers of Black executives and entrepreneurs. Wyche's insights and strategies are ideal for any leader looking to embrace DE&I in their culture and reinforce DE&I at all levels of their organization.

Diversity Equity & Inclusion (DE&I)

The premise of DE&I is "the belief that all of us, regardless of age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, or another unique characteristic, [bring] value to the workplace" (p. 10).

DE&I policies create a more inclusive workplace and generate a better leadership pipeline for people of all demographics (p. 10).

Some secondary benefits to embracing DE&I include making organizations "more innovative, more attractive to potential job seekers, and, as a result, more profitable" (p. 10).

Equity, in principle, requires "deliberate actions to provide everyone in the organization the same opportunity for success, realizing that we don't all share the same privileges". It considers everyone's unique needs (p. 21).

Why Should Organizations Invest in DE&I?

"Not only do employees with different perspectives and experiences help create more resilient and effective organizations, they also foster innovation, creativity, and empathy in ways that homogenous environments seldom do" (p. xiv).

Benefits like enhancing the working environment and culture, reinforcing the organization's values, and gaining support of local communities are some of the most frequently cited reasons leaders invest in DE&I (p. xiv).

"If organizations are serious about receiving the ROI of their diversity and inclusion efforts, they must have meaningful Black representation at every level, board included" (p. xv).

"Research has shown that inclusive organizations are six times more likely to be innovative and have two times higher cash flow per employee over a three-year period, as compared with organizations whose employees don't feel a sense of inclusion at work" (p. 5).

"Employees who do feel included are 28 percent more engaged and intend to stay three times longer at their organization than employees who work for non-inclusive organizations" (p. 5).

The Glass Ceiling

"Nearly one in five Black professionals believe that someone of their race would never achieve a senior leadership role at their company" (p. 7). When there are few Black leaders in top leadership roles or on boards, Black employees struggle to identify with senior leaders, leaving them without a leader "who can mentor and sponsor them, or who can relate to their issues, experiences, and backgrounds" (p. 7).

This further dissuades Black professionals from seeking leadership positions.

Those in middle management are often the ones responsible for executing DE&I initiatives, and the success of creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace depends on their buy-in and commitment (pp. 30-31).

Some companies with a large Asian or Latinx employee base skew diversity metrics to include all people of color (POC) together to give the impression that DE&I is not a problem. This could lead talented professionals to be overlooked for promotions or leadership opportunities. Over time, they get frustrated and leave the organization or remain with the organization but operate below their potential (p. 32).

Wyche shares, “because there is so little, or practically no representation on senior and executive levels for Black professionals, we are often overlooked for sponsorship to fast track or to be tapped as a high potential candidate early and developed accordingly throughout our careers” (p. 44).

When talented professionals do not see anyone in senior leadership who look like them in decision-making roles, it gives the perception that such attainment is out of reach (p. 74).

Effective DE&I Efforts

Include diverse associates in fostering DE&I (p. 31).

Use inclusive language, action, and hiring processes at every level of leadership, symbolically emphasizing the importance for those who have the biggest impact on carrying out DE&I initiatives – middle management (p. 20).

Design a culture that makes all feel welcome and appreciated with a commitment to DE&I and respect for individual differences (pp. 42-43).

Have consistent, trusted methods to gather honest feedback at every level of the organization (p. 20).

Invest in data collection methods that allow for complete anonymity. Successful data collection methods include hiring outside consultants, hosting focus groups, and providing online surveys hosted on external websites. Anonymous data collection ensures employees feel safe when providing honest feedback without fear of retaliation (p. 84).

Chief diversity officers (CDOs) have the power and influence to drive meaningful change when they “report directly to the CEO or to the head of HR, with a dotted line to the CEO”. Companies must also provide them with an adequate budget or staff and set the CDO up for success (pp. 75-77).

Recruit with DE&I

Seek referrals from other Black professionals in the organization, who may know other Black professionals who could be qualified for open positions (p. 48).

Develop relationships and partner with Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), schools that “have produced some of the greatest Black executives, politicians, doctors, artists, athletes, and leaders” (pp. 95-97).

Recruit through Black professional organizations that upskill and develop talent (pp. 97-102).

Development of Talent

Invest in onboarding, mentoring, development, and sponsorship of all employees (p. 33).

Fund internal talent and career development programs for Black professionals at the same level as programs dedicated to women (p. 40).

Take young professionals who “demonstrate intellectual curiosity, a passion for excellence, a willingness to do the work necessary to get results, and an openness to feedback” and provide them with “additional mentoring, access to senior leadership, assigned special projects, and put [them] in position to demonstrate their skills” (p. 45).

Identify and address underutilized diverse talent. Promote talent to roles where they can add more value and experience more job satisfaction, leveraging their skills to the betterment of the organization (pp. 110-111).

“Encourage your senior leaders (especially White men) to take ownership of sponsoring your Black associates.” Organizations that prioritize inclusive talent development are more likely to have a leadership team focused on identifying and sponsoring top talent (p. 112).

