



Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence

Daniel Goleman

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Bestselling author Daniel Goleman returns with a groundbreaking look at today's scarcest resource and the secret to high performance and fulfillment: attention

For more than two decades, psychologist and journalist Daniel Goleman has been scouting the leading edge of the human sciences for what's new, surprising, and important. In *Focus*, he delves into the science of attention in all its varieties, presenting a long overdue discussion of this little-noticed and under-rated mental asset that matters enormously for how we navigate life. Attention works much like a muscle: use it poorly and it can wither; work it well and it grows. In an era of unstoppable distractions, Goleman persuasively argues that now more than ever we must learn to sharpen focus if we are to contend with, let alone thrive, in a complex world.

Goleman boils down attention research into a threesome: inner, other, and outer focus. A well-lived life demands we be nimble at each. Goleman shows why high-achievers need all three kinds of focus, as demonstrated by rich case studies from fields as diverse as competitive sports, education, the arts, and business. Those who excel rely on what he calls Smart Practices such as mindfulness meditation, focused preparation and recovery, positive emotions and connections, and mental "prosthetics" that help them improve habits, add new skills, and sustain excellence. Combining cutting-edge research with practical findings, *Focus* reveals what distinguishes experts from amateurs and stars from average performers. Ultimately, *Focus* calls upon readers not only to pay attention to what matters most to them personally, but also to turn their attention to the pressing problems of the wider world, to the powerless and the poor, and to the future, not just to the seductively simple demands of here-and-now.

Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence Details

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From Reader Review Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence for online ebook

Jonathan Karmel says

"Understandably, we focus on the people we value most. If you are poor, you depend on good relationships with friends and family whom you may need to turn to for help--say, when you need someone to look after your four-year-old until you get home from work. Those with few resources and a fragile perch on stability "need to lean on people," says Dacher Keltner, a psychologist at the University of California, Berkeley.

"So the poor are particularly attentive to other people and their needs.

"The wealthy, on the other hand, can hire help--pay for a day care center or even an au pair. This means, Keltner argues, that rich people can afford to be less aware of the needs of other people, and so can be less attentive to them and their suffering.

"His research has surfaced this disdain in just a five-minute get-acquainted session. The more wealthy (at least among American college students) exhibit fewer signs of engagement like making eye contact, nods, and laughing--and more of those for uninterest, like checking the time, doodling, or fidgeting. Students from wealthy families seem standoffish, while those from poorer roots appear more engaged, warm, and expressive.

"And in a Dutch study, strangers told each other about distressing episodes in their lives, ranging from the death of a loved one or divorce to loss of a love or betrayal, or childhood pains like being bullied. Again the more powerful person in the pairs tended to be more indifferent: to feel less of the other person's pain--to be less empathic, let alone compassionate.

"Keltner's group has found similar attention gaps just by comparing high-ranking people in an organization with those at the lower tiers on their skill at reading emotions from facial expression. In any interaction the more high-power person tends to focus his or her gaze on the other person less than others, and is more likely to interrupt and to monopolize the conversation--all signifying a lack of attention.

"In contrast, people of lower social status tend to do better on tests of empathic accuracy, such as reading others' emotions from their faces--even just from muscle movements around the eyes. By every measure they focus on other people more than do people of higher status.

"The mapping of attention on lines of power shows up in a simple metric: how long does it take person A to respond to an email from person B? The longer someone ignores an email before finally responding, the more relative social power that person has. Map these response times across an entire organization and you get a remarkably accurate chart of the actual social standing. The boss leaves emails unanswered for hours or days; those lower down respond within minutes.

"There's an algorithm for this, a data mining method called "automated social hierarchy detection," developed at Columbia University. When applied to the archive of email traffic at Enron Corporation before it folded, the method correctly identified the roles of top-level managers and their subordinates just by how long it took them to answer a given person's emails. Intelligence agencies have been applying the same metric to suspected terrorist gangs, piecing together the chain of influence to spot the central figures.

"Power and status are highly relative, varying from one encounter to another. Tellingly, when students from wealthy families imagined themselves talking with someone of still higher status than themselves, they improved on their ability to read emotions in faces.

"Where we see ourselves on the social ladder seems to determine how much attention we pay: more vigilant when we feel subordinate, less so when superior. the corollary: The more you care about someone, the more attention you pay--and the more attention you pay, the more you care. Attention interweaves with love."

This was my favorite two pages in this book. The author summarizes some really interesting studies by other people, but then doesn't do much with this information and ends with the silly sentence: "Attention interweaves with love." The whole book is like this, and I had trouble understanding what, if any, thesis the book had.

I think the point of this book is to say that different people "focus," or pay attention to, different things in different situation. As important as intelligence is the ability to have self-control over what you pay attention to, given the context. This author would have approved of my kindergarten teacher Mrs. Jensen who forced all of the children to sit still with their legs crossed and backs straight and exercise "self-control" for 30 seconds before gym class began.

I didn't really like this book overall, because it just seemed like a rambling summary of a bunch of research. All of the research was on related topics, but the author never really tied everything together to make a coherent book. Topics include how modern technology is creating a lot of distractions, conscious versus subconscious thinking, that people with ADD are sometimes better at finding solutions outside the box, that people are happier in a "flow" state, the value of meditation/mindfulness, the value of taking a walk in nature, the value of doing what you believe in despite what others advise, the importance of nonverbal communication to show emotional empathy, the value of willpower and delayed gratification, what part of a person's brain circuitry is activated in different situations, the value of detachment for physicians, the value of empathetic engagement for physicians, global warming, the "10,000 hour rule," Larry David and the success of certain corporations and their leaders.

I guess the author feels that as a "science journalist," his job is just to summarize a bunch of scientific literature; the book doesn't really need to have a point. But I would have preferred a book that didn't just read like the notes of some guy who has read a lot of stuff and talked to a lot of people about how people think about stuff.

Soundview Executive Book Summaries says

Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence by Daniel Goleman was chosen by Soundview Executive Book Summaries as one of the Top 30 Business Books of 2014.

THE SOUNDVIEW REVIEW:

When a pioneer in any field returns with a new piece of thought leadership, whether written or spoken, the eyes and ears of the business world instinctively turn to see and hear. Daniel Goleman, former *New York Times* science reporter and multiple-bestselling author, changed the landscape of management with his book *Emotional Intelligence* (EQ). Goleman returns now with a book that has the potential to rival his previous peak. In *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence*, Goleman coaches readers on the need to strengthen a trait

that like a muscle can indicate just how well we can lift a figurative load. This book is now available as a Soundview Executive Book Summary.

Goleman begins *Focus* by helping readers understand the anatomy of attention. Of particular interest is his discussion of the bottom-up and top-down minds. The bottom-up mind works faster and is involuntary and automatic, while the top-down mind is, as Goleman writes, “the seat of self-control, which can (sometimes) overpower automatic routines and mute emotionally driven impulses.” The interplay between these two sections of the brain is critical to understanding mental toughness and, perhaps more importantly, mental tiredness.

The overarching theme that focus is a mental muscle serves as a powerful metaphor that will help the material stick with readers. *Focus* moves through subjects such as self-awareness, reading others, and smart practice in ways that offer new, thought-provoking views. As with Emotional Intelligence, Goleman has found a way to turn the complexity of human behavior into an engaging read with practical takeaways. *Focus* will help keep any executive razor sharp.

Soundview's 8-page Executive Book Summary of *Focus* is available [here](#).

Emma Sea says

If you are looking for strategies to improve your own focus, skip this.

Everything in this review is accurate.

Johannes Bertus says

This book is all about how we ... Oh look! Some interesting facts about Apple's business strategy!

Matthew Green says

How can a book entitled *Focus* be so unfocused?

Goleman doesn't seem to have anyplace he's intentionally going with his latest book. Instead, he's just cobbling together a layman's interpretation of research on attention. He clusters his topics into broader categories, but even these categories don't really seem all that meaningful. You really can't walk away with any single idea more complex than, "Attention is important," since there isn't a through-line, no particular thing he's trying to prove or demonstrate. Moreover, it's primarily not his research; it's his collection of others' work, making him more of a journalist than a scientist.

This isn't to say that what's included is bad. There's some worthwhile information in the book, but it's tied together loosely and without a single ... well ... focus. Pretty disappointing.

James Houston says

I bought this book because I need help focusing, and I have a lot of respect for Daniel Goleman's important work on emotional intelligence.

I finished it a little bit disappointed, feeling like I knew some interesting facts about how focus works and can work, but without much in the way of useful information about how to increase my own focus.

I already knew that mindfulness is a good and valuable skill to train. I already knew that certain video games targeted at brain functions could train the brain in good ways rather than bad--I've used Lumosity, an online arcade of "good" video games since 2012 (with mixed results).

And I needed a couple of days to recover from Goleman's report of the shocking "Dunedin Study" which basically showed that without willpower, there is a very good scientific chance a person is screwed for life--poverty and depression at best, criminality at worst. Definitely plausible, but very hard to swallow as a person who has struggled with willpower for thirty years.

But perhaps that's unfair--perhaps I came to it with too much expectation that it would provide me with neatly-packaged self-help platitudes and programs. Goleman is a deep-thinker type, with his motivation for writing split--I'm speculating--30%/70% between actively improving readers' lives, and passively sharing some really interesting thoughts and research.

And some of it is indeed really interesting. The analysis of "top-down" vs. "bottom-up" brain processing is applicable many times over the course of every day. (Although it's also covered in slightly different terminology in Charles Duhigg's "The Power of Habit"). Also good--though like Dunedin, also worrisome to anyone who's not a superstar at something--is his discussion of how the value of practice is largely negated if the practitioner is daydreaming or doing whatever it is imperfectly.

Finally, there is the funny meta-problem that a reviewer on Amazon rightly pointed out, that the book itself is somewhat unfocused. It seems to roughly follow a "small to large" progression, starting with the inside-the-brain processes, and ostensibly "zooming out" to look at how focus works on larger scales like person-to-person, then analyzing large data systems, and so on. But the transitions between sections are far from smooth or intuitive, and there were a couple of times when I wondered if I was still reading the same book. Then again, maybe I wasn't focusing.

And while this isn't an issue for me, Goleman concludes on a slightly political note by arguing that the highest form of focus humankind could muster right now is to stop doing things like harming the planet and increasing the wealth gap. These may indeed be very important to deal with, but it seems incongruous with a totally even-handed look at "The Hidden Driver of Excellence".

Cara says

The title of this book, "Focus", surely must be ironic. It's not just unfocused, it's so unfocused that I'm not really sure what it's supposed to be about (and yes, I did read the entire thing). It's as if the author just tried to jumble together all the things he's interested in - global warming, empathy, Daniel Kahneman-esque behavioral theory, business management, etc. The problem is there's no theme that really ties everything

together. I mean, obviously the theme is *supposed* to be focus (hence the title), but it really seems like a bunch of moderately-interesting facts collected together with no context in a book with no real purpose. And the facts themselves aren't anything new or exciting. If you've read Daniel Kahneman or Malcolm Gladwell or any pop-psych book, you won't find anything you haven't read a million times before.

Mal Warwick says

Daniel Goleman returned to Berkeley not long ago to speak to a large and enthusiastic audience at International House about the themes in his new book, *Focus*. Though he'd spent only his junior year as an undergraduate at Cal, his quips and asides quickly showed him to be fully in synch with Berkeley's humane values. Though he never stated the point explicitly, it was also clear that Goleman saw the roots of the community's concerns in the chemistry of our brains.

You may remember Goleman as the author of the huge 1995 bestseller, *Emotional Intelligence*, which taught us all that psychological factors other than IQ were better predictors of success on the job and in life. Goleman was trained as a psychologist but soon after his post-doctoral studies turned his hand to science journalism, writing about new developments in brain science and related topics for *The New York Times* for a dozen years and later turning to writing independently. Over the years, he has shifted back and forth from teaching and research to science writing and back again. To date, he has produced ten books. *Focus* is the most recent.

I vividly remember devouring *Emotional Intelligence* much as I would a compelling murder mystery. The book was a revelation. *Focus* falls far short of it. To begin with, the book's central theme — that focused attention improves outcomes in daily life, in work, in sports, and in leadership — is no surprise at all. Many others have delivered this message over the millennia, from the yoga masters of India to Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, who introduced us to the concept of “flow” — the single-minded immersion that, like Goleman's focus, enables peak performance. No doubt, Goleman's new book updates the brain science underlying these concepts, but his repeated overuse of the anatomical labels for obscure regions of the brain would have been better suited for a professional audience rather than the general reader.

The author's academic posturing aside, I found *Focus* fascinating when Goleman described the application of contemporary psychological tools to pre-school and primary education. (Parents with children in school today may find this subject all too familiar; I didn't.) The extraordinary improvement in school performance brought about by exercises in mindfulness was startling news. And the application of similar training methods in various aspects of emotional intelligence yielded similarly impressive results in the workplace, boosting job performance, job satisfaction, and workforce morale. Clearly, there's something truly significant going on here. I just wish Goleman had found a way to report it in a more accessible and congenial way.

Bee says

One of the top 10 most useful books I've ever read. Mr Goleman's *Social Intelligence* is another on that same list. A succinct, and yet detailed overview of how and why focus builds a better brain. It has revolutionised my view and motivation for meditation over and over again, more so than any Buddhist treatise or words by one of a number of meditation teachers. This book or at least its content should be taught to every

schoolgoer, and esp, every business school graduate. And anybody who cannot motivate themselves to do inner reflection or focus training. I have the utmost respect for Daniel Goleman, and hope that he continues to write, and that his books continue to proliferate to every level of society.

K.D. Absolutely says

Turning off our smartphones once in a while. Giving our full attention when someone is talking to us. Letting the other person complete her sentence and not finishing it for her. Asking questions to show interest. Look her in the eyes. Really listen. No to multitasking. Focus on what's more important.

I thought I knew all of these or maybe I used to know but somehow lost them. So, I picked up this book one Sunday afternoon from Fullybooked The Block while waiting for my wife and daughter to arrive. It is always nice to read a non-fiction book for self-development. Non-fiction can remind oneself that there is a real world out there. That in that world, we need to work. And it working, we need to deal with people. And dealing with people can be challenging because they are different with each other. Non-fiction can also remind ourselves that there is no end to improve ourselves no matter how educated, old or experienced we already are.

This book, *Focus: The Hidden Driver of Excellence* is not just a reminder of the things I used to know or at least heard before. It is written by a former science journalist of the New York Times. The first chapter is very interesting as it incorporates science research into how some people can "read" minds by looking at facial expressions. Every twitch of facial muscles, how mouth opens, how jaw drops, how those eyes sparkle and how those brows raise. There is a science to this. What struck me most is that due to the overuse of cellphones, he says that millennials (young people of today) have the difficulty of reading facial expressions. They grew up playing videos and their use of smartphones is greater than having to interact with real people.

I'd like to share with you some quotes whose pages I dogeared:

- 1) "They (a subcontractor company doing performance appraisal for their clients!) knew that people's grades and the prestige of the schools they went to had little or nothing to do with their actual effectiveness." (p. 234)
- 2) "To anticipate how people will react, you have to read people's reactions to you. That takes self-awareness and empathy in a self-reinforcing cycle. You become more aware of how you're coming across to other people. With high self-awareness, you can more readily develop good self-management. If you manage yourself better, you will influence better." (p. 231-232)
- 3) "The original meaning of *strategy* was from the battlefield; it meant the "art of the leader" - back then, generals. Strategy was how you deployed your resources; tactics were how battles were fought. Today, leaders need to generate strategies that make sense in whatever larger systems they operate in - a task for outer focus."

There are many other nice quotes but typing them all here might not entice you to buy and read this book anymore. So, please do yourself a favor. If you want to make yourself better in focusing (as it is a hidden driver of excellence), please read this book!

Dale says

"*FOCUS*" Lacks Focus (A Review of the Audiobook)

Published in 2013 by HarperCollins.

Read by the author, Daniel Goleman.

Duration: 8 hours, 8 minutes.

Dr. Daniel Goleman is best known as the author of *Emotional Intelligence*. In many ways this book is less of a book about the importance of focus and more of a sequel to *Emotional Intelligence*. It is also a anti-global warming manifesto, an education reform book, a self-help book for business leaders who want to be the real leaders in their offices and there is a little bit about how people are able to focus their attentions a bit more and get better results.

That, of course, is the problem with the book called *Focus*. The primary topic should be the ability of people to focus and some hints to help you focus better. The book starts out with exactly this...well, focus. We learn how a store detective is able to focus on a crowded room full of bustling and sort out the normal shopping behaviors from the actions of a shoplifter. Goleman discusses how the give-it-to-me-now world of Tweets, Instagram, instant video makes our attention span short (I knew this already - I teach high school and my kids are on their phones all day long and I see the results).

But, then Goleman leaves this area of personal focus largely unexplored and veers into the focus of whole groups of people and uses global warming as his "focus" for this section. I listened to this as an audiobook on CDs and this lasted for more than a CD - well more than an hour of discussion about a topic that is basically off topic. He throws in a suggestion that schools adopt a global warming science project that probably would not hit most state's standards, goes on about carbon footprints, promotes websites that track your carbon footprint, tells how various companies have shrunk their carbon footprints. None of this, not one bit, not one iota, not one word is described in the blurb on the back of the audiobook. I got bored and started skipping whole chunks of text. To his credit, Goleman does point out that the concept of a zero-emission car is a misnomer since electric cars are charged up by an electric grid that is powered largely by coal and coal plants do have emissions (and if you get your electric car charged by a solar panel, there are emissions associated with the manufacture of those panels).

Then we veer into the world of ...

Read more at: <http://dwdsreviews.blogspot.com/2014/...>

Brent McGregor says

From Amazon:

Having been a fan of Goleman since reading "Emotional Intelligence" in the 90's, I was excited to dive into "Focus".

Goleman does not disappoint. He begins by outlining our general condition in society today as being inattentive. Our minds are in a constant state of overload and what passes for 'multi-tasking' is described as a huge productivity barrier. Finding time to decompress, or be 'fully in the moment', requires a level of Self Awareness covered in Part II. Goleman goes into brain chemistry, circuitry, and function to describe how

parts of the brain can be over used, or worse, underdeveloped.

Pharmaceuticals, self-medication, and outside overload abuse and blur our minds.

This leads to System Blindness where pattern recognition is neglected in favor of shortcuts (usually technological). The story of Mau, who is one of the last practitioner of Polynesian "wayfinding". Learning how to navigate amidst a sea of distraction by focusing on subtle signs is a story for us all.

He then moves into the more conventional use of focus in improving attitudes by managing the Top-Down and Bottom-Up systems that our brains use to cope in complex situations.

I don't want to give too much away because this is a must read for everyone. Yeah, he does get political at times and ch.21 can be skipped entirely, but most academics tend that way and we all paint the house differently.

I read this twice and will probably read it as reference for years to come. It's that good.

This book has been very helpful in understanding how I can improve my own relations and focus.

Jennifer says

DNF at 50%

Book did not have enough "focus" to hold my interest.

Onward.

Janet Pawelek says

Wow. This book is a mishmash of ideas, jettisoning from preschool kids to million-dollar executives, supposedly linking all with the focus of focus. It didn't work for me. To me, the only focus was on the author, how knowledgeable he feels he is, and how amazing his family is. Would not recommend unless you have insomnia.

Ahmad says

While I was reading the book, I had doubt if I wasn't focusing with the book or it is an unfocus book despite the title and the essence of the book! after skimming through previous reviews, I saw that others too had the same impression.

The book has some useful information regarding types of focus (inner,outer,and other), and how it relates to the brain, how it relates to early childhood, focus in leadership, and other "random" information that the author tries to relate to the subject of the book.

I read the book thinking that it would give a direct road map to focusing, but I didn't end up with that. I was thinking of reading Emotional Intelligence by the same author but now I'm not sure if I should.
