



Jake 00:16

Thank you near for coming on the podcast and taking the time today. I really appreciate it, you are the best selling author of a couple of books. The first one is called Hooked how to build habit forming products. And then in distractible, how to control your attention and choose your life, both really interesting books on seemingly sort of opposing but very much related subjects. And in addition to writing, you've also well, you're also writing on a blog near and far.com pretty prolifically there. And then also doing some angel investing and doing public speaking and things like that. But I think the best place to get started would be for those who don't know, you maybe haven't read your books, to sort of tell your story from thrillers you're willing to start to where you are today and talk about some of the decisions you've made along the way.

Nir Eyal 01:04

Sure, so thanks for having me on, Jake. My story is that I'm a behavioral designer. So in my professional career, I help companies design the kind of products and services that people use because they want to not because they have to. So I work with a lot of companies in healthcare, getting people to take their medication or fitness apps to get people to work out education products to help perform habits around learning a new language, for example, or excelling in school. So all kinds of products that require repeat behavior. You know, there's so many products services out there, enterprise consumer web, that are wonderful, but fall flat or the company goes out of business, because people don't use these products that would really benefit them. So that's that's what I do professionally is I help companies design behaviors through the products that their consumers use. And that's what my first book hooked, how to build habit forming products is all about. And then I also am a father and I'm also someone who struggles with distraction, which is what led me to my second book in distractible, how to control your attention and choose your life. And the premise of that book is if hooked was about how do we build good habits in distractible is about how do we break bad habits, not to the same things. They're not opposing books, they're quite complimentary. We can build good habits with that fitness app or that language learning app, we want to do that. But then we also want to break the bad habits around the distractions in our life, like too much news,



too much booze, too much football, too much Facebook, whatever you're having too much of that you might be habituated to in a way that's not serving you and rather is hurting you. That's what indestructible is all about. It's about reclaiming your attention so that you can have the life that you desire. And so that's, that's my my subject area. I've been working in this for over a decade and a half. Now, you asked, What's the origin story where it all started for me. And I would say that it probably began my interest in behavioral design began when I was middle schooler and I was severely obese. Like, not just chubby, like full out obese, I remember my mom taking me to the doctor's office and the doctor saying, Alright, so you see this chart up here. This is normal weight, this is overweight. And here, you're in this red zone, you're obese. And I remember feeling like food controlled me. And it wasn't until I spent a lot of time trying to figure out why it felt like food controlled me that I stopped actually blaming the food. And I realized at some point in my life, that I wasn't eating because food was delicious. Anybody who's overweight and really is honest with themselves and others, we don't you know, we're not obese because food tastes good. We're overweight because we eat our feelings. And that's what I discovered is that I was eating not because I was hungry, I was eating because I was lonely. I was eating because I was bored. I was eating because I felt a ton of guilt and shame about how much I had just eaten. And so it wasn't until I really focused on what we saw today I call internal triggers, that I could regain control over my weight, and eventually my life. And so that's kind of been a consistent theme around how products influence us, and how we can fight back so that we can get the best out of these products without letting them get the best of us.

Jake 04:12

Yeah, it's interesting. There's, you know, this obesity epidemic in the US and maybe other countries, I'm not too sure. But people sort of wonder what that can be attributed to some people talk about like, oh, you know, all these processed foods, and maybe it's like sugar, or seed oil, or whatever it might be. And I don't really know enough to have an opinion. But you know, the concept of sort of eating your feelings and stress eating and things like this or boredom, whatever, depression, eating for all of these sort of feeling related reasons is not novel, but hearing you talk about it sort of the first time I've



actually connected like maybe this, you know, obesity issue in the US is actually first and foremost, not a result of, you know, food systems or sugar or seed oils or processed foods or whatever it might be, although very well may but it may be that at least a contributing factor. If not, perhaps the primary factor is actually, you know, issues of loneliness, issues of stress, sort of societal issues that go beyond the actual food system that are contributing to this problem. Again, I'm not sure but it's a possibility, I suppose. I'm curious, you know, given that this was sort of your first experience with a real issue that you sort of, tried to overcome related to feelings very much related to, you know, behavioral design work that you do today. What were what was your actual experience of overcoming the obesity issue as a kid? Was it? You know, an identity thing? Was it learning to sort of navigate some of these feelings? How did you before you were really doing any of this professionally or anything like that just in your amateur ability to sort of overcome that issue? Obviously, you did. How did you do

Nir Eyal 05:51

it? Yeah, so it is a lifelong struggle. So I still use today, I'm in the best shape of my life at 45 years old. For the first time in my life, I have a six pack, I've never in my life had one. And I'm not saying that to brag, I'm not saying that, to say I'm athletic. I'm not athletic. I'm probably one of the least coordinated people you'll ever meet, because I never played sports as a kid. But I figured out a way to get into the kind of shape I want, and to have the kind of health, physical health I want in terms of the factors I can control. By becoming indestructible. That's really what it's all about. It's about intention. It's about doing what you say you will do. And it's it's not easy. I'm not saying it's simple, you know, everything in life worth having is worth putting effort into and none of it can just be found in a magic pill or some kind of, you know, easy solution. But I would say that, you know, it's interesting that that obesity is kind of a great example, example of behavioral design, and how we can take steps to have agencies individuals, you know, I would think if you asked me on the list of suspects as to why there is an obesity crisis in the United States, I would say that it's probably not seed oils that's probably least last on my list, it probably is. I would say, number one, number one, first and foremost, the number one culprit for



obesity in America is the motor vehicle, the car, that when you design an environment where you move, you expend calories, and you spend less time eating because you're spending more time moving. I grew up in a suburb of Orlando, Florida, where we had no public transportation, where if we wanted to go somewhere, I had to wait for my mom and dad to drive me somewhere. This was before the days of the internet. So life was pretty darn boring. And what did you do you watch TV, a new channel served, and I eat Twinkies and Cheetos all day, because there's nothing else to do. You couldn't walk anywhere. And when you look at obesity rates in cities where people you know, around the world, if you look at the great cities of the world where they have, you know, what we call a 15 minute city where everything that you need is within a 15 minute walk, you have much lower rates of obesity, because the environment is designed to promote a healthier lifestyle. So I think that's number one. And then I think number two is access to abundant calories. Now that's not the food industry's fault. I think capitalism did a marvelous job of for the first time in human history. We don't have mass famine anymore. I mean, this is amazing. Think about it for 200,000 years of human history, famine was a regular part of the human equation, right? Then millions of people would starve to death because of crop failures or whatnot. Well, capitalism cure that problem, by and large, I mean, today we have a feminist because of political instability. It's not because of shortage of calories, we have more than enough calories to feed every man, woman and child on the face of the earth. Today, we have the problem of an over abundance of calories, right? We have diseases of excess, like obesity, like diabetes, you know that these diseases were pretty unheard of when you're in a caloric shortage. And so the price of all that progress, the price of progress is that we have to learn how to deal with this abundance, right? We can't shake our fists at the food companies and say, How dare you make delicious food? That's their job. We want them to make delicious food. No, of course, you know, within reason I am for legislation that protects children, for example, but for the most part, I don't want to ban Twinkies. I want to ban Krispy Kreme, it's delicious, right? I want to eat those things if that's my choice. So I think the price of progress is that even if the environment is designed to promote a certain behavior, it's up to us as individuals to understand that fact and counteract those those those designs and that abundance to make sure that it doesn't get the best of us so you



know, you can not only can you design an environment to promote certain behaviors and you know, that's very it's no coincidence that I choose to live in cities because you know, today I think I walked What 13,000 steps just go into meetings and live in my life right I didn't have to go exercise specially I choose to live in a design environment. To have it now, not everybody could, you know, live in a city, but certainly, you can take steps quite literally, to have those kinds of routines in your life. And so that's the kind of active effort we might have to make, to make sure that we keep our life in balance when we live in an age of such abundance. Yeah, it's

Jake 10:17

interesting, I think that, you know, especially with COVID, a couple of years ago, and still sort of, you know, staying with us a bit and certain ways, certain defaults that have sort of been flipped in society, I think there's a big opportunity for, you know, the designs of where we live, and where we work and how we live and how we work to, you know, be changed quite a bit over the sort of the course of this decade and, and beyond, I sort of think that the implications of COVID, and the resulting shift for a lot of people, especially like, sort of knowledge workers working primarily remotely, I think that's, you know, I'm sort of optimistic, at least that that's sort of yet to really play out, like, we're still only, you know, a few years removed from this. And I know, for me, personally, like, I, you know, started my career, I lived in San Francisco and then New York, and then COVID hit and sort of moved home for a while, my family traveled and stayed for months long at Airbnb ease, which is something I never would have done, you know, if I had to be in an office, and then now, you know, decided to move to sort of just outside of Miami, because basically, you know, there's a lot of sort of people like minded people moving down here, but for a bunch of reasons, you know, the weather's great, whatever, and I don't need to live in the city, because I don't work in the city. So I live just outside of it. And like this sort of, you know, very nice place where I can walk to get my groceries, I can walk to get coffee, I can walk to everything. So I take a car, like once a week to, you know, go to downtown Miami, or whatever it is. And it just changes the way that you live, you don't have to, you know, you're not taking the subway to work and taxi to meetings. And so you can sort of, you know, you can exercise deliberately, but your



exercise is sort of integrated into your daily life. And I think, you know, Environmental Design. And then of course, you do have sort of choices that you still need to make, like you could live in New York, but take subways and Ubers everywhere, you're obviously you know, choosing to walk to meetings instead, which obviously, serves you greatly, at least in the fitness, you know, dimension. So I think it's sort of this combination of designing your environment, and then realizing the choices available to your environment, or in your environment and sort of taking advantage of those. And obviously, this sort of translates beyond just where you live and exercise and things like this, but also to, you know, how you design the apps on your phone and on your computer and your workplace. And things like this, are there places or rather sort of realms beyond, you know, living in a city, sort of other key categories that you think about in terms of environmental design, where you've been very deliberate about sort of how you set your life up.

Nir Eyal 12:56

So certainly when it comes to technology and media, I'm very deliberate. So I was a few years ago before I wrote in distractible, I was really struggling with this problem of distraction, I, I would constantly find myself doing everything but the thing I said I was going to do, and that was having some real consequences. Right? It was having a consequence, with my health because I wasn't exercising when I said I would, I wasn't eating what I said I would I was becoming distracted. When I was with my family, I would start checking my phone when I was with my daughter and doing a lot of things that really embarrassed me now that I look back at it because I wasn't living the kind of life I know I was I was capable of I was constantly distracted. And so I think that is another price of progress. I think, again, like we we hear a lot of critics saying that technology is hijacking our brains that it's stealing our focus. And it's not stealing or hijacking anything we are giving it away. And so the price of having just like we are so lucky to live in an age where we have an abundance of food, I mean, does anybody stop and think about how amazing this age is that we have an abundance of calories, we have an abundance of information, we have an abundance of entertainment options, there's so much to be thankful for. But of course, there's a price for everything. And Sophocles, the Greek philosopher said



nothing vast, and there's the life of mortals without a curse. And so of course, there's going to be a price to be paid, right? The price of having an abundance of calories is that we have to learn how to eat right and exercise. Sorry, it's a fact of life we have to learn. If it's with the price of having the world's information at your fingertips and being able to connect with people all over the world. You're in Miami, I'm in Singapore. We're talking right now for free. It's through a magic video screen that neither of us can actually explain how it works. That's magic, man. It's amazing. We live in the future right now. And so the price of All That Is that Yeah, we have to learn how to use this stuff appropriately. And so that's what indestructible is about. It's not for people who are very comfortable whining and complaining about how the world is out to get them. It's for people who say yeah, I want to use these technologies. In a way that helps me that serves me as opposed to me serving Him. Again, not that it's easy. It's certainly not easy. But if we just sit and, you know, shake our fists at at big tech, we're not going to get anywhere. So I've certainly designed my life in many unorthodox ways to make sure that I stay in distractible. And so that's what you know, took me over five years to write the book in distractible and develop this model. It took me five years because I kept getting distracted. And that's why it took me so long to write the book. But when I really went to the fundamentals, the first principles around the research around why we got distracted, why do we get distracted? I learned that the truth is much more empowering than I originally thought. It's not as simple as saying, Oh, just you know, stop using your phone. That's really crappy advice. It but the turns out that the deeper reasons, back to those internal triggers, turns out to be something that we actually can do something about if we know the right tactics and strategies.

Jake 15:56

Yeah, I think there's sort of a few different elements of that, that I love. One is sort of this, you know, very positive and optimistic view on the world. This is the best time ever to be alive. I personally subscribe to that. But you know, certain people you can find, you can always find problems, if you're looking for problems as to why this is, you know, a bad time or things are getting worse or whatever.



Nir Eyal 16:15

And you sound smart. That's the big, the biggest problem is that people who are optimistic sound uninformed, even though I find that people who are optimistic are actually the most informed, right? Because the shallow media feeds you a narrative of everything's terrible, because that's how they make money, right? Cable News, and, you know, traditional media, their message is chicken, little Chicken Little is a great business, the sky is falling, that sells newspapers that gets people to tune in. You know, nobody, nobody has headlines that say, you know how many people were saved today from curable diseases, or how many airplanes didn't crash? No, they talked about all the terrible things that are happening in the world. And frankly, people in my industry in the tech field who talk about how terrible tech is and how awful it is, for one reason or another, they sound smart, they sound informed. But if you really look into it, if you go past the surface level analysis, you realize actually things are getting better and better.

Jake 17:11

Yeah, no, I totally agree. And so, you know, beyond the positive and the optimistic, it's also the sort of opposite of this, you know, victimhood mindset, where you're saying, like, hey, look, you know, yeah, there's these technologies. Yeah, they can be used for bad or can sort of be using us if you'd let them. But the key word is like, you let that like, you do have control at the end of the day. I mean, you can delete the app, you can take extremes if you want, but maybe there's sort of more in between options that you can do as well, to just sort of, for example, like, I have sort of a love hate relationship with Twitter, you know, I try to manage it the best I can, if I really wanted to, I could just delete it. And you know, after you know, a few weeks of having it deleted, I'm sure I wouldn't miss it very much, or whatever. But I choose to engage with it. Because there's a ton of very positive things that I sort of find from Twitter, I get awesome information. I can follow people I'm interested in I can meet interesting people, etc, etc. So I think that's just a very productive way to view the world. I want to, you know, go deep on in distractible, and some sort of via actionable pieces of that and maybe talk about some sort of tangential questions related to the process that hopefully you haven't covered before for people do, you



know, listen to but just before we do that, you mentioned sort of writing the book for yourself in a way and taking five years having to sort of Donald distractions along the way. I'm curious, you know, how your writing process sort of developed through that to the extent that you have various pieces of the process that are sort of consistent, or principles for going about it. And then it doesn't even necessarily be like where you ended up through writing the book, but even where you are now and writing for, you know, on the blog, sort of your latest and greatest version of sort of best practices and things that work for you. Of course, it's personal, but but things that have worked very well for you for writing as prolifically as you have over the years.

Nir Eyal 19:05

Sure, yeah. Happy to share everything I work on. So I'm completely open book. So for me, I write books that I need. I don't set out to write a book about something I know about because that sounds hella boring. Why would I want to write a book about something I already know? I want to write about something I want to know. So when I needed a book about how do you build habit forming products, and I couldn't find any book that taught me that I started doing research to write it for myself. And when I found that I was very distractible, and I looked out there and all the books that I found said, Oh, put away your technology, stop using tech and stop, you know, stop checking email so much written by you know, college professors with tenure. Well, thanks a lot. I'm gonna get fired if I don't use my technology. It's nice to say if you have tenure, and you're not going to get fired, but it's stupid advice, right? Like stop using your technology is really dumb, because most people can't don't have that luxury And even if they do, why would they want to write, you don't have to stop using Twitter completely, you can find ways to moderate your use so that you use it in a way that is beneficial. And it's awesome. I mean, we connected over what Instagram, I think, right? Like we reached out to each other. So, you know, there's so many tools out there that that really can enhance our lives, if we lean into using them in a way that that serves us. And that's what being indestructible is all about. But for me, it wasn't until I discovered these methods for myself, that worked for me. So for me, when I write a book, it can't just be about personal anecdotes. We know when you read, self help, personal advice,



type books, they tend to fall into these categories of very little research, more personal anecdote, almost like autobiographical type stuff, this has worked for me, so it's going to work for you. That's nice. But that's not good enough for me that I also want some of the research and this is where the other genre, you know, sometimes you get very academic books, which are very interesting from an academic perspective, but not very practical. So in what I write, I want practical advice. That's also based on really good research. And you know, sidebar, there's a lot of really crappy research out there. We've seen with the replication crisis in the, in the social sciences, how bad some of these studies are, unfortunately, every day we hear about a another fraud incident or a study that was done really poorly. So my job is really to give people actionable advice that's based on really good research. So there's 30 pages of citations in each of my book, each of my books to peer reviewed studies. So for me, that's the kind of advice that I really trust and believe in is not only is it something that worked for me personally, but also something that's, that's backed by solid research. So that's what I enjoy reading. And that's what I enjoy most writing. And the goal is always to kind of scratch my own itch. And if other people like it, you know, I'm super blessed that my books are sold over a million copies. I'm thrilled that other people find it helpful. But if I'm really honest with you, I write the books for me.

Jake 22:03

Makes sense, I think that's a great way to go about it. I know, when I started writing a blog, that was totally my thing as well write for myself. And if anyone else enjoys it, great. But at the very least, if you're writing for yourself, you're going to get something out of it. It's going to be a you know, you just feel good writing things and you learn as you go and everything like that. So I think

Nir Eyal 22:23

it's a very underrated thinking tool. I think that, you know, if you can't think clearly, you can't write clearly. So if you force yourself to write clearly, you clarify your thoughts, I can't tell you how much I've learned, just by writing, like just sorting through ideas, and most of my stuff doesn't get published, right? I just deleted or stored away somewhere. But it doesn't matter, because it helps me



clarify my my thinking it's, it's amazing. I wish everybody would just spend a little time writing through their strongly held opinions. And what you oftentimes think is that, what you'll discover is that what you think is crap, it's really hard to logically support what you think is the truth, when you sit down and kind of make your argument and try and make a case for something. So I encourage everyone to write more. The way by the way, the way you asked about my process for publishing these books, I blogged my books. So my my philosophy is that I want to get out my ideas to my readers. They subscribe through at near and far.com, as you mentioned earlier, and so by just putting out my ideas, I get so much great feedback, right? People telling me oh, this is a bad idea, or did you see this study or you need to think about this more. That type of feedback is priceless. And so when it does come time to compile what I've written, I've kind of had a pre edited version, just because I put it out there before. So I don't sit down to write a book, I blog my way over the years with different ideas. And then I select from those blog posts kind of pillars of book of chapters in a book that I can then elaborate on.

Jake 23:54

Yeah, there's there's a couple elements in there that I think are interesting. One is what you mentioned about sort of writing as a means of thinking, which I think is totally true. And some some people I think sort of think of writing as like, okay, you've done a lot of thinking and you sort of know what you want to say and then you go and all you have to do is like get it down on paper and like do some editing or something like that. But I think it's much more similar to what you've said, where it's it's very interactive process, you can go to the page without really having much of any idea what it's going to end up saying. And as you're writing, you sort of maybe have an idea of a topic, which even that may change, but it's very much of a sort of integrated process of thinking, writing, thinking writing, and then the output not only results in the output of writing, but sort of this completed perspective that you maybe didn't have as polished beforehand. And then sort of interestingly, similarly, you have on the book writing approach. It's not you have an idea for a book and you go and set out to write it. It's very much integrated with just the way that you're living the way that you're thinking the way that you're writing. you're blogging, and then eventually it's like, okay, there's



enough sort of fodder there that we can go and compile this into a book. And we'll do some extra work, maybe some extra research or whatever it is, but you're already a good portion of the way there. So I think that sounds like a really interesting process for, for people who maybe, you know, there's a lot of people with blogs who haven't written books, and maybe they would be surprised that how sort of, they would be able to maybe their book that they're thinking of writing one day is already, you know, 60% written? And, yeah,

Nir Eyal 25:29

very much. So I think that my experience is only with nonfiction writing, so I can't I have no advice for people who write fiction, but for nonfiction, the best nonfiction writing always starts with a question, right? It's either how to do something, or why is this this way? You know, it's it, because it's, it's curiosity that makes you want to read something. And if you, as a writer, are not curious about that topic, it shows in the writing, right? If you already know the answer to the mystery, your writing is gonna be pretty boring. So my favorite topics to work on are articles, where I really sincerely start with a question, and I don't know the answer, but I'm gonna hunt it down, right? Like, I'm almost like an investigative journalist, trying to figure out the answer to this question. They're really fun to write, and they're much more fun to read.

Jake 26:15

Totally. So I think that, you know, one interesting aspect that sort of, upstream of indestructible is this concept that I've heard you talk about which I've thought about myself, and I think it's just super powerful, powerful to realize, which is that, you know, the challenge for most people is not knowing what to do, it's doing it. And so like, the version that I sort of thought to myself is like, I think people use the difficulty of quote, unquote, figuring something out as an excuse to not do the part that you know, so for example, fitness, everyone knows, like exercising daily, or five days a week, or whatever it is, it's gonna be beneficial for you are eating vegetables is gonna be beneficial for you. But you're like, you know, you get caught up so much in the weeds of like, oh, which vegetables are best? Or like, what time do I need to eat? Or what size? Do I need to make my meals or whatever? And then you just sort of don't actually



do the parts that you definitely know, would be helpful. Right, I think indestructible is very much about, okay, whatever it is that you know, or don't know, let's take like sort of the things that you most fundamentally know that you want to focus on your relationships, the work that you care about your health, etc, and just do the things that you know you want to do, and that will take you like a very long way. So I think an interesting way to maybe plug into the book was sort of another quote I heard from you is, time management is pain management. And basically all that sort of goes on the premise that all behavior comes from this desire to escape discomfort. Can you sort of introduce what that you know what that means? Where why time management? Is there a management how you came to that sort of short conclusion?

Nir Eyal 27:53

Yeah, absolutely. So when I was trying to figure out why we get distracted, right? Why is it that despite knowing what to do, we don't do it, which, by the way, is an ancient problem. Plato, the Greek philosopher, talked about this very same problem. 2500 years ago, he called it in the Greek classier, the tendency to do things that are against our better interest. And it's a really interesting philosophical question. Why is it that despite knowing what to do, we don't do it? Like that is a central mystery of the human condition. We know that to exercise you have to eat right? Or sorry, to lose weight, you have to exercise and eat right? We already know that. To be successful in your job, you have to do the hard work that other people don't want to do. We know if you want to have good relationships, you have to be fully present with people you love. We know this stuff, right? And if you don't know it, frankly, in this day and age, Google it all the answers are right there at your disposal. The problem is that we is not that we don't know what to do with that we don't know how to stop getting in our own way. That's the central problem of our time. And so by removing that distraction by simply doing the things that you yourself said you want to do, that is how we become indestructible. That's how we live the kind of lives that we know we deserve. So So knowing that that is not a new problem, I think what I wanted to figure out is if we know that, right, not only what's the psychology behind why we get distracted, what's the psychology behind why we do anything and everything. Right, let's let's really start from first principles. What is the nature of human motivation? And



most people will tell you that motivation is about carrots and sticks. We've all heard this trope, right? That motivation is about, you know, rewards and punishments, carrots and sticks. And it turns out that neurologically speaking, that is not true. That neurologically speaking, we now know that all human behavior is spurred by one thing, and that is, as you said, the desire to escape discomfort and so it's almost like in that scene in The Matrix, remember the Matrix movie where Neo goes into that room and he sees the boy with that spoon bending. And you remember the line it's why is imagine there is no spoon, right? Imagine there is no spoon so in a way A if you think about it when it comes to human motivation, I'll give you another matrix like moment, consider that the carrot is the stick. The carrot is the stick that all human motivation is seeded by a desire to escape discomfort. So there's the stick the pain, motivation, but even the desire to feel good, even craving reward is itself psychologically destabilizing. We say love hurts. That's absolutely true. Right? That the desire, the longing, the wanting the craving, the hunger, for some kind of pleasurable outcome is itself uncomfortable. So the carrot is the stick, there's only one thing that motivates all human behavior. And that is a desire to escape discomfort. So that therefore must meet. If all human behavior spurred by a desire to escape discomfort, that means that time management is nothing more than pain management. Money management, is pain management, weight management, is pain management, because all human behavior is spurred by a desire to escape discomfort. That is some people that sounds like a bummer, right? Like, oh, man, it's all about pain. Well, that's actually super empowering. Because what you realize is that the barrier between your present self and what you are physically capable of right, unless, unless it violates the laws of physics, what you are capable of the only thing in between that is feelings. That's it. I mean, think about it, right? What's the number one reason people don't accomplish their goals? When we're talking about goals that are physically possible, right? And I don't have a goal to fly like a bird. But goals that are actually achievable? Why don't people achieve their goals? The number one reason they quit? That is the number one reason people don't achieve their goals. What's the number one reason people quit? The number one reason people quit is they don't feel like continuing. Right? I know I need to exercise but I don't feel like it today. I know I need to get up early, and then go on that walk. But I don't



want to, I know I need to work on that big project, I need to study I need to, you know, work on that presentation, I need to make my phone calls, my sales calls, whatever the case might be, I don't want to write. So to me, that's incredibly empowering. Because once you realize that it isn't some big existential barrier blocking you from getting what you want in life. It's just feelings, just feelings. They're just emotions. They're just uncomfortable sensations that we have not been taught how to deal with, right? No, we never had a class on how to manage your emotions. Did you ever take such a class I never took surgical asked. But it turns out that is the only barrier. So once you learn how to master your internal triggers, you are free from them being your master. Most people are enslaved by these sensations, boredom, uncertainty, fatigue, anxiety, every time they feel these things, right, like I used to, I would eat something, or today, you know, people will scroll something, although or search something or they'll drink something right to take their mind off of that discomfort. And once you realize that simple fact that all distraction is nothing more than a desire to escape discomfort, because all human behavior is a desire to escape discomfort. To me, that's incredibly empowering. Because you can find some very simple tools, have them ready in your toolkit. And whenever you experience that discomfort, now you don't have to escape it with distraction, you can actually utilize those internal triggers as uncomfortable sensations as rocket fuel to propel you towards traction.

Jake 33:31

Yeah, so I know this part is going to be somewhat repetitive. You've probably talked about it a million times and in the book and everything. But it's so important that I think it's worth restating, which is sort of the fundamental strategies for mastering your internal triggers. So whether that's a feeling of boredom, or stress, or loneliness, or whatever it might be, what are the fundamental principles for mastering those triggers?

Nir Eyal 33:53

Yeah, so there's a dozen different techniques you can use that I described in the book, and you can even come up with your own. I think the most important thing is not the tactics, it's the strategy tactics, or what you do strategies, why you do it. So the most



important thing I want to leave people with is this understanding of these four fundamental steps, sorry. These four fundamental strategies to becoming indestructible. So number one, master your internal triggers, we can talk about that more in a second. Step number two, make time for traction that if you don't plan your day, somebody's gonna plan it for you. We can talk more about how to do that as well. Number three is hack back the external triggers. And number four is prevent distraction with PACs. So those are the four fundamental strategies that anybody can use to become in distractible. Let's dive into internal triggers. I'll give you a couple of techniques. There's all kinds of things you can do. You can reimagine the task, reimagine the your temperament. There's all kinds of things you can do in those buckets. I'll give you a few very practical techniques. One technique that I use almost every single day is called the 10 Minute Rule. The 10 minute rule says that when you feel that urge to get distracted, right whether it's checking social media, whether it's eating that piece of chocolate cake, if you're trying to lose weight, whether it's smoking that cigarette, you're trying to quit, whatever the case might be, you can give in to that distraction. Okay, we know that abstinence tends to backfire, right that when you tell yourself No, don't do that, it elicits what we call psychological reactance. Psychological reactance is this gut feeling that we experience that tells us when our autonomy is threatened, when we are told what to do, we tend to rebel, right? Don't tell me what to do. So if your boss ever tried to micromanage you, or your mom ever told you to put on a coat, because it's cold outside, and you said don't know what to do, that's reactance. And it turns out, we can actually elicit psychological reactance, even when we are telling ourselves what to do. So be very careful. Anytime someone says, you know, abstinence is the way oftentimes that's not the right answer. Some cases it can be right if you can remove the external triggers altogether. So this is why they tell people in rehab, you know, you have to change your friend network, you have to change your community, because of the you know, you don't want to see those those frequent triggers in your environment. But you can't do that with food. You can't do that with technology, these things will always be around us. So a much better strategy is to tell yourself, not You're not saying no, you're saying Not yet. Not yet. So when you experience that urge towards distraction, when I want you to try what I do every day, and it's



worked really well for me, is I tell myself, hey, I can get into that distraction. Okay, I can check email, I can go on social media, I can have a piece of that chocolate cake, whatever it is, I want to do, but not right now. I choose to do it in 10 minutes, you can wait 10 minutes for just about anything, right. So I will get into that in just 10 minutes. Now, for those 10 minutes. My job is to do what's called surf the urge surfing the urge acknowledges that our sensations that these urges, these internal triggers, they crest and then they subside, they don't last forever. But that's of course, not how we experienced them. We think in the moment, oh, I'm always going to feel this way, I'm always going to be bored, I'm always going to be stressed, I'm always going to be fatigued. That's never the case that these sensations, crest and then they subside. So your job is to serve that urge, like a surfer on a surfboard. One technique that I use, when I feel when I'm trying to surf The urge is to have a simple mantra. My mantra when I find myself, you know slipping away towards distraction is to stop and say, This is what it feels like to get better. This is what it feels like to get better. And just repeating that mantra a few times that acknowledging that, hey, if something is difficult, that's a good thing that's telling you that that's a rare skill, right? If it was easy, everyone would do it. So acknowledging that you're growing, you're getting better at something and having those internal triggers having that uncomfortable emotional state. That's part of the growth process. So that's terrific. And then what you will find is within those 10 minutes, nine times out of 10, you'll get back to the task at hand. Okay, and what you're going to do over time, by learning to surf, The urge is that you're going to challenge yourself to go from the 10 Minute Rule, the 12 Minute rules or the 15 Minute Rule, and you're proving to yourself, hey, wait a minute, I have agency here, I have control over this. And look, I don't have to be beholden to every pinging or ring, I can wait a little while between when I'm going to give into these distractions. And so over time, you're proving to yourself that you are the master of these internal triggers, and that they don't master you. Yeah, I

Jake 38:16

love the 10 Minute Rule. Obviously, people use it for like anger, you know, for something or not 10 to 10 minutes, maybe about like 10 breaths or something like this, basically, delaying any immediate



reaction tends to be helpful in a large number of sorts of contexts. And I think, I guess one question I have is, you know, you learned to sort of control these internal triggers, or at the very least, you know, maybe you don't reduce the number of them, but you are able to use them as fuel for traction, like you said, rather than, you know, triggers to distraction. And one thing I actually I want to mention is that I found super interesting from your work is that most people think that external triggers, like your notifications, or whatever it might be, are responsible for the vast majority of distraction. But you know, what you were saying in the book is like, actually 90% of it is internal. And it might its purpose in checking your Twitter or whatever it is. But the actual first trigger in the first place is not a notification from Twitter, but rather, your feeling of boredom or your feeling of stress or whatever it might be. So when it comes to internal triggers, are you like, are you trying to sort of metaphorically, you know, delete the apps and turn off notifications in, you know, internally? Or is it more so saying that, okay, these apps are pre installed, like boredom, stress, whatever. And I'm just going to have to learn to live with them, or is it sort of a combination of both, if that makes sense?

Nir Eyal 39:50

Yeah. So what you mentioned those times studies, so the external triggers all the pings, dings and rings in our environment, they can lead to distraction. That's what we tend to blame, but as you said, it's only 10 percent of our distractions it turns out that 90% of the time that we check our devices 90% is because of an internal trigger. So how many times a day are you checking your phone? Not because there was any kind of beep buzzer boop, it's because you felt like it right? You're feeling bored, you're feeling lonely, you're feeling uncertain, you're feeling stressed. And you're using the device as a pacification, as a pacifier essentially, to take your mind off of that uncomfortable sensation. So what indestructible people do is that they deal with that discomfort in a different way. Paulo Coelho, had a wonderful quote, he said, a mistake repeated more than once is a decision. That mistake repeated more than once is a decision so the difference between a distractible person and distractible person keeps getting distracted by the same things again, and again, how many times can we get distracted by the same technology? Again, again, before we



say enough, I'm going to do something about it. An indestructible person realizes that there's only three reasons for every single distraction, either it's an external trigger, okay, there's strategies to hack back those external triggers, which we I talked about in the book, lots of easy things you can do. The other thing is an internal trigger. So what do you do with that uncomfortable emotional state, we all have them, right? We all have internal triggers. In fact, what I found is that studying high performers, high performers have just as many internal triggers as the rest of us, right? When you look at people at the top of their game, in sports, and business and the arts, they all have these internal triggers. In fact, many of them have really severe trauma. When you look at the lives of celebrities, and Oprah Winfrey, and whoever else, many of them have some real trauma in their lives. So they feel the internal triggers that we feel as well stress, anxiety, loneliness, they feel it to the differences that these high performers, they use that discomfort, they use those stories to propel them towards traction, rather than what many people do distract with people trying to escape that discomfort with distraction. So every distraction either is caused by an external trigger an internal trigger, or a planning problem. And so an indestructible person, when they get distracted. They say, Okay, you got me once. Alright, now, what caused that distraction, an internal trigger an external trigger or planning problem? And how can I take steps today to prevent getting distracted again tomorrow, and if you do that, if you use forethought, there is no distraction that we can't overcome nothing out there is so habit forming that we can't make sure that we can't prevent getting distracted from as long as we take steps today. So a distractible person keeps getting distracted again, and again. Whereas an indestructible person says, Okay, I'm gonna make sure I take steps today with forethought, so that that distraction doesn't happen again in the future.

Jake 42:38

Right. And I think this is probably the most important part for most people, myself included, is learning how to master these internal triggers, because it's the part that is probably gets less attention than the external triggers, and like you said, is responsible for the vast majority of the actual overall triggers. That said, I think it'd be interesting, just given your experience and expertise to talk about



the external triggers just a little bit, I think two of two of the sort of main culprits in my experience are the phone and food and these, you know, effects sort of phone effects sort of work, and then food effects sort of health. And so for me, like to have my personal, most impactful strategies, I've been on food, just being very mindful around what food I keep in house, and even where I keep it in house. So you know, not keeping a bunch of food on the calendar, just having it away and cabinets in the fridge makes it like sort of, so not seeing it all the time. And then secondarily, you know, part of the work is in the grocery store, not picking a bunch of junk, not going to the grocery store, hungry to help you not pick a bunch of junk and things like that. And then on the phone side, you know, turning off the vast majority, if not all notifications for a while, I don't have right now, but I have my phone on black and white mode, which was just sort of like helpful to making it a little less pleasant and whatever. But more recently, I got this great tip from my friend, George Mac, who does this two phones strategy where he has one phone with like, you know, Twitter and Instagram, whatever else, you know, there is an unsorted, like the most addicting apps habit forming apps in the world. And then again, apps that you can totally use for great things. But apps that are very difficult to sort of not want to check all the time, and then another phone with, he calls it sort of like I think he calls it the kale app and the dopamine app or something like that. And the kale app, there's like nothing really that fun to do. And so you sort of even if it's in your pocket or whatever all day like there's not that you know, check it you don't really get that reward. This goes back to your book hooked Of course, much more so than in distractible. But the to fund strategy has been very helpful for me and you sort of reserved these times where you allow yourself to go on the dopamine phone and you have fun and you to do whatever you want. But it's not in your pocket all the time, always tempting you, etc. Are there other sort of key practices that you've done yourself or that you've heard from others that are in this realm, whether it's foreign related food related or otherwise,

Nir Eyal 45:03

yeah, there's lots of things you can do for external triggers. And you mentioned some of them. And frankly, I don't spend a lot of time in in distractible on how to turn your phone into an indestructible phone I



spend about like a page and a half on it because a lot of it's really simple stuff, you know, change your notification settings, use the Google well being or the Apple screentime features. I mean, these products come built in with ways to restrict use. So use the tools they're right there. One of my favorite tools is Do Not Disturb while driving. Amazing, right? Like when you're trying to focus you just push Do Not Disturb while driving. And if anybody calls you or text you, they get a message that says I'm in industry you can customize it. Mine is customize. It says I'm in distractible right now, if this is urgent, text me the word urgent and Your call will come through. So amazing technique. It works like a charm. So the technology is all there, we just have to use it. So there's a list of you know, checklist of different things you can do. I think the much the type of stuff that's less discussed and more important is how to master other internal triggers, right meetings. How many external triggers do we have for meetings that are completely pointless, right? How many emails do we get, which are just a complete waste of time. So a large part of the book is dedicated to these external triggers we don't talk about which actually can take us off track as well. Not so much on the phone. Because there's a lot of techniques you can use out there. I think it's kind of a little bit kindergarten stuff, you can find these tips and tricks. It's much more important to figure out these other things. Kids, right, like I'm a dad, kids are wonderful, but they can be incredibly distracting. What do you do then? So I go through each one of these potential external triggers. I will back up for just a second, there's one step we, we skipped. So step number one is master internal triggers. Step number two is making time for traction. And step number three is hacking back the external triggers. And step number two is not to be skipped. Because what we find, one of the best things you can do is if you have these things, which you find are distractions, you can turn them into traction. How do you do that? You schedule them. So one of the best things that you can do, if you find that you spend too much time on Twitter, I want you to put in your calendar, time for Twitter, right video games, or YouTube or whatever it is that you think right now is a distraction. Watch the miracle that happens when you literally schedule that time. And I advocate that people do this for their entire day. It's called time boxing, it is the most well studied technique, it blows to do lists out of the water, it is so much more effective than to do lists, which is kind of



the, the the technique that most people use and Todoist can be actively harmful for your personal productivity. Whereas having a time box calendar, what you're doing, by setting aside the time to say, Hey, I'm going to turn this distraction into traction by planning time for it. Now your brain doesn't have to think about all day. Now you're not saying Oh, I wonder when I'm going to get time for Twitter. Oh, I know, my social media time is on my schedule 7pm After dinner, that's my hour or hour and a half whatever I have set aside in advance for that time. And the beauty is you can enjoy it without guilt. Right? Because anything that is not what you put in your calendar is a distraction. So if you're doing anything, but the thing you said you were going to do, even if it's playing video games, or going on social media, now you're distracted from the thing you said you were going to do. So anything that's planned for his traction, anything else is distraction.

Jake 48:21

Yeah, it's I'm a big believer in time boxing myself, I don't do like full day time boxes. And that's sort of well, not often at least, and that's maybe the last thing that I'd like to talk about. But before that, just wanted to say that, you know, you didn't go deep into to, to do this comment there. But one of the things that very strongly resonated with me that you've said is to do lists are actually counterproductive, not even just like not good, but actually, like counterproductive. And that basically, this is something I experienced myself, which you talk about, which is like, you make a to do list you by their nature, like you never finished the to do list, it just grows and grows and grows. And every day, you sort of end the day with a bunch of things left on your to do list, feeling like a failure. And it feels much better to sort of whether it's time boxing or some other strategy, you might come up with yourself, setting a day that is achievable. And you know, not impossible, but also not a layup. Every day, you can go out and sort of crush what you want to do. Yeah, if my mindset

Nir Eyal 49:21

just to clarify it, there's nothing wrong with getting things out of your brain and onto a piece of paper or to an app. That's wonderful. But that's where people stop, right? They just write them down. And as



you said, there's this never ending list. There's no constraint, you can always add things to a to do list and then you don't finish all those things and you feel terrible. And then you start reinforcing your mindset. As someone who doesn't have good time management skills. And you think you're the problem. You're not the problem. It's a stupid technique that we've all been told to use. That's the problem. So what you have to do immediately after you put those things on a piece of paper is to get them in your schedule, right to put them in your calendar, which will force you to make trade offs right A Time box calendar, we all have 24 hours in the day, it forces you to make trade offs and say what's more important this or that. So by doing it, that is that critical process, which what that also requires this is super important is that we have to change our metrics that have success. We are so infatuated with checking off cute little boxes, we've been so indoctrinated with this bullshit to do list method that, you know, I've known people who will literally write out things that they just accomplished just for the joy of checking them off. Right? How silly is that? We do that. Because we've been indoctrinated to think that like success is checking off boxes. That is a silly metric, the right metric of success has nothing to do with finishing the task. Nothing to do with finishing the test, the right metric of success for that time box, is this question, did I do what I said I was going to do for as long as I said I would without distraction. That is the only metric of success. And that can be done if you've scheduled time to go on Twitter, that can be done if you've scheduled time to edit a podcast or to do a sales presentation or whatever it is that you didn't want to do that you find you're constantly distracted from, if you simply measure yourself, not by whether you finished, but did you work on that task for as long as you said you would without distraction? Here's the kicker people who do this finish more, they actually get more done the To Do Lists people why? Because now there's a feedback loop. What happens when you use the to do list is you work on a task for five minutes. And then oh, let me just check email for a minute. Or oh, I need to do that other thing real quick. Or let me just check this and you have no idea how long stuff takes you. On average, we know that people think a test takes a third. As long as it actually does, it takes three times longer on average people to finish a task than they originally estimate with a time box calendar. Now you have a feedback system, right? Because you work on a task, you say 30



minutes without distraction. How much did I get done? Oh, I have to do 30 slides and in 30 minutes, I finished three. Okay, well, that means that I need 10 more time blocks of 30 minutes to finish the entire presentation. Now you have a feedback loop. So this is another reason why time box calendars and becoming a distractible are way better than the to do list method.

Jake 52:10

Yeah, no, it makes total sense. I know we're coming up on time. But I have one more question, which is maybe a difficult one. I'm not sure how much you've thought about this particular thing. But with this time box schedule, you know, basically, well, let me set some context. There's this quote from navall Raava. Khan, which is like, inspiration is perishable act immediately. And that's something that resonates quite strongly with me, some of my best blog posts, for example, among other work have come from like, Oh, I'm out for a walk, I have this idea, it feels like sort of a very inspired idea. Like sort of hits you strongly. There's like an emotional thing to it, or whatever. And I'm like, I gotta go work on that now. Because if I don't do it, now, that feeling sort of fades away, and it just ends up on a to do list somewhere. And it becomes a chore rather than something that I want to do. And so one of the things that I've struggled with, with time boxing is that balance between, here's what I set out to do today. But what if something comes up during the course of the day that feels like actually, you know, the information has changed. There's a new thing that I want to do today, do you sort of allow some flexibility for like, Hey, this is what I set out to do. This thing arose, but it's actually you know, call it a distraction, call whatever you want, but it's like very inspired, I really want to work on it. Do you have some flexibility in the timeboxing for sort of adding things like this that are, you know, very valuable changes to your daily schedule after it's been defined?

Nir Eyal 53:36

Yeah, it's a it's a very common and good question. That is typically a trap. It's typically I'll give you an exception, but it's typically a trap. because ideas are cheap. Right? Yeah, how many people out there have good ideas, everybody has good ideas, you know, what's scarce, execution, getting the shit done. That's way more scarce than the



idea. So I'm going to introduce you to a very powerful technology that I have with me at all times, whenever inspiration strikes, here it is, okay, wherever I go, I have a pen and I have a little piece of paper. And whenever I have an idea or a concern, or worry, I write it down. And I get back to the scheduled task. Okay? Because what tends to happen is if you're always at the whim of Oh, that's a good idea, or I should worry about this, or I should think about that, or I should do this. You never get to the actual execution, you have a bunch of blog posts, ideas, and you never finished the fucking blog post. You have to sit down and make sure you can work on it without distraction or to get it done. So if I do have an idea that I think, Oh, that's a really good thought, no problem. I jot it down. And then I have time scheduled later in the day to think about those things. Okay. So what you could do, right, is to schedule a big period of time. Maybe it's three, four hours, however much time you want your day to let your mind wonder to be spontaneous. You can plan spontaneity. But you also need to make sure that when the rubber hits the road, and if you're a pro, you're right. Steven Pressfield talks about this in his book, *The War of Art*. If a turning pro means that you put your butt in the chair and finish the work and do it. And so as long as you can do both, I don't have a problem with that. If you want time for loosey goosey, let inspiration strike and I'll do whatever time great, you can schedule it. As long as you can also schedule that time for Hey, I'm gonna work on this project. That's difficult for as long as I said I will without distraction. Right, you need to be able to do both.

Jake 55:38

Great. Well, I think I need to schedule a little bit of time to think that through a little bit, it's an interesting perspective. And I think it's a nuanced issue, but I think there's definitely a lot of value to that perspective on it. So anyway, I know we're up on time. I appreciate you taking the time and coming on the show. It's been awesome talking with you. Where can people go you know, obviously near and far.com That's NIR and far like your name? Where else can people go to sort of follow along and you know, keep in touch with with what you're doing?

Nir Eyal 56:06

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Yeah, that's the best place to go to my blog near and far.com and the books are hooked how to build habit forming products and indestructible how to control your attention and choose your life.

Jake 56:15

Amazing. Thank you very much, NIR.

Nir Eyal 56:17

Thanks so much, Jake. Good talking to you.