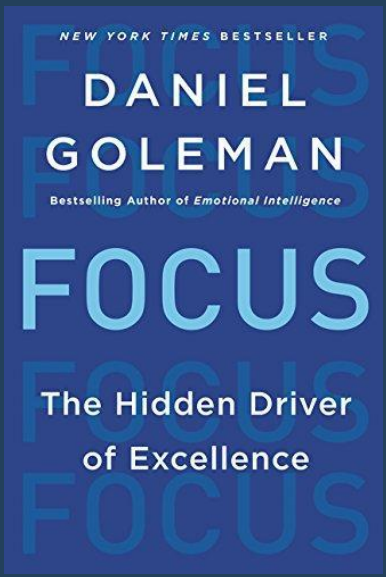

Focus

Year of publication: 2014
Author: Daniel Goleman
320 pages
Link for purchase: https://amzn.to/2LbS2Da

The Focus book (2013), written by Daniel Goleman, is a guide to mastering the rarest feature of our times: focus.
Based on scientific research, the book reveals that dominating our focus on a world where we are surrounded by distractions is the key to professional success and personal achievement.

Score

8

9 Aplicability
8 Inspiration
8 Innovation
9 Impact on results
8 Structure

Main ideias of the book

- There are three essential focus categories for a highly functional life: inner focus, external focus, and focus on the other.
- Selective attention is the ability to focus on a task, despite sensory and emotional distractions.
- Emotions interfere on focus. Completing a task is more difficult when you are upset.
- The attention gets stronger and sharper with use, exercise and practice.
- Today's young people, members of the first digital generation, are growing more attuned to handsets than to people.
- Every leader should focus the attention of the company where it is most needed and most productive.

For whom is this book suitable?

This work is suitable for workers and students who want to increase their focus and their productivity or for anyone who wants to live a focused and conscious life.
In addition, the book's content also includes leaders who want to channel their energies effectively and improve relationships with their employees.

Overview of the book

Preface: The Subtle Skill

In the preface, Goleman presents the three types of focus and the current difficulty in focusing, both on the part of adults and children.

How well you pay attention affects every aspect of your life. Effective focus skills enhance mental processes, including understanding, learning, creativity, and reading other people's signals.
You need to exercise the three focus categories to make your life work well. They are:

- The inner focus refers to attention to your feelings, values, and decision-making skills.
- The focus on the other is about how you relate to and connect with other people.
- The external focus allows you navigate the world around you.

> *Directing attention toward where it needs to go is a primal task of leadership.*

The moment of threat

The constant attraction of technology takes young people's attention and compromises their interactions with other people.
Today's youth, the first digital generation, grow more attuned to devices than to people, which can compromise the insightful skills needed to build empathy and social skills.

The impoverishment of attention

Many professionals have been complaining about the difficulty of concentrating on work because they feel the need to check their smartphones every minute.
Because of this, many patients have been self-medicated with attention-deficit medicines because they claim that without them they can not work.
Attention today is the number one problem within companies, schools and other organizations.

Part I - The Anatomy of Attention

Part I of the book brings the concept of focus and explains the brain functioning responsible for attention.

Basics

Someone who writes poetry on a laptop in a busy cafe is showing selective attention, concentrating on a task and ignoring outside stimuli.
Distractions are sensory or emotional, and the explanation for all this lies in neuroscience.
The pre-frontal region of the brain is responsible for selective attention. The more you focus on one thing, the better your performance, because focusing on the target suppresses emotional interference and helps you stay calm under pressure.

Absent-minded

Your wandering mind - where your thoughts travel when you are not engaged in a mental task - is the configuration of absence of the brain. In this state, people pause for self-reflection, contemplate future scenarios, project ideas, recall memories, or question their assumptions.
Doing activities that do not require much focus frees your mind to ramble.
If your attention is being drawn by something, to recover it, take breaks, meditate, exercise or do something fun.

Do you love what you do?

You focus more easily when you do something you like.
On the other hand, repetitive and unsatisfactory tasks cause disengagement, boredom and apathy.
Only 20% of people are able to engage in activity at least once a day. The secret to getting there is to do what we want with passion.

Superior attention and inferior attention

The human brain is formed by two semi-independent systems. These systems are the upper part of the brain and the lower part of the brain.
Brain activity at the bottom is involuntary, reflexive, and fast.
Already the upper brain, which is under conscious control, is the place of voluntary focus, active when you choose to do some activity.

Part II - Self-Awareness

In this part, the concept of self-awareness is addressed.

The ability to read people

The ability to read people by their body gestures can be extremely useful as it allows you to know when someone does not want to deal with a certain subject, when to leave someone alone or when someone needs some comfort.
This can improve your relationship with your family, friends, co-workers and clients.

Empathy

Cognitive empathy is a brain function that allows you to look at things from another person's point of view, understand what that person is thinking and feeling, and manage their emotional response.
People who do not have empathy often act inappropriately, miss out on nonverbal messages, or misread certain contexts.
They usually do not notice when committing social gaffes, such as being rude or speaking too loudly.

Part IV - The Bigger Context

In this part, we will understand why focus is more important than repetition itself.

The 10 thousand hours rule

The rule says that you need to devote at least 10,000 hours of effort to become good at something.
Second, expert Anders Ericsson, a psychologist at Florida State University, said, "No one benefits from mechanical repetition, but rather adjusts their performance several times to get closer to their goal."
Practice only brings you closer to perfection if done intelligently, that is, if the person who is practicing uses that time to make adjustments and improvements. How much attention you put into practice is crucial.

The sweet spot for smart decisions, then, comes not just from being a domain expert, but also from having high self-awareness

Part V - Intelligent Practices

In the fifth part, the author highlights the importance that well choose games can have in developing the focus.

Certain games enhance some cognitive abilities, including visual acuity and spatial perception, attention, decision making, and the ability to track objects. Intelligent games that improve focus and increase cognitive function can become educational tools and provide:

- Specific goals for different levels of play;
- Feedback and pacing for each user;
- Challenges that progress according to the skills of the players;
- Different contexts for applying a particular skill set.

Part VI - The Well-Focused Leader

In this part, the book addresses the triple focus directed to leaders.
Every effective leader should focus the attention of the company where it is most needed and productive.
One way to do this targeting is through triple focus. We will now talk about each of these 3 focuses:

- Inner focus: pay attention to your behaviors and the effects of your actions. Leadership requires knowing your values and communicating your vision to inspire and motivate others.
- Focus on the other: it means developing an organizational strategy to provide a roadmap of problems and goals that require attention. Great managers develop interpersonal skills and can effectively listen, respond and collaborate.
- External focus: Leaders absorb the big picture, visualize complicated systems, and predict how their decisions will be made in the future.

Part VII - The broader framework

Here we reflect on our values and motivations.
Triple focus can help us achieve our goals, but for what purpose? We should ask ourselves what motivates us to do that. It is not enough only to think in ourselves, because in the long run this will condemn our species.
Some questions from the Dalai Lama help us evaluate our motivations:

- Is it just for me or for others as well?
- Is it for the benefit of the few or many?
- Is it for now or for the future?

Undoubtedly, staying focused has a great impact on our performance and, consequently, our ability to become successful.
A life focused on us, on other people and on our planet, leads us to richer experiences in everyday life.

Okay, but how can I apply this in my life?

One way to exercise your attention is by meditating. Meditation will help you focus on one thing for a certain period of time.
Feeling optimistic is also crucial. Positive emotions activate the left prefrontal area of the brain, making people feel motivated, aware, and energized.
Remember that focus is the key to being successful in any area of your life.

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