

NOTES FROM: *The Science of Powerful Focus*, by Peter Hollins

SUMMARY: Okay, so this isn't the most *riveting* self-improvement book out there, but it's *extremely* actionable and it could be a tremendous help in stimulating your willpower, concentration, and productivity. What it lacks in page-turn-ability, it more than makes up for in practicality, is I guess what I'm saying!

Hollins is a prolific writer with a number of Amazon bestsellers, and he's known for writing self-help manuals packed with science-backed tips and advice. In this book, it's all about self-discipline, willpower, getting more done, jacking up your focus, etc. It's also quite short, so it's not like you'll have to sludge through some giant textbook. Just take what you need, apply it, watch your life get a bit better, come back for more, and repeat.

You don't have to read this one front to back, although I did. Instead, you could view my notes and see if you want a more fully fleshed-out explanation of any or all of these ideas, tactics, and strategies for effortless focus, deep concentration, and high performance.

"Focus is a product of our willpower and other subconscious drives, so you can imagine that just about every desire we have plays a role in it."

"*Willpower* is a companion to discipline. It is the mindset of energetic determination that allows discipline to manifest."

"The goal of discipline *today* is to receive a direct benefit in the *future*. Practicing the piano for half an hour each day not only validated your parents' expense for piano lessons, but it prepared you for that all-important recital, making you look like a rock star in comparison to the humiliated kids who didn't practice. Every single afternoon practice session was painful, but when the time came to perform, you were glad you stuck with it. Unfortunately, though, the notion of the future self, which is closely tied to planning ahead, is not realistic for many people."

"During one study, participants underwent brain scans while thinking about one of three subjects: their current self, a specific celebrity, or themselves in 10 years. Surprisingly, the scans of participants thinking about the celebrity or thinking about themselves in a decade were nearly identical. This indicates that while we may be familiar with the subjects, we don't attach personal significance to them. They are not relevant to us in the current moment. In other words, we view our future self with the same detachment as someone we don't personally know."

“In our minds, we can offload unpleasant tasks to be handled by our future self because we don’t connect the consequences with our current lives. This is a mind game that often leads us to choose behaviors that seem self-destructive or counterproductive, like skipping the gym for the fourth day in a row because it’s raining. Rationally, it doesn’t make sense, but we justify it by saying our willpower is weak, when in reality we are simply unable to visualize the long-term consequences and connect them with ourselves today.”

“Understanding *why* a specific action was chosen helped boost self-discipline. Participants were asked to describe a time when they resisted temptation; they were immediately thereafter offered an indulgence and 70% gave in. But when another group was asked to explain *why* they had resisted a temptation, 69% were able to turn down the indulgence. They placed strong emotional value on resistance and acknowledged a benefit from avoiding a previous temptation, so merely being aware of the reason for resistance significantly reinforced their self-discipline.”

“Repetition (coupled with awareness) seems to be the most effective strategy in improving self-discipline. Creating new and positive habits is essential to improving self-discipline.”

“In theory, what you need is a floating arrow to follow you around and poke you when you’re not on task, and there are multiple ways to create that feeling. They can come from reminders you put around your home or workspace, phone alarms, or friends who will contact you to keep you accountable.”

“We learn that we can do the hard thing with relative ease, and that the more often we make that choice, the easier it becomes. That is when our willpower and discipline receive a boost, and even without strong motivation, we can push through the impossible.”

“Setting a goal brings clarity to our desires and gives direction to our thoughts and actions, even when we aren’t consciously focusing on it. Our intent remains active in the back of the mind, influencing our choices and setting us up for success.”

“We already know that a goal has a specific focus, or it is just a daydream. In order to get focused, ask the following questions: who, what, where, when, why, and which. *Who* is involved? *What* do I want to achieve? *Where* will the action(s) be performed? *When* will I do it or how long will it take? *Why* do I want to do this (list purpose or benefits of goal)? *Which* methods or tools will I use (list requirements and/or restrictions)?”

“What can you look at on a daily basis to understand that you are indeed moving forward and not regressing or remaining stagnant? Having something to measure will allow you to know whether changes need to be made in your goal approach.”

“A higher, seemingly harder goal is often easier to reach than a moderate or low goal, because the challenge serves as a stronger motivator. Start small and set milestones instead of one large goal. Having only one large goal can be extremely disheartening because any progress you make can seem insignificant in the grand scheme of things. Small goals will make you feel achievement and real progress on a daily basis.”

“It would be impossible to quantify all the reasons for procrastination, but researchers have defined three procrastinator ‘types.’ *Arousal procrastinators* get a thrill from waiting until the last moment - ‘I work best under pressure.’ *Avoidant procrastinators* are unwilling to face an unpleasant task - ‘I’d just rather not right now...’ *Indecisive procrastinators* are intimidated by their task and frequently don’t know how to start - ‘I could do it like this, but also that other way. I’ll have to research and plan some more.’”

“The biggest impediment to success is simply getting started. Our tendency to procrastinate on large or intimidating projects is reinforced by our imagination. We visualize the worst parts of the task, adding layers of each emotion each time we picture ourselves performing it, and that makes it easier to delay getting started. But we can overcome this inertia by implementing the 10-minute rule. The rule is very simple: commit to starting the project and sticking with it for 10 minutes.”

“Give your brain time to relax and come to grips with the idea that you are doing this, but don’t fill it with competing projects.”

“Working intensely for 90 minutes, followed by a rest period of no more than 15-20 minutes, is the ideal sequence for optimum mental performance. This follows the rhythm we see in sleep.”

“When you sit down to work, you have a ticking time bomb of 90 minutes before you lose peak effectiveness and focus.”

“This is also why it’s so important to get rid of distractions so they are not allowed to eat into your 90-minute period of peak performance.”

“Overcoming something that you struggled with a little is an amazing feeling - easily finishing a task does nothing for your confidence, and being stopped cold by another task is far too discouraging.”

“The act of committing to something and being held accountable for it, and knowing that there is no way to get around a solid figure, will make your progress increase dramatically. Tracking progress honestly doesn’t allow you to lie and sometimes the truth can be a dramatic wake-up call.”

“This what-gets-measured-gets-improved effect means that you will want to start spending more time on highly productive or valuable activities just so you feel great at the end of the day and don’t have to look at what you could have done better.”

“By tracking your small victories, you are basically keeping up your positivity and thus your motivation, allowing you to stay focused because of your constant achievements and the positivity that this will bring to your working attitude. With so many victories, no matter how small they are, you will be continuously inspired to keep working hard and keep earning as many victories as you can.”

“When you’ve got a plan or decision for something you know will happen, you won’t forget to act or miss an opportunity that will benefit you, nor will you waste time deliberating. You will be less swayed in the heat of the moment by those attractive short-term benefits and instead choose the long-term benefits almost automatically.”

“When you’re faced with a ‘D’ task, you must ask yourself if you would pay X amount of money to be rid of it and not have to worry about it. Is your time worth more than the cost of having someone else do the task? If you’re not in a position to delegate or outsource these tasks, you might have to move them up in priority to just behind the ‘A’ and ‘B’ tasks. They need to be done, but not necessarily by you.”

“A 1% drop in hydration can result in a 5% drop in cognitive abilities. Every little bit counts, especially if you’re trying to make a creative breakthrough.”

“Whether it is surrounding ourselves with greenery, natural light, plants, or cute animals, there is always something the world can give us that may help our concentration and our overall motivation. Nature is another way that our literal environments fuel our focus.”