



How to Become Indistractable, with Nir Eyal

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Pat Flynn: How many times would you say that you've been distracted today? There was something that you wanted to do or said you were going to do but something got in the way, something interrupted you, and then you were distracted and you haven't gone back to do that thing. Or you tried to go back but you weren't in the right mindset and then you had it in your schedule at one time but now it's too late, and you have this other thing on your schedule so you have to put that off until tomorrow? Things begin to snowball when we get distracted.

Today, we're going to be talking with an expert in the space of distraction. He just wrote a book called Indistractable: How to Control Your Attention and Choose Your Life ([Amazon link](#)). I got to say, it doesn't matter where you're at in business or in life, you are getting distracted and it needs to stop. It's going to surprise you where the effort to stop this should actually be coming from and where your attention should be. It was actually very surprising to me. We dive into a lot of yes, tactics and strategies but we talk a lot about why we get distracted and how to avoid that. *[Full Disclaimer: As an affiliate, I receive compensation if your purchase through this link.]*

It's going to be a beautiful conversation today with the author of *Indistractable*, Nir Eyal, who was on the show not too long ago to talk about his book, Hooked ([Amazon link](#)), which was a beautiful book and a great conversation. A lot of people love that interview, you're going to love this one, too. Nir is a great guy. He's very funny and we connect quite a bit here on a lot of similar things related to distractions that we both have. Nobody's perfect but we can be less distracted and become indistractable today on the Smart Passive Income Podcast. *[Full Disclaimer: As an affiliate, I receive compensation if your purchase through this link.]*

Announcer: *Welcome to the Smart Passive Income Podcast, where it's all about working hard now so you can sit back and reap the benefits later. Now your host, one hundred percent of his success is one hundred percent related to his failures, Pat Flynn.*

Pat: What's up everybody, Pat Flynn here and welcome to Session 387 of the Smart Passive Income Podcast. My name is Pat Flynn, here to help you make more money, save more time, and help more people, too. Each of those three things, you can't really do very well if you keep getting distracted. Like I said in the beginning, how many times, even just today, did you not do the thing that you said you were going to do? Or something got in the way and it was because of that external factor that you are now no longer doing what you should be doing? Maybe it was a ping or a notification on your phone. Maybe you just got a notification right now and it's going to force you to pause this episode and not listen all the way through, which you shouldn't do, you should listen all the way through. Why? Because this can be a life-changing conversation that we're about to have with the author of the brand new book, *Indistractable* with Nir Eyal. Like I said, a great conversation, so much vibe in this and I cannot wait to share it with you.

The biggest takeaway that I had was where the distractions come from and it's the why behind them. Because we know that we should turn things off. We know we shouldn't answer those things that are notifying us yet we do it anyway. Why? It's because it fulfills certain needs that we have as humans and it's the science behind it that makes it interesting. You're going to hear all about that today with Nir so let's not wait any longer. Let's do this. Nir, welcome back to the Smart Passive Income Podcast. Thanks so much for coming back on.

Nir Eyal: My pleasure, Pat. It is so good to be back here.

Pat: You know, it's been since Episode 262 where we talked about your book, *Hooked*, and habit-forming products. We're here to talk about, today, your next and upcoming book, which is actually coming out next week, actually, which I'm really excited about because it's something that I and most other people who are in this world have—or need some help with—and that's being distracted. I think, especially for us business owners and entrepreneurs, distraction can be the death of any sort of business ideas that we might be working on. *Indistractable* is what it's called, it comes out on September 10th,

next week. We'll talk about a little bonus and stuff a little bit later that you're offering everybody who pre-orders, which is really cool. I want to know, why did you write this book and who is it for?

Nir:

Yeah. Many of us today experience this problem with distraction. I experienced it. I was a little bit early to the party where . . . You know, when I wrote *Hooked*, we're just having the five year anniversary of *Hooked*, actually. So, when I actually did this revised edition, I was looking back through it and you know, I remember that after I wrote *Hooked*, which the idea behind *Hooked*, the reason I wrote the book was, you know, I wasn't trying to help companies like Facebook and Twitter and YouTube and those companies. You know, back then, when I wrote *Hooked*, the problem was not that people would overuse a product. The problem was, and it still is, frankly, for most businesses, that nobody uses the product. I'm guessing the vast majority of people listening to me right now have products and services that are not addicting anybody. They're just desperate for anyone to use the product because if they would then the product would actually benefit these folks. That's really who my audience was for *Hooked*.

The gaming companies and the social networks, they've known these techniques for years and years and years. I wanted to democratize these methods so that everyone could utilize the same psychology that makes Facebook so sticky and YouTube so sticky, and all of these products so habit-forming so that we can build healthy habits. That's always been the goal of *Hooked*. Five years on, that's exactly what's happened. There's been many, many companies who have used *Hooked* for good to build healthy habits. However, what I also noticed after I wrote *Hooked* is that I was using these products and services, some of these products and services, more than I'd like and in ways that I didn't always understand.

I remember one particular occasion, I was with my daughter, this was kind of a seminal moment in my life. I was with my daughter and I had this afternoon with her and we had this activity book of things that daddies and daughters could do together. One of the activities was

to ask each other this question, “If you could have any superpower, what superpower would you want?” I wish I could tell you what my daughter said but I can't, because in that moment, I was on my device. I was distracted. I was looking at something on my phone and I totally blew this perfect daddy-daughter moment. So, that's when I realized, this was very soon after publishing *Hooked*. I said, you know, “Wow, this is a problem, right?” If I'm struggling with this then I'm guessing lots of people struggle with this.

So, that's when I kind of started on this journey to understand why I was getting so distracted. You know, if you ask me today what superpower I would want, I would tell you I'd want the power to be indistractable because being indistractable is about doing what you say you are going to do. I really call this the skill of the century. I mean, imagine if you did everything you said you would do. Now, the funny thing is in the self-help or personal development industry, you know, we spend billions of dollars in this industry to get someone to tell us what to do. But if we're honest with ourselves, we already know what to do. You know how to lose weight. We all know that chocolate cake is less good for you than eating a healthy salad. We know that we have to go to the gym and exercise. If you want a good relationship, you have to be fully present with people. If you want to do really well at your job, well, you have to actually do the work. So, we know what to do. Why don't we do it?

I thought this would be a pretty simple question. I thought I would write basically like an “Unhooked,” that's what my publisher wanted me to write. You know, here's how to stop using technology so much. But the more I got into this problem, the more I kept asking myself this question of, “Why don't we do what we say we're going to do?” I realized it was not an easily-answered question. In fact, Socrates and Aristotle talked about this very same question twenty-five hundred years ago. They called it *akrasia*, this tendency that we had to do things against our better interest. So, people have been struggling with distraction for a very, very, very long time, and so I realized that the problem was much bigger than our devices. The way I realized this, by the way, I did what all the books told me to do. I went and

bought like you know, I'm looking at my bookcase right here next to me and I bought literally every book on the topic of focus and technology distraction and digital detoxes. I bought every book I could find and they all basically said the same thing. They all said, "Stop using it. Go on a digital detox. Excise it from your life for thirty days and then you'll figure it out."

I tried that. You know what? It didn't work. It didn't work for the same reason that fad diets don't work. So, I used to be clinically obese. I'm no longer clinically obese, thankfully, but I used to be. I remember I would do all of these fad diets. No junk food for thirty days. Guess what happened on day thirty-one? I would eat and make up for lost time because I hadn't dealt with the real root cause of the problem. So, that's what indistractable is really about. What's the root cause of distraction? Why do we do things that we know are bad for us? Why do we go off track and what do we do with it? How do we become indistractable?

Pat:

Now, is this specifically about the devices and those kinds of things or is this about other things? Because your story about your daughter reminded me of a story with my wife. This is before we had kids, thankfully. But it led to a really important conversation that we needed to have about boundaries and setting those boundaries and things like that. This conversation was my wife and I were chatting on the couch and she was speaking, sound was coming out and I was just nodding because in my head, I was thinking about my business and the next email I had to write or the next product I had to come out with or this other problem, whatever. She caught me in the middle of that thought and she basically said, "Whoa, hold on. You're thinking about your business right now, aren't you?" I was like, "No." She's like, "Okay. Well, what's the last thing I said?" I was like, "Oh, crap." Then I made the mistake of saying, "Well, the last thing you said was you're thinking about your business, aren't you?" Then that led to all these other conversations but it was really important to have because it made me realize I needed these boundaries, especially because we were going to have a kid and we had another kid and I want to be fully present with them. So, is this book about all

kinds of distractions like the ones that are in our head taking us away from what we should be doing? Or is it about the distractions on our screens and the distractions in our pockets, too?

Nir:

Yeah. So, it's much bigger than the technology because as you demonstrated . . . By the way, listening to this story is so painful because it's happened to me, too so I totally feel your pain. I was cringing, it's something I knew exactly what you were going to say. So, the idea behind the book is that it's not just about our devices, it's not about whatever latest gadget seems to distract us. Because as you demonstrated, distraction starts from within. So, we are always going to blame . . . People love doing this, by the way, the latest, you know, it's very fashionable right now to say the technology is addicting us and it's hijacking our brain, it's melting our brains and this has happened with every successive technological revolution. We always blame the latest technology. It happened with the radio, with the television, even the written word. Everything was supposed to melt our brains. Even Socrates talked about how the written word was literally going to enfeeble people's minds. So, this has been a very, very popular idea.

But as you demonstrated, distraction starts from within and if we don't deal with why we get distracted, then we'll never be able to overcome it. So, instead of blaming these proximal causes, the surface level analysis of whatever tool we're using to distract ourselves, the idea behind the book is, "What if we could always do what we say we're going to do?" That's the goal behind becoming indistractable. It's not you never become distracted, it's that you strive to do what you say you're going to do. It's about personal integrity. It's such an amazing superpower because, as I mentioned before, we already know what to do. So, the question is really why don't we do it?

Once we figure out this methodology, there's four basic parts to this methodology. Once we figure out that methodology, we can use it to change our life in terms of what I call the personal domain. So, this is about stuff we do for ourselves, our health, our mental well-being

becoming more educated. We have more time to take care of our family, the family domain: or our relationships with other people in our lives, including friendships. You know, there's this crisis today, that loneliness that we experienced in America where, you know, people do not have close friendships anymore. Part of this is because they're not doing what they say they're going to do. We know we should have friends but we're not making time for them. Why? Why don't we do what we say we're going to do?

Then finally, the last domain is what I call the work domain. This is about doing what you say you're going to do at work. I mean, I think if there's one rule to success, the one thing you need to do to be successful in life, it's do what you goddamn say you're going to do at work. If you say you're going to meet a deadline, meet the deadline. If you say you're going to work on that big project, work on the big project. Yet, so many of us—me included—like I'd sit down at my desk and I'd say, “Okay, I've got that big project I need to work on but let me just check email for a minute,” or, “That Slack channel seems important.” So, I wasn't doing what I knew I should do, what I knew I wanted to do. I kept getting distracted.

Pat: I mean, my hand is up as well across all these domains. It's something that I want to improve on. I'm so thankful that there are people like yourself who are creating these methodologies for us to learn how to improve. Is this the same as just saying, we need to be more disciplined or is this something different?

Nir: No. So, here's the beauty of it. I am not a disciplined person. In fact, I'm pretty darn lazy. But the thing is, the idea is that you can use certain methodologies to not require willpower, to not require self-discipline. So, the phrase I want people to remember is that the antidote to impulsiveness is forethought. You see, the human brain has this amazing trait that no other animal in the animal kingdom has, which is the ability to predict the future with a high degree of accuracy. You know, we know some animals, like squirrels, can hide their nuts for the winter but they don't really understand, it's just an instinctual thing. They're not contemplating what winter will feel like

when they do that. Human beings can plan ahead, we can see into the future. So that is the antidote. Once you know these techniques, you have to know what to do. But once you know how to plan ahead, once you know how to use forethought, you actually don't need a lot of self-control, you don't need a lot of self-discipline, you don't need a lot of willpower because it happens automatically if you do the right things in advance.

Pat: Alright. So I think everybody's asking in their heads now, "Okay, what are these methodologies?" Obviously, it's in the book and that's where you can get all the details and stuff. But can you give us the rundown of these things that we can start doing now so that we don't have to be so strong-willed that we have to fight every single day to not open email or to use these apps? I can't remember the name but there's one that like forces you to not open certain things, you can set time limits on those. I've tried those as well and those don't work because I can just simply hack my way around it. So, what are these methodologies?

Nir: Alright. So what I'm going to give you is the strategy, not the tactics. Tactics are what you do, the strategy is why you do it. So there are lots of disparate tactics out there. You've heard a million of these tactics out there, "Grayscale your phone or turn off notifications." Many of these things may . . . Grayscale your phone I think is rubbish. That doesn't really work. Anyway, there's lots of techniques that I'm sure you've tried out there.

Pat: What is that?

Nir: It's this idea of if you make your screen gray then you won't use as much because it's more boring. I don't know, I tried it and the data doesn't look really good on it. It certainly didn't work for me. Just like, you know, the digital detox idea of just stop using these technologies for thirty days and then you know, you'll be cured. Also, didn't work for me, it's so unrealistic.

Pat: I was told to put certain apps in the back, like on the back page of my iPhone where I have to swipe three times. Guess what? I would swipe three times anyway.

Nir: So what you're describing are all these surface-level tactics. The reason that they tend not to work is because people haven't first tackled the real reason why we use these devices the way we do or, let me back up, not just devices. Why we turn to any distraction, why we do anything against our better interest. The reason why has to do with why we're motivated to do anything. Let's go here to first principles. Why do we do anything we do? Most people believe in what Freud called the "Pleasure Principle." The Pleasure Principle says that human behavior is motivated out of a pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. Seems pretty simple, carrot and stick.

Turns out, it ain't true. That in fact, we are not motivated by the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain. It's pain, all the way down. Everything we do, all human behavior—neurologically speaking—is about the desire to avoid discomfort. Everything you do, this is called the "homeostatic response," physiologically think about it. So, you go outside and it's cold. What do you do? You put on a coat. That feels better now. Then you go back inside, it's too hot. What do you do? You take the coat off, you do that to restore this homeostatic state, this balance of what your body wants. Those are physiological sensations. Turns out the same exact rule holds true when it comes to psychological sensations. So where do we go when we're feeling lonely? We check Facebook. Where do we go when we're feeling uncertain and we want to know the answer to something? We Google it. What about when we're feeling bored? Well, we check the news or stock prices or sports scores or Pinterest, or any number of other solutions because we don't like that sensation, that psychological itch that we seek to scratch.

So, if all human behavior—and even, by the way, the desire for pleasure . . . What about with the pursuit of pleasure? That's not motivated by pain. In fact, it is. We know, neurologically speaking, that even craving for something, wanting something—desire is

uncomfortable. There's a reason why we say love hurts. It neurologically does because craving is uncomfortable. So, if we agree that all human behavior is spurred by the desire to escape discomfort, what that means is that time management is pain management. So, if you are driven off track, if you are distracted by something, every action that you take is driven by this desire to escape an uncomfortable sensation, which means the first step to becoming undistractable is to master your internal triggers, master these uncomfortable psychological states.

So, in the book, I tell you how to do that. There's only two solutions: you can either change the source of the discomfort. So, there's a whole chapter about creating an undistractable workplace because it turns out that where most people feel these internal triggers is from the workplace. So I uncovered some fascinating research about how certain types of workplaces lead to—literally causes, not just a correlation, there's a causal relationship between a certain type of work environment and depression and anxiety disorders. There's a certain type of work environment that literally makes us crazy and these are work environments that have high expectations and low control. They create these internal triggers. Of course, the response to feeling these uncomfortable emotional states—stress, anxiety, uncertainty, fatigue—is to go to our devices to call a meeting, to look for something online, to waste time by getting distracted and not doing what we seek to do because we are so desperate to scratch these uncomfortable psychological states.

So, a big part of the book is about how do you fix a type of work environment that creates distraction. I like to say that what I uncovered here is that distraction in the workplace is a symptom of cultural dysfunction. It's not that the technology is doing it to us at work, it's not Slack or email or your iPhone or whatever that's distracting you at work, it's this dysfunctional culture that perpetuates the cycle of responsiveness that we always feel like we have to be checking in. Turns out the companies that tackle that problem don't have this problem around distraction. So, there's a lot of ways we can either fix the source of the problem or, in a lot of the discomfort of life

of being an adult is not something that you can always fix. Life has uncomfortable moments to it.

So, the only other solution, if we're not going to fix the source of the problem, is to learn how to cope with it. So that's where I give these three methods to cope with the discomfort that drives us to distraction. It starts by realizing that we are not built for satisfaction. That evolutionarily speaking, satisfaction did not help our species survived. Can you imagine, you know, two groups of people on the Serengeti and one group of people is perpetually perturbed, they're always pissed off just like we are, they always want more and more and more. Then you've got another tribe and they're cool. They don't need anything. They don't need more land, they don't need more animals, they don't need more anything. Well, which one is going to survive? You know exactly what's going to happen. That's what our ancestors did.

We are evolved from people who are constantly wanting more and more and more and more. That can get the best of us. Clearly, that has some unhealthy consequences. It also makes us who we are. It's why we create lifesaving medicine, it's why we overturn despots, it's why we go to explore outer space, it's all about this desire for more. Now, realizing that fact, to me, was very comforting because a lot of the self-help BS out there tells us that if you're not happy, you're not normal. It turns out the exact opposite is true. That it's perfectly normal that you are designed to be dissatisfied. But knowing that fact, you can harness it to your advantage. To do that, you have to learn how to cope with these uncomfortable internal triggers. So that's the first step. That's a mouthful.

Pat: Yeah. It was. It makes me almost feel a little depressed actually, that being kind of unhappy . . . So, are we saying that it's okay to be unhappy?

Nir: I don't know if I would use the word unhappy as much as I would use unsatisfied.

- Pat: Unsatisfied. Okay, thank you.
- Nir: Unhappy is a negative valence stage. That's a problem. Now unsatisfied is also you know, it's not that you're . . . You want more. I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. Of course, it can get the best of us but if we know how to harness it, then we can use it to our advantage, we can use it to do amazing things in the world.
- Pat: Can you give me an example of a very common distraction that people have and how some of these innate, sort of who we are, can help us cope with those things?
- Nir: Sure. So let's see. You want to do a case study about you? Is there an area of distraction that . . . Or a type of distraction or an area of your life that you feel you're distracted?
- Pat: I love this, thank you. Let's see. Let's talk about the workplace. You know, I'm building out the studio and I'm here doing this podcast and in between, when I'm supposed to be sort of answering emails and doing those things and it is on my schedule to do that, I work really hard to try and honor my calendar. Yet, I still get pinged here and there and I get, you know, Slack messages, which I know I can answer later but I have a need to know what a person says right now. Because what if that message is the one that they need my immediate answer for that could change everything? I have these weird thoughts in my head about . . . Especially when it's my team. So that's why it's Slack. My team, they're pinging me. Yes, I have notifications on for certain ones. But even if they're direct messages, I know that nothing is going to change if I don't answer it immediately. Well, what if it could?
- Nir: Right, right, right. So, this is a perfect example. In fact, there's a chapter in the book about how to manage group chat because I hear it so frequently about how potentially distracting group chat can be. So you know what might be helpful? Let me talk about the four steps real quick, just to get the picture in the listener's mind around what it takes to become indistractable. Then what I want to do is to come

back to this exact problem and we'll work through the indistractable model to help give you some real tactical steps that you can take. How's that sound?

Pat: I like it. Thank you, Nir.

Nir: Alright, terrific. So the first step is about mastering these internal triggers. We can either fix the source of the problem or learn to cope with the discomfort, and there's lots of techniques we can use to do that. The second big step is to make time for traction. So, traction, the opposite of traction is dis-traction. Distraction and traction. Both traction and distraction have the same end word, they both end in the word action. They both actually come from the same Latin root meaning to pull, *trahere*.

Traction is things that pull you towards what you want in life, things that you do with intent. Traction is great. The opposite of traction is distraction. Any action that you take that is not what you intended to do. Something that takes you off track. Distractions are bad. So, the next step is to make time for traction. How do we make time for traction? To make time for traction, we have to turn our values into time. Many of us, including me, talk a good game. Before I started writing this book five years ago, I used to say that I have these values in my life that my family is number one, and that I'm very you know, taking care of my health is super important. Friends are very important in my life.

But then when I take a look at my calendar, there'd be nothing on that calendar that would tell you that those things are my values. So, the fact is, two-thirds of people out there do not keep a calendar. They keep no schedule whatsoever in their life. So when I was writing this book over the past five years, I talked to hundreds of people and I worked with them to try these different techniques and see what works and what doesn't, and one of the most common things I would hear people would complain to me about how distracting the world is and they can't get anything done and the pings and dings all around us, this happened in the news, they just

can't concentrate. I would say “Wow, that's really tough. You know, can I see what it is that you plan to do today? What did you get distracted from?” They’d take out their phone and they showed me their calendar. They’d kind of sheepishly hand it to me and it would just be white, it'd be blank. Maybe a dentist appointment or something on the calendar. So, here's the thing, you cannot call something a distraction unless you know what it distracted you from.

You can't call something a distraction unless you know what it distracted you from. Because it's impossible to say that something distracted you from something unless you knew what it was you were going to do with that time. So, that's why it's essential that we have to use this timeboxing technique. Now I didn't make up timeboxing, it's been around for a very, very long time. It uses a principle from psychology called setting an implementation intention, which is one of the most well-studied ways to make sure you do what you say you're going to do. It's just a fancy way of saying planning out what you're going to do and when you're going to do it. So, I actually built a free tool, I'll give you a link to it in the show notes, it's on my blog, where anybody can make what I call this calendar template.

Now, that calendar template needs to fill up—all of your waking moments need to be accounted for. That doesn't mean that you're going to be strictly, you know, if you fail for any, you're going to beat yourself up and you're a terrible human being. No, no, no. The idea here is that you have a template for how you wanted to spend your time so that if you do something that's not what you plan to do, you can identify the source of the problem—you can identify the distraction. Anything you planned to do is traction, anything you didn't plan to do is distraction. So this is incredibly empowering. Just making that calendar to know the difference in traction and distraction is very, very important.

Then the idea here and what I teach you to do in the book is to synchronize your calendar with the various stakeholders in your life. With your colleagues at work, with your spouse, your significant

other, with yourself, to review that calendar, make sure you have time to live out your values. And I'll show you how to do that in various domains of your life. Now, that's the second really, really important step.

The third important step is to hack back external triggers. Now earlier, we talked about internal triggers, those feelings inside of us that make us seek out traction or distraction. Then, of course, we have the external triggers, the pings, dings, rings, all of these things that prompt us to either do we say we're going to do or prompt us to distraction when we do something we didn't want to do. So, if my phone rings, and it says, "Hey, it's time to go to the gym. That's what you planned to do," great. That external trigger lead to traction. But if I get a notification while I'm with my daughter and I planned to spend time with her and be fully present, now that external trigger led to distraction. So hacking back external triggers is really about asking yourself, "Is this trigger serving me or am I serving it?" Then evaluating, in all these various domains of our life, where these external triggers exist.

I'm not just talking about our phones. It turns out the number one distraction that I found in my research that people experience throughout their day is distraction from other co-workers. I found this amazing story of these nurses at UCSF who tackled what would be the third leading cause of death in the United States. So, I'll give you a clue what that is. So, number one source of death is heart disease. Number two, is cancer. The third leading cause of death? Can you guess what it is, Pat? The third leading cause of death in America?

Pat: You said heart disease, cancer.

Nir: What's number three.

Pat: Car accidents?

Nir: You would think so, right? It's not. If it was a disease, it would be prescription mistakes. People in hospitals getting the wrong

medicine or the wrong dosage of medicine. So, these nurses wanted to tackle this problem. Two hundred thousand people are affected every single year in the United States of America because of this very human mistake of giving people the wrong medication in hospitals. Crazy, crazy. It's a hundred percent human error. So, most hospitals are like, "It's nothing we can do," whatever. "It's just a fact of life." Well, these nurses at UCSF decided to figure out what the source of the problem was. They discovered that the solution to this problem, it wasn't some fancy, multimillion-dollar technology, it turned out that the solution to the problem was plastic vests. Plastic vests that they wore, that had written on these vests, "Medication rounds in progress." What these vests did was alert their co-workers to the fact that they could not be bothered because at that moment, they were doing something that required their full focus attention. Why? Because we know when our attention is broken, our work suffers.

So, you can see the metaphor here, right? What these nurses discovered. By the way, these plastic vests reduce prescription mistakes by eighty-eight percent. They almost eliminated the problem completely. So, the metaphor here for us, the people who work as knowledge workers: our work product is also hurt when we are distracted. So in the book, in the hardcover copy of the book or if you order it in a Kindle, I give you an email address to get it, you can tear out this piece of card stock, fold it up, and it's this red sign you put on your screen that says, "I'm indistractable, please come back later." That's one example. There's about, you know, forty-five other examples of ways to hack back these external triggers to make sure that the external triggers serve as opposed to us serving them.

Pat:

I like that. Before we get to the fourth one, it makes me think of this movement not too long ago about open-air offices and how that was supposed to lead to a lot more collaboration, random chances of meeting in the hallways or next to each other to be able to collaborate and grow your business. But then I recently saw that there were other studies done more recently that says that it's probably the worst thing you can do as a business is to have these sort of open-air offices or open space offices. I would imagine that

that's because you're getting a lot of these distractions all day with no control whatsoever.

Nir: That's right. That's right. So the idea is, how do we keep the good aspects? We know that the open floor plan offices actually do have some good aspects. These good aspects happen when people kind of bump into each other, going from place to place. You're going from here to there, to one thing to the next. It's, "Hey, how's it going Bill? What's the status of such and such project?" You chat for a minute. Or you go to the water cooler or the break room, whatever, and you see each other and you know, that's where a lot of ideas are hatched, when people have these disparate work products and then they can discuss these various ideas. The problem is what we didn't anticipate is that it becomes so easy to interrupt people when they're trying to think. It's a disaster because we know the only way that human beings can solve complicated problems—look, the fact is the only jobs that are going to be left, the jobs that are not going to be automated away are the ones that the machines can't do. The machines can't do the kind of tasks that require human ingenuity and creativity. The only way that we can be creative is if we focus, if we reflect. So, part of this movement I want to create is to stop all of this reacting. All we do all day long is react, react, react, react, constantly responding to every ping and ding. Instead, we need to carve out time in our day to reflect because that's where we do our best work.

Pat: Love that. Cool. You said there was a fourth method?

Nir: Right. So, the four steps, remember how we talked about the—you know, that we've got traction and then we've got distraction? Well, the fourth step is to prevent distraction with pacts. So this is only something we do after we've done the other three steps, after we've mastered internal triggers, after we've made time for traction, after we've hacked back external triggers. We want to do this last. To prevent distraction with pacts . . . This is a very old technique, it was first described twenty-five hundred years ago in the story of the Odyssey by Homer. Twenty-five hundred years ago this was written.

So, the story of Ulysses, you may be familiar with it, he has to sail his ship past the island of the sirens, the siren sing this mythical song—this magical song that anybody who hears crashes their ship on the shores of siren's island and dies. Well, Ulysses knows this and so he plans ahead. The antidote to impulsiveness is forethought. So he thinks ahead, he plans ahead. He decides to ask his crew to bind him to the mast of his ship and he instructs everyone in his crew to put beeswax in their ears so they can't hear the siren's song. So, he's driven temporarily insane. He yells and cries and says, “Let me go, let me go.” But his crew can't hear them so that he can successfully navigate past this distraction, past this thing that he knows he's going to get tempted to do. He plans ahead and he doesn't get distracted, he safely sales his ship home.

So, we can use the same idea of a pre-commitment, as it's called, to help us make sure we don't get distracted. There are three types of pacts. We can use effort pacts, price pacts, and identity pacts. Now, effort pacts are whenever we make something that we don't want to do more difficult. So for example, in my household, every night, the internet shuts off at 10:00 p.m. I used to actually use this outlet timer that I got at Home Depot for five bucks, that I connected to my monitors and my router. Now my router actually is built-in with this function in it, and it turns off the internet at 10:00 p.m. because that's when I know I want to go be with my wife and go to bed and call it a night. That's an example of an effort pact.

I could do something about it. I could unplug or rewire or something but it requires more effort and that bit of effort helps me do what I want to do. Then you've got a price pact. A price pact is when there's some kind of cost to doing the thing you don't want to do. So, one technique I talked about in the book that's gotten me in the best shape of my life is called the “Burn or Burn Technique.” Have you heard about this before?

Pat:

I have not.

Nir:

Alright. So, the burn or burn technique, here's how it works, every day I go into my closet when I get dressed in the morning and I have my calendar. On this calendar is taped a fresh, clean, crisp one hundred dollar bill on today's date. Above the calendar is a BIC lighter. Now every day, I have a choice to make. I can either go burn some calories in the gym and do some physical activity or I have to burn the hundred dollar bill. Now it's been three years and I've never burned the hundred dollar bill. Because when it comes to, "Okay. Am I going to do what I say I'm going to do? If this is a value that I have to take care of my physical health, I have to make this choice. Either do some push-ups, take a walk, go to the gym, do what it is I say I'm going to do or burn that hundred dollar bill." Now of course, it goes, "I can't burn that hundred dollar bill, I can't afford that." That's exactly the point. You don't want to burn the hundred dollar bill, you want to do the damn thing that you said you're going to do. So there are many, many other examples of price pacts but that's kind of a simple one that I use every single day.

Then finally, perhaps the most powerful pact is an identity pact. Because what we know is that identity change is behavior change, and behavior change is identity change. So, what I did and when I researched this book is that I looked to religion. I learned from organized religion in how amazing it is that so many religions can get people to do things with very little effort, without willpower, without a lot of self-discipline, that people who are not part of that religion would find very difficult.

So, if you think about a devout Muslim, they're not debating whether they should have a tequila or a beer every day. No, it's just something they don't do, they don't drink. Whereas for many people, giving up alcohol would be difficult. Or a devout Jew, they're not debating whether they should have pork every day, it's just something they don't do. I used to be a vegetarian for a very, very long time. It wasn't hard to give up meat because I was a vegetarian. So, if you can make an identity for yourself, if you can create a pact and even more importantly, preach that identity to others much like religions do—you know, we think that religions proselytize because they want to get

converts. Actually, the reason it's so effective is because it solidifies the belief of the person doing the preaching. So, if you can have a new identity—and this is exactly why I called the book *Indistractable*, because I want people to have this moniker of, “I'm indistractable. This is why I do these slightly strange things that most people don't do because I am indistractable. That's who I am.” So that's how we make an identity pact. So these are just touching the surface of a few techniques here. But the idea here is to use these four techniques in concert to understand the strategy behind the tactics of how to make sure we do we say we're going to do.

Pat: Now when you set these pacts, for example, you gave the one about burning the hundred dollar bill, what's to stop you from not exercising and not burning that hundred dollar bill? Because I can imagine that happening very easily. You know, you say that you're going to do that but then you don't exercise and then you don't burn the bill. So you're like, “It's okay.”

Nir: Right, so this is why that technique comes last. Many people have heard of different techniques where you put some money on the line. If you don't do what you say you're going to do, you're going to lose the money. The problem with this technique—and this is the only technique that I describe that actually can backfire, and the reason it can backfire is that if you don't know how to cope with failure then it backfires because you beat yourself up. So, that technique is only for people who know how to use self-compassion. It turns out self-compassion is a really important trait. That people who are more self-compassionate are much more likely to reach their long-term goals. I teach you in the book how to be self-compassionate. The idea is that you are able to cope with these potential failures in your life, which all of us have. We all will have occasions when we give in to distraction. Again, being indistractable is not about never getting distracted, it's about striving to do what you say you're going to do. But as long as you have that toolkit of knowing how to be self-compassionate, you can get back on the wagon and continue with that path and you can use these techniques effectively. So it's really

about having the ability to be self-compassionate, the ability to move beyond failure.

Pat: Love it. Thank you.

Nir: That's the thing. I wanted to get back to your Slack problem.

Pat: Okay, so where do we go from there? So, I have said to myself that I know I shouldn't be distracted, that these messages that are coming in probably not so important and life-changing that I have to answer them right at this moment. Yet, even though I'm in the middle of a task, I still check them.

Nir: Right. So, here's what I would do. Start with the internal triggers. The first thing is always to master the internal triggers to figure out what is the thing you are escaping, what's that uncomfortable sensation. Again, this isn't about judgment. This isn't for someone to judge you or for you to judge other people. It's about sitting with yourself and asking, "What is that feeling I'm looking to escape from?" For some people, it's the corporate environment. It's stress from their boss. I can tell you all these techniques to make you undistractable but if your boss insists on calling you at 9:00 p.m. when you're getting ready for bed or whatever, it's very hard to say, "No, I refuse."

So, some of this does come as a factor of the corporate workplace. There's a whole section in the book on how to deal with that. Let's say if you're your own boss, you can make your own decisions here, then I would advise you to get curious about that sensation. So, one of the techniques I described in the book is about reimagining the internal triggers, understanding on a deeper level what's going on. So, coping with it from these techniques that I borrowed from Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. So, I'll just give you one technique that I use all the time, which is called the ten-minute rule.

The ten-minute rule says that you could give in to any temptation, whether it's a piece of chocolate cake, whether it's not going to the gym, whether it's . . . Whatever it is that you know you shouldn't do

and you feel tempted to do, you can give in to that temptation in only ten minutes. Literally just ten minutes. It turns out that that ten minutes helps us ride out these negative emotions, these negative sensations, it's called "surfing the urge," and lets them pass. Because we used to think, there's this myth, you've probably heard of "ego depletion?" This idea that willpower is like a limited resource. It's like a gas tank that runs out. It turns out that that's actually not true. There's been many studies that can't replicate those results. It turns out, the only people who experienced ego depletion are people who believe it is true.

Pat: Interesting.

Nir: It's fascinating. So, what that means is when we tell ourselves, "We're spent. I deserve this, I've been working hard." We actually make it true. Whereas willpower is not like a gas tank, it turns out what Michael Inzlicht proposed is that willpower is an emotion. So, just as we would say, "I ran out of happy," or, "I ran out of sad," it doesn't work that way. No, emotions crest and then leave, they dissipate. So, using techniques like the ten-minute rule and there's many, many others that I described in the book that we can use, these are some of the techniques that we can cope with that discomfort. So, that's part of it, is to have in your tool belt these tools that you can use to cope with discomfort when you feel it. So, that's how you can start to master the internal trigger.

Pat: That's really cool. When I think about the Slack issue and you made me think internally about, "Okay. Well, what's the reason why I'm checking this? What's the fear? What's going through my head at that time?" I had alluded to this earlier, it's the fear that maybe, you know, I might be upsetting somebody if I don't answer them right away. Which then might lead me to believe, "Okay. Well, would I actually upset somebody if I didn't answer them immediately?" I know the truth to that is no. I do have time in my calendar to go in, that my team knows that I do go into Slack and answer questions, that I'm not going to disappear. I think I just have to realize that and cope with

that internal urge and realize and almost kind of swat it away. Like, “No, that's not true.” Is that the way to tackle that?

Nir: What most people do . . . You're right on, Pat. That is exactly right. What most people do is they either blame or shame. The blamers say, “Stupid Slack. It's always doing this to me.” They blame the technology. The shamers say, “There's something wrong with me. Stop feeling this way, this is a bad feeling.” It turns out neither of those are true. That what we want to do is we don't want to just, you know, say, “Stop feeling that, Pat.” What we want to do is to get curious about it. Because it turns out, when we become more curious about a negative sensation, it goes away.

By the way, the opposite is true about a positive sensation. The more focused we become on a positive sensation, the more it expands. But with a negative sensation, the more we focus on it, we begin to rationalize, we begin to think to ourselves, “Actually, you know what? If somebody really needed me urgently, would they send me a Slack notification? If the office was on fire, they would call me, they would text message, they wouldn't send a Slack notification.” So, it's about giving yourself that bit of room to surf the urge to get comfortable with that internal trigger until it dissipates and goes away.

Pat: I love that. Thank you. That's super helpful. I think it's going to help a lot of people. I can't wait to dive into this book and I can't wait for my audience to start diving in as well. I also know that you have some . . . So, first of all, you mentioned the calendar template. Then also, there's a chance to still get it on pre-order and get something else along with that. Can you share with us exactly what those things are?

Nir: Yeah, absolutely. So the book is available September 10th in the United States. It's available wherever books are sold. But if you order before that date, if you pre-order it, you can actually get a PDF of the entire book, which means you kind of get a two for one. So, if you order the audiobook or if you order the hardcover book or you order a Kindle book and you want a PDF of the book, you can actually get it right away at indestructible.com. You just pre-order it somewhere

else, you go to indistractable.com, you enter in the order number from wherever you order it from and then we will email you right away a PDF along with a bunch of other resources and tools and templates that you can use to help you become indistractable.

By the way, I just wanted to mention, just fixing the internal trigger that we talked about with your Slack habit is just the first step. The second step, I know we're running out of time here but the second step is to make time for that behavior. To put time on your calendar which sounds like you already do, which is terrific. Most people don't do that. They just let Slack interrupt them or email interrupt them all day long. So, I give a lot of techniques around how to manage email, how to manage Slack. Some people have reported that they reduce their time spent on email by ninety percent by using some of these techniques.

Then we want to make sure that we hack back the external triggers. So, making sure that, "Hey, you know what? If Slack doesn't serve you, when it interrupts you in the middle of your day, then we have to hack back those external triggers." Remove the pings and dings that so often lead to distraction. That's a simple step you could do in this case with Slack. Then finally, you could use pre-commitments, you could use a pact. So, you can use these apps for select times in your day. I wouldn't recommend doing it all day long. But if you say, "You know what? Right now I need to work on this project and I need a good forty-five solid minutes of focus." Well, then you can use apps like Freedom or Focus or RescueTime, or I mean, there's just dozens of these that I talk about to help tune out distraction to enter into a little pact. So for example, every day when I write, you know, writing's really hard. I'm tempted to get distracted to Google something or email something, I use this app called Forest that is free. I open the app, I dial in how much time I want to do focused work for and if I pick up my phone and do anything with it, this little virtual tree dies. This stupid little virtual tree. Who cares?

Pat:

No way.

- Nir: But it's enough of a commitment. It's enough of a reminder to remind me, "Hey, you know what, Nir? You plan to do something else. This is not what you plan to do. Picking up that phone right now is a distraction." So again, it's not something I want to do all day long and it is something we want to do last as the last step of becoming indistractable, but it can be a very effective technique.
- Pat: That's really interesting. But before you go, and we'll get that URL one more time for everybody in a sec. But another thing that I know it takes people away from what I know they should be doing is just the consumption of all the great content that's out there, including my podcast. Some people email me and they go, "Pat, I've listened to every single episode of the last four months. Every day, I listened to four or five episodes." I'm like, "Are you crazy? Go and take action on these things that I'm teaching you. Don't listen to every single episode." We kind of often default to, "Let's learn as much as we can before we go." I'm curious to know your thoughts, especially as somebody who is productive, who is writing amazing books and who is an expert on distraction and indistractable. How can we balance consumption versus action when it comes to wanting to create and wanting to build?
- Nir: This is a terrific question. So there's a quote by Kierkegaard who said, "Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom." Anxiety is the dizziness of freedom. This was true when he wrote it. It's even more true today because we live in a world with so much choice, with so many interesting, good things to explore. You know, we would have to live several lifetimes to ever absorb what's created every day out there on the internet. There's so many good things to learn from. The problem is, if we do that, then exactly what you said, you know, we just consume and we have no time to create. Then we look back with regret on our lives because we didn't do what we wanted to do with our lives.
- The idea here is it's not to necessarily have a moral judgment. A lot of people will say, "You know, video games: bad. Reading books: good." Well, I don't take that point of view. That's a very moralistic argument, because look, you know, my daughter got into *Harry Potter* last year.

One day, she spent five hours reading *Harry Potter*. Well, you know what? Five hours of *Harry Potter* is too much. You know, reading is not always good. If you consume too much, it comes at a price and that price . . . It's not that it's melting your brain. I don't believe this garbage that these tech products, Facebook and Instagram are melting our brains, are addicting us, I think that's rubbish. What they are doing is they are costing us our time, our attention. And that price that we are paying is paid in the opportunity cost, the things you could have done with your time. That's the real price.

So we don't need to get into a moral panic that these things are bad. They're not bad if we use them with intent. So for example, to answer your question around content, there's nothing wrong with consuming content. I mean, I've learned so much from your podcast and audiobooks and content out there, it's wonderful. The idea is to make time for your values. So, if self-education is one of your values, that's terrific. Make time for it on your calendar. So, for me, there is time in my calendar. So, I love listening to podcasts in the gym so I use this technique called temptation bundling, where I listen to podcast episodes and audiobooks when I'm in the gym. That's kind of my reward for going on a walk or going to the gym and it's on my calendar. You know what? There's nothing wrong with it. It's beautiful. It's only when we do these things when we didn't intend to. When we use these products as an escape from our uncomfortable realities and therefore we do what the app maker wants or what the content creator wants, as opposed to what we really want.

Pat: Right. Dude, great answer. Love it. Thank you, Nir, for that. I cannot wait to get your book. I recommend everybody grab it before it comes out next week because we'll have that pre-order bonus. Where can people go to submit their receipt and order number to get that?

Nir: Absolutely. So it's indistractable.com. It's the URL. It's a I-N-D-I-S-T-R-A-C-T-A-L- . . . Wait, I think I misspelled that. Did I misspell that?

Pat: I don't know.

Nir: A-T-A-L. Sorry, it get messed up. I hope we can edit.

- Pat: Yeah, yeah. Even if not, this is real life. I-N-D-I-S-T-R-A-C-T-A-B-L-E. Thank you, Amazon. Dude, you rock, man. Keep pumping out the great content. Thank you for your time and effort not just here on the show but just to help people with these really, really important things that are literally life-changing. So, thank you so much for what you do, Nir. It was great to have you back on.
- Nir: My pleasure. This is really fun. Thank you, Pat.
- Pat: Alright. I hope you enjoyed that episode with Nir Eyal, the author of the brand new book, *Indistractable*. Hopefully, this episode has made you more indistractable, have had less distractions. Yes, there are tactics, strategies, things you can do, apps, programs that can help you. But really, it starts right up there in your head. Knowing why and understanding it and coping and all the things we talked about today. So, good the science behind it and you can under—Once you understand that, you could deal with it. That's what I always say about everything, "Once you can understand it, you can deal with it."
- We have a better understanding of distraction. I'm just so thankful that Nir stepped up to write this book over the past five years and has really, really become something that I've really believed in everything he's talking about. So make sure you grab the book if you haven't already. You can check out the links in the show notes over at smartpassiveincome.com/session387. smartpassiveincome.com/session387. Of course, just look up *Indistractable* on Amazon or if you want to go directly there smartpassiveincome.com/indistractable. That is an affiliate link, just so you know.
- Thank you, once again, for supporting SPI, supporting the great guests that we have here on the show and most of all, supporting your life and your family and your work and your commitments and honoring those things that you put in your calendar. That's what it's all about. I'm here to help and serve you. Let me know what you thought about this episode. Give me a shoutout on [Twitter](#) or [Instagram](#) if you loved this, and also reach out to Nir, as well, N-I-R-E-Y-A-L. Let us know what you thought. Thank you so much, Team Flynn, you're amazing. Cheers. Team Flynn for the win.

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