

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

## Worksheet for Worksheet for Nir Eyal | Control Your Attention and Choose Your Life (Episode 250)

*“Nothing that is vast enters into the life of mortals without a curse.” -Sophocles*

Getting what you want in life is about more than knowing *what* to do. It’s also about actually doing those things we know we *should* do, as well as making sure we don’t do the things we know we *shouldn’t*. In short, to live the lives we want, we need to learn how to be — as today’s guest would say — *indistractable*.

On this episode we talk to returning guest Nir Eyal, author of *Indistractable: How to Control Your Attention and Choose Your Life*. In this conversation, we’ll tackle modern time management, the effects of smartphone dependence on our love lives, technology as a symptom rather than a cause of childhood (and adult) attention deficits, and what it takes to become *indistractable* in the 21st century. It doesn’t mean you never get distracted — that’s impossible. It means you strive to do what you say you’re going to do. You get better at managing your time and managing your life. “It doesn’t mean you never get distracted — that’s impossible,” says Nir. “It means you strive to do what you say you’re going to do. You get better at managing your time and managing your life.”

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## Time/Pain Management

You make a perfectly organized to-do list, you sit down to work on a new project, yet find yourself sliding down the Internet rabbit hole. Why don't you do the things you say you're going to do? The uncomfortable truth is that distraction is an easy way out. It's a behavior you engage in to deal with discomfort and escape from an unpleasant reality.

"One of the most popular notions is that motivation is about the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain — we call this Freud's pleasure principle — and it's just not true," says Nir. "Neurologically speaking, it is pain all the way down. When you realize that, it's kind of like unplugging from the Matrix. You see the world a little differently, because you realize that, 'Wow, if everything is a desire to escape discomfort, then that means that time management is pain management. You can try every tip and trick in the book — in all the books — but if you don't fundamentally understand your emotional state, if you don't realize that procrastination, that distraction is driven by the desire to escape some kind of discomfort and you don't have the tools to deal with that deeper discomfort, you will always get distracted from something. So that has to be the first place to start."

**What are your most common distractions? What pain are you trying to avoid?**

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## Tech Isn't the Enemy

According to Nir, technology is the low-hanging fruit we blame when we want a scapegoat for our distractions — even Socrates and Aristotle lamented the written word as an advancement that would be the ruin of civilization 2,500 years ago. But our ability to be distracted by technology is only a symptom — not the cause — of the problem.

“I read every book I could find on the topic of distraction, and they all told me the same thing: it's technology's fault. Get rid of the technology. Do a digital detox. A 30-day cleanse. And it didn't work! And it doesn't work for the same reason that fad diets don't work. Because I used to be clinically obese. And now I'm not anymore — I'm at about 11 percent body fat and I finally have figured out how to take care of my body in a way that's consistent with my values. But I would do these fad diets. 30 days, no fast food, and then of course you know what happened on day 31, right? It's the same thing with our technology. If we don't figure out why we keep getting distracted, we will always find something. Does social media cause some problems? Of course it does. Does it have a lot of benefits? Of course. We now need to figure out how to get the best of these tools without letting them get the best of us.”

**What are the pros and cons of the technology you use daily? In conscious moderation of the time spent with this tech, how might you reduce the list of cons while still enjoying the benefits of its pros?**

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## Learned Helplessness

While the media popularly parrots some variation of the statement “technology is hijacking our brains,” Nir points out that there’s no science to support this claim. Some people do get addicted to technology just as some people get addicted to alcohol or sex, but obviously not everyone who distracts themselves with these things become addicts. Most don’t.

“The harm done here is that when we tell everyone they’re addicted, that these tools are controlling you and your children, people make it true. It’s called **learned helplessness**,” says Nir. “We need to think of this as a harm perspective as opposed to a fear perspective. We need to ask ourselves: ‘What’s the price of kids using these technologies?’ For ourselves, as well. The evidence doesn’t show that this stuff is hijacking our brains; studies find that normal amounts of screen time are not deleterious to our kids’ well being. No study has found that two hours or less of extracurricular screen time of age-appropriate content...seems to have any negative effects.”

**In other words, we stop trying to control how we use this technology because we’re told we’re powerless to stop its sway over us. Do you find yourself deferring to this learned helplessness when trying to reign in your — or your children’s — use of tech? Now that you know the control is firmly in your hands, how does this change your perspective and relationship with this tech?**

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## Psychological Nutrients

Richard Ryan and Edward Deci, who formulated the **Self Determination Theory**, say every human needs three things — and if they don't come from a healthy source, people will look for them somewhere else — possibly an unhealthy source. Like the three macronutrients of fat, protein, and carbohydrates, Nir shares these three psychological nutrients we need for psychological well-being — and why a kid might seek them online if they're deprived of them in the real world.

- **Competency.** To be capable of the task at hand. When kids don't feel competent in the real world, they go online where they can be the master of some virtual world.
- **Autonomy.** To have choice over your own actions. While rebellion for someone who doesn't feel autonomous might have taken more dangerous forms in the past (drag racing, drinking, etc.), it now gets channeled into going online where kids feel in control.
- **Relatedness.** To have a connection to your situation. "So where do kids go if they don't get that in the offline world?" asks Nir. "They go on social media. That's where they can get a sense of relatedness."

**Do you (or your child) lack any of these psychological nutrients, and if so, is technology being used to find them? In what ways might you nurture competency, autonomy, and relatedness in the real world?**

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## Teach Them to Swim

“Are swimming pools dangerous? They’re incredibly dangerous,” says Nir. “Kids drown all the time in swimming pools. But do we keep our kids from ever enjoying the fun of diving into a pool forever? No. We teach them to swim.” In the same way, we should be empowering kids to use their devices responsibly rather than going overboard on punishing them when it’s already too late.

Here’s how Nir and his wife empowered their daughter to use her iPad responsibly. “We had a conversation with her at five years old and said, ‘How much screen time do you want? Here’s the cost. The price is that you can’t spend time doing other things. What’s good for you?’ She kind of looked at me and said, ‘Really? I get to decide?’ I thought she was going to say, ‘All day.’ But here’s what she said: ‘Two episodes,’ meaning two Netflix episodes. That’s about 45 minutes.”

When it’s the child’s choice and not the parent just arbitrarily deciding it’s time for them to stop using a device, they’re empowered to self-police their own activities. Nir’s daughter would put 45:00 into the microwave timer, and when the timer beeped, her time on the device was up.

“We told her, ‘Look, if we find that you can’t regulate yourself, then we’re going to have to have another conversation about this. But until this day — now she’s 11 years old — she still does that. Now, she doesn’t even need a microwave. Now, the technology comes built in — Apple Screen Time will shut off certain apps after a certain amount of use. So now it’s not Big, Bad Daddy having to be the bad guy. The app does it for her, because that’s what *she* set the timer to do.”

**How might you ensure your children are ready to swim before they get in the pool?**

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## Indistractable Four-Step Model

When it comes to making sure you're in control of how you're using technology (or a distraction of any kind), you can apply Nir's Indistractable four-step model to just about any situation:

- 1. Master your internal triggers.** Understand what you're escaping from.
- 2. Make time for traction.** Plan your day, or somebody else will. You have no right to call something a distraction unless you know what it's distracting you from, so make time in your day for what's important to you.
- 3. Hack back external triggers.** Every media outlet monetizes by turning your eyeballs into cash, but you're ultimately in control of where your eyeballs wander.
- 4. Make a precommitment.** Prevent distraction with pacts (of effort, price, or identity — see below). The antidote to impulsiveness is forethought, so take steps now to make sure you don't get distracted in the future.

**Give it a spin! What distraction do you want to get a handle on today? Make a note of how you implement it here.**

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## Three Pacts

When making a precommitment in step four of Nir's Indistractable four-step model, there are three pacts you can make with yourself to avoid distraction.

- **Effort pact.** You put some kind of friction between you and the behavior you don't want to do. For instance, if you want to break the habit of going online at bedtime, you could get an outlet timer that turns off your Internet router (or something like an eero router that has this function built in) between bedtime and breakfast.
- **Price pact.** You put money on the line — keeping it if you stick to your intended behavior, and forfeiting it if you don't. "I used a price pact to finish the first draft of my book, promising my accountability partner \$10,000 if I did not finish the draft by my deadline," says Nir. "I kept my money and finished writing my book."
- **Identity pact.** "Your self-image has a profound impact on your behavior," says Nir. "By taking on a new identity, you empower yourself to make decisions based on who you believe you are. Consider how people who call themselves 'vegetarians' don't have to expend much willpower to avoid eating meat."

**Which pact do you think will be most effective for you? Keep in mind that you don't have to use just one.**



# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## Avoiding the Online Rabbit Hole

Reading articles online, Nir would fall down the rabbit hole of suggested articles, related videos, and other **hooks** designed to keep him online. So he made a rule to never read anything online.

“If I see an article online, I use an app called **Pocket** to save it to my phone, and then, when I’m in the gym — this is called temptation bundling, so this is a triple win — I have this other app called **Voice Dream** that will play the text of those articles for me. I reduced the distraction of not doing something I didn’t want to do when I’m reading articles online, and now I also have this incentive to go to the gym or for a walk because I get to listen to these articles played to me.”

**What techniques do you have in place to avoid your own trips down the rabbit hole? Might Nir’s work for you?**

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## Email Techniques

Most time spent on email is in rechecking correspondence you've already opened. So Nir's rule is: every email you get, you only touch it twice. The first time is when you open it, and the second time is when you reply to it. So when you get a new email, this forces you to do one of three things:

- **Delete or archive** it if it's nonsense.
- If it needs a reply today, **label it "Today."**
- If it needs a reply by the end of the week, **label it "This Week."**

"Every night, I have an hour and a half to only answer the urgent messages — only the things that need a reply today. My inbox goes down dramatically in terms of my workload every day because I don't need to answer every email.

Once a week, Nir has message Mondays. This is where he puts his four-hour block to plow through all of the "This Week" emails.

"You would be amazed how many emails, when you just let them wait for a little bit, take care of themselves," says Nir. "People figure out their issues for themselves, the group figures out the solution they're looking for, or it's just crushed under the weight of some other priority, so it's no longer important." So you may not even need to answer a lot of the 'This Week' emails if you just slow down the process."

**Try it this week and see if it makes a difference!**

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## But What If It's Important?

You want to condition yourself to stop depending on your phone in the bedroom, but what if someone needs to get in touch with you for something urgent?

“Let’s say you really need that peace of mind,” says Nir. “Here’s what you do. You charge a cellphone in a different room. Turn the volume all the way up on the ringer. And then set it to **Do Not Disturb While Driving**. When someone texts or calls you, it will send them an autoreply; you can customize it to anything you want. But by default, it says, ‘I’m driving. If this is urgent, text me with the word URGENT.’ If somebody takes the time to type the word URGENT, that call or text message will come through and the phone will start ringing. But if it’s not urgent — as [is the case] 99.9 percent of the time — it will just wait for you until tomorrow morning.”

**Could you implement this to reduce your dependence on your smartphone? If not, why not?**

*Full show notes and resources for this episode [can be found here](#).*

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

---

## About



Join us as we get deep into the untapped wisdom of the world's top performers – from legendary creators to intelligence operatives, iconoclastic writers to visionary change-makers.

We deconstruct the playbooks of the most successful people on earth – and learn new strategies, perspectives, and insights you can't find anywhere else. Then, take these valuable insights into your own life and live what you listen.

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW

[support@jordanharbinger.com](mailto:support@jordanharbinger.com)

# THE JORDAN HARBINGER SHOW



Share This With  
Your Friends!



**Share This**