Why is this book worth our time?

1. This is Daniel Goleman, who helped bring emotional intelligence into our thinking about business, and life. In this book, he brings the insights of emotional intelligence into strategy development, while also emphasizing the critical value of empathy within the workplace.

2. We are having enormous difficulty with keeping our focus and attention. As individuals -- and as organizations. This book will help us do better at this.

3. This book will help us understand that self-awareness is a critical tool all leaders need to have, and why it is sadly lacking in many leaders.

Here are some key quotes from the book.
(Note: The “#s” following each quote indicate the Kindle App for the iMac “location” of the quote in the book.)

1) …attention in all its varieties represents a little-noticed and underrated mental asset. 104

2) All that can be boiled down to a threesome: inner, other, and outer focus. A well-lived life demands we be nimble in each. The good news on attention comes from neuroscience labs and school classrooms, where the findings point to ways we can strengthen this vital muscle of the mind. Attention works much like a muscle—use it poorly and it can wither; work it well and it grows. 114

   Inner focus attunes us to our intuitions, guiding values, and better decisions. Other focus smooths our connections to the people in our lives. And outer focus lets us navigate in the larger world. 118

   A leader tuned out of his internal world will be rudderless; one blind to the world of others will be clueless; those indifferent to the larger systems within which they operate will be blindsided. 120

3) Our need to make an effort to have such human moments has never been greater, given the ocean of distractions we all navigate daily. 170

4) They were away, in a state, as one participant put it, of “continuous partial attention,” a mental blurriness induced by an overload of information inputs from the speakers, the other people in the room, and what they were doing on their laptops. 181

5) Tony Schwartz, a consultant who coaches leaders on how to best manage their energy, tells me, “We get people to become more aware of how they use attention—which is always poorly. Attention is now the number-one issue on the minds of our clients.” 194
There are two main varieties of distractions: sensory and emotional. 223

The power to disengage our attention from one thing and move it to another is essential for well-being. 245

A reader’s mind typically wanders anywhere from 20 to 40 percent of the time while perusing a text. 273

The bombardment of texts, videos, images, and miscellaneous of messages we get online seems the enemy of the more full understanding that comes from what Nicholas Carr calls “deep reading,” which requires sustained concentration and immersion in a topic rather than hopscotching from one to another, nabbing disconnected factoids. 282

The more distracted we are, the more shallow our reflections; 291

Continual switching saps attention from full, concentrated engagement. 315

“The most precious resource in a computer system is no longer its processor, memory, disk or network, but rather human attention,” 316

“Bottom-up” has become the phrase of choice in cognitive science for such workings of this lower-brain neural machinery. By the same token, “top-down” refers to mental activity, mainly within the neocortex, that can monitor and impose its goals on the subcortical machinery. 388

Voluntary attention, willpower, and intentional choice are top-down; reflexive attention, impulse, and rote habit are bottom-up 403

... the vast majority of mental operations occur in the mind’s backstage, amid the purr of bottom-up systems. 409

Top-down wiring adds talents like self-awareness and reflection, deliberation, and planning to our mind’s repertoire. 416

As world-class champions attest, at the topmost levels, where your opponents have practiced about as many thousands of hours as you have, any competition becomes a mental game... 437

Brain studies find that having a champion athlete start pondering technique during a performance offers a sure recipe for a screwup. 458

“When the coach reviews plays from a game and only focuses on what not to do next time, it’s a recipe for players to choke.” 466

... if you show people luxury items or just have them think about luxury goods, they become more self-centered in their decisions. 510

Life today seems ruled to a troubling degree by impulse... 518

Let’s step back for a moment, and think again about thinking. In what I’ve written so far there is an implicit bias: that focused, goal-driven attention has more value than open, spontaneous awareness. 590

We might revise our own thinking about a “wandering mind,” by considering that rather than wandering away from what counts, we may well be wandering toward something of value. 595

...It’s impossible to instruct someone to have a spontaneous thought—that is, to make the person’s mind wander. 597

The inner tug to drift away from effortful focus is so strong that cognitive scientists see a wandering mind as the brain’s “default” mode—where it goes when it’s not working away on some mental task.

Focus
It’s not the chatter of people around us that is the most powerful distractor, but rather the chatter of our own minds.

The inner tug to drift away from effortful focus is so strong that cognitive scientists see a wandering mind as the brain’s “default” mode—where it goes when it’s not working on some mental task. 601

20) This gets us back to what the mind wanders toward: more often than not, our current personal concerns and unresolved business—stuff we’ve got to figure out... 610

Among other positive functions of mind wandering are generating scenarios for the future, self-reflection, navigating a complex social world, incubation of creative ideas, flexibility in focus, pondering what we’re learning, organizing our memories, just mulling life—and giving our circuitry for more intensive focusing a refreshing break. 617

“New ideas won’t appear if you don’t have permission within yourself...” 625

21) A classic model of the stages of creativity roughly translates to three modes of focus: orienting, where we search out and immerse ourselves in all kinds of inputs; selective attention on the specific creative challenge; and open awareness, where we associate freely to let the solution emerge—then home in on the solution. 638

22) Our mind holds endless ideas, memories, and potential associations waiting to be made. But the likelihood of the right idea connecting with the right memory within the right context—and all that coming into the spotlight of attention—diminishes drastically when we are either hyperfocused or too gripped by an overload of distractions to notice the insight. 668

23) In the tumult of our daily distractions and to-do lists, innovation dead-ends; in open times it flourishes. 682

24) The faculty of voluntarily bringing back a wandering attention, over and over again, is the very root of judgment, character, and will,” observed the founder of American psychology, William James. 704

25) ...people’s moods were generally skewed to the unpleasant while their minds wandered; 711

Creative associations aside, mind wandering tends to center on our self and our preoccupations: all the many things I have to do today; the wrong thing I said to that person; what I should have said instead. While the mind sometimes wanders to pleasant thoughts or fantasy, it more often seems to gravitate to rumination and worry. 719

26) It’s not the chatter of people around us that is the most powerful distractor, but rather the chatter of our own minds. 725

Utter concentration demands these inner voices be stilled. 726

27) When we turn such full attention to our senses, the brain quiets its default chatter. Brain scans during mindfulness—the form of meditation the lawyer was trying—reveal it quiets the brain circuits for me-focused mental chatter. 739

“You can’t ruminate about yourself while you’re absorbed in a challenging task.” 743

28) Mulling things not going on here and now—“situation-independent thought” as cognitive scientists call it—demands we decouple the contents of our mind from what our senses perceive at the moment. 757

29) THE WANDERING MIND “Whenever you notice your mind wandering,” a fundamental instruction in meditation advises, “bring your mind back to its point of focus.” 779

The operative phrase here is whenever you notice. As our mind drifts off, we almost never notice the moment it launches into some other orbit on its own. 780

Catching a wandering mind in the act is elusive; more often than not when we are lost in thought we fail to realize that our mind has wandered in the first place. 787
Clarity begins with realizing what we do not notice—and don’t notice that we don’t notice.

30) The mind has to fight off the pull of everything else, sorting out what’s important from what’s irrelevant. That takes cognitive effort. 840
Tightly focused attention gets fatigued—much like an overworked muscle—when we push to the point of cognitive exhaustion. 841

31) The antidote to attention fatigue is the same as for the physical kind: take a rest. But what rests a mental muscle? 844
The most restful surroundings are in nature... 846

32) We do well to unplug regularly; quiet time restores our focus and composure. 850

33) You need to depend on your body's signals. 936

34) There are two major streams of self-awareness: “me,” which builds narratives about our past and future; and “I,” which brings us into the immediate present. 961

35) “He’s got zero self-awareness,” she adds. “He just does not realize when he’s being a bully.” 977

36) All too often when we “lose it” and fall back on a less desirable way of acting, we’re oblivious to what we do. And if no one tells us, we stay that way. 981

37) There’s an intriguing relationship between self-awareness and power... 986
But the higher someone’s position in an organization, the bigger the gap. Self-awareness seems to diminish with promotions up the organization’s ladder. 987

38) Whatever the reason, tuned-out leaders see themselves as being far more effective than do those they are guiding. A lack of self-awareness leaves you clueless. 991

39) “I am what I think you think I am.” 1005

40) But our tone of voice matters immensely to the impact of what we say: research has found that when people receive negative performance feedback in a warm, supportive tone of voice, they leave feeling positive—despite the negative feedback. But when they get positive performance reviews in a cold and distant tone of voice, they end up feeling bad despite the good news. 1026
...get coaching on ways to make their voice communicate empathy and caring—to hear themselves as others hear them. 1030

41) The illusion of skill...1054

42) Inflated self-ratings reflect the “better-than-average” effect, which has been found for just about any positive trait, from competence and creativity to friendliness and honesty. 1068

43) It takes meta-cognition—in this case, awareness of our lack of awareness—to bring to light what the group has buried in a grave of indifference or suppression. 1077

44) Clarity begins with realizing what we do not notice—and don’t notice that we don’t notice. 1078

45) …dumb decisions are built from too narrow a base of inputs. 1079

46) Our circuitry for empathy was designed for face-to-face moments. Today, working together online poses special challenges for empathy. 1382
47) ...we need to think about feelings. 1391
“Theory of mind,” the understanding that other people have their own feelings, desires, and motives, lets us reason about what someone else might be thinking and wanting. 1405

48) Empathy entails an act of self-awareness: we read other people by tuning in to ourselves. 1473

49) If self-absorbed, we simply do not notice other people; we can walk by utterly indifferent to their predicament. But once we notice them we can tune in, sense their feelings and needs, and act on our concern. 1495

50) Empathic concern first emerges early in infancy: when one baby hears another cry she, too, starts crying. 1500

51) One sign of the ability to pinpoint what’s salient is how someone answers the simple question, What’s your main point? 2891

52) Directing attention toward where it needs to go is a primal task of leadership. 2895
But it’s not just the focus of a single strategic decision-maker that makes or breaks a company: it’s the entire array of attention bandwidth and dexterity among everyone. 2897
Organizations, too, have to choose where to allocate attention, focusing on this while ignoring that. 2901
Signs of what might be called organizational “attention deficit disorder” include making flawed decisions because of missing data, no time for reflection, trouble getting attention in the marketplace, and inability to focus when and where it matters. 2903

53) ...there’s been a renaissance in an older method: telling a good story. 2907
Stories do more than grab our attention: they keep it. 2908

54) Leading attention requires these elements: first, focusing your own attention, then attracting and directing attention from others, and getting and keeping the attention of employees and peers, of customers or clients. 2913

55) A well-focused leader can balance an inner focus on the climate and culture with an “other focus” on the competitive landscape, and an outer focus on the larger realities that shape the environment the outfit operates in. 2914

56) People make their choices about where to focus based on their perception of what matters to leaders. 2918

57) An organization’s strategy represents the desired pattern of organizational attention, what every unit should share a degree of focus on, each in its particular way. A given strategy makes choices about what to ignore and what matters... 2920
When leaders choose strategy, they are guiding attention. 2923

58) The company was floundering. His (Steve Jobs) strategy was simple: focus. 2937

59) Apple and Singer left fresh footprints in the snow that their competitors followed in a desperate game of catching up. 2956

60) The original meaning of strategy was from the battlefield; it meant “the art of the leader”—back then, generals. 2958
Strategy was how you deployed your resources; tactics were how battles were fought. 2959
61) A new strategy means reorienting from what’s now business as usual to a fresh focus. 2961

62) The best leaders have systems awareness, helping them answer the constant query, Where should we head and how? 2970

63) As Clay Shirky observes of the failure to disengage focus from comfort zones, “First the people running the old system don’t notice the change. When they do, they assume it’s minor. Then it’s a niche, then a fad. And by the time they understand that the world has actually changed, they’ve squandered most of the time they had to adapt.” 3016

64) RIM during its difficult days offers a textbook example of organizational rigidity, where a company that thrives by being the first to market a new technological twist falls behind successive tech waves because its focus fixates on the old new thing, not the next. 3019

65) Any business school course on strategy will tell you about two approaches: exploitation and exploration. 3023 Companies with a winning strategy tend to refine their current operations and offerings, not explore radical shifts in what they offer. 3026 A mental balancing act—exploring the new while exploiting what’s working—does not come naturally. 3040

66) Being in survival mode narrows our focus. 3045 But prospering is no guarantee of ambidexterity, either. 3045

67) Intel’s Grove calls (it) the “success trap.” 3046 “Miss the moment,” he warns, “and you start to decline.” 3047

68) The most successful entrepreneurs gather data that might be relevant to a key decision far more widely—and from a larger variety of sources—than most people would think relevant. But they also realize that when facing a major decision, gut feelings are data, too. 3095 The sweet spot for smart decisions, then, comes not just from being a domain expert, but also from having high self-awareness. 3106

69) There’s a strong case that leaders need the full range of inner, other, and outer focus to excel—and that a weakness in any one of them can throw a leader off balance. 3118

70) But to speak from the heart, to the heart, a leader must first know her values. That takes self-awareness. 3135

71) These are elements of emotional intelligence, which I’ve had to rethink a bit in light of our new understanding of focus. 3137

72) Attention gets talked about only indirectly in the emotional intelligence world: as “self-awareness,” which is the basis of self-management; and as “empathy,” the foundation for relationship effectiveness. 3138 Yet awareness of our self and of others, and its application in managing our inner world and our relationships, is the essence of emotional intelligence. 3140 That means a leader can be very smart but not necessarily have the focusing skills that come with emotional intelligence. 3145

73) Take empathy. The common cold of leadership is poor listening. 3146 We pay careful attention in moments that matter most to us. But amid the din and distraction of work life, poor listening has become epidemic. 3154

74) The just-get-it-done mode runs roughshod over human concerns. 3186

These are elements of emotional intelligence, which I’ve had to rethink a bit in light of our new understanding of focus.
No one person could have them all. But there was one “meta” ability that emerged: self-awareness.

Focus

75) Focus is not just selecting the right thing, but also saying no to the wrong ones. 3191

76) “Pacesetters lack empathy…” 3205

77) “To anticipate how people will react, you have to read people’s reactions to you,” says Spencer. “That takes self-awareness and empathy in a self-reinforcing cycle. You become more aware of how you’re coming across to other people.” 3228

78) …once you are at work among a pool of colleagues who are about as smart as you are, your cognitive abilities alone do not make you outstanding—particularly as a leader. 3244
McClelland argued that once you were in a given job, specific competencies like self-discipline, empathy, and persuasion were far stronger forces in success than a person’s ranking in academics. 3246
…nonacademic abilities like empathy typically outweigh purely cognitive talents in the makeup of outstanding leaders. 3258
…leaders who showed strengths in eight or more of these noncognitive competencies had created highly energizing, top-performing climates. 3260
…such leaders are rare: 3262
Only 18 percent of executives attained this level. 3262

79) No one person could have them all. But there was one “meta” ability that emerged: self-awareness. 3267

80) If the leader has high levels of empathy and low levels of self-control, performance is also reduced—too much empathy gets in the way of calling people on their misbehaving.” 3292

81) Leadership maven Warren Bennis uses the term “first-class noticers” for those who bring a finely honed attention to every situation, and a constant, sometimes infectious sense of fascination with what’s going on in the moment. 3349
Great listeners are one variety of first-class noticers. 3350

82) “To harvest the collective wisdom of a group, you need two things: mindful presence and a sense of safety,” 3405

83) Even leaders of great companies can suffer a blind spot for the long-term consequence if their time frame is too small. 3491

84) Problems of such complexity and urgency require an approach to problem-solving that integrates our self-awareness and how we act, and our empathy and compassion, with a nuanced understanding of the systems at play. 3555

85) So many leaders are preoccupied with today’s immediate problems that they lack bandwidth for the long-term challenges we face as a species. 3558

86) “Essential to understanding systems is your time horizon,” Peter Senge told me. “If it’s too short, you’ll ignore essential feedback loops and come up with short-term fixes that won’t work in the long run. But if that horizon is long enough, you’ll have a chance of seeing more of the key systems at play.” 3560
“The bigger your horizon,” adds Senge, “the bigger the system you can see.” 3563
This is a study of focus and attention.

Both are tough to come by in this Smart Phone, tweeting, texting, constantly distracted world.

This book is not a motivational speech – “be more focused.”

It is a careful look at what needs to be done to have greater focus.

And, really, we all need to have greater focus.

Focus

The Hidden Driver of Excellence

by Daniel Goleman
Harper (2013)

- A few words on the “different parts of the brain” regarding focus and attention…
- About Doctors and empathy…
- Self-awareness, other awareness – a lesson from the BP Oil Spill…

The Book:

1) The Subtle Faculty

Part I: The Anatomy of Attention

2) Basics
3) Attention Top and Bottom
4) The Value of a Mind Adrift
5) Finding Balance

Part II: Self-Awareness

6) The Inner Rudder
7) Seeing Ourselves as Others See Us
8) A Recipe for Self-Control

Part III: Reading Others

9) The Woman Who Knew Too Much
10) The Empathy Triad
11) Social Sensitivity

Part IV: The Bigger Context

12) Patterns, Systems, and Messes
13) System Blindness
14) Distant Threats

Part V: Smart Practice

15) They Myth of 10,000 Hours
16) Brains on Games
17) Breathing Buddies

Part VI: The Well-Focused Leader

18) How Leaders Direct Attention
19) The Leader’s Triple Focus
20) What Makes a Leader?

Part VII: The Big Picture

21) Leading for the Long Future
• A few “thoughts”

1. Sometimes, on purpose, you’ve got to get “unfocused” in order to focus…
   
   • Mindfulness can play a big role here
     “…she started by handing him a few raisins. She then led him through the steps in eating one of the raisins slowly and with full focus, savoring the richness of every moment in that process: the sensations as he lifted it into his mouth and chewed, the burst of flavors as he bit into it, the sounds of eating. He immersed himself in the fullness of his senses.”

2. Coherence matters – see the big picture; see how it all ties together…

Some takeaways:

#1 -- Organizational rigidity keeps the old focus for too long, and can lead to being left behind.

#2 -- Focusing on IQ only takes you so far. Then you need other skills (in Goleman’s world, skills connected with Emotional Intelligence).

#3 -- Since top leaders may not listen to other people about their own deficiencies, they have to be incredibly self-aware to spot their deficiencies and work on them.

#4 – Leaders must – MUST! -- provide time and space to talk about human concerns.

#5 – Getting the right balance between intense focus and attention, and the value of “mind wandering,” is a great challenge.

#6 – Master the “long view” – or risk being left behind…

Handout designed by JVO DESIGN, LLC