

The Inception Effect (The Secret to Lasting Self-Improvement)

Red Pill Theory | 14 August, 2016 | by Avery

I was desperate, insecure, and willing to do anything to change my life in my teen years. Additionally, my income was completely disposable, so dropping a few hundred dollars for a video course once every few months wasn't problematic. In other words, I was the perfect self-help prospect.

I genuinely believed that I sucked (at life), but that I could change that with enough time, effort, and learning. Years later, after consuming dozens of self-help and psychology books and hundreds of hours of videos, I've been able to make the changes to my behavior and thinking that I wanted to. But, the changes didn't come the way I expected them to. There wasn't some magic-pill exercise or practical tip that helped me make a radical shift.

Honestly, I've been making this crucial mistake with my own content, I've focused on practical advice, especially exercises. But if I look back to how the self-help and psychological content I've consumed helped me improve, it wasn't exercises or tactics that catalyzed long-term change.

What really helped me make the changes I wanted to make were ideas that challenged my assumptions and opened my mind to the possibility of living by improved values and with a more effective mindset. A great self-improvement or psychology book will alter the lens through which you see the world, and as a result, you will start making better decisions. This is how self-help content can really change us, not through the techniques and exercises that we rarely, if ever, make into daily habits, but through introducing us to new modes of thinking. When our thinking changes, our emotions follow suit (sometimes subtly), and when our emotions change our behavior changes naturally, without conscious effort.

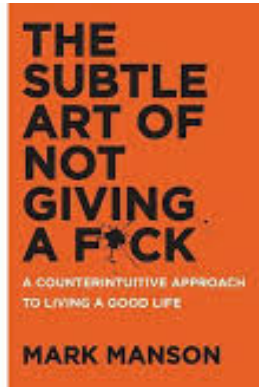
A great book plants new ideas in your mind like seeds. These ideas take root in your mind like an inception, and the idea grows over time, leading you to make better choices in your day-to-day life without conscious awareness or effort.

It's not like one day you have a conversation with someone and you notice that you were more empathetic to their perspective than usual, and you tell yourself, "You know what, today I really embodied the concept from *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* to seek first to understand, then to be understood. Really glad I bought that book, it's changing my behavior!" Even if sometimes you do notice how the ideas in a book are impacting your behavior, most of this happens totally outside of conscious awareness.

When asked how to become more motivated and make positive change in your life, Neuroscientist Moran Cerf said the best strategy is to surround yourself with people who are already doing what you want to do. He then said that the best way to accomplish this is usually by reading high-quality books and watching videos of these people because we are sponges for the world around us. What you let in is what you put out. Make sure to let in the best ideas you possibly can.

Here are three of the self-help books that have most dramatically shifted my own perspective:

*The Subtle Art of Not Giving a F*ck* by Mark Manson:



This book is everything that most self-help books aren't, it's extremely entertaining and written with a humorous and impactful voice. Perhaps even more importantly, the book is about harsh truths (hence the chapter titled *The Misadventures of Disappointment Panda*), questioning your deepest values, and a counterintuitive definition of happiness.

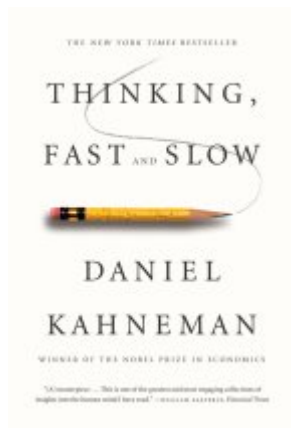
Reading this book will show you the incredible power of the values that you choose and it will make you see life's problems in a totally new light.

The biggest flaw of *The Subtle Art* is that it mentions a decent amount of scientific research but doesn't provide references. However, this flaw would only ruin the book for the most diehard scientific reader as it's more a philosophy book than a psychological trade book.

If you've found most self-help wanting, do yourself a favor and buy Mark Manson's book.

Amazon Link: [The Subtle Art of Not Giving A Fuck](#)

Thinking, Fast and Slow by Daniel Kahneman:



Written by a Nobel Prize winning economist, most of the chapters here are brutal mindfucks. If you read this book with an open mind, by the end you will not only question your thinking, but your ability to think logically. You will be shown (not just told) time and time again that your brain is subject to cognitive biases that effect how you see the world and how you make decisions in ways that are often not to your benefit.

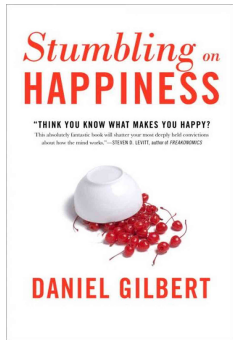
And that's a good thing, because the best way to get better at thinking is to learn about those cognitive biases, you can't learn from mistakes that you don't know you're making. As the book reminds us, what you see is all there is, and *Thinking, Fast and Slow* will allow you to see how the brain works in new and fascinating ways.

The book uses exceptionally well-done research and covers a variety of fascinating topics. The writing isn't particularly enthralling (but by no means bad), it's fairly matter-of-fact- but the ideas the writing

conveys will capture your imagination and make you ask questions you never thought you would ask.

Amazon Link: [Thinking, Fast and Slow](#)

Stumbling on Happiness Daniel Gilbert:



Written by Harvard Psychologist Daniel Gilbert, *Stumbling on Happiness* sets itself apart from the many other books on happiness in drastic fashion. This book isn't about how to get more happiness, it's about questioning your ability to create happiness in your future. In it, Daniel Gilbert mentions that we treat ourselves like our children. We spend our efforts today to create a better tomorrow for our future selves. But maybe it isn't the best strategy, Daniel Gillbert writes, "Like the fruits of our loins, our temporal progeny are often thankless. We toil and sweat to give them just what they think they will like, and they quit their jobs, grow their hair, move to or from San Francisco, and wonder how we could ever have been stupid enough to think they'd like *that*. We fail to achieve the accolated and rewards that we consider crucial to their well-being, and they end up thanking God that things didn't work out according to our shortsighted, misguided plan. They will inevitably whine to their therapists about how our best just wasn't good enough for them."

Reading stumbling happiness will not only make you question what happiness is, but whether your efforts towards getting it have any hope of working. With these doubts, you might find that happiness is something that you don't earn, it's something you stumble on.

Amazon Link: [Stumbling on Happiness](#)

Conclusion

Of the many self-help and psychology books I've read, the above have had a particularly profound impact on my thinking and my view of the world. Read these books, read other great books, it's the single most powerful habit you can build to change. Read books that challenge you to expand your world view to change your thinking, and therefore, change how you feel and how you behave. This isn't to say books focused on practical advice are bad, but seriously, when's the last time you did an exercise form a book for more than a week? (If you can think of an example of a helpful exercise you've made into a habit, comment about it below)

Let books like those I mentioned get under your skin. Who I am today compared to who I was a year ago is monumentally different, not because of the practical advice I read, but because of the books I read that challenged my thinking.

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