

The Willpower Instinct: How Self-Control Works, Why it Matters, and What You Can Do to Get More of It.

Kelly McGonigal

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Reviewed by Leland Beaumont

Whenever we are lead into temptation, willpower is tested in a struggle between immediate indulgence and our long term goals. Too often our long term goals lose out as we eat too much, drink too much, smoke, waste time, and shop ‘till we drop. Now our resolve can be bolstered by the well researched and very practical techniques provided in this new book. Stanford Professor Kelly McGonigal has adapted her very popular course “The Science of Willpower” into this witty, readable, and helpful book.

She consistently creates a bridge between reliable scientific research and practical applications in ten chapters each dedicated to one powerful idea about willpower. These ideas include:

- + The I will, I won’t, and I want manifestations of desire,
- + The willpower instinct to pause and plan that emerges when we are relaxed and mindful,
- + Analogies between willpower, muscles, exercise, and exhaustion,
- + Distinctions between moral worth and short-lived temptations,
- + Relentlessly chasing the satisfaction we crave rarely increases happiness,
- + Feeling bad, often as a result of a minor failure, increases stress and shifts our brains into a reward-seeking state,
- + Our inaccurate concept of the future distorts our thinking about distant rewards and efforts,
- + Social norms and pressures greatly influence our self-control,
- + Ironic rebound makes us makes us more likely to think, feel, or do the thing we most want to avoid.

As each of these ideas is explored our many misconceptions about willpower are examined closely and dispelled. Throughout the book we are invited to try many “willpower experiments” that provide new approaches to choosing our long-term goals over a momentary indulgence.