



You Are Not Your Brain: The 4-Step Solution for Changing Bad Habits, Ending Unhealthy Thinking, and Taking Control of Your Life

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Two neuroscience experts explain how their 4-Step Method can help identify negative thoughts and change bad habits for good.

A leading neuroplasticity researcher and the coauthor of the groundbreaking books *Brain Lock* and *The Mind and the Brain*, Jeffrey M. Schwartz has spent his career studying the human brain. He pioneered the first mindfulness-based treatment program for people suffering from OCD, teaching patients how to achieve long-term relief from their compulsions.

Schwartz works with psychiatrist Rebecca Gladding to refine a program that successfully explains how the brain works and why we often feel besieged by overactive brain circuits (i.e. bad habits, social anxieties, etc.) the key to making life changes that you want—to make your brain work for you—is to consciously choose to “starve” these circuits of focused attention, thereby decreasing their influence and strength.

You Are Not Your Brain carefully outlines their program, showing readers how to identify negative impulses, channel them through the power of focused attention, and ultimately lead more fulfilling and empowered lives.

You Are Not Your Brain: The 4-Step Solution for Changing Bad Habits, Ending Unhealthy Thinking, and Taking Control of Your Life Details

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Gladding

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Lesley says

Great read for do-it-yourself life coaching. Once you realize your brain is continuously sending you messages for all the wrong reasons (e.g., habits), you are able to readjust those destructive thoughts by calling on the mind for reconstructing the reality and presenting healthier responses. Interesting theory but will take some practice in awareness and differentiation to fully implement. However, I found the approach very valuable and refreshing.

Eric says

READ THIS BOOK! Excellent book! Although very redundant (it could use a ruthless editor to delete redundancy and dumb analogies), it has changed my life for the better. This book has empowered me. It just clicked with me and I "got it" instantly. It has given me a new direction.

The very simple point that clicked for me was this: Your brain and your mind are two different things: your brain fires connections and your mind thinks/analyzes/decides. Sometimes your brain sends your mind wrong impulses JUST BECAUSE THAT'S HOW THE SYNAPSES HAVE FORMED OVER ALL THE YEARS, but you have the ability to change those synapses, rewire your brain; you can destroy a synapse connection and build another in its place. You can tell your brain, "No, that's not right, not valid, not correct, not appropriate, not true."

Before, my brain would automatically send thoughts and feelings to my mind because that's what it has always done and I would just follow them blindly. My brain would tell my mind, "Respond this way; do this, because that's what you have always done, so do it now because you're experiencing the same feelings and thoughts."

No longer do I rely on those autopilot responses I have used for years that were built since I was a small child when my brain processes a thought. My mind can now intercept the **DECEPTIVE BRAIN MESSAGES** that my brain sends to my mind and I now have the option of rewriting them and reworking the connections in my brain.

Now, my mind intercepts the **DECEPTIVE BRAIN MESSAGES** and because of my "WISE ADVOCATE" (or my true inner self, the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God, the Light of Christ, or whatever you want to call it) telling me what is really appropriate and true, I can rewrite the response I know how to control my own reality and how I perceive things, especially myself and what I think and feel, as well as what happens to me and those things I "think" I want to have or do.

I now know that I don't really want "those" things because they will damage me in some way or another and just make those bad synapses stronger. Those urges to respond to situations in a certain way, for example, this happens so feel this way; gone, because I now see that those habit responses are not really me nor what I really truly want for myself; they are my brain and just those faulty synapses firing.

Feelings, bad habits, auto-responses, whatever they are, whether of inferiority, jealousy, etc., they are not really you; they are your brain because you have trained your brain to fire those synapses when certain things happen. You can break up those 12-lane highways you've created in your brain since early childhood and build other 12-lane highways through your brain synapses that you know are best for yourself.

Jesse Bowers says

Not a book for people wanting to learn about the brain, but for people who struggle with OCD, anxiety, and depression, you will find this book a powerful tool.

Iain says

I liked this book and it has a lot of good advice for coping with "deceptive brain messages" - that negative inner dialogue you sometimes have with yourself that holds you back from doing something or makes you reach for another glass of wine to cope after a stressful day.

There's quite a lot of repetition in the book, which is why it didn't get a higher rating from me, personally, but I can see why it's there. It's designed to be repetitive to drum into you the four steps recommended to deal with these intrusive thoughts.

1. Notice you are having such a thought
2. Relabel it for what it is
3. Refocus on what you want to achieve
4. Revalue - judge the thought and consider whether it is useful to you

While the authors are at pains to point out that if you are in danger or have a serious mental condition you need medical help, these steps can help to overcome bad habits, cravings and negative self-talk that plague us all from time to time.

Melody says

I've been on a neurology kick, and picked this up at the library based on the credentials of the author. I thought it would not be a typical self-help book, even though the cover sure looked like one. I should have turned it over and noticed that one of the blurbs on the back was from Leonardo DiCaprio, noted ~~neurology researcher~~ movie actor.

I guess that was a good example of a deceptive brain message, because this is a self-help manual with all the smarmy examples one might imagine. Abby thinks too much! Sarah is depressed! Let's examine their behaviour at length.

The death knell, for me, was the part where the authors explain, briefly, the neurology behind a certain response, then in essence dismissively say that you needn't bother your pretty little head- here's a perfect example:

"Collectively, you can think of the amygdala, insula, and anterior cingulate as the warning center of the brain, or what we like to call the *Uh-Oh Center*." Uh-oh, indeed.

This book didn't work for me (not that I applied it to any of my bad habits, I mean I didn't like it) and I can't recommend it unless you like dumbed-down science wrapped up in magazine-article style examples of people just like you only with no bad habits!!!!1!

Daniel Ionson says

I love this book for the data that it gives. SDN: "Self-directed neuroplasticity" was a complete life-changing piece of knowledge for me.

However, I hate the style used in the writing of this book. It comes across as very "self-helpie" in the worst kinds of ways.

So, if you go into this book forewarned of that style, the knowledge you gain is exciting and helpful.

Vanessa says

I'm not crazy for the gimmicky title and much of the material has been in other books but it's the overall content of this book, the message and the concrete help the author offers that I'm loving. It's the neurobiological how-to of inner-bonding (Margaret Paul's Inner Child healing process) that I am always trying to distill for myself and other people. This book illuminates how to differentiate between the wounded part of us, what Schwartz calls "deceptive brain messages" versus the loving adult or Schwartz's "Wise Authority." It tackles the way in which we strengthen neural pathways through a reward of temporary relief when we indulge habits that are ultimately painful and harmful and are far from our true goals and awesomeness and the work involved to make new pathways and feel empowered. It's repetitive and a bit dense but the message, you are not your brain is huge. I'm going to use this stuff with my clients (and myself, for sure). Differentiating between the brain and the mind is a really useful tool as is mindfulness and components of CBT and ACT (acting on values). I've always been drawn to Acceptance and Commitment Therapy but the activities were too formulated and artificial. ACT focuses a lot on metaphors and is a very "heady" theory. I love that Schwartz took a lot of those concepts and made them applicable. As someone is constantly being taken away by overthinking/worrying and the like, I appreciate this very grounded and practical way of changing the way neurons fire. Self directed neuroplasticity is awesome.

Nessy Dimitrova says

I read this book thanks to the app Blinkist.

The key message in this book:

Your brain gives false, destructive messages, that trigger detrimental patterns and habits. But you have the ability to reshape this brain wiring. The Four Steps of relabeling, reframing, refocusing and revaluing allow you to break down the associations between unhealthy thoughts and habits.

Actionable advice:

The next time you feel the urge to procrastinate, go through the Four Steps.

- (1) Relabel by saying what's happening: e.g., "I'm having the urge to go on Facebook."
- (2) Reframe by reminding yourself why it's troubling you: "Checking Facebook reduces my anxiety that I might not be able to complete the work I should be doing."
- (3) Refocus by doing something productive like beginning the easiest work task.
- (4) Revalue by recognizing that this impulse to procrastinate is just a deceptive brain message, and needn't be taken seriously.

Keep a notebook of healthy activities.

In order to work through the Four Steps effectively, why not keep a little book of healthy, productive or fun refocusing activities? This way, you'll never be short of activities to distract you when a deceptive brain message pops up.

Emma Sea says

this approach is very similar to ACT therapy, except it makes a distinction between "emotional sensations" and "emotions," in which "emotional sensations" are deceptive . . . not true, and are leading you to act in ways that are not helpful or constructive." In contrast emotions "should be felt and constructively dealt with because they honor your true needs and your true self."

It seems to me like a tangle of worms to try to distinguish between false emotional sensations and "real" emotions. I much prefer ACT's premise in which all emotions are 'real' experiences your brain is giving to you, noticed by the observing self. You can acknowledge emotions, and allow them space to exist, without being ruled by them. You can take action toward being the person you want to be, no matter what emotions your brain are presenting the observing self with.

So, yeah, this is not my book. YMMV.

Sara Strand says

I will tell you that the reason I picked this book to review is because I have a very unhealthy way of thinking when it comes to diet and exercise. I am extremely good at talking myself out of good behaviors and convincing myself that the bad behaviors are not only more fun and awesome, but will be better for me later on. Despite the fact thunder thighs are not my friend.

Basically everything in the book comes down to four steps:

Step 1: Relabel: Identify your deceptive brain messages and the uncomfortable sensations; call them what they really are.

Step 2: Reframe: Change your perception of the importance of the deceptive brain messages; say why these

thoughts, urges, and impulses keep bothering you: they are false brain messages.

Step 3: Refocus: Direct your attention toward an activity or mental process that is wholesome and productive -- even while the deceptive brain messages are still bothering you.

Step 4: Revalue: Clearly see the thoughts, images, and impulses for what they are -- simply sensations caused by deceptive brain messages that aren't true and have little to no value.

Without going into a whole lot of detail about it (which is all explained really well and there are worksheets in the book for you to work through on your own) I will say I found them very helpful. At first the book started slow with me with a lot of precursor explanations that I didn't find relevant to me, but once it started talking about these four steps I was really interested. One of my favorite parts of this book is when it talks about biology is not your destiny. I find that people are so quick to rely on their biology to dictate their life versus trying to change themselves for the better. It's harder to change yourself but it's more rewarding.

The other part of the book I found really helpful is the discussion of positive versus destructive anxiety. I am a high anxiety person and I often have to talk myself into things I know I'll enjoy because my brain is constantly telling me negatives. It's a problem to say the least. But I really felt like I had a better grip as to why I have that inner struggle so often.

Overall, I found this book to be extremely helpful. If you are at all interested in learning about the brain, how to make changes in your life or both- this book is for you.

Kunal says

If there is one book for everything you need to know about will over skill, then this is it!

Ally says

I have to be honest about this book: I was skeptical. The title sounds like an infomercial, and I've been studying ways to treat my OCD for a year now, with limited successes. But from the first chapter, I was hooked. The writers are very honest about the limitations of their program, including who will and will not benefit from it, and that it is strongly recommended it needs to be supplemented with therapy.

The program itself is a combination of CBT and mindfulness practices, along with a gentler version of exposure therapy that is designed, instead of forcing you to experience the extreme versions of your most unpleasant fears and anxieties, but to slowly work up to goals that specifically speak to you as a person. It's too early to say the program is having a huge effect, but I will say I'm catching myself thinking about it a lot, and I've been talking to people about it a LOT. The methods seem to work better than typical CBT, at least for me, which tends to cause more thought loops and preoccupations. I've marked up my copy with bookmarks and high lighters, and kept a journal while I was writing, and I know this is a book with a lot of practical advice that I keep coming back to.

In addition, a lot of the personal stories speak directly to my experiences. You can't imagine how often I was nodding along or saying, "YES." out loud while I was reading this book. The thought processes and faulty

logic of the OCD intrusive thoughts, and the anxiety-induced experiences are outlined really well. If you struggle with an anxiety disorder, or obsessiveness compulsive thoughts or actions, I HIGHLY recommend this book.

Mark says

Good! Very helpful for better, more accurate thinking. Having read Brain Lock, this explains the 4 steps in more detail. Maybe just a tad technical in places and somewhat repetitive in others, but that helps learning. I'd recommend this to fellow thought strugglers.

Kelly says

I read a synopsis of this book in a magazine, which was really interesting. However, it turned out to be a self-help book which turned me off by immediately introducing an internal "wise advocate". I'm marking this "read" so I don't try to pick it up again.

Aggie says

If you are doing inner work, this book is a must read. Seeing the prison is paramount if you hope to escape.
