

How to Break Up With Your Phone

by Catherine Price

Book Summary and Review

Summary

Part I. The Wake Up

1: Our Phones Are Designed to Addict Us

It's pretty simple: Our phones are designed to addict us. Many are not even aware that they are addicted to their phones, but it is very easy for phone addiction to happen.

2: Putting the Dope in Dopamine

In same way that drug use releases dopamine in our brain, our phone use also releases dopamine. This reinforces our habits of phone use. Many phone and app developers are designing specifically to release dopamine and keep us hooked.

3: The Tricks of the Trade

We desire new experiences and don't enjoy doing the same thing over and over again. The phone and our apps are designed to meet this desire. Random rewards are more addicting than regular consistent rewards. This is why we keep checking our phones and social media even when there is often no reward there. We also want to avoid pain and bad feelings. It seems we are increasingly using our phones for this.

4: Why Social Media Sucks

Many studies show that social media use has a negative effect on our happiness. Even liking other's content and clicking on links leads to less happiness.

5: The Truth About Multitasking

So called multitasking is only switching rapidly between tasks. Unfortunately for "multitaskers", studies show it to be utterly ineffective. All of our task switching is making it difficult for us to focus and get real work done. Our phones are contributing to our inability to single task and focus.

6: Your Phone is Changing Your Brain

Our phones are teaching us to be focused on distraction. This is causing our brains to change in very detrimental ways. The author says “if you wanted to invent a device that could rewire our minds, if you wanted to create a society of people who were perpetually distracted, isolated, and overtired, if you wanted to weaken our memories and damage our capacity for focus and deep thought, if you wanted to reduce empathy, encourage self-absorption, and redraw the lines of social etiquette, you’d likely end up with a smartphone.”

7: Your Phone is Killing Your Attention Span

The way phones and apps are designed to constantly distract us is making our attention span significantly shorter. It is becoming harder for us to focus on anything and the more we use our phones the worse it gets. Focus is one of the most important skills for life success and we are training ourselves to be unable to focus.

8: Your Phone Messes With Your Memory

Because of all the distractions our phone brings into our lives, our working memory becomes full. This makes it harder for our brains to store information and experiences into our long term memory. If information does get stored in our long term memory, it often has fewer ties to other information we have stored. This means that we will not have as many new ideas and creativity. We think we are learning new things, but instead we are pushing things “in one ear and out the other”.

9: Stress, Sleep and Satisfaction

Our phone use can stress us out, destroy our sleep and leave us unsatisfied. They stress us out by running us through all kinds of emotions quickly and suddenly. You’ve probably had the experience of checking your email in the evening and seeing something which makes you anxious or worried. Our sleep is also impaired by the blue light of our phones before bed which blocks melatonin production and keeps us awake. Our phones are also very exciting which keep us up at night as well. Lastly the distraction of our phones prevents us from being engaged with our life. We never fully focus and our creativity is impaired. This leaves us unsatisfied.

10: How to Take Back Your Life

The next section of the book focuses on how to reverse the damage done by our phones. One way to do this is through mindfulness. We need to become aware of our thoughts, cravings and desires so that we can change our response to them. Become aware of the next time you are tempted to waste time on your phone. Notice what’s going on, become an outside observer of your thoughts and see how it changes your experience.

Part II. The Breakup

Week 1: Technology Triage

Day 1: Download a Tracking App

Write down how long and how often you think you use your smartphone each day. Then download one of the recommended tracking apps to record your actual usage.

Day 2: Assess Your Current Relationship

This is a day to do some thinking and writing about what you like and don't like about your phone. Spend some time also writing about how your phone affects you when you use it and how you feel when you don't.

Day 3: Start Paying Attention

We often aren't consciously aware of how our phone use makes us feel. One technique for paying attention to this is to put a rubber band around our phone and every time we use it think about how we are feeling before we use it, while we are using it and after we use it. Do you feel better after using your phone? What was the trigger that caused you to pick up your phone.

Day 4: Take Stock and Take Action

Look at the data in your tracking app. Does anything surprise you? Are you using your phone more than you thought? When you are feeling best, what activities are you doing? Do those activities involve your phone? Start using the WWW method: Ask the following before you pick up your phone. What For? Why Now? What Else? This helps you pause and decide whether now is the right now to be using your phone.

Day 5: Delete Social Media Apps

How much money per week would you pay to use each of the social media platforms you most use? Think about your recent most fun enjoyable experience. How much would you have to be paid to miss out on that experience? If we ask ourselves these questions we realize that we don't value social media as much as real experiences.

Remove all social media apps from your phone. You can check them from your computer if you want.

It's important to focus on what you will gain from using social media less.

Day 6: Come Back to Real Life

Make a list of the offline things you love to do or think you would love to do. Then schedule some of these activities in your calendar over the next couple weeks.

Day 7: Get Physical

Do something physical that you enjoy. Exercise can help your self control to make it easier to resist your addiction to your phone.

Week 2: Changing Your Habits

Charles Duhigg says that a habit is “a choice that we deliberately make at some point, and then stop thinking about, but continue doing, often every day.” He says that habits are made of 3 parts.

1. A cue or trigger - starts your brain on the path to the automatic response.
2. A response or habit – this is the behavior that happens automatically
3. A reward – The thing you enjoy or that reinforces the habit.

Habits can be helpful if the response is a good behavior that we want to have. Having good and positive automatic responses is great, but if they are negative then the habit is bad as it is an automatic negative behavior.

The author says that habits cannot be completely eliminated but they can be changed.

Day 8: Say “No” to Notifications

Notifications are designed to distract you and are shown to increase app launches by 3 times if enabled for an app. Notifications interrupt you and suck your time and attentions.

Turn them off, all of them. Exceptions would be possibly (think carefully about it) messaging apps and your calendar. If you install a new app, don’t allow it to send notifications. Don’t forget to turn off the little dots that show up beside the icons. The notification dots suck your time and attention as well. Also disable all your notifications for email. Just do it!

It’s good to start with this extreme of a notification policy you may be able to turn on notifications for some apps in the future, but be conscious of it.

Day 9: The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Apps

It’s time to cleanup and sort your apps. There are 6 categories of apps.

1. Tools – Apps that make your life, better but don’t distract you and waste your time. This is the only category of apps you should put on your home screen. Empty space is ok.
2. Junk Food – Apps that are beneficial or fun in small quantities but are also addictive. Delete any app in this category which is likely to steal your time and attention and doesn’t bring enough value to outweigh this risk. Any food apps you decide to keep, put on the second page of your phone, possibly in folders.
3. Slot Machine – Apps that do not make your life better, distract you and waste your time. There’s no point to having these on your phone, delete them.
4. Clutter – Apps you don’t use. Delete these or put them in a folder on the third page of your phone.

5. Utility – Apps that you don't use frequently, but that may serve a purpose. You can keep these on the third page of your phone.
6. Undeletables – Apps that your phone won't let you delete. Tuck these away in a folder on the third page of your phone.

Don't forget to customize your menu bar and remove any distracting apps. Reserve this space for utilities.

Day 10: Change Where You Charge It

Remove your phone chargers from your room and start only charging your phone away from where you sleep. If you live in one room, then make sure your phone and chargers are out of site in a drawer somewhere. If you are worried about missing calls, turn your ringer on and your notifications off.

Day 11: Set Yourself Up for Success

It is important to setup new triggers that help you establish new habits. Think about how you can setup your environment to do the non-phone activities that you want to do and then go setup those triggers. Your brain is still going to want to reach for your phone at times, but focus on trying other activities when you feel those triggers and ask yourself if they are satisfying activities that are a good alternative to using your phone.

Day 12: Download an App-Blocker

Using an app blocker can be useful to limit your access to apps you find useful, but also distracting. You can make lists within your app blocker of different apps and even schedule when those apps will be available.

Day 13: Set Boundaries

Establish "No-Phone Zones". These are physical areas where no phones are allowed. A great start would be the bedroom and dinner table.

Give your phone a wake-up time and maybe a bedtime as well. Decide when you will turn your phone on in the morning. A good practice is to get up at least an hour before you let your phone get up. It's a good idea to have a bedtime for your phone as well. You can either turn your phone completely off, use airplane mode, or use your app blocking app to schedule app restrictions for when you phone is not awake.

Day 14: Stop Phubbing

Stop using your phone when you are with other people. Using your phone while with other people or "Phubbing" is inconsiderate and gets in the way of building relationships. If you get a call or text while you are with someone else, the best policy is to ignore it. You can even do something extreme like shut down your phone, put it on airplane mode or silent whenever you

are with someone. If you do get a call or text you need to respond to, don't take it in the same room with other people.

Week 3: Reclaiming Your Brain

Day 15: Stop, Breath, and Be

When you are feeling the urge to pick up your phone, use the Stop, Breath, and Be method. Stop and take a breath. Then take some time to be. Use this time to notice what's going on around you, examine your emotions, and how your body feels. You can even use the WWW method we talked about earlier.

Day 16: Practice Pausing

Be deliberate about taking a break and pausing when you normally reach for distraction. It's important to learn to pause, but it can be difficult. Your brain may be uncomfortable with not being distracted, but if you keep practicing pausing from distraction you can learn to enjoy it and it can help you become more relaxed and creative.

Day 17: Exercise Your Attention Span

We need to train our brains to be able to focus. Create a daily practice of focusing on one thing for a period of time. It doesn't matter the activity is as much as that you are completely focused on it. Reading is a good activity to choose. Consider bringing focus into your daily life, stop doing multiple things at once and focus on your current activity.

Day 18: Meditate

Meditation is the art of learning to ignore everything else. Find something to meditate on and when your mind gets distracted (it will), bring your focus back to what you are meditating on. If you find you enjoy meditation try doing it every day.

Day 19: Prepare For Your Trial Separation

This is the day to prepare to be separated from your phone for 24 hours. The author lists all the practical steps you can take so you are ready to completely disconnect from your phone and other screens for 24 hours.

Days 20-21 Your Trial Separation

When the time comes, turn off your phone and put it away. Enjoy doing all the non-phone activities you can do. It may feel strange at first, but you will probably enjoy the change in routine.

Week 4 and Beyond

Day 22 Trial Separation Recap

Take some time to reflect and write about your experience without your phone. The author has some great question prompts to help you get started.

Day 23 Phast

It's important to continue to take times away from your phone. Consider scheduling these phone "phasts". They don't need to be 24 hours, but even shorter breaks from your phone can be helpful.

Day 24 Manage Your Invitations

Our brains are always inviting us to do things like check our phones. Often these invitations need to be turned down. Practice making a deliberate choice when your brain invites you to do something. This would be a great opportunity for Stop, Breath and Be. This gives you the space to make the best choice.

Day 25 Clean Up The Rest of Your Digital Life

There are lots of other things you can do to cleanup your digital life like: Take time to cleanup your emails and unsubscribe from everything you don't want. Set up driving mode on your phone. Consider unfollowing people you don't actually want to follow on your social media. Unlink your social media accounts that you are using to login to other services.

Day 26 Check Your Checking

If you get the urge to check your phone ask yourself what the best outcome would be from that urge. Then consider the likelihood of that outcome. More than likely the outcomes you usually get from checking your phone are negative or not highly positive. This can help you resist the urge to check your phone.

Day 27 Digital Sabbath Life Hacks

If you enjoyed your 24 hour break from your phone or found it beneficial, consider scheduling a regular "digital Sabbath". There are many different ways to create a break from completely not using your phone, using airplane mode, or setting up an old phone with only tools and no distractions.

Day 28 The Seven Phone Habits of Highly Effective People

Several habits are listed in this chapter that could be important. I think one of the most valuable ones is writing a list of your non phone activities. Another important habit would be practicing focusing your attention on one thing for longer periods of time.

Day 29 Keep Yourself On Track

It is important to schedule a monthly check in with yourself to see where you are at with your phone usage. Take that opportunity to refocus and make changes each month.

Day 30 Congratulations

Take some time to write yourself a note celebrating the changes you have made and what you are proud of. Learning to break up with your phone can make a positive difference in your life.

Review

This book was informative, enjoyable and life changing. I would highly recommend this book to anyone who has a smart phone, which is just about all of us. The first section of the book focused on how our phones are damaging our health. This was very informative and eye opening and gave me the motivation and desire to change how I used my phone so that I could improve my life.

The second section of the book is focused on how you can change your phone use. It is very practical and useful. After installing a tracking app on my phone and reviewing the data several days later, I realized I was using my phone much more than I thought. The section that was most impactful to me was turning off all my notifications. I had been partially doing this one app at a time, but going into my phone and turning them all off at once was extremely helpful! I also removed all my social media apps and it is working out well so far.

If you have a smart phone I would highly recommend reading this book. It will help you become more focused, less anxious, have more time to do the things you love and get more satisfaction out of life. This is a book I will revisit from time to time.

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