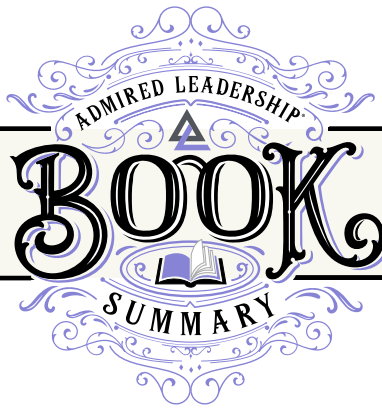BOOK SUMMARY

ADMIRED LEADERSHIP
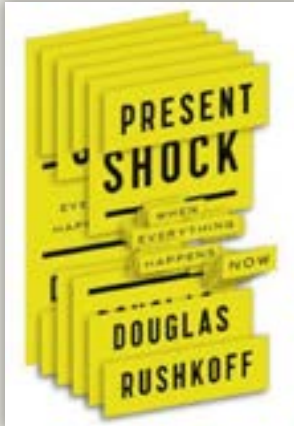
Eight Minutes, Not Eight Hours

November 2023

Present Shock

When Everything Happens Now

BOOK AUTHOR: **DOUGLAS RUSHKOFF**

Published 2013

Throughout the twentieth century and up until now, technology has progressed to allow humans to gather and store data and knowledge in unprecedented ways. It has also enabled us to connect faster in physical and virtual spaces. Unfortunately, however, technology has created a dissonance between our digital selves and our analog bodies, a phenomenon the author labels as 'present shock.' This phenomenon has created a continuous now where constant updates and information-overload impact our work-life balance, and more importantly our relationships with one another. Cultural, behavioral, and societal changes in the contemporary world suggest a breakdown of the traditional narrative and thought, and instead prioritize the continuous and ever-changing flow of updates and communication. To avoid individualism and media overconsumption, Rushkoff recommends that humans should live in the present moment by embracing our current surroundings and cherishing physical human connection.

Key Quote

"By dividing our attention between our digital extensions, we sacrifice our connection to the truer present in which we are living" (p. 75).

KEY POINTS AND CONCEPTS

How Technology Impacts the Virtual / Physical Self

Technology has made it so that humans can clone their identities on virtual platforms and on multiple networks. As a result, people on social media platforms learn to relate to our virtual selves as if they were the original (p. 72).

"Wherever our real-bodies may be, our virtual personae are being bombarded with information and missives" (p. 72).

We lose the right to choose when we allow digital technology to prevent us from achieving our natural and daily flow and rhythm (p. 115).

Humans have become more easily distracted by constant updates and access to information; it becomes difficult to plan, follow through on plans, and focus on our present surroundings (p. 4).

"All these interruptions, more than simply depleting our cognitive abilities, create the sense that we need to keep up with their impossible pace lest we lose touch with the present. These are live feeds, after all, pinging us almost instantaneously from every corner of the globe" (p. 74).

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It is a false goal to assume that if we catch up with the latest wave of information, we will be in the now. In fact, the "phantom vibration syndrome" – which generates continuous feeds, pings, and updates – leads us to lose focus and eventually burn out (pp. 74 - 99).

We are behavioristically doomed in believing that at any moment, something can become all-important; this method of viewing time is both flawed and narcissistic (p. 6).

How Technology Negatively Influences Society and Culture

Younger generations are more adapted to this lifestyle of media consumption, and their social and physical activities have become more individual and extreme through the use of video clips and images (p. 40).

Unlike traditional team rivalries, players individually compete for record-breaking statistics and take steroids to further personal ambition, gain lucrative endorsements, and gain admittance to the Hall of Fame (p. 41).

In the workplace, we give up our right to choose by letting technology disconnect us from what we may be doing in the present moment; this translates into less efficiency, productivity, and a lack of creative output (p. 98).

In the workplace, we give up our right to choose by letting technology disconnect us from what we may be doing in the present moment; this translates into less efficiency, productivity, and a lack of creative output.

Political and marketing campaigns encourage the trending impulsive behavior by utilizing advertising ploys to suggest we are living in the current now, when in reality, we are serving as targets for their political and commercial interests (p. 6).

Breakdown of the Traditional Narrative

24-hour networks and live feeds have allowed us to witness natural disasters and terrorist activity in slow motion and in real-time like Hurricane Katrina, Hurricane Sandy, 9/11, and the recent Paris attacks (p. 49).

The traditional narrative and goals are pushed aside as we surrender our minds to a false notion of what we believe to be real and immediate (p. 6).

Television networks have also adopted the impulsivity of TV drama in the form of reality TV and are beginning to reject traditional narratives and storylines. Producers benefit by not having to pay writers and actors, and instead place cameras in situations that are most likely to generate conflict (p. 35).

"We attempt to re-create the exhilaration and fall of traditional narrative with the increasingly lewd, provocative, or humiliating imagery of the reality TV spectacle," (p. 66).

Furthermore, contemporary luxuries such as on-Demand, DVR, Hulu, and Netflix all enable us to watch entire seasons of episodes in a single sitting; sponsors lose the ability to make us sit through commercials and we no longer have to wait for weekly new episodes (p. 36).

What Living in the Present Looks Like

Occupy Wall Street represents a post-narrative political movement in that the participants are not seeking a particular end goal, but an ongoing conversation that permeates different social circles, creating just as many questions as answers (p. 57).

Occupy's General Assembly further lives in real time through its adoption of Greek style methodology in that participants all engage in group discussion and ensure that every opinion is voiced and heard (p. 57).

Living in the present also means existing in real time; this very reward enables us to be creative, imaginative, and innovative beings (p. 119).

It is important to have physical connectedness because nonverbal forms of communication – such as head nodding in a conversation – sends a nerve signal to our brains that releases dopamine, and positive re-enforcement, which allows us to further our original train of thought (p. 126).

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Freedom to Choose

It is crucial to retrain our brains to value personal connection and live engagement over solo contemplation (p. 117).

Digital technology embodies the underlying promise of the freedom to choose; for example, electricity allows us to sleep when we want, asphalt gives us the ability to drive our cars where we want, and Prozac enables others to lead more fulfilling and happier lifestyles (p. 110).

"Email lives outside of time and can sit in the inbox until we are ready to read it. This should not be guilt provoking... [it will] form a stack, just like the stacks of processes in a computer program, and wait until we open it" (p. 117).

"Instead of succumbing to the schizophrenic cacophony of divided attention and temporal discon-nection, we can program our machines to conform to the pace of our operations" (p. 75).

If we coordinate our activities and exercises with our natural surroundings, we will subsequently be able to reduce stress, increase productivity, and foster greater human connectivity (p. 103).

Rushkoff, D. (2013) **Present Shock**: *When Everything Happens Now.* New York: Penguin Group.

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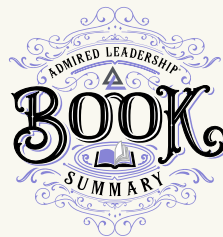
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