

"The user's guide your brain never came with."
– Ian Gilbert, Founder of Independent Thinking

NEIL PAVITT



BRAINHACK

**TIPS AND TRICKS
TO UNLEASH YOUR BRAIN'S
FULL POTENTIAL**



CAPSTONE
A Wiley Brand

Brainhack

Tips and tricks to unleash your brain's full potential

Neil Pavitt



CAPSTONE
A Wiley Brand

This edition first published 2016

© 2016 Neil Pavitt

Registered office

John Wiley and Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, United Kingdom

For details of our global editorial offices, for customer services and for information about how to apply for permission to reuse the copyright material in this book please see our website at www.wiley.com.

The right of the author to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, except as permitted by the UK Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Wiley publishes in a variety of print and electronic formats and by print-on-demand. Some material included with standard print versions of this book may not be included in e-books or in print-on-demand. If this book refers to media such as a CD or DVD that is not included in the version you purchased, you may download this material at booksupport.wiley.com. For more information about Wiley products, visit www.wiley.com.

Designations used by companies to distinguish their products are often claimed as trademarks. All brand names and product names used in this book and on its cover are trade names, service marks, trademark or registered trademarks of their respective owners. The publisher and the book are not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book. None of the companies referenced within the book have endorsed the book.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with the respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. It is sold on the understanding that the publisher is not engaged in rendering professional services and neither the publisher nor the author shall be liable for damages arising herefrom. If professional advice or other expert assistance is required, the services of a competent professional should be sought.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Pavitt, Neil, author.

Title: Brainhack : tips and tricks to unleash your brain's full potential/Neil Pavitt.

Description: Chichester, West Sussex, United Kingdom : John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2016. | Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2015038324 | ISBN 9780857086426 (pbk.)

Subjects: LCSH: Psychology, Applied. | Brain. | Cognition. | Mental efficiency.

Classification: LCC BF636 .P386 2016 | DDC 153.4—dc23

LC record available at <http://lcn.loc.gov/2015038324>

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-0-857-08642-6 (paperback) ISBN 978-0-857-08644-0 (ebk) ISBN 978-0-857-08643-3 (ebk)

Cover design: Wiley

Cover image: © gst/Shutterstock

Internal pages designed by Andy Prior Design Ltd

Set in 9/12pt Myriad Pro by Aptara, New Delhi, India

Printed in Great Britain by TJ International Ltd, Padstow, Cornwall, UK

"An incredible richness of insights and inspirational ideas."

**Menno Van Dijk, co-founder and MD of THNK,
School of Creative Leadership**

"Neil Pavitt writes the user's guide your brain never came with. Full of fascinating anecdotes and mind boggling research from across the world, he shows how our brains are fallible, gullible, malleable and, ultimately, incredible. We just need to learn how to use them. This book shows you how."

Ian Gilbert, Founder of Independent Thinking

"Cover-to-cover packed with wisdom, wrapped in fun and entertaining anecdotes. There are over 40 golden nuggets in this book, all easy to mine and own and apply to everyday life. A very rare thing indeed – a useful book for people who want to upgrade their brainpower."

Marc Lewis, Dean at The School Of Communication Arts

"This book is a must-read for anyone who wants to discover the full extent of their creative potential. It's jam-packed full of simple yet highly effective strategies and techniques that will 'sculpt' your brain and significantly impact the way you think and how you create – now and forever!"

Gabriella Goddard, Founder and CEO of Brainsparker App

"Neil Pavitt has a rare talent for making what could be difficult subjects accessible and simple to understand. His new book gives you the tools to train your brain and think smarter. Fascinating stuff. I learnt a lot."

Peter Freedman, Director of Thinking at Think Inc

"Neil Pavitt transforms scientific discoveries about how your brain works into wondrous stories that will fire up your imagination. You will form new neural pathways just by reading this book...and if you try his simple brainhacks you will develop the skills to optimize your brain."

Linda Naiman, Founder of Creativity At Work

"Full of counterintuitive ways to increase your creative potential."

Tony Davidson, ECD and Global Partner at Wieden + Kennedy

"A wonderfully inspirational book that can help us all to unleash our ideas on the world. If you want a book to support you through difficult creative/life periods, and to expand your work when all is going well, then I strongly recommend you try this."

Miles Hanson, Founder and CEO of The Collaboration Company

"Where you are now, and where you would like to be is called your potential. If you learn how to be at your best that gap will disappear. Read *Brainhack* very carefully. It's like a user manual for you to optimise you."

David Hieatt, Co-Founder of Hiut Denim Co and The Do Lectures

"*Brainhack* keeps the reader abreast with all the latest theories in neurology as well as telling some good stories about how the brain behaves. In 45 instructive 'brainhacks', Pavitt reveals how every one of us can make more of our brains. As a 'creativity professional' myself, I found tips and hints in this book that were new to me."

Patrick Collister, Creative Director, The Zoo – Google EMEA

For Kalya and Harry

“There are billions of neurons in our brains, but what are neurons? Just cells. The brain has no knowledge until connections are made between neurons. All that we know, all that we are, comes from the way our neurons are connected.”

Tim Berners-Lee

CONTENTS

Introduction	1
--------------	---

PART

1

THINKING SMARTER

1. Make a Done List	6
2. Change Your Memories	10
3. Be Kinder, Be Happier	16
4. Reward Upfront	18
5. Make a Better Impression	20
6. Exercise More to Make Your Brain Run Better	22
7. Let Your Body Do the Talking	24
8. Be More Musical	26
9. Don't Get Labelled	28



PART

2

GETTING STARTED

- | | |
|---|----|
| 10. See Things Differently | 36 |
| 11. Watch Cat Videos | 40 |
| 12. Don't Be Biased | 42 |
| 13. Practice With Purpose | 46 |
| 14. Stop Moaning | 50 |
| 15. Don't Get Stressed | 56 |
| 16. Make Fewer Decisions | 60 |
| 17. Count the Days,
Minutes and Hours | 64 |
| 18. Look on the Bright Side | 66 |

PART

3

PROBLEM SOLVING

- | | |
|---------------------------|----|
| 19. Take a Break | 70 |
| 20. Just Start | 72 |
| 21. Take Away the Context | 74 |
| 22. Keep Asking Why | 78 |
| 23. Sleep Well | 82 |
| 24. Be More Sarcastic | 86 |
| 25. Take Notes | 90 |
| 26. Notice Your Mistakes | 94 |
| 27. Write by Hand | 98 |

PART

4

IDEA GENERATION

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|-----|
| 28. Map It Out | 102 |
| 29. Run a Brain Marathon | 104 |
| 30. Do Something Different | 108 |
| 31. Don't Try to Have
Good Ideas | 114 |
| 32. Think Like a Child | 116 |
| 33. Don't Finish | 120 |
| 34. Take Part in Name
Calling | 122 |
| 35. Stay Focused | 128 |
| 36. Work Messy | 132 |



PART 5

BREAKING THROUGH AND INNOVATING

37. Enjoy Being Blocked	136
38. Think Like Goldilocks	140
39. Take a Walk, Have a Shower	145
40. Switch Off	150
41. Think When You're Tired	154
42. Just Say It	158
43. Give It the Overnight Test	160
44. Plan a Pre-Mortem	164
45. Make a Story of It	168
References	174
Image credits	177
About the Author	178
Acknowledgements	179

INTRODUCTION

Are you ready to become a hacker?

Probably the first thought that comes to most people's minds when they hear the term "hacker", is of someone who seeks and exploits flaws in a computer system or network.

In a way, that's what this book aims to help you to do. It's just that the network you're trying to find a flaw in, is your own brain.

Amazingly 95% of your brain's day-to-day activity is unconscious. One hundred billion neurons, one hundred trillion connections and we're only in control of a tiny 5% of it.

The forty-five brainhacks in this book aren't going to suddenly give you control over huge swathes of your unconscious. That would be a nightmare. It's unconscious for a reason; the last thing you want, is to constantly have to think about putting one foot in front of the other every time you go for a walk.

But what these brainhacks will do, is open a window onto some of the activities we do unconsciously and reveal some of the biases our conscious mind has. The aim of this is to help you become more productive, more creative and help you see more clearly why you do what you do.

The purpose of the book is not to give you deep insights into how the brain works, but to give you practical tips and techniques that you can actually benefit from.

All the brainhacks in this book can be read independently, so if you do want to dip in and out, that's fine. However, I have tried to give them an order, so they work better if you read them chronologically.

The first two sections cover general ways to make your brain work better for you, as well as how to use your time more wisely and be

more productive. The last three are about how to be more focused in your thinking, how to solve problems better and create more innovative ideas.

One of the most important things to remember is how flexible the brain is. You really can change how you think and act. There aren't analytic people, creative people, focused thinkers and dreamers. These are qualities a person might have, but they're not set in stone.

Our brains actually physically change shape depending on how we use them. It's called neuroplasticity.

The most famous example of this is with London taxi drivers. They have to spend years learning the streets of London before they get their badge. The effect of this is that the area in the brain that deals with spatial awareness, the hippocampus, is larger in London taxi drivers. However, once they retire, their hippocampus returns to its normal size.

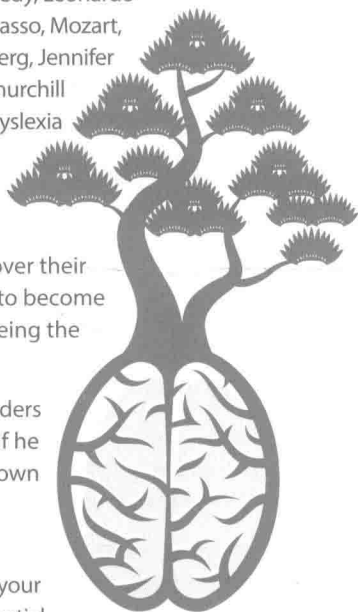
Now think of people with dyslexia. They might have learning difficulties, but they certainly don't have achieving difficulties.

Einstein, Beethoven, Steve Jobs, J.F. Kennedy, Leonardo Da Vinci, Agatha Christie, Walt Disney, Picasso, Mozart, Jamie Oliver, Cath Kidston, Steven Spielberg, Jennifer Aniston, Richard Branson and Winston Churchill are/were all dyslexics. Also people with dyslexia are also four times more likely than the rest of the population to become self-made millionaires.

Dyslexics' minds have to adapt to get over their difficulties with language, by learning to become more adept at thinking visually and seeing the bigger picture.

Santiago Ramón y Cajal, one of the founders of neuroscience said, "Any man could, if he were so inclined, be the sculptor of his own brain."

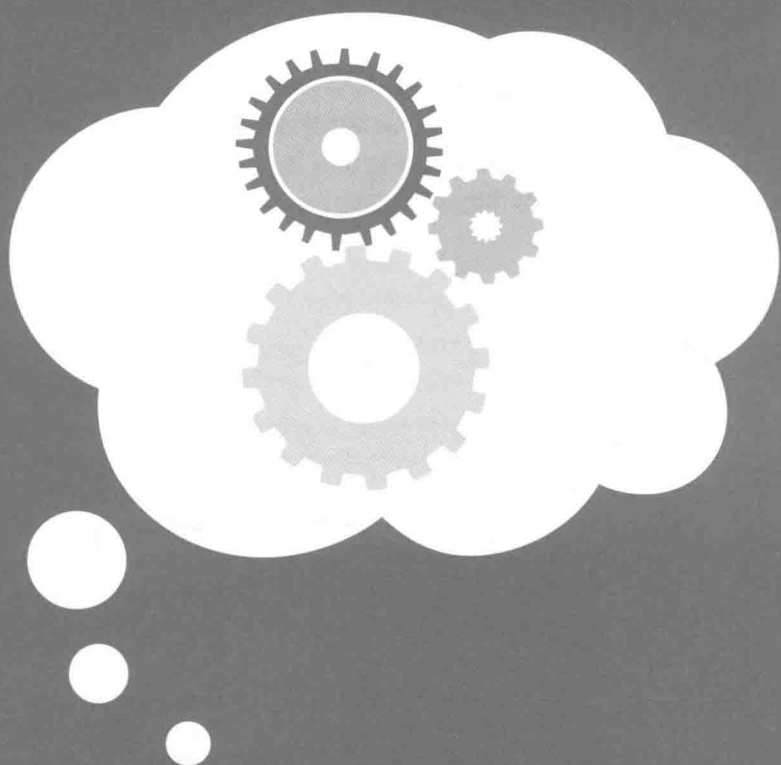
And that's what I aim to do with these brainhacks. Give you the tools to sculpt your brain, to help you to unleash its full potential.



And it really is about sculpting. At two years of age, we have the most synapses (the connectors between neurons) that we'll ever have. By the time we've reached seventy, that number is likely to have halved. In between then, in the same way a gardener prunes a shrub, our brains are shaped by how we use them.

I really hope you find these brainhacks interesting and useful, and hopefully they'll lead to you doing some neural topiary of your own.

“In the same way a gardener prunes a shrub, how we use our brain shapes it.”



PART I

Thinking Smarter

**General ways to
make your brain
work better for you**

Make a Done List

"What you get by achieving your goals is not as important as what you become by achieving your goals."

Zig Ziglar

Before you read this, I want you to leaf through your work diary.

Is there anything inspiring in there? Were you impressed by how much you've achieved?

I know when I look through old work diaries, all I find are lists of meetings and to-do lists.

Even on your phone or laptop, there are endless productivity apps enticing you in to make to-do lists in new and different ways.

The trouble with to-do lists, is I don't think they make us any more productive. I don't think they excite and stimulate our minds to want to get things done.

Usually we don't finish them anyway, which immediately has a negative effect.

Now I'm not saying we should do away with to-do lists. We all need reminders of what we've got to do. What I'm saying is, they serve a useful purpose of reminding us of things we need to do, but they're not actually going to make us more productive.

What you need is a done list. Seeing what you've actually achieved will spur you on. Of course, you may look back and think how little you have achieved, but hopefully this will also spur you on even more.

