

# ION VALIS

*Strategies for Acceleration and Reinvention*

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## **Key Points**

- **September's theme is "Modern Problems"**
- **Be like the All-Blacks and have rituals**
- **Say "I don't" instead of "I can't"**
- **Read *Irresistible* and *The Nature Fix***
- **Beware of "The End of Endings"**

This month, I'm tackling some of our uniquely modern problems - and exploring ways how to solve them. *Read on ...*

## Acceleration

### *Have Rituals to Achieve Peak Performance*

You probably don't watch much professional rugby, but if you have ever caught a match involving the [New Zealand All-Blacks](#) you no doubt were stunned by their pre-game ritual, [the Haka](#). Drawing on their Maori roots, the team performs an elaborate war dance designed to motivate themselves and intimidate their opponents.

Staying with rugby, expert penalty goal kickers like Jonny Wilkinson have [elaborate routines](#) they use to clear away the distractions of 50,000 screaming fans so that they can focus on splitting the uprights. There is a good **reason** why these top teams and athletes **go through these specific steps: it translates into peak performance.**

We should all take a page from their playbook. Cal Newport in his excellent manifesto [Deep Work](#) recommends that we adopt rituals to mark the beginning of intense, concentrated work sessions (getting into "Flow") but also that we symbolically celebrate their end with our own shutdown sequence. Newport actually mimics his computer, announcing (to no one but himself!) "Powering Down" almost like a mantra. **This can be particularly helpful if you work from home, or if - like almost everyone these days - your work follows you home through your iPhone.** It may sound hokey, but marking our starts and stops will, over time, make you **more productive on command and achieve closure** on your work day.

**Conclusion: Be like the All-Blacks and have your own "Haka".**

## Thinking Tool

***Want to kick a bad habit? Try saying "I don't" rather than "I can't."***

I'm a huge believer in the power of habits. Some of mine are good (I go to the gym 4 days a week without fail) and some are bad (I crave Starbucks Iced Mochas at precisely [2:22 pm](#) every afternoon!). Come to think of it, these two habits may be related ... Either way, we all probably struggle with breaking bad routines and setting positive ones.

Here's a thought: consider re-framing the behaviour subtly. Instead of saying to yourself "I **can't** have an Iced Mocha every afternoon", pivot to "I **don't** have Iced

Mochas every afternoon.” It may seem superficial, but that slight change can make all the difference. Rather than focusing on what you’re giving up, you’re doubling down on how you’re in control.

**Conclusion: The words you use determine the lens through which you see the world. Pick the ones that are most helpful to what you’re trying to achieve.**

***Pair this with the excellent [Way of Life mobile App](#).*** Sometimes, frames aren’t enough. I’ve had a lot of fun - and success - adopting new habits with this tool, which gamifies the process by which you commit to meditating more or snacking less. The app is free for up to 3 habits and \$6 for the premium version (about the price of a Medium Iced Mocha; just sayin’ ...)

## **Binge-Worthy**

**[Irresistible: The Rise of Addictive Technology and the Business of Keeping us Hooked](#) | Adam Alter (2017)**

This book is a wake-up call for all of us who have ever looked up from a deep dive into our Facebook feed to realize that we just wasted two hours of our lives. The argument Alter makes is that **these services are fiendishly designed to hook and keep you**. The book is at its strongest in diagnosing the scope of the problem at both the individual and societal level. The average human attention span (8 seconds) is now actually lower than a goldfish’s (9 seconds). The typical North American spends a **quarter of their waking lives on their phones - more than any daily activity except sleeping!** It’s also chilling when it reminds us that these technologies are in their infancy; if we get mesmerized by an Instagram feed, how are we going to fare in the coming world of AR (augmented reality) and VR (virtual reality)?

**Conclusion: “Endless” is the business model upon which many of the most successful products and companies today are built. We need to be mindful of what they are doing to our minds but also create structural checks to short-circuit their addictive properties.**

***Pair this with [The Nature Fix by Florence Williams](#):*** *The good news:* I devoured this book while on vacation this summer at the lake. *The bad news?* I read it on a Kindle. That about sums up the challenge we all face when dealing with these

devilishly addictive devices. The book's message was both compelling and clear: **we need regular doses of nature in our lives** - especially in today's hyper-connected world. This is not necessarily a new idea, as she points out: "Aristotle believed walks in the open air clarified the mind. Darwin, Tesla and Einstein walked in gardens and groves to help them think." But Williams' call to action has **taken on a new urgency in today's screen-centric existence**. In an era where one in four middle-aged American women takes or has taken an antidepressant and one in fourteen children takes a drug for emotional or behavioral problems, getting outside is part of the answer. Studies have shown that **spending time in nature calms us, make us happier and more creative while leaving us feeling more refreshed and energized**. By introducing us to the practice of *shinrin yoku* ("forest bathing" or taking long walks in nature) in Japan to theories of biophilia (that our brains respond innately, powerfully and positively to natural stimuli), this book should prompt you to put away your phone and put on your hiking boots ...

**Conclusion: Turning off and getting out is not a luxury but a necessity - for your health, happiness and productivity.**

## **Pop Philosophy:**

### ***The End of Endings***

*Have you noticed how nothing ever really ends anymore?*

Today's technologies are increasingly irresistible. Our favourite apps have feeds that go on forever, and this one design feature makes it almost impossible to not to get lost in them. They're literally endless. When you think about it, more and more aspects of our lives are characterized by these infinite loops ...

Continue [here](#) (5 minute read)

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*Cheers,*

***Ion***