

HEALTH HIJACKERS

Who They Are
and
How to Stop Them

Introducing the Zig-Zag Solution™



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Is It Worth It?, and *Roll a Recipe**

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Labyrinth Publishing Works
P.O. Box 83
Lynnwood, Washington 98046-0083

ISBN-13: 978-0-9911440-3-7

First Printing: October 2020

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Labyrinth Publishing Works

To my mother — who told me when I was a young girl, I should become a writer. I'm just sorry she didn't live long enough to see it happen.

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ISTP — The Artisan (Introvert, Sensor, Thinker, Perceiver)

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Introduction

There are times when you read a book, watch a television program, or listen to a speaker and get this a-ha moment, a moment you find so inspiring you have to share it (and thus this book). That happened to me while watching the PBS program, *Hacking Your Mind*, hosted by the very entertaining Jacob (Jake) Ward. As I listened to what Ward was sharing, I kept saying, “yes, yes, yes”. I totally understood where he was going — that we don’t appreciate how most of our decisions are made on “autopilot”, also known as “*fast thinking*”, one of our many hijackers.

As much as we would like to think we are rational beings, if we took the time to analyze our actions, known as “*slow thinking*”, we might view our actions differently, wondering why we do such dumb things — like going on one more diet; skipping that walk; allowing that person to get you mad; shopping until you’ve maxed out your credit card, and the list goes on. With *slow thinking*, we could actually fight the hijacking of our health. Don’t we deserve it?

Every one of those actions from going on a diet to maxing out your credit card required a decision. In fact, there isn’t an hour of the day where we aren’t making a decision about something, whether as simple as choosing what to wear to work or deciding what to invest our money in. Decision-making should be viewed as a great privilege. Being free to make decisions and following through with them can be life-enhancing and be a key to our overall happiness. It puts us in charge of our own lives. It means we’re not living on autopilot and hoping for the best.

Then how is it that hijackers manage to take over control?

As the title promised, I will be sharing with you who the hijackers of your health are (by the way, YOU are included in the list) and how they manage to do it. Then I’ll show you how to use the clever *slow thinking* method called the *Zig-Zag Solution™* to deal with those hijackers. They’re very good at tapping into your autopilot mode. However, by the end of this book, you will know how to put them in their place. No need for using willpower to try to adhere to some prescribed way of living handed down by some self-proclaimed guru. That’s not a way to live. No, you’ll be in full control all the way, armed to fight and win the battle.

This approach is different than anything you’ve ever encountered because it’s based on personality typing — yours and the principles of type. It’s also based on your setting the rules, not me. With the knowledge you’ll acquire in this book along with *slow thinking*, you will be in charge. No one is going to be with you for every second of every day to tell you whether you’re doing this thing right or that thing wrong. It’s up to you to make health happen and this book will show you how.

The Firewall to Health Hacking

Just as we have firewalls to protect our computers from being hacked, we need firewalls against our health being hacked and hijacked, both from outside sources as well as from ourselves. Living on autopilot (*fast thinking*) has allowed our firewalls to become porous and penetrable. We have become so vulnerable to outside influences (aka “hijackers”) such as food manufacturers, marketers, diet products, health apps, Mrs. Fields’® cookie smells As you read this book, you’ll learn what your weak points are, which are allowing your health to be hijacked. You’ll also learn how to plug those holes so you’re in control of your health.



I've leaned on the works of such people as Daniel Kahneman, an Israeli psychologist and behavioral economist and recipient of the 2002 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences, Amos Tversky, an Israeli cognitive and mathematical psychologist who worked closely with Kahneman, Richard Thaler, also a recipient of the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences in 2017 and economic psychologist, along with Cass Sunstein, an American legal scholar and professor at Harvard Law School (all of whom I will talk about in more depth later in the book). Kahneman and Tversky came up with the theory of *fast* and *slow thinking*, which Kahneman talks about in great detail in his book, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein also contributed to my thinking with their work on the biases people have that interfere with the choices they make. Most of all, with my being a certified practitioner of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® (MBTI® - personality typing), I want you to understand what the MBTI® is all about, learn about your own type, and how you will be using type in your pursuit of *slow thinking*.

Just as a business would bring in an expert to clean up the mess a hacker has done to their computer system, you will become your own expert in cleaning up the mess that health hackers have done to your health. You'll also find out how you can be your own worst enemy. When you use *fast thinking* to make decisions, you're letting your firewall down, allowing it to be accessible for hijacking.

You have your own personal reason for reading this book. Do you need to lose weight? Has your doctor told you that you have heart disease or diabetes? Have you not been running at your optimal best? Maybe you don't seem to have enough energy and wondering why. Maybe none of the above apply to you, but you know that stress is making your life miserable and you worry what it's doing to your health. Are you worried you may continue your family's genetic health history? Granted, each health issue has its own "medical" fix. However, there is a universal approach to all of these issues and it starts in your head.

Being on Autopilot

From a health perspective, *autopilot* is another name for *habits*. When those habits are working for you, keep them. However, if they aren't, then continuing to do them, wishing for things to change, is pretty close to the definition of insanity — "Doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results." Our environment, food manufacturers, even our friends and family tap into and rely on our living on autopilot, something Ward refers to as "hacking your mind" and to which I refer to as "hijacking your health". As I was watching the program, I was appalled by the amount of control these habits have over us.

To be fair, as I just said, some habits are good to have. I will happily live on autopilot when it comes to flossing and brushing my teeth. I don't even have to think about it. In that regard, that's the good part about autopilot. However, my husband "trained" me to expect that all dinners will end with dessert. That's a habit I'm sorry to have acquired. He teases that when he was just a toddler, he pointed to a spoon and asked his mom, "What's for this?" and thus started a lifelong relationship with dessert.

For over 30 years now, I've been working with personality typing based on the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator®, having written many books on the subject of type and health (check them out on <https://www.advantagediets.com>). Watching this PBS program reaffirmed what I've been saying and writing about for years — your actions are based on who you are, and, in turn, how you make decisions. No one type has decision-making down perfectly as evidenced by the many unhealthy decisions people make. However, after you learn the *slow thinking* approach that I call the "Zig-Zag Solution™", you'll be better equipped to fight the hijackers of your health.

Decision Science

Habits, as defined by cognitive psychologists, are “automatic behaviors triggered by situational cues”, the *fast thinking* that Ward was talking about in the program. Every day, we make hundreds of decisions that we aren’t even consciously aware of. Sadly, many of those unhealthy decisions are controlled by others or even by our unconscious mind, all part of our world of hijackers. In this book, I hope to help you take back control of your life from these hijackers so your decision-making is in your best interests.

Why are our minds so vulnerable to being hacked and hijacked? It’s almost like you need to have “anti-virus software” to protect your mind from being hacked into. There are systems that power our decisions. It’s become such a major field that it’s been given a name — “decision science”. Back in the early 2000s, the greatest contributors to this new field were Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky. I started learning more about them by reading the book, *The Undoing Project*, by Michael Lewis. Through their research, Kahneman and Tversky tried to show that we are hardwired to make some really serious mistakes (not intentionally but naturally). Instead of feeling ashamed of being fallible because of this wiring, though, they wanted to figure out how we could correct for it.

When I read this, I thought of the many overweight people who feel ashamed of their weight. Many believe there must be something morally wrong with them or mentally deficient to have gotten to be so heavy. Maybe too many of us who were raised on episodes of Star Trek believe Mr. Spock to be correct when he said “we should be logical, flawlessly logical”. Kahneman and Tversky set out to prove that Mr. Spock was an outlier. Most people aren’t “flawlessly logical” because that thinking process, i.e. *slow thinking*, requires ample time devoted to it to be successful. Instead, according to Kahneman and Tversky, most people employ *fast thinking*.

Fast thinking is non-conscious, intuitive, effortless, shaped by a gut feel, spontaneous, mindless. In other words, fast thinkers operate on autopilot, just acting without pre-thought. That isn’t to say that *fast thinking* is bad, especially when you’re in a situation that requires a snap decision. In some situations, we’d say we’re in a “fight-or-flight” mode. And thank goodness we have that capacity when being chased down by a tiger! However, always being in fight-or-flight mode can be very stressful (your body doesn’t need an endless supply of cortisol) and your snap decision made at such times may come back to haunt you later. However, don’t ignore the many good habits you have (You do have good habits, don’t you?), which are being done on *fast thinking*.

Autopilot consists of habits that have been built up over time, often based on intuitions or previous experiences. Even emotions may determine our actions (Are we happy? Sad? Upset?). The area in the brain that controls our autopilot decisions is one of the oldest areas of the brain. It developed so long ago that we could never get rid of it or should we want to. But we have other ways to control the brain that can override those negative autopilot reactions. What I’m talking about is that we need to become more **conscious** of what we do rather than relying on the **unconscious** part of the brain that deals with autopilot actions. In other words, we need to resort to *slow thinking*.

Slow thinking is more conscious, time-consuming, logical, mindful, and yes, sometimes energy-draining. It means you’ll have to give up the multi-tasking to focus. Interestingly, if you were hooked up to a blood pressure cuff when you’re in the throes of *slowing thinking*, you’d see a slight change in your blood pressure and pulse. Even your pupils become dilated. You’re having to exert some effort to come up with an answer. But, at least, it’s good energy that’s being expended, not nervous energy. And the results will be well worth your time.

Your Slow Thinking Loves Fast Thinking

Your *slow thinking* requires energy and effort. Kahneman even accuses *slow thinking* of being “indolent” and lazy. Every time you allow *fast thinking* to take over, your *slow thinking* doesn’t have to work. I can

hear the cheers coming from your *slow thinking* process. “Yay, we get some time off.” But consider what that means in terms of healthy eating decisions. Unless your *fast thinking* has already established healthy habits that you perform on autopilot, you’re looking at a date with Wendy’s or Burger King. As you drive up to one of these fast-food restaurants, your *slow thinking* has wandered off, lost in thought about what you’ll be doing later in the evening, what teams are playing football tonight on television, what tasks need finishing up on that project at work. When the cashier asks through the speaker, “What will you have?”, you say without taking a pause to think about it, “Make that a Double Whopper and a shake.”

There are times, though, when you know *fast thinking* is not the way to go. Let’s say you’re visiting England for the first time. You don’t know where you’re going and, even worse, you’ve never driven on the left side of the road. I promise you your *slow thinking* is on high alert. Each time you have to make a right turn from the left lane, your guard is going to be way up to make sure you end up on the left side of the street onto which you’re turning, avoiding your American habit that would have you on the right side of the street instead. At the end of the day, you’re going to notice how exhausted you are. *Slow thinking* requires a lot of energy. But it also will have saved you from making any major mistakes that could have proven fatal.

After a day of driving in England, you’ll understand why you tend to rely on *fast thinking* most of the time. It’s just so much easier (although not always productive). Because you wanted to visit England, you were willing to go through all that *slow thinking*. How about your health? Are you willing to give up some of that *fast thinking* for healthy results?

Cue the Habits

I’m sure you don’t like to hear that we’re all puppets having our strings pulled by the environment, people, or situations around us. That makes it sound like we have no control over our habits. However, depending upon the cue and how we’ve learned to react to it can mean the difference between a healthy habit and a not-so-healthy habit. My habit of flossing is cued by going up to bed and getting ready to shower. My husband’s habit of desserts is cued by the taking away of the dinner plates from the table.

If we stepped back from our lives and watched our lives as if we were spectators, we’d be appalled to see how Pavlovian we are. Back in the 1890s, a Russian physiologist named Ivan Pavlov showed how classical conditioning could get dogs to salivate even without the presence of food. What he did was to present dogs with a bowl of food, at the same time ringing a bell. When that connection between the food and the bell were well established, Pavlov would ring the bell but present no food. And yet, the dogs still salivated. They had been conditioned to the bell and a habit had been created.

Sorry to say that we humans are no different. So much of our lives are run on habits formed by connections between an action and a cue. Take the example of people who go to the movies and always buy a box of popcorn. Maybe the first time they asked themselves or whomever was with them, “Should we get some popcorn?” They did. And then the next time, maybe the question again was asked and the popcorn purchased. At some point, just walking into the lobby of the theater was the cue to go get popcorn. At least the first time the question was asked, some *slow thinking* was involved. A question was asked and considered. Eventually, though, these people were on autopilot, buying the popcorn with *fast thinking*. They were hijacked by cues and habits.

Let’s say you’re standing in line at Starbucks, waiting to pick up your double tall mocha latté. What do you do? You pull out your phone and check your Instagram account, maybe Facebook or Twitter to find out what’s changed in the fifteen minutes since you last pulled out your phone. Your phone has become your companion during those boring moments of waiting. It’s now a habit.

You might believe that your addiction to your devices isn’t your fault. It must be the fault of device manufacturers having made the experiences so compelling that your device habit is just a natural result.

We could also say the same thing about the thousands and thousands of food items that food manufacturers have created, not to mention all the fast-food restaurant items. If food manufacturers were being honest, they'd admit they have manipulated the fat, sugar, and salt profiles of their foods to maximize our taste experience, bringing along with it the maximizing of our waistlines and the food manufacturers' bottom line. (You're just starting to meet some of your hijackers.)

In his book, *Salt, Sugar, Fat*, Michael Morris shares the inside scoop on a meeting that took place in Minneapolis on April 8, 1999. Eleven men, heads of America's largest food companies (such as Pillsbury, Kraft, General Mills, Nabisco, Nestlé, Procter & Gamble, Coca-Cola and Mars), met secretly to discuss the growing concern about obesity. The news media were starting to point fingers at these companies for producing foods that were potentially causing the obesity epidemic in our country. As much as these companies wanted to blame the public for their wanton overconsumption, the rise in the number of overweight and obese individuals couldn't just be attributed to lack of willpower or some personal flaws.

Even children were vulnerable to the appeal of the sugared cereals and Oreos® that were now mega-stuffed. However, it wasn't simply that food manufacturers were changing the profiles of the foods they created. They also were spending billions of dollars on advertising and marketing. Now it wasn't just our taste buds being hijacked, it was also our minds. This was especially true for children seeing ads on television for their favorite foods. Grocery stores were very accommodating to these food companies by putting those unhealthy foods at the eye level of children. As their harried parents rushed through the grocery aisles to get the shopping done so they wouldn't be late for getting their kids to soccer practice, a long whiney cry from a child "Pleasssse, can we get the _____" would find that product in the cart and out the door. Who had time to stop and *slow think*, asking, "Do we really need this?"

I don't want you to think that all cues lead to unhealthy actions. They don't. Take the example of my flossing that is cued when I go up to bed. Sometimes the day of the week can be a cue for taking some action. My husband and I tend to do the housework on Sundays. Fridays are "movie nights" when we watch DVDs or streaming. Maybe you put things aside that you want to donate to charity. When the designated corner of the garage gets full you know it's time to pack it up in your car and take a drive over to your favorite donation site.

What cues are dictating or determining your life?

It's Not Hopeless

If you believe that the habits you have are bad for you, but questioning whether you can change them, let me assure you that all is not hopeless. While you may be living on autopilot most of the time, you can learn to use *slow thinking* to make changes in your life where it counts. Not every decision requires *slow thinking*. The sooner you exchange your unhealthy habits for healthy ones and convert those healthy ones into habits, you'll find yourself needing to use *slow thinking* less often.

Here's a perfect example. You're hungry. In front of you sits a fresh green salad topped with avocados, tomatoes, carrots, pumpkin seeds, and balsamic vinegar salad dressing. Right next to that sits a slice of deep chocolate ganache-cloaked cake.



Your gut feeling would tell you “Go for the cake”, but your reasoning would tell you “Go for the healthy salad.” Guess what? Your *fast thinking* is going to go for the cake, not even giving your *slow thinking* time to weigh in on this. As it turns out, the brain is wired in such a way that it registers taste information before health information. That makes sense when you think of the evolution of humans. They needed to know that something wasn’t going to kill them. Most of the time taste would alert them to dangerous foods. (I’ve always wondered who volunteered to try new foods back in the caveman days to find out whether they were safe to eat!) However, in our world and time, *slow thinking* has to take a role in that decision.

No question that autopilot is fast and easy to use. Why not rely on it? I’d say that if you find your autopilot decisions are causing you to have health issues, emotional issues, or financial issues, it’s time to slow down your thinking. I’m just saying — your decision!

Are You Ready?

First, I want you to determine whether you’re ready to change. Trying to change something you’re not ready to change is just going to backfire. I turn to the book, *Changing for Good*, by James Prochaska, John Norcross, and Carlo Diclemente. For them, it’s a matter of identifying what Stage of Change you’re at. Which level sounds right for you?

“Who, me, have a problem?” At this stage, a person can’t even see that he or she has a problem. That’s why people who’ve been told by a loved one to lose weight won’t probably be successful — it wasn’t even their idea. Or maybe someone who has stress issues is being told to see a psychologist. Of course, it’s possible for one to deny that there is a problem or place the blame elsewhere. (“It’s my genes.” “My mother forced me to clean my plate and now I can’t break the habit.” “My work is so stressful.”) I can see *fast thinking* at work here. Are you at this stage? (I’m hoping because you’re reading this book, you’re further along. And if not, maybe this book will get you there faster.)

“Don’t rush me. I’m thinking about it.” At this stage, people are willing to admit that they’re overweight or have unhealthy habits that need changing, wonder what caused it, and will begin to think about how to fix it. But again, it’s doubtful they’ll tune into *slow thinking* for this. What you will see is a lot of procrastinating. You can see why getting started will often be challenging because people don’t want to risk failing. Are you at this stage?

“Okay. I’m looking into it.” At this stage, one is getting closer to actually doing something. Some people start to make their intent public. Others will keep it to themselves until they’re ready to actually take action. Much of this depends upon their personality type. Thoughts of how to go about changing start to surface. Are you at this stage?

“Let the games begin. I’m charged up and ready to go.” This is the exciting stage. You’re finally ready to do something. Of course, it will take time and energy. This is the step at which you must “break habits.” And you’ll be breaking them by switching from your usual *fast thinking* to *slow thinking*.

“Just keep on, keepin’ on.” This may be the most important stage — and maybe the most difficult. It will take a great deal of commitment on your part, a continued heightened awareness of what you’re doing (keep up on that *slow thinking*), and a realization that none of this can happen overnight. Yet, it is also a time when the results of your *slow thinking* are now being converted to habits — healthy habits that you can start to experience on autopilot.

“It’s working. It’s really working.” At this stage you should no longer have to police yourself, consciously watching your every move, and worrying about some possible misstep. Your *fast thinking* now includes a lot of healthy habits that you can experience on autopilot. Yay! What you’ve learned should have become a part of you. This isn’t deprivation or avoidance. You’re living life normally as a fit person.

The Anti-Hijacking Approach

Here’s what you have to look forward to in this book. With my background and experience in personality typing, I’m going to introduce you to personality typing and how much influence it has over your health and the decisions you make. My emphasis will be on the preferences that make up type because they’re involved in the *Zig-Zag Solution™*. You’ll have the opportunity to take the Personality Profile Questionnaire at the end of the book to determine what your type is. There are 16 personality types, each with its own strengths and weaknesses.

After you understand type and the preferences in type, you then learn about the anti-hijacking approach called the *Zig-Zag Solution™*. This is *slow thinking* at its best. I’m hoping that learning this anti-hijacking approach will allow you to take control of what’s hijacking your health and be the healthier for it.