



Carrots and Sticks: Unlock the Power of Incentives to Get Things Done

Ian Ayres

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Could you lose weight if you put \$20,000 at risk? Would you finally set up your billing software if it meant that your favorite charity would earn a new contribution? If you've ever tried to meet a goal and came up short, the problem may not have been that the goal was too difficult or that you lacked the discipline to succeed. From giving up cigarettes to increasing your productivity at work, you may simply have neglected to give yourself the proper incentives.

In **Carrot and Sticks**, Ian Ayres, the *New York Times* bestselling author of **Super Crunchers**, applies the lessons learned from behavioral economics—the fascinating new science of rewards and punishments—to introduce readers to the concept of “commitment contracts”: an easy but high-powered strategy for setting and achieving goals already in use by successful companies and individuals across America. As co-founder of the website stickK.com (where people have entered into their own “commitment contracts” and collectively put more than \$3 million on the line), Ayres has developed contracts—including the one he honored with himself to lose more than twenty pounds in one year—that have already helped many find the best way to help themselves at work or home. Now he reveals the strategies that can give you the impetus to meet your personal and professional goals, including how to

- motivate your employees
- create a monthly budget
- set and meet deadlines
- improve your diet
- learn a foreign language
- finish a report or project you've been putting off
- clear your desk

Ayres shares engaging, often astounding, real-life stories that show the carrot-and-stick principle in action, from the compulsive sneezer who needed a “stick” (the potential loss of \$50 per week to a charity he didn’t like) to those who need a carrot with their stick (the *New York Times* columnist who quit smoking by pledging a friend \$5,000 per smoke . . . if she would do the same for him). You’ll learn why you might want to hire a “professional nagger” whom you’ll do anything to avoid—no, your spouse won’t do!—and how you can “hand-tie” your future self to accomplish what you want done now. You’ll find out how a New Zealand ad exec successfully “sold his smoking addiction,” and why Zappos offered new employees \$2,000 to quit cigarettes.

As fascinating as it is practical, as much about human behavior as about how to change it, **Carrots and Sticks** is sure to be one of the most talked-about books of the year.

From the Hardcover edition.

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From Reader Review Carrots and Sticks: Unlock the Power of Incentives to Get Things Done for online ebook

Jordan Lombard says

Fascinating and informative. A must read for those struggling with commitments.

Shubham Garg says

'A' is a small apple. 'B' is a BIG apple.
B is bigger than A. A is smaller than B.
B must be heavier than A. B must have more volume than A.

If you felt like all the conclusions drawn were obvious from the first line, this book is not for you.
The book tells you everything you already know.

We value short term rewards more than long term ones and punishments are cheaper than rewards. Summary completed.

Claire says

Interesting, and I'll keep stickK.com in mind if I ever find there is a commitment I REALLY want to keep but don't have the intrinsic motivation to fulfill. One would hope that if something truly was REALLY important to me I'd be able to achieve it without the sticks offered on stickK, but we are all human and at times weak, perhaps such a formal commitment would prevent the 'slippery slope' action that many of my less formal commitments fall prey to.

I guess the above indicates that I feel this book is a bit of a sales-pitch, which is distasteful. Another distasteful thing is that there's lots of title-dropping in this book, Harvard professor this, Yale professor that. Sheesh, Ian, I got it, you're a professor at Yale Law and are in that Ivy circle.

That said, this was an interesting read, and I learned several nuggets of information, which I'll list here, mostly to jog my memory later: A) Many of us find it hard to wait for a better option when we could have an adequate option now; this is pretty much at the route of most weak-will mistakes. B) You can disable choice by making the option of not following the commitment too bad to accept (or conversely reward for following it too good to refuse). C) By putting small things at stake you can only guide daily choice. D) You can increase your future self's intrinsic motivation by proving (memorably) what you're willing to sacrifice today in order to achieve something. E) Giving yourself a virtual head-start on your goal can make it seem more achievable. F) It is likely that on any given day we have a limited supply of self-control; to meet our commitments and live better lives we can either increase our supply or decrease the demands placed on it (which includes making some things automatic). G) Remember that no one is perfect, focus on what matters most.

Aimee says

I won an uncorrected proof of this book in a First Reads giveaway.

I am giving this book a generous three-stars. Ayres reviews lots of research on different commitment issues. Is it better to offer incentives for fulfilling commitments (carrots) or punishments for failing to fulfill those commitments (sticks)? In which situations is it better to offer one rather than the other? He also reviews current research on future discounting -- when people would rather have something right now, rather than wait for something better at a later date. Some of the answers to these questions are a little surprising. I thoroughly enjoyed the anecdotes Ayres gave to accompany each chapter.

To what I didn't like... I felt like a significant chunk of the book was a soft sales pitch for his commitment contract website, stickK.com. It would have helped if Ayres had better explained stickK.com, how it got its name, and why he created it up front, rather than peppering the text with references to it. I also would have appreciated if he had included somewhere a table showing when using which types of incentives/punishments was most useful. The final book may have that information, but my proof copy had none of the figures and tables. :(

Overall, an interesting non-academic read for those interested in learning about and using the power of commitments.

John McIntosh says

The way i worked with collegues change alot after this book - thankyou!

Katie says

Have you ever read a research paper in which the researcher already has a preordained conclusion and makes all supporting information fit that conclusion no matter how tenuous the actual connection? That is exactly what this book felt like. I generally enjoy random collections of unusual research studies (Freakonomics, Blink, Mindless Eating) but this one just didn't hold together for me. The author is trying to pull together research to support the idea that this website can help people change their habits through the use of incentive contracts. The research that supposedly supports his work is very random and tenuously connected at best. The writing is not at all witty or even very interesting and I just couldn't follow his connections at times. It isn't completely awful, but it isn't good enough to finish.

David Wygant says

People favor small immediate rewards over bigger, long term ones. Easy to lose self control when it's already weakened. The big stick is often more effective and cheaper. Small taxes on bad behavior don't have much effect. Penalty needs to be much bigger

Katey says

I won an Advanced Uncorrected Proof of this book from a first read's giveaway.

My preconception of this book was that it was going to be more of a traditional self-help book, designed around a series of "how-to's." I generally dislike and avoid that kind of book, since they almost always talk down to the reader as if they were, to be elegant, a mentally-challenged simian. Not so with this book.

Instead it goes into behavioural psychology and the relatively new field of behavioural economics, giving examples, tested theories, and experiments regarding what exactly motivates personal change; weight-loss and smoking cessation were the most common and extensive topics.

The author's website is stickK.com, a place where people can go to make commitment contracts to, say, lose weight or stop smoking. Their own personal money is on the line, for if they fail, the money is forfeited and goes to an "anti-charity." For an example that was used most often in the book: the George W. Bush Presidential Library.

Another dislike: it seemed as though the majority of the book was a big commercial write-up for the website stickK.com, which I have still not explored, as I have made it a point with myself to read more, be online less (and I didn't need a commitment contract for that).

Still though, there's lots of great information concerning human behaviour and motivation, but I do wish my twisted predicament fit: I used to motivate myself with cigarettes (i.e. get the kitchen clean and then you can have a smoke). I recently quit smoking. So what happens when your carrots would now warrant a stick?

Powell Omondi says

Same old story on Psychology on delayed gratification and how to stick to habits and resolutions. No new idea, most of the research we've already heard of, especially with the work by J.B Foggs at Stanford. The only key lesson will be the analogy on sticks and carrots which was quite plausible in defining how to streamline the masses to stick to one path, can be used in the competitive strategy environment.

Dustan Woodhouse says

I digested this book in various bite size pieces.

It's dense with many studies cited and referenced and is perhaps a bit overly detailed for some.

Not something I'd classify as 'light reading' but nonetheless an interesting story of the origins of www.stickk.com, commitment contracts, how they work, where they may fail.

The book warmed the left side of my brain with its logic.

Butterfly92 says

This book didn't really teach me anything new, except maybe give me a few interesting ideas regarding my fight against bad habits.

I am often seduced by immediate rewards even though understand he repercussions of not following through with my original goal.

I realised I am not giving myself severe punishments in case of failure and also I often try to deal with my problems on my own. Friends have helped me improve before, so I think they can be really beneficial when it comes to tackling down nasty habits.

Shannon says

I like the concept and the tools, but the book wasn't super engaging.

Nessy Dimitrova says

I read this book thanks to Blinkist.

The key message in this book:

We are slaves to now and often forgo long-term benefits to indulge in immediate rewards. Lucky for us, there's a way to overcome this bad habit and it starts with carrots and sticks, or rewards and repercussions.

Actionable advice:

Make your long-term goals a reality with commitment contracts.

The next time you decide to make a major life change like quitting smoking, losing weight or saving money, make sure you follow through by drafting a commitment contract. It's easy to build an effective contract for yourself as long as you set realistic goals and severe punishments for failing to meet them.

Suggested further reading:

The Power of Habit by Charles Duhigg

The Power of Habit explains how important a role habits play in our lives, from brushing our teeth to smoking to exercising, and how exactly those habits are formed. The research and anecdotes in The Power of Habit provide easy tips for changing habits both individually as well as in organizations. The book spent over 60 weeks on the New York Times bestseller list.

Antoine Buteau says

I heard of this book because of Tim Ferriss mention of <http://www.stickk.com/>.

I preferred The Power of Habit by Charles Duhigg, more to the point and feels like an advertisement.

Overall, it's worth checking out Stickk, not so sure about the book.

Ken says

You've probably heard of the expression "carrot and stick (also "carrot or stick"). It's an idiom that refers to a policy of offering a combination of rewards and punishment to induce behavior.

The origin of the phrase is supposedly from a practice of a wagon driver would tying a carrot on a string to a long stick and dangling it just out of reach in front of a donkey pulling the wagon. The donkey moves forward to get the carrot, and pulls the cart in the process.

That seems pretty cruel, and I can't imagine a donkey would fall for it for very long.

The phrase has evolved more to mean that you can give a reward (carrot) or a punishment (a crack with the stick?) to "motivate" behavior. Punishment and reward. Psych 101...

more at <http://paradelle.wordpress.com/2010/1...>
