

21:47

TUESDAY, 15 SEPTEMBER



THE CHECK LOOP

now

**You picked this up
without deciding to.**

Stop compulsive phone checking, rebuild your
attention, and keep the phone you actually need.

THE CHECK LOOP

He builds the apps on your smartphone.

It did not make him immune.

MIKE SALARI

FREE SAMPLE

The Check Loop

This is a free sample of **The Check Loop** by Mike Salari.

It contains the opening of the book: the story behind it, and the chapter that names the problem.

It deliberately contains none of the system. No steps, no settings, no walkthroughs, no worksheets. Those are the working half of the book, and they are in the full edition.

What this sample will tell you is whether the problem it describes is yours.

Read it in about ten minutes. If it lands, the full book is at mikesalari.dev//the-check-loop

What the full book does for you

Not a detox. Not a thirty-day cleanse. Not a month without your phone.

You keep the smartphone. Maps, messages, banking, work, camera, tickets, authentication, the people you love. All of it stays. The book has no interest in taking away the parts that are genuinely useful.

You get a better measure than screen time. Screen time counts hours. It cannot tell the difference between forty minutes you chose and six minutes that happened to you. The book gives you a way to see the difference, and once you can see it the problem stops being vague.

You find out which pattern is actually costing you. Most people try to fix everything at once and fix nothing. There is usually one loop doing most of the damage. Finding it is most of the work.

You stop relying on willpower. Every method in the book changes the conditions around the behaviour rather than asking you to want it more. That is the difference between a change that survives a hard week and one that does not.

You learn how the hooks were built. By someone who builds the apps on your smartphone. Once you understand why the setting that protects you is buried four levels deep and the one that keeps you scrolling is the first thing you see, you stop taking your own behaviour as evidence of weak character.

You get a plan for the days it breaks. Every system fails sometimes. The book treats that as expected and tells you how to recover in a day instead of abandoning the whole thing.

You get your evenings back. Not all of them. Not perfectly. But the quiet minute that used to get filled, the conversation that used to get interrupted, the last hour before sleep that used to disappear.

And it is short on purpose. You can read it in one sitting and change your phone before bed.

I understood the system. I was still inside it.

There is a version of this story where something dramatic happens.

A rock-bottom night. A furious argument. A phone thrown across a room, and a man who wakes up changed.

None of that happened, and I am not going to manufacture it. What actually happened was ordinary, and the ordinariness turned out to be the entire point.

My wife Helen and I live in London. We both work in technology, she on the finance side, and between us we have a few decades of professional experience in how systems behave and why people do what they do inside them.

It made no difference whatsoever.

Like most people, we spend our evenings in the same room. And over a long stretch of those evenings, we developed a habit of being together without quite being together.

You know the shape of it.

You sit down at the end of the day. One person checks something. The other person checks something. A useful action turns into a second app, then a third. A conversation starts and stops. A small silence appears, and instead of letting the silence exist, a phone fills it.

You can be less than a metre away from somebody you love and still repeatedly leave the room without moving.

Nobody was neglected. Nothing was in crisis. I would not have described us as having a problem, and if you had asked either of us at the time, we would have said things were fine.

That was exactly what bothered me. It was normal.

The pattern was made of moments too small to defend individually and large enough, in aggregate, to change the quality of an evening.

I should tell you what I do for a living, because it is the reason this book exists.

I build the apps that live on your smartphone. That has been my job for more than fifteen years.

Which means my working life is spent inside exactly the machinery that was doing this to us.

I know how a notification decides to interrupt you, because I have written the code that sends them.

I know what an interruption actually costs, because I have spent days rebuilding the things an app forgets the moment you look away from it.

I know how a screen decides what your thumb meets first, because arranging that is part of the work.

And I know precisely how much a single removed step changes what a person does next, because removing steps is a significant part of what I am paid to do.

I knew all of that.

And I was still reaching.

I want to be precise here, because this is where books like this usually overclaim. I did not build the machine and come back to confess. I am not a repentant architect of anything. I was a mobile engineer who understood the technology extremely well and found that the understanding did not protect him.

If knowledge and willpower were sufficient, I should have been one of the safest people in the room.

I was not.

My mistake was thinking that understanding the system meant I was outside it.

I wasn't.

There is one more thing, and it is the part I would rather leave out.

For a long time I thought about this as a productivity problem. Focus. Deep work. Getting the important thing done. That framing is comfortable, because it keeps the entire cost on my side of the ledger. If I lose an hour, I lose an hour, and I get to decide how much that bothers me.

That framing was incomplete.

There were evenings when Helen and I were physically together and repeatedly being pulled elsewhere. Sometimes one of us was looking at a screen while the other was talking. Sometimes both of us were. Sometimes a pause that could have become a conversation became another check instead.

My attention was not an abstract personal resource I was free to spend badly. There was another person sitting beside me who was not receiving it.

I am not going to soften this, because it is one of the reasons Helen is in this book at all.

Sometimes your phone habit does not cost you your time.

It costs somebody else your attention.

They notice. And because the cost lands on them rather than on you, you can run the pattern for years without ever seeing the bill.

You did it again

It is 6:43 in the morning. You have not spoken to anyone yet. Your eyes are barely open.

Your hand moves.

Not because the phone rang. Not because somebody needed you. Not because you made a calm decision that the first useful act of the morning was to open a screen. Your arm reached across the duvet and found the phone the way a sleeper finds a pillow, by position and habit, before the rest of you woke up to notice.

You unlock it. There is a message. You answer it. While you are there, you check email. A headline catches your eye. Then another. You open a social app. Someone posted something you have no real need to see. A short video starts, lasts eleven seconds, and the next one starts automatically.

At some point you put the phone down.

Somewhere between the bed and the bathroom you will have a faint feeling, not quite guilt, not quite frustration. More like the sense of having agreed to something you did not read.

What happened?

Nothing dramatic. That is why the pattern is hard to respect.

Most people who dislike their relationship with a phone are not sitting in a dark room for eight continuous hours staring at one app. The cost is more often scattered across dozens of tiny entries, each one completely plausible:

Thirty seconds while the kettle boils.

Two minutes before the meeting.

A check in the elevator.

A check in the bathroom.

A check after sending the email.

A check because the paragraph you were reading became difficult.

A check because your partner paused to think.

A check because the traffic light is red.

A check because you are tired and there is still an hour left in the day.

Individually, each one looks harmless. Together, they create a different kind of day. Your attention is rarely destroyed in one event. It is divided, reopened, redirected, and restarted until concentration begins to feel unnatural and stillness begins to feel wrong.

Here is the part that should bother you.

You have almost certainly already tried to fix this.

You set a screen time limit and tapped through it. You deleted an app on a Sunday and reinstalled it on a Wednesday. You put the phone in a drawer during work and took it out forty minutes later. You did a weekend without social media and felt good about it and were back to baseline by the following Thursday. Maybe you bought a book about this before. Maybe you are holding your second one.

None of that was a failure of character.

You were attempting to out-discipline a system built by teams of professional engineers, funded by some of the largest companies in the world, refined against behavioural data collected from hundreds of millions of people, and specifically optimised to make the action you are trying not to take feel like the easiest available option at every moment.

You lost that fight because it was not a fair fight.

The rest of the book is about stopping the fight and changing the terrain instead.

That distinction matters because most advice attacks the wrong target.

It says: reduce screen time.

Screen time is real data, but it treats the phone as a single activity. The phone is not one activity. It is a container for hundreds of activities, some

valuable, some neutral, some deliberately chosen, and some almost entirely automatic.

You can spend forty minutes reading a long article on your phone because you chose to read it. You can spend six minutes bouncing between five apps without ever deciding what you wanted.

The six minutes may tell you far more about the problem.

Here is the version of this that is harder to admit: the six minutes happens inside the forty-minute session. You opened the phone to read the article. You read two paragraphs. A notification arrived. You checked it. You answered the message it contained. While you were there, you opened a second app. Three apps later, you returned to the article, reread the opening paragraph, and put the phone down because you had lost the thread.

The screen time recorded forty minutes of “reading.” What happened was considerably less.

The question I want you to start asking is not:

How long was I on my phone?

It is:

Did I decide to be there?

Those four words are the line this book cares about.

The phone is not the enemy. The loss of intention is.

And it is a specific kind of loss: not dramatic, not catastrophic, not the kind that announces itself. It is the quiet disappearance of the moment before the hand moved. That moment is where this book lives.

The closing page and the “Also from Mike Salari” page are generated by `build_v2/backmatter.py`, because they differ between the Amazon and Gumroad editions. Do not re-add them here or the two will drift.

The sample ends here

That is the diagnosis. The rest of the book is the repair.

In the full edition you get:

A name for the pattern, and a way to see it happening in the half second before your hand moves.

A better measure than screen time, so you can tell the difference between the phone use that serves you and the phone use that simply happened.

A way to find the one loop that is costing you most, instead of trying to fix everything and fixing nothing.

The full system, in five moves, for changing the conditions around the behaviour rather than relying on willpower.

The chapter on how the hooks are actually built, by someone who builds them.

Step-by-step walkthroughs for iPhone and Android, so you are not left to hunt for settings.

Seven case studies, a seven-day field test, a ninety-day maintenance plan, and five printable field cards.

Short on purpose. Read it tonight, change the phone tonight.

Get the full book

mikesalari.dev//the-check-loop

Instant download.

Paperback on Amazon. ISBN 9798192845059.

Also from Mike Salari

Self-Discipline for Real Life

A systems guide to reliable action

Most discipline advice tells you to want it more. This one treats follow-through as a design problem instead.

Thirteen chapters that move from diagnosis to design to recovery, a casebook of six complete systems tracked to day ninety, an adaptive plan that adjusts rather than resets, and cited sources with an evidence grading scheme so you can see which claims are strong and which are contested.

It refuses to promise twenty-one days, sell willpower as a muscle, or use shame as a tool.

If The Check Loop is about one behaviour, this is about all of them.

mikesalari.dev//discipline

Ticket Taker, Outcome Owner

A developer's system for building trust, influence, and career momentum

You finished every ticket. Your code was careful. And your review still said "be more proactive, take more ownership," which is correct in direction and useless in detail.

Written from the hiring side of that verdict. A five-move loop for turning an ambiguous ticket into a trusted outcome, a diagnostic that cannot be flattered, word-for-word scripts for the conversations where trust is actually built or lost, and a twenty-one day plan designed to be finished rather than abandoned on day four.

For experienced developers who deliver reliably and keep hearing they should be more strategic.

mikesalari.dev/ticket-taker

Everything at salari.dev