Throughout the book, Hari says he had to hold clearly in mind the structural nature of our attention crisis and found this a real struggle. He notes, ‘We live in an extremely individualistic culture, where we are constantly pushed to see our problems as individual failings, and seek out individual solutions. You’re unable to focus? Overweight? Poor? Depressed? We are taught in this culture to think: that’s my fault. I should have found a personal way to lift myself up and out of these environmental problems’ (p.202).

We use drugs to put us to sleep and caffeine to wake us up. We juggle work and home life frantically and multitasking is the new normal. It’s clear that to recover our stolen focus it’s going to take a lot more than individuals working out their own personal answer.

What can we do? Ban surveillance capitalism? Redesign social media sites to encourage focus? How about enabling human interaction rather than seizing attention? Hari believes that we must now re-learn to focus together or face the fires alone.

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How To Say Goodbye
Wendy MacNaughton
Bloomsbury, 2023, HB, 128pp, £16.69, 978-1639730858

SAYING GOODBYE BETTER

There is no right way to say goodbye at the end of a life. Most GPs are used to dealing with the medical business of a death. From the tragedy of the unexpected death in a young person to the long-awaited death in old age. We have witnessed, remember, and learnt from the best and worst of deaths. Less of us have experienced the death of a loved one. Few of us are prepared for our own deaths.

This short book, drawn from the wisdom of hospice caregivers and containing handwritten text and drawings is useful for anyone involved with the process of dying and death. It takes less than 15 minutes to read the text and illustrations but you will probably want to read it more than once, and share it with others. It reads more like an illustrated poem than a conventional book, but it does provide guidance about the thoughts, feelings, and actions that may help when a loved one is dying. There are tips such as the five things you may want to say or have said before death: ‘I forgive you’, ‘Please forgive me’, ‘Thank you’, ‘I love you’, and ‘Goodbye’.

It’s a guide to improve the lived experience of dying and death. For GPs it is a book for your personal or practice library to lend to patients who are on their journey to meet death, and to their family and friends who want to learn how to say goodbye better and be able to live afterwards without unnecessary remorse.

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