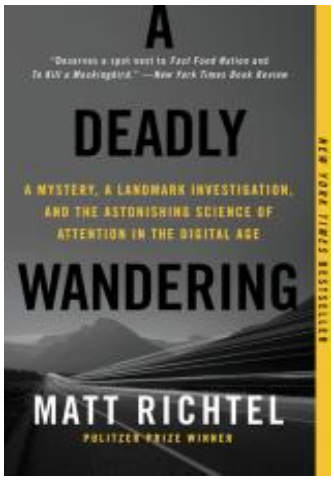
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A Deadly Wandering: A Mystery, a Landmark Investigation, and the Astonishing Science of Attention in the Digital Age

by Matt Richtel



About the Book

From Pulitzer Prize?winning journalist Matt Richtel, a brilliant, narrative-driven exploration of technology?s vast influence on the human mind and society, dramatically-told through the lens of a tragic ?texting-while-driving? car crash that claimed the lives of two rocket scientists in 2006.

In this ambitious, compelling and beautifully written book, Matt Richtel, a Pulitzer Prize-winning reporter for the *New York Times*, examines the impact of technology on our lives through the story of Utah college student Reggie Shaw, who killed two scientists while texting and driving. Richtel follows Reggie through the tragedy, the police investigation, his prosecution and ultimately, his redemption.

In the wake of his experience, Reggie has become a leading advocate against ?distracted driving.? Richtel interweaves Reggie?s story with cutting-edge scientific findings regarding human attention and the impact of technology on our brains, proposing solid, practical and actionable solutions to help manage this crisis individually and as a society.

A propulsive read filled with fascinating, accessible detail, riveting narrative tension, and emotional depth, A DEADLY WANDERING explores one of the biggest questions of our time --- what is all of our technology doing to us? --- and provides unsettling and important answers and information we all need.

Discussion Guide

1. Metcalfe?s Law defines the power of a computer network by the number of people using it. As Matt Richtel paraphrases: ?More people, more communication, more value. More pressure.? Would you agree with this assessment? Is there necessarily more pressure and more value involved when more people are engaged in a discussion or are focused

on an idea? Or do you think a situation or belief becomes less valuable once a larger number of people have glommed on?

2. Are you a fan of social media sites like Facebook, Twitter and Instagram? Does keeping in check with daily feeds make you feel better about your life or worse? Do you compare yourself to others more or less since becoming involved with social media?

3. Do you think people are better or worse communicators, thanks to inventions like email and social media sites? More or less intimate? If you participate in social media or use technology frequently (for example, keeping your phone on the dinner table while out with a friend or colleague), has easy access made it more or less difficult to communicate effectively with friends or loved ones? Would you say your relationships are deeper now that social media is so popular, or are they more on the surface?

4. Do you talk on the phone or text while driving? (Be honest!) If so, what do you think about Richtel?s premise --- that texting while driving is too distracting and could cause serious damage? Did your habits change at all while reading A DEADLY WANDERING?

5. Think about your life as it stands now. Now strip it of all modern technology --- computers, cell phones, flat screen TVs, internet radio, video games, digital cameras, --- everything. How well do you think you?d be able to function without these devices? What do you think your first reaction or feeling would be? Fear or peace? Do you have ?technology-free? time in your life now? If so, what do you do?

6. If you were Reggie?s mother and you were the first one he called after his accident, what would you tell your son to do? Tell the truth no matter what the consequences, or keep quiet? What do you make of Reggie?s parents? actions throughout the ordeal? Should they have pushed Reggie on the texting issue?

7. Richtel reveals the circumstances and aftermath surrounding Reggie?s car accident fairly neutrally, describing both Reggie?s family?s way of dealing with his potential guilt as well as the victims? families? grief over the death of their loved ones. Do you think Richtel was fair in remaining objective, and did he do a good job reporting both sides? Could you sympathize with Reggie and his family?s feelings?

8. Regarding how technology and our brains have evolved over time, Richtel explains that ?technology was evolving by the day, but the human brain was more or less staying put. The brain evolves at a glacial pace, both in actual terms and certainly relative to the pace of technological change.? [p. 68] Given that premise, what do you imagine the world of technology will look like in 100 years? 200 years? Will our brains be able to sufficiently evolve and adapt over time?

9. What are your thoughts on Google glasses? Cool invention, or yet another technological distraction?

10. Terryl?s upbringing in an abusive home with a perennially drunk and violent father and an ill-equipped mother is disheartening. What do you think, if anything, her story adds to the book? When reading books like A DEADLY WANDERING, do you think these types of personal accounts add to the book?s purpose or serve as a distraction?

11. It?s nearly impossible *not* to multitask in today?s fast-paced world. In fact, it?s in most job descriptions, not to mention a requirement at home. Would you say you are good at multitasking, or do you prefer to concentrate on one

thing at a time? Can excessive multitasking be detrimental to your health?

12. On pages 105-106, Richtel describes an experiment by Dr. Anne Treisman. In it, a subject is made to listen to two different literary passages piped through a set of headphones, one passage per ear. If you are able to try this experiment at home, give it a go! Were you able to filter out the passage in your right ear in order to focus on the one in your left? What does this tell you about your own attention span and ability to focus?

13. Why do you think video games, cell phones, social media sites and the like ?do such an extraordinary job of capturing our attention?? Do you think it varies culture by culture, or is technology?s effect on people and places around the world universal?

14. Although the book is mainly about a case involving texting while driving, Richtel discusses the harms of overusing other forms of technology too --- television, video games, social media. Do you think some forms of technology are more harmful to the brain than others? Why or why not? If you had to give up one tech obsession, what would it be and why is it the easiest to relinquish?

15. At the end of 2012, two studies from the Pew Research Center and Common Sense Media reported that most American teachers believe technology is hampering their students? ability to focus and ?persevere through tough challenges.? [p.218] Do you think technology is shrinking young people?s attention spans? Or teaching them that immediate gratification is more important than working toward long-term goals? In what other ways do you see the effects of technology taking hold on today?s youth (i.e. dating, career-planning, creative pursuits)?

16. During Reggie?s trial, opinions were split down the middle. One side felt the accident was just that --- an accident and that the trial was merely a witch hunt. Those who sided with the prosecution felt there was enough scientific and factual evidence to prove Reggie?s undoubted guilt. What side do you fall on and why? Do you think Reggie?s sentence was too lenient? Too tough?

17. In 2009, Reggie Shaw did something he had struggled to do for a long time. He confessed to a room full of Utah legislators and citizens that what he had done was wrong and ?to see a law passed that would prevent people [from doing] this would mean a lot to [him.]? He later made a similar confession during his trial. In effect, his testimony was the first stepping-stone in the passing of the law against driving while texting in Utah. What do you think about Reggie?s actions? Was he courageous, or was it just a way to get a lesser sentence and a clean record? What would you have done in his shoes?

18. Susan Forward, the author of TOXIC PARENTS, believes ?it is naïve to think that all people can survive trauma, as great as those experienced by, say, Terryl and Linton --- or, in a different way, Reggie? [Instead], a lot of it has to do with the way we?re wired.? Do you agree with her assessment? Why is it seemingly easier for some people to pick up and move on from a bad point in their lives, while others just wallow in it and never recover?

Author Bio

Matt Richtel is a Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* reporter and bestselling nonfiction and mystery author. He lives in San Francisco with his wife, Meredith, a neurologist, and their two children. In his spare time, he plays tennis and piano and writes (not very good) songs.

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