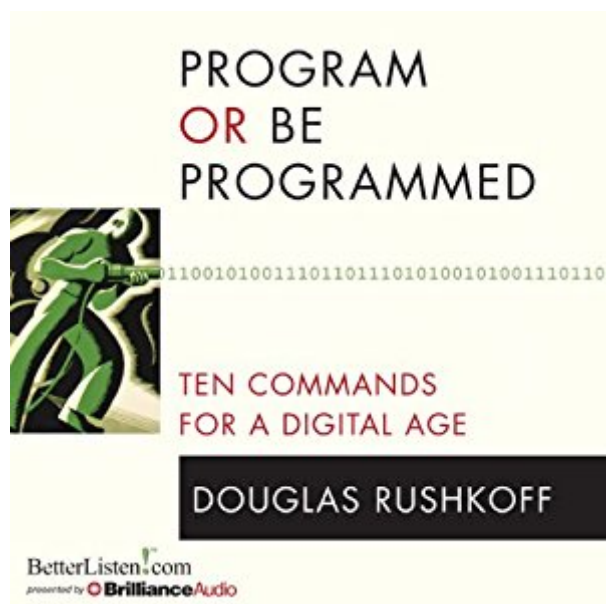# Program Or Be Programmed: Ten Commands For A Digital Age

Synopsis

The debate over whether the Net is good or bad for us fills the airwaves and the blogosphere. But for all the heat of claim and counter-claim, the argument is essentially beside the point: It's here; it's everywhere. The real question is, do we direct technology, or do we let ourselves be directed by it and those who have mastered it? "Choose the former," writes Rushkoff, "and you gain access to the control panel of civilization. Choose the latter, and it could be the last real choice you get to make." In 10 chapters, composed of 10 "commands", Rushkoff provides cyber enthusiasts and technophobes alike with the guidelines to navigate this new universe. In this spirited, accessible poetics of new media, Rushkoff picks up where Marshall McLuhan left off, helping listeners to recognize programming as the new literacy of the digital age - and as a template through which to see beyond social conventions and power structures that have vexed us for centuries. This is a friendly little audiobook with a big and actionable message.

Book Information

Audible Audio Edition

Listening Length: 3 hoursÂ andÂ 28 minutes

Program Type: Audiobook

Version: Unabridged

Publisher: BetterListen

Audible.com Release Date: September 17, 2013

Whispersync for Voice: Ready

Language: English

ASIN: B00F9189YE

Best Sellers Rank: #159 inÂ Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Computers #299 inÂ Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Reference #357 inÂ Books > Audible Audiobooks > Nonfiction > Philosophy

Customer Reviews

I haven't read Rushkoff's other books (although I might go back and read Life Inc: How Corporatism Conquered the World, and How We Can Take It Back).Program or be Programmed is a quick read. I read it on the Kindle my wife got me for Christmas. The irony of reading a book about the pitfalls and possibilities of technology we don't fully understand on a device I don't fully understand was not lost on me.I would describe this as an "Internet philosophy book" that might fit on the bookshelf somewhere between Neal Stephenson's In the Beginning...was the Command Line and Jeff Jarvis'

What Would Google Do? But I found Program to be even more thoughtful and succinct than those books.Quote from the book: "Instead of learning about our technology, we opt for a world in which our technology learns about us."Rushkoff has proposed ten ideas/concepts/considerations for principles to live by online. He starts with the obvious -- don't always be online, live in person, be yourself -- and builds to the not-so-obvious. By numbers nine and ten, he's making the case for doing away with centralized currency because it's not compatible with the new digital world we've created.

In "Program or Be Programmed" Douglas Rushkoff argues for the need of people to be aware of the implications of transitioning into the digital age, and he urges readers to gain technical literacy in order to maintain control over their lives and foster opportunities for innovation. In ten commandments, he directs attention to the biases of digital technologies and the resulting negative and positive outcomes. Following a compact introduction, he breaks up his argument into concise and articulate justifications that culminate in a prompt to learn to program.Rushkoff's book is filled with one-line zingers that summarize critical issues of debate regarding digital technologies with such eloquence that Larry Lessig and maybe even Evgeny Morozov would applaud (though Morozov would vehemently shake his head in disagreement with Rushkoff's optimistic outlook). As a student in an interdisciplinary major called Science, Technology, and Society, which mixes computer science and communication courses, I found myself nodding along with Rushkoff and occasionally vocalizing agreement at my computer screen. At one or two instances I sat puzzled wondering if he believes that he is Morpheus from "The Matrix" and that I, the reader, am the One.There are many issues surrounding digital media--far more than a single author can provide full insight on. Rushkoff's work is interesting in that I can see it as a useful resource for a student just delving into these issues for the first time, and as a useful resource for a student who is familiar with issues touched upon in this book. It is a work of breadth rather than depth. Rushkoff jams statements into a concise synopsis that can be unpacked on many levels. It is a great starting point and roadmap.

To explain how I came across this book, I have to make a confession: since my family doesn't subscribe to cable television, the only time my kids or I watch cable TV (or much TV at all, really) is when we're on the road, visiting family or otherwise. My son, predictably gravitates to Disney and the Cartoon Network, but I'm a C-SPAN man. And when CSPAN-2 has Book TV, I'm watching it. So guess when and where I saw Douglas Rushkoff interviewed about his new book. That's right. When

I can watch anything on cable television, I go to Book TV.Confession out of the way, what makes this book worthy of the Neil Postman Award that it won (I just learned that such an award exists) is its refusal to let any digital technology become transparent, something that's a mere window through which we see the world as the world happens to be. From the first Arpanet connections to email to the ubiquitous vibrating phones (and accompanying "phantom phone buzz syndrome"), Rushkoff keeps his sharp eye on the assumptions that one has to make before the technology makes any sense: that one should adjust one's personal biological rhythms to the atemporal "always on" existence of computer networks rather than vice versa; that the world should conform its complexity to the reductionism of binary choices; and that human beings are meant to exist as infinitesimal nodes in a vast global network, just to name three. Spelling out those assumptions, Rushkoff does not so much give ten commands as ask ten penetrating questions, questions that ought to haunt human beings as we jump on board the Internet train.Why ten commands, then?

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