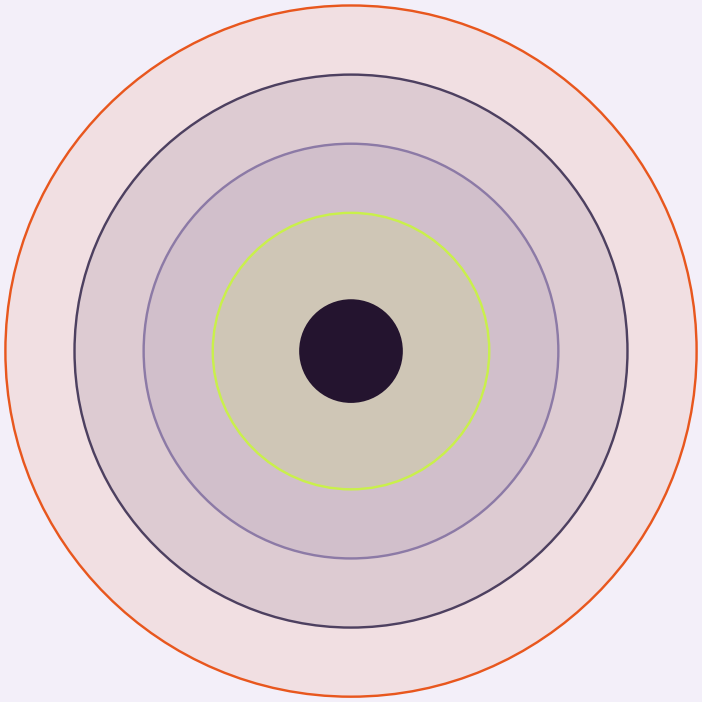
NOVEMBER 6, 2026



Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit

A reading of the book by John Douglas and Mark Olshaker (1995)

1. ACTION BOOK

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ABOUT THIS EDITION

This is HourLife's reading of Mindhunter: Inside the FBI's Elite Serial Crime Unit, in our own words. It is not a substitute for the book.

BEFORE YOU START 01

The book in a minute

John Douglas was one of the first criminal profilers in the FBI's Behavioral Science Unit at Quantico, and Mindhunter, written with Mark Olshaker, is his account of that work. It describes how a small group of agents learned to read behaviour and infer the kind of person behind it. The method grew out of prison interviews with convicted offenders, carried out to understand motive in their own words. Douglas sets out working ideas such as behaviour reflects personality, the difference between modus operandi and signature, and the shorthand that why plus how points to who. He mixes case work with an honest account of what the job cost him, including his near-fatal collapse from viral encephalitis in Seattle in 1983.

Below are the 9 ideas HourLife readers vote up most, each in our words with a note on what it asks of you, and then the steps that put them to work.

WHAT READERS KEEP

The takeaways

1

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

What a person does, and the way they do it, is the best evidence of who they are.

Douglas works from the premise that behaviour reflects personality. The choices someone makes when nobody is watching carry their habits and their needs. In ordinary life the same rule holds: weigh what people do over what they say about themselves.

2

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Ask why before you ask who.

The book's shorthand is that why plus how points to who. Starting from motive narrows the field honestly. Starting from a suspect tempts you to bend every clue to fit, which is how most snap judgements go wrong at work and at home.

3

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Methods change with circumstance; the extras a person adds stay the same.

Douglas separates modus operandi, what someone does to get a thing done, from signature, what they do because they need to. The method is learned and shifts over time. The signature does not, which is why it says more about the person than the method ever can.

4

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

You cannot understand people by filing them; you have to listen to them.

In the late 1970s Douglas and Robert Ressler began interviewing imprisoned offenders to learn, in their own words, why they had acted. It was an unusual idea at the Bureau then. The wider lesson is that careful, patient listening teaches more than a label does, even with people you dislike.

5

HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Look at the whole situation, including the person on the receiving end.

Douglas puts weight on victimology: asking why this person, in this place, at this time. The everyday version is to study the context of a problem and who it landed on, not only the person who caused it.

6 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Carrying other people's darkness has a cost, even for experts.

In 1983, working in Seattle under a crushing caseload, Douglas collapsed with viral encephalitis and nearly died. He writes plainly about the stress of the job and what it did to his health and family. Anyone whose work means absorbing other people's pain needs recovery built in, not saved for later.

7 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A profile narrows a search; it does not close a case.

Douglas presents profiling as a tool that helps local investigators focus, while evidence and police work make the arrest. Researchers still debate how accurate profiling is. Treat any read of a person the same way: a lead to check, never a verdict.

8 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

Experience helps others only once it is organised into patterns they can learn.

The unit's early work turned scattered interviews and cases into something agents could teach and share. Your own hard-won judgement is worth the same treatment: write the patterns down so they outlast the moment.

9 HOURLIFE TAKEAWAY

A hunch is worth something only after you have tried to prove it wrong.

Reading behaviour invites confident leaps. The discipline is to name what would contradict your guess and go looking for it. A theory that survives that test is worth acting on; one that never faces it is just a story.

PUT IT TO WORK

Your action book

Do the setup steps once, then keep the habits going. The setup changes your week; the habits keep it changed after the first good one.

The download puts this whole reading and a printable action book in one PDF: the setup checklist, then a page of real calendar days for each habit, starting on the day you choose.

SET UP ONCE

- [ ] Open a pattern log
- [ ] Turn one judgement into three whys
- [ ] Sort one puzzle into routine and telling
- [ ] Set a hard stop for heavy work
- [ ] Name your early warning signs

KEEP UP DAILY

- ◯ Ask why before who
- ◯ Notice the extra
- ◯ Test a hunch before you act on it

30 days · Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Part two, after the reading, prints each of these as a page to fill in by hand.

THE LAST WORD

Before you go

Pick one step from the action book and do it today. An idea from a book starts to count once it changes what one ordinary day looks like.

PART TWO

The action book

Change the setup once, then keep it up. 5 setup actions to do once, and 3 habits to mark each day for 30 days.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026

Print it, or write on it in any PDF app.

SET UP ONCE

The setup checklist

Each of these is done once. Do one a day, and check it off when it is done.

- [ ] SETUP 1

Open a pattern log

Pick one behaviour that puzzles you, yours or someone else's.

For two weeks, note each time it happens: the date, what came just before, and what came after.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 2

Turn one judgement into three whys

Take a recent verdict like 'they are just lazy' or 'she doesn't care'.

Write three different reasons the person might have acted that way, and one fact that would tell them apart.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 3

Sort one puzzle into routine and telling

List what the person did.

Mark each item routine (anyone would do it to get the job done) or telling (more than the job needed). Read the telling items for the need behind them.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 4

Set a hard stop for heavy work

If your work means taking in other people's distress, choose a fixed end time and a short ritual that marks it: a walk, a change of clothes, a written list of what can wait until tomorrow.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

- [ ] SETUP 5

Name your early warning signs

Write down three signs that you are carrying too much, such as broken sleep, a short temper or feeling numb.

Share the list with one person and ask them to tell you when they see them.

MY VERSION

DONE ON

DAILY HABIT 1 OF 3

Ask why before who

The next time something goes wrong at work or at home, ask what happened and why before anyone is named.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
16 ○	17 ○	18 ○	19 ○	20 ○	21 ○	22 ○
23 ○	24 ○	25 ○	26 ○	27 ○	28 ○	29 ○
30 ○						

December 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
	1 ○	2 ○	3 ○	4 ○	5 ○	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30	31			

EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 2 OF 3

Notice the extra

Once a day, spot one thing someone did that the task didn't need: the extra apology, the copied manager, the third check.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP

DAILY HABIT 3 OF 3

Test a hunch before you act on it

Before you act on a read of someone, write one thing that would prove you wrong.

Nov 6 - Dec 5, 2026 · 30 days · circle each day you do it

SMALLEST VERSION

CUE

WHERE

November 2026

MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT	SUN
						1
2	3	4	5	6 ○	7 ○	8 ○
9 ○	10 ○	11 ○	12 ○	13 ○	14 ○	15 ○
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December 2026

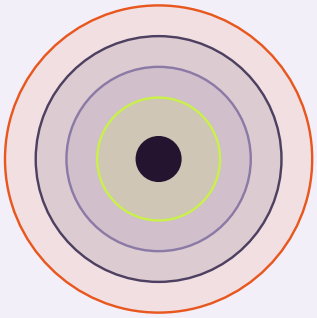
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EACH FRIDAY

WHAT HELPED

WHAT GOT IN THE WAY

ONE CHANGE TO THE SETUP



Before you decide who someone is, find out why they did what they did.

HOURLIFE NOTE AFTER JOHN DOUGLAS