

intuition

*the ability to understand something immediately,
without the need for conscious reasoning*

The workplace, we're told, is unemotional. Facts reign supreme. Feelings have little role to play. In such a logic-based world, intuition can often be deemed unreliable. After all, gut instinct can easily be misinterpreted. Is that deep rumbling in your belly a signal of ominous things to come? Or just a bad chicken sandwich? Believe it or not, intuition can be a valuable tool in the workplace—*when heeded properly*. That doesn't mean you should rely solely on your sixth sense; however, don't totally discount its importance either.

What Intuition Is—and Is Not Malcolm Gladwell does not cite "intuition" anywhere in his best-selling book *Blink* (Little, Brown and Co., 2005), which looks at the two seconds it takes for a person to reach a conclusion about something or someone. Gladwell, a frequent keynote speaker at SHRM conferences, does not even like the word "intuition," he says at the end of his book. "Intuition strikes me as a concept we use to describe emotional reactions, gut feelings—thoughts and impressions that don't seem entirely rational," he wrote. "But I think that what goes on in those first two seconds is perfectly rational. It's thinking—it's just thinking that moves a little faster and operates a little more mysteriously than the kind of deliberate, conscious decision-making that we usually associate with 'thinking.'"

Intuition Can Provide Important Information In his book, "How We Decide," Jonah Lehrer explains that sometimes, your brain is able to connect the dots of the information it receives in a way that is so subtle it's actually not even understandable by the conscious brain. It sees patterns we aren't even aware of. Often, this information is translated into a "feeling." Imagine you're in the process of planning a business event and reviewing possible venues. When you visit one location, you have an indistinct gut feeling that it's just not right. However, when you set aside the emotion and just look at the facts, you see no reason to pass on this. After all, it's a good location, reasonable price and the staff seems friendly. And yet, something feels off. That feeling could be your body's way of telling you there's a problem. Perhaps your subconscious brain has picked up on signals you missed. Maybe it sensed patterns that matched dissatisfying venue experiences in the past. Maybe you read a poor review about this venue months ago and just consciously forgot it. Maybe the parking lot was awfully small and, though you didn't really think about it, you know how inconvenient it would be. All kinds of things could be happening in your brain that you're unaware of. On paper, everything might look perfect. But, just because you can't see it or explain it, doesn't mean your brain isn't picking up on real evidence that this is the wrong fit.

Use Intuition to Inspire Deeper Investigation Feelings can be red flags telling you to sit up and pay attention. Don't discredit them just because they aren't immediately supported by the kind of "logic" you're familiar with. The brain is a powerful and mysterious thing, and feelings ultimately come from the brain. However, be cautious about intuition as the sole factor in business decision-making. Remember that, should a decision go awry, you need a reasonable defense for why you did what you did. "It just felt right," usually isn't the best justification. Instead, use your feelings to inspire deeper investigation about a situation. When your gut is telling you something, pause and listen. Look around with a fresh perspective and try to find what you're not consciously seeing.

A number of new studies have shown that intuitive intelligence can help us make better decisions. Scientists are just beginning to understand, for example, that the body receives messages more quickly than a visual image is able to register in the brain. That's why, for instance, soldiers in Afghanistan report being able to intuitively stop seconds before an IED goes off. Scientists acknowledge there is a type of intelligence or awareness that happens outside of the brain. In the gut, for example. This intelligence is there to help us make better decisions. Whether you're a salesperson, a manager, or a computer engineer, learning to "read" people and situations at work using a broader spectrum of your intelligence—sharpening your intuition—will only make you better and smarter at what you do.

To make sure your gut is guiding you in the best possible direction, ask yourself these questions:

Are you really listening to what your inner voice is advising?
Or are you rushing to an answer to stop thinking about this decision?

Are you trusting your gut because you have all the information you need?
Or are you being too lazy to fill in any gaps you may have?

As you fill in those information gaps, is your gut becoming more confident or more anxious?

How much of what your gut is telling you is based on other people's experiences, opinions, and expectations,
and how much is based on your own experiences, opinions, and expectations?

Your answers will help you evaluate your gut response as objectively as possible. You will also be giving your intuition a workout—neuroscience also shows that your intuition improves with practice. That means that the more you pay attention to your inner voice and emotions, and the more you evaluate your intuition, the stronger and more confident you will feel to trust it.



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