



Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking

Malcolm Gladwell

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Drawing on cutting-edge neuroscience and psychology and displaying all of the brilliance that made *The Tipping Point* a classic, *Blink* changes the way you'll understand every decision you make. Never again will you think about thinking the same way.

Malcolm Gladwell redefined how we understand the world around us. Now, in *Blink*, he revolutionizes the way we understand the world within. *Blink* is a book about how we think without thinking, about choices that seem to be made in an instant - in the blink of an eye - that actually aren't as simple as they seem. Why are some people brilliant decision makers, while others are consistently inept? Why do some people follow their instincts and win, while others end up stumbling into error? How do our brains really work - in the office, in the classroom, in the kitchen, and in the bedroom? And why are the best decisions often those that are impossible to explain to others?

In *Blink* we meet the psychologist who has learned to predict whether a marriage will last, based on a few minutes of observing a couple; the tennis coach who knows when a player will double-fault before the racket even makes contact with the ball; the antiquities experts who recognize a fake at a glance. Here, too, are great failures of "blink": the election of Warren Harding; "New Coke"; and the shooting of Amadou Diallo by police. *Blink* reveals that great decision makers aren't those who process the most information or spend the most time deliberating, but those who have perfected the art of "thin-slicing" - filtering the very few factors that matter from an overwhelming number of variables.

Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking Details

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Kemper says

I generally distrust anyone who says that they 'go-with-their-gut'. But when the company I work for announced a major decision a few years back, I instantly said, "This is going to be a huge mistake." Smart people had examined the deal backwards and forwards for months and thought it was a great idea. I had a bad feeling about it that I could only later explain, and I was far from the only one. And we were right. The entire thing turned out to be a huge disaster.

I kept thinking about that incident when I read Blink. The book has a pretty obvious point. People make snap decisions that they can't consciously explain. Sometimes these decisions are correct and amazing based on the limited amount of information available. Art experts who instantly know a statue is fake despite scientific tests indicating otherwise. A fireman who appears to be fighting a routine small fire suddenly orders his men out without really knowing why and the floor collapses a second later. And sometimes these decisions can be wrong and have tragic consequences. Four cops think a guy has a gun when he's pulling his wallet out and shoot him multiple times.

We've all made quick decisions and later been amazed at how good or bad they turned out, but what makes Blink interesting is that Gladwell does some examination of the science behind how we arrive at these conclusions, and his thoughts on how the data we're processing can either give us incredible insight or lead us horribly wrong.

Thankfully, Gladwell is not making an argument against logical thinking or analyzing a problem. What he is doing is pointing out that instinct or intuition can be a powerful tool IF the people involved have trained themselves to make good decisions, and if we know when to trust it. He's got a lot of great examples of doctors, military officers and police officers who often have to make life-or-death decisions in a matter of seconds with limited information. They have to trust their instincts, and Gladwell makes some common sense points that the right kind of training and education can make a huge difference. He contrasts the story of the four New York cops who killed the guy with a wallet versus a patrolman who did not fire on someone who actually had a gun but was attempting to surrender it.

What made this book fun to read was the variety of examples that Gladwell uses and the scientific research done with them. Art dealers, doctors, marriage counselors, cops, military officers, car salesmen, a tennis coach, and classical musicians are all used as examples of the strengths and weaknesses of snap decisions. There's also some simple experiments included that let you play along at home. This is a book that will make you think about the way you think.

Matt Kosinski says

Here's Blink in a nutshell:

Split decisions can be good; better than decisions where we take a lot of time to carefully weigh our options and use scientific evidence.

Except when they're not.

Rapid cognition is an exciting and powerful way to use your brain's quick, intuitive capabilities to make stunningly accurate decisions, and can even lead you to have better success in sports, business and politics.

Except when it won't.

We should learn to trust our snap judgments, even in seemingly complex situations where we don't have a lot of information.

Except not really.

Basically the book gives scientific and anecdotal evidence on why rapid cognition can be both a good and bad thing, without offering us much advice on how to tell the difference between situations where we should or shouldn't trust our instincts.

There are many times when I felt that Gladwell contradicted himself. To support his "rapid cognition is good" section of the book, he uses an example of a psychological test where students were able to tell whether or not a professor was good at their job by simply watching a 5 second clip of them lecturing with the sound turned off. The results basically corresponded with impressions given by other students who spent an entire class with those professors - thus proving that there is some mysterious and powerful part of our subconscious that can make accurate snap judgments.

But then later on in the book, in the "rapid cognition is bad" section, Gladwell warns us that, in general, people instantly like tall, attractive white people better than short, unattractive minorities.

WELL DUH! OBVIOUSLY THE STUDENTS RATING THE PROFESSORS WERE BIASED BY WHETHER OR NOT THEY WERE TALL, WHITE, OR ATTRACTIVE!

Mystery solved!

While Gladwell brings up some interesting concepts, his book never gels into a coherent whole. I read most of it in under a day and already my rapid cognition is telling me it's not worth finishing.

Carolyn says

Equally as fascinating as Gladwell's other book *The Tipping Point*. Really makes you think, consider your decisions differently.

Quotes:

But in the end it comes down to a matter of respect, and the simplest way that respect is communicated is through tone of voice.

Of the tens of millions of American men below five foot six, a grand total of ten in my sample have reached the level of CEO, which says that being short is probably as much of a handicap to corporate success as being a woman or an African American.

Most of us, in ways that we are not entirely aware of, automatically associate leadership ability with imposing physical stature.

...when corrected for such variables as age and gender and weight, an inch of height is worth \$789 a year in salary. That means that a person who is six feet tall but otherwise identical to someone who is five foot five will make on average \$5,525 more per year.

Prejudging is the kiss of death...because sometimes the most unlikely person is flush.

The truth is that improv isn't random and chaotic at all...it's an art form governed by a series of rules, and they want to make sure that when they're up on stage, everyone abides by those rules. One of the most important of the rules that make improv possible, for examples is the idea of agreement, the notion that a very simple way to create a story—or humor—is to have characters accept everything that happens to them. Good improvisors seem telepathic; everything looks pre-arranged. This is because they accept all offers made—which is something no normal person would do.

Neither Masten nor Rhea believes that clever packaging allows a company to put out a bad-tasting product. The taste of the product itself matters a great deal. Their point is simply that when we put something in our mouth and in that blink of an eye decide whether it tastes good or not, we are reacting not only to the evidence from our taste buds and salivary glands but also to the evidence of our eyes and memories and imaginations, and it is foolish of company to service one dimension and ignore the other.

Emotion can also start on the face. The face is not a secondary billboard for our internal feelings. It is an equal partner in the emotional process. Silvan Tomkins one began a lecture by bellowing, "The face is like a penis!" What he meant was that the face has, to a large extent, a mind of its own.

Imagine if there were a switch that all of us had, to turn off the expressions on our face at will. If babies had that switch, we wouldn't know what they were feeling. They'd be in trouble. You could make an argument, if you wanted to, that the system evolved so that parents would be able to take care of kids.

People with autism...have difficulty interpreting non-verbal cues, such as gestures and facial expressions...in anything less than a perfectly literal environment, the autistic person is lost.

In the interviews with police officers who have been involved with shootings, these same details appear again and again: extreme visual clarity, tunnel vision, diminished sound, and the sense that time is slowing down. This is how the human body reacts to extreme stress, and it makes sense. Our mind, faced with a life-threatening situation, drastically limits the range and amount of information that we have to deal with. Sound and memory and broader social understanding are sacrificed in favor of heightened awareness of the threat directly in front of us.

MacKenzie says

so i bought this book in boston's logan airport about 10 minutes before i had to board a flight to seattle. the bookstore was limited; i didn't want to have to work to get interested. and the first 100 pages or so did the

trick... until i realized that gladwell wasn't so much building an argument as telling stories about a certain topic. don't get me wrong, i finished the book. later. back in boston, on the T. and it did cover some interesting studies, or i wouldn't have done so. but i suspect the author might've lacked the attention span necessary to lend this book any coherence. meh. it was basically a series of loosely related tidbits about snap-judgments, none of which led me to conclude that instinct or intuition is significantly more or less reliable than rational deliberation. if a point could be gleaned and summarized, i guess it would be that with the right thin-slice of information, under the right conditions, instantaneous judgements can be spot-on. shrug. the best i can say about this book is that there were a couple of well-set-up digs at the bush administration and i discovered the music of kenna, who's pretty cool. i also learned that when my girlfriend's eyes get even a little wider, it means she's angry.

Diane says

O, to have the writing career of Malcolm Gladwell. The man pulls interesting case studies from academic research and news headlines, spins it into a book under a general theme, and blammo! He has a bestseller. This formula worked for him with *The Tipping Point* and then *Blink*.

Blink is a compelling read, despite its weak overall theme, which is that sometimes split-second decisions are good and sometimes they're bad, and we need to learn when to trust our first impressions and when to discount them (except there's no real way to make that distinction).

The book is a pleasure to read simply because of its case studies. Gladwell throws in so many topics — art, politics, marriage, consumer testing, athletes, war, police shootings, music — that there is bound to be something engaging for everyone. (After reading another one of Gladwell's peppy articles in *The New Yorker*, my husband joked, "Gladwell thinks he can make ANYTHING seem interesting.")

After finishing *Blink*, I feel like I've learned something important, but I'm not sure exactly what, other than that Gladwell has a very charmed career.

My rating: 3.5 stars rounded up to 4

Doc Opp says

As an empirical psychologist by training, I get very annoyed at journalists who simplify things to the point that its no longer even remotely accurate. Such is the case for *Blink*. This is especially annoying to me, because the book describes my area of research specialization. If you're interested in a fun read, Gladwell is certainly an engaging author. If you're looking for something that accurately describes the research, I'd recommend looking elsewhere.

For example, Scott Plous's "the psychology of judgment and decision making" (which, despite the title, is not textbook like), or the Heath brothers' "Made to stick".

Ashley says

I would put this book in the category of "Freakonomics" and "The Tipping Point." By the same author as the latter title, Malcolm Gladwell, the purpose of this book is to weigh the advantages as well as the disadvantages of the power of the mind's ability to unconsciously leap to conclusions based on what is seen in the proverbial blink of an eye.

While I have read some negative reviews of Gladwell's book, mostly citing that he fails to inform the reader how to know when to go with your gut and when not to, as well as arguments that he urges readers not to follow their gut when the gut instincts are politically incorrect, I have to disagree with many of them. I think that Gladwell's objective in "Blink" is to make the reader simply aware of their gut instincts and to urge them to consider trusting it more frequently than we do. People tend to make decisions that are supported by a litany of rationalizations and explanations, but do we always really have reasons for why we do or think what we do? Gladwell is arguing that we don't, and that sometimes it takes the unconscious mind to make those decisions for us. On the flip side, he also argues that sometimes we unconsciously make negative decisions based on that same quick judgment and our predetermined stereotypes, such as with people of other sexes or other races than ourselves.

"Blink" was a very complicated book with many facets and it's hard to explain all of them or review them all without writing an essay. In the end, I think the main goal isn't perfect knowledge of the subject of thinking without thinking, but rather consideration of it and how it can benefit us or hinder us both individually and as a society.

Margaret Ross says

I think this book wins my prize for Most Easily Misinterpreted to Serve Personal Agendas. Gladwell gets so into the interesting details of the case he's building, he really doesn't emphasize the final conclusions of the book at all, leaving people to think that the interesting details are the whole point, which is unfortunate. But then again, I'm not 100% sure I got the whole point.

Most of the folks I know think that this book is about how a person's gut instincts can be a better read of a situation than a read based on thorough study. Which is an idea that most people love, since they don't want to have to do all that boring study anyhow. What's missing from that analysis is that Gladwell later insists (but only at the very end of the book, and almost in passing) that it's the thorough active training and study of a subject that allow a person to have "true" or "correct" gut reads. The guy who can tell who's getting divorced after 60 seconds of hearing them talk spent years coding verbal and physical cues in couples, studying them intensely for years before he was able to give his 60 second analysis. The art historians were drawing on a vast body of knowledge when they made their judgment about the statue. The cop who read fear instead of aggression and didn't shoot couldn't name what he was seeing, but he'd seen it before. Then he also says that our gut reactions can be easily colored by training we don't even know is there- our prejudices, whether unknown or unacknowledged- influence or reads of a situation as well.

Ultimately, I saw this book as a reaction to and analysis of the Amadou Diallo killing in 1999, with some tips for how to avoid such future tragedies. In that light, I thought it was interesting and even constructive, but only if you pay close attention to the last chapter.

Trevor says

Elsewhere, in one of my other recent reviews, a GoodReads friend (Richard) told me that he had become less infatuated with this book after reading a review by a specialist in the field who gave it a drubbing. I was worried that knowing this might ruin this book for me – but it has not. I really enjoyed this one too. This is the third of Gladwell's books I've read in quick succession and this contained lots of information about things that have made me think and sparked my interest to learn more. It may well be that Gladwell's style does not appeal to an expert in the field – and that is quite likely to be true, but I've found that it is often the case that I've been introduced to themes by popularisers and later went on to read more deeply on a subject. I rarely condemn those who introduce me to fascinating topics – and this is a fascinating topic.

I'm not going to do a full review, but rather quickly talk about wine. While he was talking about coke and about taste tests I was thinking about wine.

He makes the point that when asked to judge jam people do nearly as well as the experts if they are just asked which jam they liked the most, but do much worse than experts if asked to explain why they graded them in the order that they did. That is, if they have to talk about texture and sweetness and citrus flavours – people change how they judge jam and end up picking the worst jam rather than the best. This is because we don't really know what 'texture' is and so trying to slot jams into categories that we don't really understand means we are most likely to stuff up and confuse ourselves.

Now, wine. I wonder if anyone has ever done a test at cellar doors to see what people end up buying and if they pick the nicest wine for the price, or do they buy vinegar instead? I wouldn't mind betting that there would be something similar happening here – and if you are with someone who says things like, "Oh yes, fruity, but with a back-taste of coal tar" you might end up buying something that is quite disgusting. You know, unless you actually have some idea of what you are talking about, it might be best to shut up and drink the wine.

That is the point of this book – learning when to trust your "immediate reactions" and when to question them. I think there is much in this book that is worth knowing and much that is fascinatingly interesting. (The stuff about unconscious racism is so important that everyone should be forced to read this for that alone). But with Richard, I am a little concerned that an expert in the field didn't like this book. All the same, the expert does recommend *Made to Stick* so I guess that can be the next book I read.

There is – as is proven by Dylan Moran – only one way to pick wine:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cw2gGf...>

`Ashlula` Ayse says

I reread this after realizing I couldn't remember enough to compare with Kahneman's book. They are mostly

aligning, only Kahneman suggests against making snap judgements and relying more on evidence whereas Gladwell gives views from both sides and stays impartial.

Blink is about unconscious decision making. Our unconscious side is fascinating, because it seems to be the one that holds the strings most of the time; making very fast decisions, watching out for any threat to our existence. However when our drives (the motivators of unconscious) are in conflict, our rational mind is quick to get in. The rational mind is also there to make corrections, and making plans.

So it seems that mostly we are on autopilot for unimportant things, and also when we have to do something at lightening speed. But at other times even if there is an urge to act instinctively, one should act relying on data rather than on instinct.

Ed says

I didn't learn much from this book that I did not already know. I am beginning to suspect that Malcolm Gladwell is not writing books that uncover valuable facts that we should know, but rather is writing books that restate facts we already know but in an interesting way.

I like his anecdotal stories very much which is why I finished the book - hoping for more stories. When he lays out the facts, though, his writing is no more interesting than any other scientific author.

So, in summary, what we have is a talented writer making certain scientific findings available to a much wider audience than usual. Bravo! However if you want to learn something new, this book or his previous effort, *The Tipping Point*, is not where to go to find it. I imagine, if I read it, I will find *The Outliers*, his latest effort, to be similarly constructed.

Blink's content is easily summarized. First impressions are often more accurate than conclusions arrived at after much study and analysis. Be careful, though, because first impressions can be troublesome because of people's prejudices. Got it in 254 pages. He does come up with an interesting term, "thin slicing", to describe the process of taking in a first impression. Maybe learning that term made reading the whole book worthwhile. Maybe.

seak says

Much like the reason behind my majoring in Economics, I like Gladwell because he opens my mind to new ideas and new ways to think. Much like Economics, I believe he's far from perfect, but I really enjoy viewing the world through his lens.

In just about anything, when people start acting as if there is only one way to do something, I stop listening to them. This goes for many things, but especially politics. If you DO, however, find someone who is omniscient and knows exactly how every policy will turn out in the end, please let me know. I may listen to their one way of seeing the world. Otherwise ...

What I got from Blink is that there is a lot to our instant thoughts and feelings and many times much more than we give them credit. The traditional wisdom is to plan and make huge weighty decisions based on every

single bit of information that we have at our fingertips (which is just about everything, google!). This is actually a big reason my wife and I get into ... disagreements (we'll go with that). She likes to plan everything down to the last detail and I like to be a bit more relaxed.

So it would seem that this book is a big proponent of my way of doing things, but it turns out it's not so much.

We should trust our gut-instinct, says Blink, if we have many hours of experience in said realm of understanding because we have developed the skills to make sense of those small details and because we have the ability to "thin slice."

Gladwell also makes the point that not always can we trust our gut-instinct, however, because our gut-instinct tends to be racist, even when we are not in fact consciously racist. Also, our instincts can get overwhelmed by heightened arousal, such as when people can't even dial 911 in an emergency because their senses are overloaded.

But then again, you can practice and have these types of unconscious reactions mitigated.

The interesting story-telling style of introducing these topics is, of course, what really gets me. It's the stories that are often unbelievable that have me clamoring for more, just like in Outliers (although I think Outliers was a little better written) and I would assume his other books.

He goes into why The Getty art museum spent millions on a fake kouros (Greek statue) and why cops probably aren't racial profiling when they beat people like Rodney King, but because of a few key mistakes such as allowing their unconscious to get overwhelmed and also because they were a group of officers instead of just one.

He talks about people who can listen to a couple and tell when they should start talking to their lawyers and people who have developed the actual abilities that are shown in the TV show "Lie to Me." How looking at a person's room for 5 minutes may give a complete stranger a better picture of a person than a good friend.

I've always loved these types of explanations for things. There's the old wisdom we have and the wisdom we assume when we don't have any other way to describe a particular event and which is completely wrong. I love thinking new ideas, even when it's old news and that's why I'll keep coming back to Gladwell.

Will Byrnes says

This was a big best-seller for Gladwell. He posits that much of the time we make decisions, reach conclusions in a sort of pre-conscious manner that he calls "thin-slicing." That means taking a very small sample, a thin slice, and making a decision immediately based on that information. However, it is the case that the ability to evaluate that slice is fed by a lifetime of experience. It is not simply, as some, including President Bush the second, might believe, that using one's gut, in the absence of years and years of preparation, is as valid a way of reaching decisions as taking the longer route of careful analysis of available data. No, no, no.

Sanjay Gautam says

Blink is- what all the stories, case studies, and arguments add up to- an attempt to understand the magical and mysterious thing called Judgement. Its basic premise is: split second decisions (snap judgements); how they can be good and bad.

Gladwell suggests split-seconds decisions are better than the decisions where we take considerable time to weigh our choices and options. He points out that our mind figure things, people, et al. in a blink of an eye. And it is often that these snap judgements are much more trustworthy than judgements arrived at rationally. But he does not stop here and goes on further: snap judgements can be misleading, too; he termed it Warren Harding error. He suggested that there are some instinctive processes that prevent us to see clearly; and hence cloud our judgements.

Blink is an interesting read. It is very well written, and at the same time engages your attention from the start. And writing is reader friendly, perfectly suitable for a layman.

.....

I bought this book because I was intrigued by the subtitle of the book: The Power Of Thinking Without Thinking. This subtitle was something Zen like, I felt. And when I read it initially, three years ago, I found it resembling with Zen teachings (and koans). Following are two quotes that mainly convey the spirit:

"They were so focused on the mechanics and the process that they never looked at the problem holistically. In the act of tearing something apart, you lose its meaning."

"When making a decision of minor importance its advantageous to consider all the pros and cons. In vital matters, however, such as the choice of a mate or a profession, the decision should come from the unconscious, from somewhere within ourselves. In the important decisions of personal life , we should be governed by the deep inner needs of our nature."

Riku Sayuj says

Probably the best among Gladwell's books. He still stands true to his success mantra - "Gladwell - The Power of Inductive Reasoning." But, it was still a well researched and informative book. Blink.
