

From the desk of

*Randy Schuster*

KEEPING YOU AHEAD BY COORDINATING  
THE PIECES OF YOUR FINANCIAL PUZZLE



## blink

Malcolm Gladwell

### Snap Judgment vs. Rational Analysis: Which Do You Use?

Are hunches or logical thinking more effective in making decisions? In *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell, he delves into the value of our adaptive unconscious as part of the decision making process. Frequently we dismiss our initial thoughts in preference of more objective rational analysis. However doing so may mean ignoring critical information. In Gladwell's words "...truly successful decision making relies on a balance between deliberate and instinctive thinking."

Gladwell begins with the story of "The Statue that Didn't Look Right", a story of the sale of a very rare Greek sixth-century BC sculpture to the J. Paul Getty Museum in California. Although scientific tests initially showed it to be authentic, experts had a "feeling" it was not.

*"...Evelyn Harrison was next. She was one of the world's foremost experts on Greek sculpture..." [The curator] took us down to see it," Harrison remembers. "He just swished a cloth off of the top of it and said 'Well, it isn't ours yet, but it will be in a couple of weeks.' And I said, 'I'm sorry to hear that.'" What did Harrison see? She didn't know. In that very first moment...all Harrison had was a hunch, an instinctive sense that something was amiss...*

*A few months later...Thomas Hoving, the former director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York [went down] to see the statue as well. Hoving always makes a note of the first word that goes through his head when he sees something new, and ..."it was 'fresh' - 'fresh',"...And 'fresh' is not the right reaction to a two-thousand-year-old statue."*

**Thin Slicing** is the ability of our unconscious to find patterns in situations and behaviors based on very narrow slices of experience. This ability, especially in experts, can lead to sophisticated judgments made in a very short period of time, frequently without understanding why they know what they know. In the story of the Greek statue ignoring this intuition cost the museum significant money and embarrassment when the statue was eventually proved a forgery.

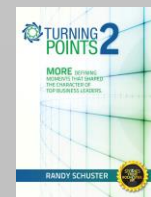


**Randy Schuster**

Centra Financial Group  
500 Linden Oaks  
Rochester, NY 14625

Phone: 585-899-1200  
Fax: 585-899-1299  
[www.coordinatedplan.com](http://www.coordinatedplan.com)

[Randy@coordinatedplan.com](mailto:Randy@coordinatedplan.com)



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As Gladwell continues through the anecdotes of his book he cautions us to understand how **our adaptive unconscious can be manipulated, or primed**. For instance, a research subjects were called to walk into an office and read ten phrases with the words “worried”, “Florida”, “old”, “lonely”, “gray”, “bingo” and “wrinkled” inconspicuously sprinkled in. After reading the phrases participants (unknown to them) were noted to walk down the hall more slowly than they had on their way in. Why? Because the words made the subjects focus on being old. Individuals should be aware that every day our adaptive unconscious is primed by personal experiences, the news and other media.

In addition, Gladwell examines when **too much information can overwhelm our instincts**. In the case of Cook County Hospital, an average of 30 individuals a day entered the ER worried they were having a heart attack. Measurements are taken for blood pressure, the heart was listened to, and questions about length and location of the pain, what causes pain, history of heart trouble; cholesterol level, diabetes, and an ECG are done.

*“When it comes to chest pain, doctors gather as much information as they can and then they make an estimate...The problem with that estimate, though, is that it isn’t very accurate...The doctors thought they were making reasonable estimates. But in reality they were making something that looked a lot more like a guess, and guessing, of course, leads to mistakes...doctors correct for their uncertainty by erring heavily on the side of caution...”*

*We just didn’t have the number of beds we needed to deal with patients with chest pain. We were constantly fighting about which patient needs what.”*

A new decision matrix based on the work of Cardiologist Lee Goldman was implemented to simplify the process. Doctors combined the ECG results with only three urgent risk factors: (1.) unstable angina, (2.) fluid in the lungs and (3.) systolic pressure below 100. The simpler solution was shown to be a 70% improvement because **the extra information confused the issue** of diagnosis, resulting in frequent poor judgments.

**In summarizing** the book, Gladwell indicates that understanding how your adaptive unconscious works and making accommodations to either trigger (such as in the case of the Greek Statue) or curtail (in the case of too much information or stereotypes ) your “Blink” mechanism can help improve your decision making process.

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