

Review of malcom gladdwells blink and lessons within book reviews example

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Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Blink* coins the term rapid cognition, which is the term that he applies to being able to making a lightning fast decision. He spends time interviewing and learning from people in jobs and lives that require them to make not just lightning fast decisions, but the right decisions in a short amount of time. This takes him to emergency rooms, art installations, the police and psychology laboratories to not just learn about people acquire rapid cognition, but also how the layperson can develop techniques of rapid cognition.

Rapid cognition is the brain at its best, and is a potent way to utilize the three pounds of grey matter encased in all of our heads. Malcolm points out that this rapid cognition is not achieved by accident. While most people consider knowledge necessary for the brain to be operating at peak performance, Gladwell introduces another layer to that narrative. He writes, “The key to good decision making is not knowledge. It is understanding. We are swimming in the former. We are desperately lacking in the latter” (Gladwell, 2007).

The overall takeaway from the book is that rapid cognition is not something that some people were lucky to be born with. Like any skill it can be acquired and developed in order to operate on many levels of life. Rapid cognition leads to “snap judgments” meaning that discernment, say on an emergency room operating table, happens in a flash and the doctor must then be committed to that course of action. Aside from responding to an emergency situation, which could arise, snap judgments allow people to become better drivers, and more efficient workers since discernment time can be reduced when a person is able to make the right decision quickly.

What resonated most with me was the first chapter in which Gladwell presents the theory of thin slices and how a little bit of knowledge could go a long way. This theory is based off of the phenomenon of thin slicing, which is the ability to be able to detect patterns based on limited observation or experience. Gladwell explains this using an anecdotal situation of a museum, which had purchased a piece of art called the “ Getty kouros.” Although supposed art experts had deemed the sculpture genuine, it left a bad impression in the gut feelings of some experts who looked at it. They could not pinpoint it to a particular thing, but there was something, based on all of their experience as art experts, which made them uneasy about this sculpture. This illustrates an example of thin slicing, in which some small, perhaps subconscious detail points to a deeper underlying reality.

As Gladwell demonstrates, very often this happens subconsciously. People make snap judgments so frequently, that very often they are not even aware of making them. Gladwell writes, “ Taking rapid cognition seriously—acknowledging the incredible power, for good and ill, that first impression play in our lives—requires that we take active steps to manage and control those impressions” (Gladwell, 2007).

This is key, because if a person does not learn how to control and channel their power for rapid cognition, they will become a victim of the sometimes-erroneous assumptions of it. The Warden Harding Error is an example of how rapid cognition plays out in everyday life. While thin slicing can be positive, The Warren Harding error shows the downside of think slicing. Malcolm shows how things like racial biases are all often due to people thin-slicing with preexisting fallacies engrained in their brains. He uses the anecdotal

evidence of US President Warren Harding. He believes he won the election because he came across as looking handsome and distinguished. The US soon found out their president did not live up to these attributes; he merely appeared to have them because he was tall and handsome.

Gladwell highlights this phenomenon with something called the Implicit Association Test. The test is taken as quickly as possible, arranging words into a column they most associate with it. In presenting this information, Gladwell also shows how the natural human tendency to form biases can be overturned when they are recognized and people actively try to dispel the reality of them in their lives.

We develop the biases that we have because the world is a complicated place to navigate through and the brain needs to have a mechanism to take shortcuts in order to not have to fully think through every minor decision. It might be true that some bears will not attack humans. But rather than getting to know every bear one encounters on a personal basis, it is a good rule of thumb to assume that all bears are man-eaters and to give them a wide berth.

Gladwell writes “our world requires that decisions be sourced and footnoted, and if we say how we feel, we must also be prepared to elaborate on why we feel that way. We need to respect the fact that it is possible to know without knowing why we know and accept that - sometimes - we're better off that way” (Gladwell, 2007). With this recognition also comes the realization that sometimes, perhaps 5% of the time, we will reach a false positive in our assumptions. It is good to trust one's instinct, but not 100%. It is also necessary to further develop one's instinct in a methodical way.

An ER doctor, for example, is so accustomed to his or her craft, that he has become an expert in identifying the outer signs of underlying conditions that the body gives off. "When we become an expert in something," Gladwell writes, "our tastes grow more esoteric and complex." (Gladwell, 2007).

In my own chosen careers as an accountant it is easy to see where the lessons of rapid cognition can be applied to that industry. Much of accounting involves repeating the same tasks month after month. Numbers interact with each other, and are used to track real world transactions. Often times the numbers interact with each other in such a way that it is difficult to focus on the whole plane of interaction when one is focusing on the individual parts. One of the most important jobs of an accountant is to be able to identify irregularities or anomalies happening with the values being recorded and the outcomes being derived from the data. Through rapid cognition, a specific problem might not be quickly identified, but it might help identify that there is something erroneous or anomalous happening with the numbers.

In much the same way the Getty kouros gave off a bad vibe on a primordial level. Sometimes without an articulate reason something seems wrong because it is wrong. If an accountant is working with a range of numbers and there seems to be something "off" about them that is a signal that thin slicing is occurring it might be beneficial to check them numbers again. Or even better, find a different approach to check the numbers to see them in a new way.

More than being an informational book, Blink is also a motivational book. It lets readers know about the "secret" of rapid cognition, the benefits of it,

and examples of how it is beneficial for a person to utilize it in their lives to make better, faster decisions. The final chapter, "Listening with Your Eyes: The Lessons of Blink" gives readers a rough idea of how they can begin to practice rapid cognition in their own lives and to do it in such a way that minimizes false positives.

The benefit of this is large. It could realistically save a person months of their life spent deliberating. As Gladwell points out, "There can be as much value in the blink of an eye as in months of rational analysis" (Gladwell, 2007). To incorporate this into one's own life, it is important to be mindful that there are other ways to learn other than the usual paradigms. Since "We learn by example and by direct experience because there are real limits to the adequacy of verbal instruction" Understanding the limits of normal impressions, that there are sometimes false biases in rapid cognition, and learning to discern between the two, will give anyone a competitive advantage in a life filled with hundreds of daily decisions.

Reference:

Gladwell, M. (2005). *Blink: the power of thinking without thinking*. New York: Little, Brown and Co..