

Chapter 5 summary of blink: the power of thinking without thinking

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Malcolm Gladwell Blink summary by chapter 5

In chapter 5 of Malcolm Gladwell's, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, he takes a new twist on the idea of thin-slicing, which he describes as, "the ability of our unconscious to find patterns in situations and behavior based on very narrow slices of experience" (23). Throughout the four previous chapters, he explained how thin-slicing works and how it can be useful in everyday life. However, in this chapter, offers the other side of thin-slicing, demonstrating how it cannot always be trusted. He shows how it can be also be harmful to our lives. Sometimes humans make snap judgments about things with a very limited amount of information. Without all of the necessary information to generate a full, accurate opinion, improper judgments are often made. This is one of the ways in which thin-slicing can have a bad effect on someone's life. The first example Gladwell used to demonstrate how thin-slicing can also be detrimental was the career of singer and songwriter, Kenna. Kenna was a very different man with a very different sound, and that is where his issues began.

Because his sound was so different, people had a very hard time labeling him as any specific genre. However, professionals absolutely adored him. His songs found themselves to a talent scout and from there, to the co-president of Atlantic Records, Craig Kallman. When Kallman listened to Kenna's songs, he immediately took a liking to him and quickly decided to bring him to New York to meet in person. When they first met, Kallman had Kenna sing for him right in front of his face, and Kallman was not disappointed. Following this success, Kenna began to become more readily noticed by people such as

Danny Wimmer, who worked with the band Limpbizkit, and Paul McGuinness, the manager of U2. He also even made a music video, which made it onto MTV2. The viewers also really enjoyed his sound, and MTV2 ended up playing his song over 475 times over a few months, which is a lot more than the usual one or two hundred times. Following this success, Kenna made a full album and gave it to Kallman. Kallman handed it out to his executives, and it seemed that everyone wanted it. Anyone that truly understood music wanted Kenna, and they all thought that he was going to be the kind of artist that the majority of music buyers would want. However, this was not the case. In order for an artist to be successful, they must be played on the radio. For this to happen, their music is often given to market research firms.

These firms may post sections of songs on the Internet to see what feedback they get, or they might play songs over a phone call and ask the listener to rate the music. They might even mail a sample CD to listeners to obtain feedback. The songs are rated on a scale of 1 to 4, and a 3.0 has a very good chance of making the radio. However, when Kenna was rated, he only received a 1.3, obliterating the chances of furthering of his music career. It wasn't because his music was bad or because the listeners disliked him as a person, but because they didn't receive the entire package. Craig Kallman, Danny Wimmer, and Paul McGuinness all really loved Kenna, but they got to experience him in the flesh. They heard him and they also got to see him, just as the viewers of MTV2 did. The participants of the market research firm's tests didn't get a chance to experience everything because they were only given a little piece of his music, not even a full song. They were limited on what basis to judge him on, and it's hard to judge someone based only on

a section of a song with a music style much different than what anyone is used to. It is cases like these that thin-slicing cannot be trusted (147-153). Kenna's dilemma demonstrated how thin-slicing can affect feelings towards other individuals, but thin-slicing can also be affected when only small amounts of something are given. Gladwell expresses this through Pepsi's Challenge. Coca Cola had been the paragon of soft drinks for decades, leading the industry completely.

However, Pepsi began to slowly catch up to their status and in the early 1980s, Coke had only a one percent lead over Pepsi in exclusive drinkers. Coke was very concerned with this because their product was more readily available than Pepsi's and they spent more than \$100 million more annually on advertising and they really didn't want Pepsi to usurp their rank as the leading cola. However, Pepsi had been running commercials on television where they put Coca Cola and Pepsi head-to-head in a blind taste test that came to be known as the Pepsi Challenge. In this challenge, Pepsi had faithful coke drinkers take a sip from two different glasses and pick which sample they preferred. One of the cups was marked with a " Q" and the other was marked with an " M." They consistently chose the cup marked " M," which would be the cup holding Pepsi. When Coca Cola heard of this challenge, they immediately wanted to prove it to be false, so they conducted blind taste tests themselves. However, when their tests were performed, they got the same results as Pepsi, and the majority of the testers, 57%, preferred Pepsi over Coke. These results really concerned Coca Cola, and they began to do a plethora of other market research projects. They couldn't figure out exactly what it was that made testers prefer Pepsi,

but eventually decided that it must be the taste. From this came the creation of what came to be known as “ New Coke.” Coca Cola had their scientists experiment with the secret formula and make the soda sweeter like Pepsi. After this change, Coca Cola was coming out on top in blind taste tests and in 1984, they had engineered a final product, “ New Coke.” They did numerous blind taste tests and were now easily topping Pepsi’s ratings. It seemed as though everything went really well and the Coca Cola Company was content with this choice of action. However, when they asked their steadfast consumers what they thought about New Coke, they said they were really disappointed and really disliked it. This little action of adjusting the soda to be sweeter ended up being a catastrophe, causing protests throughout the country. Coca Cola was forced to bring back “ Classic Coke” and get rid of “ New Coke.” However, even with reverting to the original Coke, Pepsi did not top Coke, and Coke is still the leading soft drink in the world. The issue with these tests was the way they were laid out. A sip test is not an accurate way to test what consumers prefer. When taking a sip of something, human senses are more attracted to the sweeter object.

However, when finishing off the rest of the product, this sweet factor might become overbearing or it might lose its sweetness. Pepsi is sweeter than Coke, even though its flavor begins to wear off by the time an entire can is consumed, so it had the advantage in the taste test. As Gladwell put it, “ Pepsi, in short, is a drink built to shine in a sip test” (159). Therefore, thin-slicing abilities may be flawed because it can be very hard to get all of the necessary information needed to make an accurate judgment of something (155-159). Consumers are not only affected by limited quantities of

something but also by something being too different or out of the ordinary. Gladwell establishes this idea through Don Chadwick and Bill Stumpf's Aeron chair. These men were industrial designers and wanted to create a chair that was actually different than all of the other chairs. They changed how the seat pan and back of the chair move, where the arms were attached, the size layout of the back of the chair, making the top wider than the bottom, and changed the padding of the chair from a foam look to an elastic mesh that covered the plastic frame.

This chair was the complete opposite of the ideal chair that someone would want in their office. When they tested these chairs, they brought prototypes to various local companies and had workers sit in them for at least half a day. They had the workers rate the chair's comfort on a scale of 1 to 10, and 7.5 is where they wanted to be before they took it to market. The initial reaction was a mere 4.75. They continued to work with and improve the prototypes and eventually got the comfort level up to an 8. However, everyone thought that the chair was absolutely hideous. The aesthetic score never reached above a six. When preparing to launch the chair, they brought it to various focus groups, and the majority told them to change it. However, they decided not to listen, to keep the chair the same, and to launch it as it was. Nothing really happened at first, but eventually, it attracted attention from the design community and even won a design of the decade award. It continued to bloom from there, appearing on television commercials, films, and advertisements. Its aesthetic scores rose to an 8 and it was now considered beautiful. The issue with the chair wasn't really the look or its use, but the fact that it was so different and new that people didn't know

how they truly felt about it (167-174). Gladwell explains how, in reference to blind sip tests, initial feelings cannot be trusted because sodas are not meant to be just sipped. They are meant to be completely consumed. In regards to the Aeron chair, the initial feelings were incorrect because the people testing the chair didn't understand how they actually felt about the chair. They thought they disliked it when really, they were filled with trepidation because it was so new and different and they had a hard time accepting that.

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The chair wasn't ugly, just merely an aberration (172-173). Sometimes we need to trust our thin-slicing abilities. In the previous chapters, Gladwell expressed how thin-slicing can be really beneficial and necessary to everyday life. However, chapter 5 was the complete reverse of this and he actually showed how thin-slicing can be bad and can limit us from experiencing all that life has to offer. Amazingly, thin-slicing can actually be very harmful to every day life and we shouldn't always trust our initial gut feeling. Works Cited

Gladwell, Malcolm. *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. New York: Back Bay Books, 2007. Print.