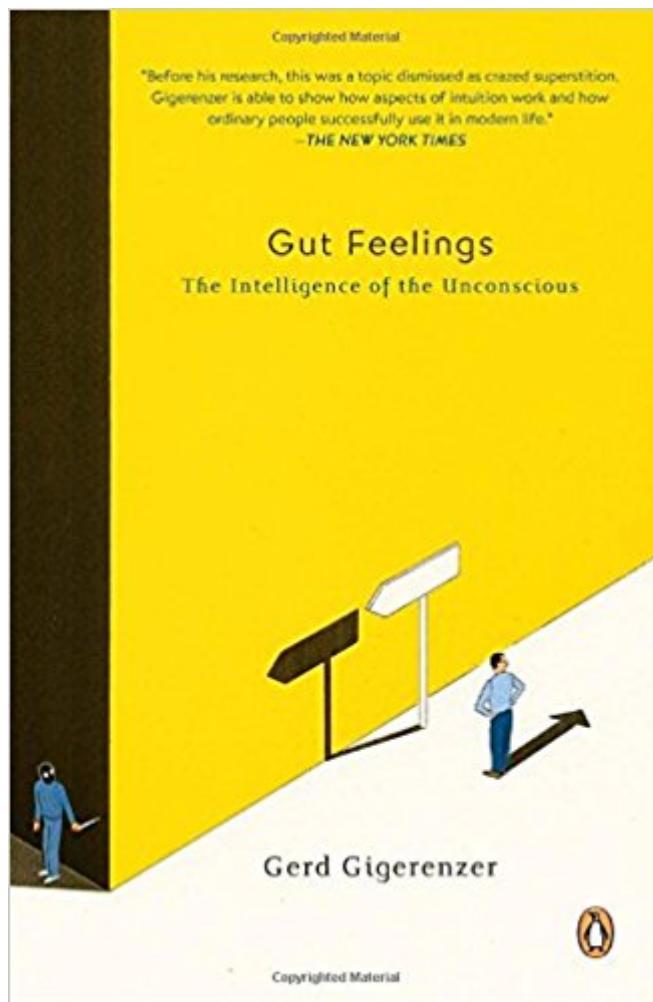


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# Gut Feelings: The Intelligence Of The Unconscious



## **Synopsis**

Why is split second decision-making superior to deliberation? Gut Feelings delivers the science behind Malcolm Gladwell's Blink. Reflection and reason are overrated, according to renowned psychologist Gerd Gigerenzer. Much better qualified to help us make decisions is the cognitive, emotional, and social repertoire we call intuition—a suite of gut feelings that have evolved over the millennia specifically for making decisions. Gladwell drew heavily on Gigerenzer's research. But Gigerenzer goes a step further by explaining just why our gut instincts are so often right. Intuition, it seems, is not some sort of mystical chemical reaction but a neurologically based behavior that evolved to ensure that we humans respond quickly when faced with a dilemma? (BusinessWeek).

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

Gigerenzer's theories about the usefulness of mental shortcuts were a small but crucial element of Malcolm Gladwell's bestseller *Blink*, and that attention has provided the psychologist, who is the director of the Max Planck Institute for Human Development in Berlin, the opportunity to recast his academic research for a general audience. The key concept—“rules of thumb” serve us as effectively as complex analytic processes, if not more so—“is simple to grasp. Gigerenzer draws on his own research as well as that of other psychologists to show how even experts rely on intuition to shape their judgment, going so far as to ignore available data in order to make snap decisions. Sometimes, the solution to a complex problem can be boiled down to one easily recognized factor, he says, and the author uses case studies to show that the “Take the Best” approach often works. Gladwell has in turn influenced Gigerenzer's approach, including the use of

catchy phrases like the zero-choice dinner and the fast and frugal tree, and though this isn't quite as snappy as *Blink*, well, what is? Closing chapters on moral intuition and social instincts stretch the central argument a bit thin, but like the rest will be easily absorbed by readers. Illus. (July 9)

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Trust your hunches, for intuition does have an underlying rationale, according to this accessible account from a German scientist of human cognition. Permeated with everyday scenarios, such as picking stocks, schools, or spouses, the book adopts an evolutionary perspective of how people act on the basis of incomplete information (usually successfully). He sets the table with an example of a baseball player pursuing a fly ball, who relies not on conscious calculation but on an evolved "gaze heuristic" to make the catch. Definitions of such rules of thumb dot the text, which Gigerenzer embeds amid his presentations of studies that indicate, for example, that financial analysts don't predict markets any better than partially informed amateurs. Explaining this as an outcome of a "recognition heuristic," Gigerenzer argues that knowing a little rather than everything about something is sufficient to take action on it. He forges on into medicine, law, and moral behavior, succeeding in the process in converting a specialized topic into a conduit for greater self-awareness among his readers. Taylor, Gilbert --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is a solid book, based on a very interesting insight: that in a lot of cases, more information doesn't lead to better decisions, but worse ones. As it turns out, the additional information only serves to obscure our view of the most important factor in the decision. This isn't just true for fallible human brains, but also when all the data is plugged into a computer for a big, nasty regression equation. Cool, huh? So why not five stars? Because the book peaks in the first two chapters as Gerd Gigerenzer (truly one of the all-time great author names) very clearly explains his insight to you using the fascinating concept of how humans catch a fly ball. (Hint: it isn't by doing all sorts of subconscious calculations about speed and trajectory) From there on out, it's just one example after another of the same concept. By chapter four, when new examples get introduced, you're already projecting out exactly how people traditionally view it and how Gigerenzer's research shows things actually work. The good news is that shows Gigerenzer is a good teacher; the bad news is that the book is clearly too long. So I'd highly recommend this first two or three chapters of this book to learn about Gigerenzer's very interesting, counter-intuitive and well-explained insight. As soon as you feel

like you get the idea, though, I'd move on to your next book - you won't be missing any new ideas.

One of the major unexplained gaps in the science of economics is the assumption that consumers are rational. Based on the assumption of rationality economics papers are littered with differential equations and other forbidding mathematics which describe how consumers make choices. But in the real world consumers don't solve differential equations in order to decide whether or not to buy a cup of coffee. This is a sticky problem. The standard rebuttal is to point out that the flight of a baseball can also be described with all sorts of forbidding differential equations. The fact that baseball players don't solve the differential equations which describe the flight of the ball doesn't mean that they can't catch! Baseball players must subconsciously approximate this mathematical process. Gigerenzer points out that the standard rebuttal is wrong. A baseball player couldn't hope to gather and process all the information about the flight of a ball in real time, even approximately. Instead they use what he calls the gaze heuristic: 'fix your eyes on the ball and adjust your running speed so that your angle of vision to the ball remains constant.' The interesting thing about the gaze heuristic is that it ignores virtually all of the information about the ball's flight and focuses on just one piece of information: your angle of vision relative to the ball. But that single piece of information is enough to reliably let people catch a ball. That in a nutshell is the concept of bounded rationality. Once you factor in the cost of gathering and processing information it becomes extremely irrational to make decisions by solving differential equations. Heuristics (AKA rules of thumb) are the way to go. They give you a lot more bang for your information-processing buck. Here is the truly radical part of Gigerenzer's book. If you were to simply claim that heuristics allow people to make decisions that are almost as good on vastly less information then I doubt many modern social scientists would disagree. But in fact Gigerenzer shows that heuristics can outperform the information-greedy favorites of the social sciences like multiple regression analysis and neural networks with back propagation. Another really nice thing about this book is that Gigerenzer is a very good writer with a very light touch. You will not find the heavy and ponderous writing that you normally expect from scholars. This book is an easy and fast read that belongs on the shelf of everyone interested in politics and the social sciences. You may also want to consider *The Bounds of Reason: Game Theory and the Unification of the Behavioral Sciences* (you can easily and profitably skip over the math).

-Are we really that flawed that in order to figure out which pizza to order you need to do multiple regression analysis? Or do we survive (and have for millennia) because we are part of the order of

things, and as such, have innately within us, the correct mechanisms to figure out things. Or, are these mechanisms outdated in Modern society? Gigerenzer makes a very compelling argument for, not against, Heuristics. We are not flawed beyond repair in our thinking process. But maybe some that espouse 'biases' are. We do not have (or need) a computer-like brain, or worse, have a moral dictate to be an efficient being (even when such an attempt actually makes us less efficient!) Highly recommended. [This is an identical review to Simple Heuristics That Make Us Smart \(Evolution and Cognition Series\) \(Hardcover\)](#) I read both, either one or both work, up to you.

-I gave this five enjoyable stars because several months after reading it, I often use the book's main points (unlike many other facile but forgettable books which are read, agreed with, and then used little). -As an example, I found the Fast and Frugal Decision Tree interesting and tremendously helpful in practical decisions (including ones relating to my Buddhist spiritual practice), and I often develop my own decision trees while approaching similar problem sets. The Decision Trees help me identify the main issues, discern the consequences, and nail down a good imperfect decision. I enjoyed his amusing discussions on Satisficers (those willing to accept a good decision and move on) and Maximizers (those wanting perfection, even at the cost of detailed analysis), and when to choose one method over the other (and when you don't). These concepts are neither unique nor original to the author but I found he explained them thoroughly and meaningfully. -Unlike other reviewers, I rarely found the book bogging down, and when I did I used the satisficer principle and just breezed through those sections. I found his writing and persuasive style elegant, clear, and sensible. The author appeared to dispense with the abstractions, which was just right for this book. Incidentally, I have subsequently found his name arising in descriptive articles on cognitive topics (his credentials are pretty solid. Neat. -So ... I look forward to reading some of his other works.

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