

Member's Quarterly

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President's Message

Trust Your Instincts

Instinctual thinking has great benefits

One of the most valuable and underused tools in many manager's toolboxes is their instincts. It's that feeling you get in the pit of your stomach that says a particular situation has the likelihood to go great guns or become a complete disaster. That's why they're sometimes called gut instincts. They are our body and mind's natural reaction to life and work and yet we often ignore them at the time only to regret that decision later.

Now science has rediscovered what we instinctively knew all along. The scientific journal *Neuron* recently published an article confirming that when we trust our instincts or what they call 'subliminal thinking', people can correctly guess the right answer to a series of difficult questions. They quote researchers at University College in London, England who administered such a test. Not only did they get more correct answers, but the scientists were also able to isolate the part of the brain where this instinctual thinking took place.

So if we have this underutilized capacity sitting inside our brains, how can we better access it? The short answer is one we've heard so many times before – practice, practice, practice. This might mean starting out small, using your instincts in low-risk, high-reward situations. If that goes well, you can branch out to bigger things. You don't have to become a clairvoyant. You just need to trust your own judgment a bit more often.

Another way to do that is to listen to the recurring voices in your head. Pay attention to the ideas that keep coming back even as you dismiss them the first or second time around. They just might be the solution to an old problem or a concept that can lead to a real breakthrough. Maybe your instincts are telling you to try it out. Maybe you should listen.

One of the other things we need to do to fully harness our instincts is to learn not to judge them. Think about them as you would an idea in a brainstorming exercise. All ideas, good and bad, get put on the table at the beginning of the discussion. Your instincts should at least get that same courtesy. Let your instincts survive long enough so that you can evaluate them. Be patient, don't judge and see what happens.

Finally, you should use your instincts with the same care and caution as all other tools in your managerial toolbox. Our instincts may be great and we can learn to utilize them wisely, but at the end of the day they are just more information that can help us make a decision. They should not be the only information that you use to make your decision. So trust your instincts. But check with someone else before you bet the bank or your career on them.

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