



Intuition at Work

Conventional wisdom says that a new product is the last thing your company needs, but you sense that the time is just right for the product you have in mind. It is.

Something inside tells you that the person interviewing for the job will not work out, but it seems easier to take a chance and hire him than continue the recruiting process. He leaves after three months, threatening a lawsuit.

You suddenly get the idea to call a colleague you haven't spoken with for years. She offers to sell you her business.

Just like bats have built-in sonar that guides them in the dark, we humans have an internal guidance system that gives us information beyond the limits of our other five senses. No longer considered "mystical" or "woo-woo," intuition is acknowledged today as a potent and important contributor to successful business innovation.

The Voice of Intuition

Intuition doesn't talk to us the way our other senses do. Its voice is fragmented, symbolic and often sudden. We get an urge to call someone immediately, a certain song comes to us out of the blue, a particular object or image appears again and again, we get answers or options to questions we may not even know we have asked.

Intuition experts say that our so-called sixth sense is an equal-opportunity gift that we're all born with, regardless of race, gender or social status. Like strengthening our physical body by exercising, we can develop our intuitive skills to better serve both personal and professional areas of our life.

In relationships, intuition can steer us toward healthy unions or away from painful ones. And while intuition is no substitute for research, planning and common sense, intuition can be a useful additional tool in financial decision-making.

In the early 1990s, a team within DuPont discovered how useful it can be when it began to evaluate intuition as an active tool for business. Using an imagery technique, along with traditional analytical techniques, the team applied intuition to typical business decisions in a systematic way,

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reporting results that were impressive, accurate and reliable. Among other things, the team used intuition to:

- Create a shared team purpose.
- Provide insight into personnel development needs.
- Design events, meetings and/or conferences.
- Prioritize and allocate efforts and resources.
- Evaluate product development.
- Generate new marketing options and decisions.

In one dramatic example, the team intuited the year-end departure from the market of a competitor. In the exercise, a team member unaware of the subject matter of the inquiry, was asked to think of and describe a person, to comment on the person's strengths and weaknesses and to imagine a brief, year-end headline. The team member described a thin woman with red hair who was too sensitive, easily hurt and vulnerable. The headline was: "Woman dies of a heart attack." The competitor indeed exited the market six months later, at the end of the year.

Four Clues That It's Not Intuition

DuPont's experience also showed that intuitive knowing can be colored by intellectual and emotional patterns and habits of perception, which become like grooves in the mind that channel our thinking and limit our creativity.

Nancy Rosanoff, author of *Intuition Workout*, offers these warning signals that intuition may be getting mixed up with habits and patterns:

- 1. Attachment to outcome.** When people become too focused on a particular desired outcome, they may ignore intuitive information that could conflict with that outcome.
- 2. Rejection of external data.** You'll know when intuitive information may be going unheeded when you hear such phrases as: "That's impossible" or "They don't know what they're talking about" or "I don't need to look at that report; I know what's in it."
- 3. Lack of clarity.** Sometimes an issue can be "fogged in" because of emotional confusion and attachments, and nothing helps to gain clarity. Another opinion may be needed to clear the fog, or the issue may need to go to another person for resolution.
- 4. Needing to make it happen.** Strong statements such as "I can make this work!" often indicates an attachment to a certain set of results. Forcing something to work can require enormous amounts of energy and is counter-intuitive.

The Need for Intuition in Business

In the end, to paraphrase Einstein, neither the problems of the world nor the issues facing businesses today will be solved at the same level of thought at which they were created. With today's business climate demanding ever faster product development, increased customer service, global responsiveness and tighter fiscal responsibility, we need to listen to and learn from our intuition from more than ever.

Tips to Help Strengthen Your Intuitive Skills

Clear your mind. Relax and unclutter your brain.

Know the question. Focus the question, and understand what you're asking. Not, "Will I get a new position?" but, "What will my new position be like?" Look for impressions, feelings and physical reactions, not specific "yes" or "no" answers.

Pay attention to details. Read between the lines. You can prime your perception skills by monitoring how people interact with you.

Map your messages. Take notes on hunches, inklings and gut feelings then track events and situations to get an ear for the sound of your intuitive voice. Also, piecing together random bits of inner information might give you insight into a bigger picture.

Don't judge. Listen to your inner voice and accept what comes without judgment. Don't let your logical mind interfere with your intuitive mind.

Beware of negative influence. Stress, fear or anxiety may block intuition. Common interference comes from fears of failing, of being criticized or ridiculed, of losing credibility or money, of isolation or lack of support.

Notice symbols and other nonlinear clues. You may have to translate or decode recurring images and pictures that are unique to your intuitive alphabet.

Expect mistakes. Not in the intuitive process, but in your interpretation. Remember with practice, you'll be able to use your intuition, not as a replacement for, but as an enhancement to your own good judgment.