

Going with your gut

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The importance of intuition in decision making

Let's face it; we all know that business operations require accurate accounting and numerical statements of fact. Accounting...that old, enduring historical system of checklists and rules that allows business leaders to review their current situation and predict the future. However, as business moved into the 21st century, it has come to be recognized that financial facts aren't the be-all and end-all. Many business decisions require a balance of head and heart. By this I mean that leaders need to assess their intuition, their "gut feeling," and wrap these feelings around their facts in order to make a final decision.

Everyone has some sense of gut feeling or intuition. For instance, recall a time when you made a decision based on fact only to have a gnawing feeling that something was amiss. Sure enough, when the results unfolded, your intuition ended up being correct and you literally kicked yourself for not listening to your gut.

On the other hand, some leaders rely too heavily on intuition for their decisions and neglect the facts.

Once research demonstrated that intuition was a highly rational skill in the 1980s, it has become more and more accepted as a management strategy. Intuition is defined as the subconscious ability to integrate information from both sides of our brain. It is simply an extension of logical decision making. Intuition as a skill allows us to quickly recognize situational possibilities and to make quick decisions. It gives us instantaneous clues or cues and has proven to be a very practical tool for decision making.

Why is it important to develop the skill of intuition and how can business and organizational leaders develop this skill? First of all, business challenges are becoming much more complex, much more global and much more intercultural. As a result, you may face problems you have never experienced before. Not only that, statistical analysis may not be sufficient to tackle some of these problems. Other management techniques, such as the use of intuition, might indeed be helpful.

The first step to developing intuitive skills is to determine your current skill level. This can be

accomplished by engaging in a good deal of self reflection and self awareness. For instance, intuitive leaders are fully aware of where their intuitive information comes from. They diligently assess clues from their physical, emotional, mental and spiritual information flows. They are also typically very good at looking at problems and generating multiple potential solutions; they are very creative and can assess which solutions are practical. They are also very good at identifying trends. The simplest way of assessing your level of intuition is to keep a journal of how you make decisions and assess the effectiveness of each. Alternatively, there are psychometric assessments such as the MERIT profile that assist you in identifying your skill level.

How does one go about developing an intuitive skill? Frankly, I don't know of a book or online course that can teach this skill but rather I believe you are much better off looking for opportunities for practical application. For instance, you can engage in exercises as wild as going to a large, unfamiliar shopping centre, getting lost and then trying to intuitively find your way back to where you started. Rate and diagnose your success.

There are also plenty of popular computer games today that involve sophisticated problem solving and are excellent tools for improving your intuition. At the same time, pay close attention to the various problems that face you every day: watch for trends and propose potential solutions from an intuitive point of view and then compare the selected solutions with your intuitive proposals. You'll find them to be much more accurate than you might have thought.

Business leaders who are highly intuitive will have the opportunity to play a greater role in the future business world. Make intuitive skill building one of your New Year's resolutions!

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