

*Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* by Malcolm Gladwell

Malcolm Gladwell, a New York Times reporter, first hit the publishing scene with his book *The Tipping Point*. Now he has another New York Times Bestseller, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. Gladwell makes the following critical points, which are followed by questions they encourage:

1. "The part of our brain that leaps to conclusions... is the called the adaptive unconscious and the study of this kind of decision making is one of the most important new fields in psychology". He likens the adaptive unconscious to "a kind of giant computer that quickly and quietly process a lot of the data we need in order to keep functioning as human beings".

This is the part of us that allows us to make snap decisions whether under stress or even in the gentleness of moments.

In example after example, Gladwell shows how we can grab a "thin slice" of information, which provides critical insight into the whole.

This critical "thin slice" information is perhaps the jewel or nugget in the whole.

For example, students who watched videos of couples during a conflict were able to assess in only a few minutes whether the marriage will survive with some 90% accuracy. Trained psychologists, dealing with couples over much greater periods of time, had difficulty approaching such a figure, presumably because of too much information.

Question: What is the "thin slice" when it come to employee productivity or the filing of claims? Perhaps it is showing that you care?

2. "Decisions made very quickly can be every bit as good as decisions made cautiously and deliberately". The caveat here includes training, experience, and circumstances. The more education and skills we have coupled with experience under similar circumstances, the more likely we are to make a good snap decision as opposed to perhaps a disastrous one.

Just ask a Marine how important preparation is.

Question: How much training do you really do? How good are your folks under fire?

3. "In one study, we were watching newlyweds, and what would often happen with couples who ended up in divorce is that when one partner would ask for credit, the other spouse wouldn't give it".

Gladwell reports the "thin slice" in a relationship, which will lead to its failure, is where one party is condescending towards the other (or conversely where one party doesn't give the other credit).

No rocket science here. Furthermore, he tells us that once a relationship starts going south, there's a 94% chance it will continue to do so. Whether its defensiveness, stonewalling, criticism, contempt or condescending behavior, none of us need a book to know these actions are harmful to marriages and workplace relationships as well.

Question: What approach do you take during disagreement? Are you proud of it? Does it work? Has there been any agreement on how to handle matters before they go south?

4. "It is quite possible for people who have never met us and who have spent only 20 minutes thinking about us to come to a better understanding of who we are than people who have known us for years."

He gives the example of peeking into someone's medicine cabinet (to help us understand that we can learn as much, or more from one glance at a private space as from hours of exposure to a public space).

Taking a quick look at an employee's cubical can be the workplace equivalent of the medicine cabinet.

Question: What impression does your workplace or workspace make in a nanosecond?  
Realize it is never not making that impression!

However, Gladwell in the chapter of his book on Warren Harding's Mistake, that our first impressions are not always correct.

As an example he cites one of the worst American presidents of all time, Warren Harding.

In 1899 in one of the hotels of Ohio lawyer and lobbyist Harry Daugherty met a newspaper editor from the small town of Marion Warren Harding. Daugherty looked over at Harding and said: "he would make a great President". In 1914 Harding have been elected to the U.S.Senate.

In 1916 Daugherty arranged for Harding to address the Republican presidential convention, because he knew that people only had to see and hear Harding, to be convinced of his worthiness for high office.

The convention was deadlocked between the two leading candidates, so, Daugherty predicted, the delegates would be forced to look for an alternative.

So the republican party bosses threw up their hands and asked, wasn't there a candidate they could all agree on? And one name came immediately to mind: Harding!

"Didn't he look just like a presidential candidate?" So Senator Harding became candidate Harding, and later he became President Harding.

Harding served two years before dying unexpectedly of a stroke. He was, most historians agree, one of the worst presidents in American history.

It means that sometimes we can know about someone or something in the blink of an eye than we can after months of study. But we also have to acknowledge and understand those circumstances when rapid cognition leads us astray.

Books like *Blink* can provide insight if after reading them we ask "What does this mean for me or my business?"