

DANIEL
GOLEMAN

Author of the Groundbreaking International Bestseller

Emotional Intelligence

Working
with
Emotional
Intelligence

The Power of Intuition: The First Thirty Seconds

Credit managers must sense when a deal might go bad even if the numbers look fine; executives have to decide whether a new product is worth the time and money it takes to develop; people must make an educated guess about who among a field of candidates for a job will have the best chemistry in a working group. All such decisions demand the capacity to fold into the decision-making process our intuitive sense of what is right and wrong.

Indeed, among three thousand executives in a study of decision making, those at the top in a wide range of fields were most adept at utilizing intuition in reaching their decisions.⁵ As one highly successful entrepreneur put it, “An intuitive decision is nothing but a subconscious logical analysis. . . . Somehow the brain goes through these calculations and comes up with what we would call a weighted conclusion—it seems more right to do it this way than that way.”⁶

Intuition may play its biggest role in work life when it comes to people. Bjorn Johansson, head of a Zurich executive search firm specializing in placing top-level executives with multinational firms, told me, “This business is intuition from A to Z. First you have to assess a company’s chemistry—size up the CEO, his personal qualities and expectations, the tone he sets, and the resulting culture of the corporation. I have to understand how the management team works, how they deal with each other. There’s what you might call a ‘smell’ to every corporation, a distinctive quality you can sense.”

Having registered that “smell,” Johansson then sizes up prospective job candidates accordingly. The key judgment is intuitive: “I know within thirty seconds of meeting someone whether this person’s chemistry fits with my client. Of course I need to also analyze his career, his references, and the like. Still, if he doesn’t pass the first barrier, my intuitive sense, I don’t bother. But if my brains, heart, and gut all say this is the right person, that’s who I recommend.”

That fits with data from studies at Harvard: People can sense intuitively in the first thirty seconds of an encounter what basic impression they will have of the other person after fifteen minutes—or half a year. For instance, when people watch just thirty-second snatches of teachers giving a lecture, they can assess each teacher’s proficiency with about 80 percent accuracy.⁷

Such instantaneous intuitive astuteness may be the remnant of an essential early warning system for danger, one that lives on today in feelings such as apprehension. Gavin deBecker, a specialist in security arrangements for celebrities, calls apprehension a “gift of fear.”⁸ This radar for danger alerts us with a primal feeling that something is “off.”



Intuition and gut feeling bespeak the capacity to sense messages from our internal store of emotional memory—our own reservoir of wisdom and judgment. This ability lies at the heart of self-awareness, and self-awareness is the vital foundation skill for three emotional competencies:

- *Emotional awareness*: The recognition of how our emotions affect our performance, and the ability to use our values to guide decision making
- *Accurate self-assessment*: A candid sense of our personal strengths and limits, a clear vision of where we need to improve, and the ability to learn from experience
- *Self-confidence*: The courage that comes from certainty about our capabilities, values, and goals