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### To Blink or Not Blink

In the last few years, there has been an infusion of psychological thinking into the business community. One such example comes from the psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Csikszentmihalyi studied the most creative people and pioneered the concept of flow, how people get into the highest levels of productivity and creativity – recovering a sense of harmony, getting around the chaos, and controlling one's own experiences to obtain real happiness.

More recently, we have seen Malcolm Gladwell, writer with the *New Yorker* magazine, rise to the top of critical thinking for business leaders. Gladwell's first book, *The Tipping Point*, is the foundation behind certain business models such as Starbucks. And now with Gladwell's most recent book, *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*, the entire business world has become captivated, making Gladwell somewhat of a cult figure. Given all of this attention to Blink, it's worth exploring what "blink" is and whether or not we should all start blinking more.

Let's start with a basic premise - People in business often make decisions by going through an endless parade of meetings, deliberation, expert opinions, consultants, and so forth. Business people are drowning in an endless array of information and analysis – all pre-occupied with trying to come up with solutions to problems. However, Malcolm Gladwell has noticed that some people have an uncanny ability to make decisions by following their gut feelings or somehow they seem to follow some intuitive sense. These first impressions that all of us sometimes have can be quite accurate, but since we can't defend them in front of the boss or the board room, we tend not to act on them, instead opting for further analysis and downstream work.

This rapid-fire, instantaneous "blink" type approach to decisions, relying more on what we quickly process in our powerful, but hidden subconscious has stirred a major debate in how we go about making decisions. Gladwell illustrates several subtle, but real examples of how this works. Let's say you want to learn more about someone. You could talk to this person, asking questions, probing and analyzing things to develop an overall opinion. However, you might learn more about the person by simply visiting their house and picking up on clues about the person – what's in their bedroom, furniture, books, and the like. This subconscious approach can be incredibly powerful and accurate, allowing us to learn in a matter of seconds.

The art of blink thinking is aptly called Thin Slicing – taking a small slice or first impression to quickly make a decision. According to Gladwell – "Decisions made very quickly can be every bit as good as decisions made cautiously and deliberately." Gladwell provides several interesting examples of how people thin slice in a matter of seconds with extreme pinpoint accuracy:

- Tennis legend Vic Braden who can "thin slice" when he observes a tennis serve, instantly predicting double faults every time.
- John Gottman, a psychologist, who after listening to conversations for approximately one-hour between married couples can tell if the marriage will end after 15 years.
- Wendy Levison, a medical researcher who based on conversations between doctors and patients can tell if the doctor is likely to get hit with a malpractice lawsuit.

To his credit, Gladwell makes it clear that thin slicing can sometimes throw you way off – especially if you lack broad experience and expertise. For example, some of us have an inner prejudice or pre-condition that somehow taller people are very intelligent and forceful as leaders. As a result, most of our Presidents and CEO's are taller people despite the fact that shorter people are just as smart and capable. Gladwell himself confirmed this dilemma when he grew his hair into an afro, confirming that racism plays a role in how police officers respond to motorist.

However, for difficult decisions thin slicing may have its place; especially when people are highly trained, acting alone without undue prejudice or influence. So if you can somehow know when to rely on the thin slice of thinking, then you will probably be just as accurate with your decisions as those who must go through volumes of analysis. And even if we are not sure about blink thinking, then we should at least be engaged in a conversation as a matter of curiosity since those who are curious usually get it right.