

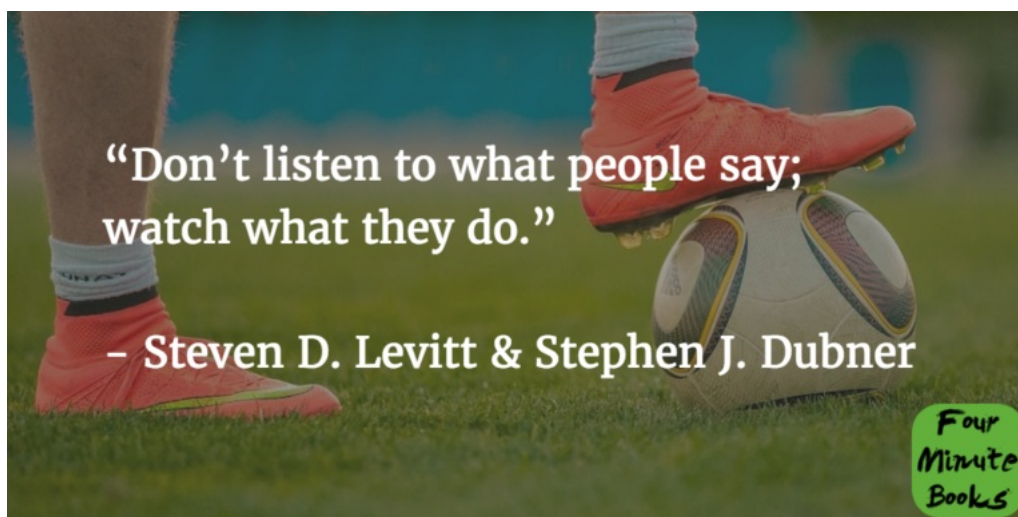
Think Like A Freak Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *Think Like A Freak teaches you how to reject conventional wisdom as often as possible, ask the right questions about everything and come up with your own, statistically validated answers, instead of relying on other peoples' opinions or common sense.*

Read in: 5 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



Almost ten years after *Freakonomics*, Steven D. Levitt and Stephen J. Dubner came up with *Think Like A Freak*. The original book was an expedition into the world of incentives, explaining how many of the most popular, sometimes global phenomena, have a hidden cause we don't see at first sight.

With this book they dive deeper on how you can learn to think the way they did, when they came up with the original book's material. Thinking like a freak is about seeing the world clearly, as it truly is, not as most of humanity perceives it to be.

Here are 3 lessons to teach you how to do just that:

1. If you want to be right, you have to be willing to be unpopular.
2. Observe how incentives drive human behavior in the real world to solve problems creatively.
3. Conventional wisdom is often wrong, so letting go of it will make you happier.

Want to be part of the Suicide Squad of thinkers? Of course you do, let's get to work!

Lesson 1: Would you rather be right or run-after?

Let's say I gave you a shot at winning the FIFA World Cup (soccer). All you have to do is make a penalty kick and score. One kick. All or nothing. Would you rather score a goal in a lame way and win or make a cool shot that your fans love, but lose?

You'll probably say "Duh, Nik, of course I wanna win!" but the choice isn't always as obvious.

Sometimes being right requires you to break with all conventions and that makes you unpopular. In order to think like a freak you have to accept that not everyone will like you, because you're shaking up the world they know.

Sticking with the soccer example: If you do your homework and study the statistics of penalty kicks, you'll see that goalkeepers jump to the kicker's left side 57% of the time. Why? Because most soccer players are right-footed, which makes their kick to the left stronger. Goalkeepers only choose the right side 41% of the time.

But if you add up those numbers, this reveals something even more interesting. $57\% + 41\% = 98\%$ – so what does the keeper do the other 2% of the time? He stays in the middle.

A kick in the middle is therefore always more likely to end in a goal. In fact, using Bayes' Theorem you can calculate that it's about 7% more likely to convert.

But a kick up the middle is one of the most boring, unsporting ways to make a penalty kick. It's not spectacular, breaks the conventions and to some, feels like cheating. What's more, if it doesn't work, the goalkeeper will have caught the ball with zero effort – and the shooter's fans will boo him.

Being right often means being disliked, but which one would you rather be – a disliked winner or a favored loser?

Lesson 2: To find better solutions to problems, observe how incentives *actually* impact human behavior in the real world.

Psychologist and marketing professor Robert Cialdini (who wrote *Influence*) once did an interesting experiment. He wanted to find out what gets people to conserve energy at home (electricity, water, heat, etc.). Naturally, he started with a survey, asking people to rank a few factors by how much they thought they influenced their use of energy.

The result:

1. Wanting to protect the environment.
2. Doing something that benefits society.
3. Saving money.
4. Doing it simply because other people do it too.

Aww, that's nice, isn't it? A whole bunch of environmentally aware people, who care about society. Actually, not so much.

To find out how these answers fared in real life, Cialdini and his team went around neighborhoods in California, from which they could track energy data, putting up five different posters, one for each stated reason and a neutral control poster. They all advertised using a fan instead of air conditioning in the summer to save energy, but used different incentives (like "help protect the environment" or "your neighbor does it, will you?" etc.).

When they measured how much more energy the houses in neighborhoods with the different placards saved over the summer compared to the neutral one, only one factor really made an impact: whether the neighbors saved energy too.

Even though people *thought* this would have the least impact on them, in reality the peer pressure of neighbors saving energy was the *only* thing that actually got them to reduce their energy consumption.

Naturally, this'd be the one to advertise with. **What gets people to do things is rarely obvious, so be on the lookout for the actual incentives and you'll find much better solutions to real-world problems.**

Lesson 3: Letting go of conventional wisdom will likely make you happier, because it's often wrong anyways.

How many people who do you know, who live their lives by the book, doing everything conventional wisdom says, yet are profoundly unhappy? Now contrast that with how many people you know that seem to be doing nothing society dictates, but are almost annoyingly happy.

Chances are you'll know a lot more of the first kind than of the second, but that's a good indicator that you should at least think a lot about conventional wisdom before accepting it.

The two Steves argue that in most cases, letting conventional wisdom go will make you happier.

Take the mantra "winners never quit and quitters never win," for example. This is horrible advice. In fact, the only thing that helps you win is quitting – as long as you're quitting strategically. But even when quitting is the obvious best choice, we often hesitate to do so, because there are plenty of biases preventing us from doing so, like:

1. **Social pressure.** Quitting makes us seem weak.
2. **Sunk costs.** The more time, money and energy we've already invested, the harder it gets to throw in the towel.
3. **Opportunity cost.** We constantly forget that doing one thing keeps us from doing another.

The authors did a study getting people to flip a virtual coin to make important quitting decisions. The result? Quitting often left people happier, especially when it came to quitting their job and ending bad relationships.

Think Like A Freak Review

Totally ran out of space with this one. And as for Freakonomics, I could've written way more lessons. *Think Like A Freak* is a great book, an absolute must-read!

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- Why you should always admit when you're wrong and flipping a coin is better than trusting stock market experts
- How a tiny Japanese student managed to break the world record for eating hot dogs
- What abortion's impact on crime rates can tell you about symptoms vs. causes
- Why children are a magician's toughest audience
- What Van Halen's request to remove all brown M&M's from their candy was really about
- How you can persuade others once you've found out the truth

Who would I recommend the Think Like A Freak summary to?

The 15 year old soccer player with big aspirations, the 33 year old housewife, who thinks she's resistant to advertising, and anyone who feels pressured to keep doing something that's clearly not working.