

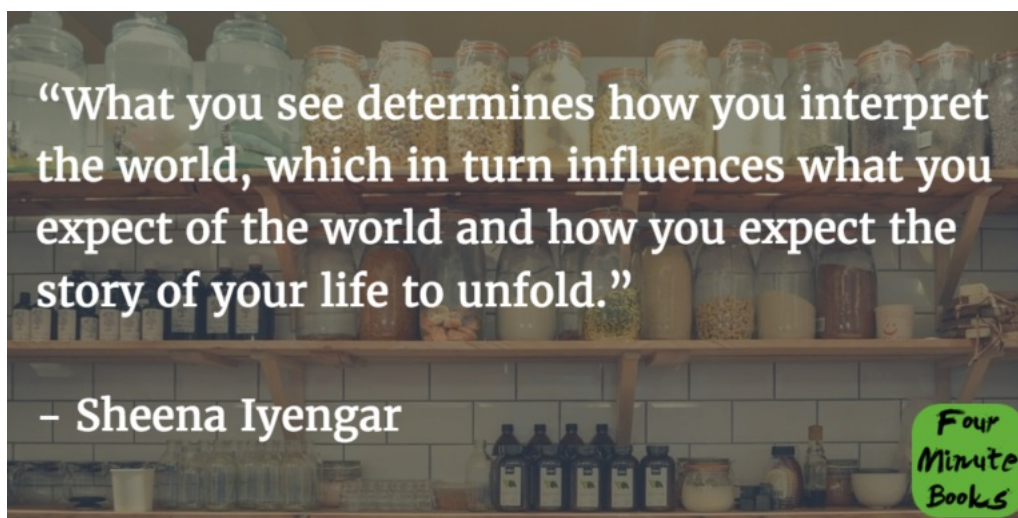
The Art Of Choosing Summary

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1-Sentence-Summary: *The Art Of Choosing extensively covers the scientific research made about human decision making, showing you what affects how you make choices, how the consequences of those choices affect you, as well as how you can adapt to these circumstances to make better decisions in the future.*

Read in: 4 minutes

Favorite quote from the author:



The Paradox of Choice is one of my favorite books of all time. Call me old-fashioned, but I'm a sucker for most books that, in one way or the other, tell us to go back to "the good old days," when making choices was easier.

Sheena Iyengar thinks learning how to make choices is more important today than ever. She's one of the world's most prominent researchers in this field and conductor of the famous jam study, in which shoppers could sample either 6 or 24 different varieties of jam at a grocery store, which led to six times more purchases when less jams were available.

In *The Art Of Choosing*, she explains what affects our choices, how those choices in turn affect us, and what we can do to choose better. Here are my 3 favorite lessons, one from each category:

1. How much choice you need is up to you to find out, but very important.
2. Having some choice is so important that even just thinking you do helps.
3. There are situations when it's better for us not to choose ourselves, as long as the choice is communicated well to us.

Are you game to chop some complexity out of your choices? Let's level up your inner decision-maker!

Lesson 1: You must find out how much choice *you* personally need, something that heavily depends on culture, for example.

There are innumerable factors that influence any given choice you make. When we think about how we can change these, we usually try to answer the question “How can I maximize the amount of choice I have?” – because we assume that more choice is better. At least that’s how I try to answer it, because I grew up in the Western civilization.

Here’s where it gets tricky: **Not all of us need to maximize our freedom of choice to thrive. How much choice you need is highly individual.**

One of the factors that determines how much choice you actually need is culture. It makes sense. Cultures that focus and promote individual freedom, as in Europe or the United States, produce people who thrive on being in charge. Eastern cultures are usually more focused on their collective entity, in which it feels more natural to have others make decisions for you.

In a study where Asian-American and Anglo-American children were either given a toy to play with by their mothers or allowed to select a toy to play with themselves, the Asian kids played longer when their mom selected the toy, whereas the American kids enjoyed playing longer if they self-selected.

What might seem trivial when looking at kid’s playing behaviors is not when it comes to life: In another study, the same two ethnic groups were given a math test before and after playing Space Quest, a game designed to improve their math skills. One group could choose their spaceship’s color and name, another was given the most popular settings among the class.

The American kids improved by 18% when they were allowed to choose themselves and not at all when they were denied the choice, whereas the Asian kids improved by 18% when they were given the settings, and only 11% if they had to decide.

How much freedom of choice you need is not an easy one to answer for yourself, but you can bet that it’s an important one to find out.

Lesson 2: Some choice is better than none, and even the illusion of it makes us happier.

Two famous studies among over 10,000 British civil servants, called the Whitehall studies, showed that employees with a higher salary tended to be healthier, in spite of having more stressful jobs. Those with the lowest pay grade had the highest likelihood of dying from heart disease. However, nobody who works for their government in a Western country lives a life close to the poverty line, so what’s the deal?

As it turned out, **health wasn't a matter of money, but a matter of choice**. With higher pay comes higher responsibility, but also more freedom to structure your work and tasks – and this makes people happier and healthier.

Feeling like you're in charge is (to some extent, remember lesson 1) so important that even the *perception* of choice matters a great deal, regardless of how much you actually end up having.

For example, when new residents of a nursing home were given a suggested schedule of activities, along with being told they were “allowed” to visit other floors, they felt like their health was the staff's responsibility, and they gave up on it. Telling a second group that everything was their choice made them much happier, even though technically both groups were free to do as they pleased.

Lesson 3: Sometimes it's better to have others choose for you, but only if you're properly informed.

Sometimes in life, we have to make really, *really* hard choices.

For example, in the extreme situation of parents having to decide whether to keep their terminally ill children alive or not, parents can deal better with the decision to cease palliative care if it's initiated by the doctor – it puts less of a burden on their shoulders.

However, while it ultimately *is* better to have someone make such a tough decision for you, it only makes you *feel* better if you're well-informed about it.

In a study where participants read about the following three variations of such a scenario, the group that didn't have to make the decision but was well-informed felt best about it:

1. The parents aren't informed about their child's survival chances, the doctors stop the treatment and the child dies.
2. The parents are told there's a 60% survival chance, but with severe neurological disabilities, before the doctors stop the treatment and the child dies.
3. The parents are told the chances and have to decide themselves.

Groups 1 and 3 felt equally as bad, either for being robbed the choice and the information or for having to deal with both, while group 2 felt glad to know what was going on and that the choice was inevitable.

The Art Of Choosing Review

There were so many good things to share from *The Art Of Choosing*, I had a tough time choosing – ironic huh? Highly recommended read!

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What else can you learn from the blinks?

- The two systems that determine our choices
- Why our rules of thumb are often flawed
- What kinds of choices we want to make – unique, but not too much
- How the selective attention effect influences us without us even noticing
- Why our gut feelings are miserable decision advisors
- How we often change our mind in hindsight without realizing it
- Why limited options make it easier to decide
- How to make yourself a better decision maker

Who would I recommend The Art Of Choosing summary to?

The 27 year old Asian college student, who's frustrated with her parents pressure to do things a certain way, the 79 year old nursing home resident, who's sick of being told what to do, and anyone who struggled with a tough health decision before.