



Intuition

Trusting your gut to help guide your decisions...

Alison Fox | Senior Advisor
Phacelift Consulting Services

Intuition. That ability to understand something instinctively without the need for conscious reasoning. That feeling that rises up unconsciously guiding our decisions. Until recently, I had never really focused on the role of intuition in making decisions. It was always just that “gut feeling” you had when something felt right or wrong. But in bringing my awareness to it, I discovered the importance of ‘intuitive thought’.

When my first child was born, I was given loads of advice - as most new parents are. I was recommended loads of books to read, apps to download, routines to follow, products to buy. As I worked through the information I noticed that there were things that didn't quite sit well with me. But still, on with the reading I went. Anyway, when my daughter suddenly arrived prematurely, she had a few complications which saw her have major surgery hours after birth. As a result, we were unable to hold her for a few days while she recovered in the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit. A few days passed and eventually she was strong enough for cuddles. Then a few more days passed, and she was moved out of ICU. And a few weeks passed, and we were eventually able to take her home.

As I fumbled through the first few weeks of motherhood, I realised more than ever just how powerful intuition is. Trying to gain some sanity, I decided to follow some of the advice in the recommended list of readings. However, the more I read, the more confused I became. One book says this, another book contradicts it completely, and one app says something else. There was this conflict building as my “gut” was telling me something completely different. A conflict between my consciousness and unconscious thoughts. It became apparent that as the domain advice was tangible and provided conscious, rational thought,

my unconscious intuitive thought was consciously being ignored and overruled, despite something feeling really “off”. After many sleep deprived meltdowns, I decided to work out what my gut was saying and use my intuitive thought to make decisions based on what felt right. To be the mumma I wanted to be, not the mumma the books were telling me to be.

“...intuitive decisions should be respected...”

See, as well intended as this domain advice was, there was something telling me that it wasn't right for me. And it wasn't so much that it wasn't right, it just wasn't right at that time. They didn't take into account the nuances of my child; they didn't take into account her rocky start, they didn't take into account her physical needs, her psychological needs, nor her medical needs. So, when I listened to what my gut was telling me, and given our situation at that time, I felt that it wasn't the advice we needed, and made an intuitive decision to seek a different path. Dennis Kelly (British writer who co-wrote Matilda the Musical) delivered a comedic and powerful graduation speech that sums up advice like so: “Good advice and bad advice often look exactly the same”. In my opinion, by listening to your intuition, you'll be able to filter through the advice to focus on what is right for you and your situation. He continues, “You can learn from people who have been down a similar path to yours, but they are not you. You'll find you'll always be asking lots of questions, and naturally you will want answers. But one of the few things I have learnt are there are no right answers. Just decisions. You take them, you stand by them and you hope they're right.”

So, from this, I learnt three very valuable lessons when making decisions:

1. Intuitive thoughts shouldn't be ignored;
2. Intuitive thoughts are generated through internal dialogue between our unconscious self and past experiences, triggering an intuitive decision; and
3. These intuitive decisions should be respected.

Intuition is a critical aspect of human interactions and connections. It's a feeling that comes quickly into a person's consciousness, without knowing why the feeling is present. Yet its presence can be strong enough for people to heavily rely on and act accordingly; it influences our thoughts, our decisions and our judgments. Using intuition as a tool for decision making has long been linked to successful executive management and favoured by impressive individuals such as Richard Branson (founder of Virgin Group) and Steve Jobs (founder of Apple Inc.).

To appreciate how our intuitive decisions are formed, we need to understand what the foundations of intuition are, enabling us to make intuitive decisions. First off, we have our consciousness, or conscious thoughts. Conscious thoughts are built on tangible information, domain knowledge and rational thought. The more information our consciousness retains, the more domain knowledge we acquire, the better our verbal understanding is of a topic. Thus, the information we draw from rational thoughts comes from a foundation of learning, understanding and comprehension.

Then we have our unconsciousness, or unconscious thoughts, colloquially known as that "gut" feeling. Unconscious thoughts are those unexplained feelings within us, which are derived from our past experiences, individual hereditary, external unconsciously observed signals we pick up in real time, and the flow of emotions that are triggered by the intersection of these elements.

So here we have two different thinking platforms; the conscious and the unconscious thought. Both platforms play a pivotal role in making decisions. During the decision-making process, our unconscious

thought is activated automatically causing a reaction, even before our conscious thought is engaged. This reaction generates our intuitive thought, which when calibrated against our past experiences, guides our intuitive decisions. Thus, our intuitive decisions become a by-product of our unconscious reasoning.

"...it's the highest form of intelligence..."

Whilst we may not entirely understand why our intuitive thoughts are directing us towards certain decisions, it's important to take a moment and respect what our gut is trying to tell us. Even if our conscious mind wants a certain outcome to prevail, we need to acknowledge that there may be a conflict between our consciousness and unconsciousness. In these situations, it's important taking a moment to observe this conflict, without judgment, and decipher what your gut is saying opposed to your conscious mind. The best decisions are often made when there is a balance between our unconscious and conscious thoughts.

It's a variable algorithm, which is wonderfully unique. The same conscious thought in a different situation may harbour a different intuitive decision as our unconscious draws upon different experiences and real time signals to generate the intuitive thought. Practicing mindfulness and awareness of our different state of thought processes, we can start to hone our intuitive skills, and be prepared to investigate within ourselves why we are producing certain intuitive decisions.

It's been widely said that intuition is a form of intelligence. Some argue it's the highest form of intelligence. Good or bad, it's important to acknowledge and listen to what our gut is trying to tell us. So, as I continue to fumble through the journey of motherhood, I will do my best to respect my intuitive thoughts and decisions, and all that it brings.

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About Alison Fox

Alison has worked across a diverse range of customer centric organisations, with a strong focus on customer engagement, organisational development and design. During her career, she has worked across a variety of creative and corporate organizational development assignments in both public and private sectors, focusing on frontline management, business management and leadership.

Alison's background in design and management has enabled her to lead teams of researchers, designers and operators to develop new stakeholder engagement processes across government organisations. Providing seamless customer interactions, communication strategies and staff processes, she collaborates with organisations to deliver concise information based on customer and stakeholder requirements.

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