

Albert Einstein.
(1879 - 1955)
a German-born theoretical physicist who is widely held to be one of the greatest and most influential scientists of all time.



COMMON SENSE

Whatever your background, training, IQ, or experience, common sense can be learned and applied to everyday situations.

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Common sense is the collection of prejudices acquired by age eighteen.

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Smart people do not always do bright things; sometimes-intelligent people can do confoundedly irrational things, such as gambling away all their money on the stock market or forgetting to take adequate clothing for a back-country hike in the middle of very changeable weather. And while it may seem provocative to suggest that people do not use common sense, this deliberate association is merely to highlight that everyone has lapses in common sense.

Furthermore, the more we are trained to think one way, by our workplace, family, culture, etc., the greater the chance we will allow sloppy or autopilot thinking to take the place of common sense. Common sense is not a one-stop-destination; it is a way of thinking that needs constant nourishing.

Common sense is about exercising sound and prudent judgment based on a simple perception of the situation or facts. As to the purpose of common sense, it is basically thinking that prevents you from making irrational mistakes or decisions, a thinking approach that may open your eyes to the possibility that insisting on being right prevents you from seeing the bigger picture.

Common sense can also serve the purpose of keeping you from being a stickler for rules, theories, ideas, and guidelines that would hamper or stifle the best decision in a particular situation. In other words, just because something says so, or it has always been done that way, is not a good reason to abandon common sense about present needs and changed circumstances. Common sense is natural, but things can always go wrong; just do not beat yourself up about the past too much. Some things are inevitable.



Remember that good judgment requires that we ask ourselves two fundamental questions before we act: "What can I say or do that will help me get what I want?" and "What impact will my actions have on others?"

How does the brain work?

We are human; we are fallible. And our brains work in certain ways as a means of providing shortcuts to ensure survival in a world where being chased by predators could end our lives. In a modern world where caves and saber-toothed tigers are no longer constant companions, some of that reactive, split-second judging can land us in hot water as we react instead of reflecting, assume instead of teasing apart the realities, and follow habit instead of challenging its continued utility. Some of the things our amazing minds are capable of doing to override common sense include:

Maintaining our own sense of reality out of proportion with identifiable reality. While each of us creates a reality out of our own experiences and makes sense of our world through this "personal lens", for the most part, we understand that our sense of reality is only a small portion of a much larger picture.

For some people, however, their sense of reality becomes the only sense of reality, and they believe that they can manipulate or magically transform situations to turn out the way they want them to be. In such cases, steps irrational behavior for some and insanity for the less fortunate.

Engaging in reflex or associative thinking. This is reactive thinking that is based simply on what we have learned through life, reenacting learned models and applying them to each new situation as it appears, without modifying the thought processes being applied. This type of thinking leads to errors in thinking because we refuse to push beyond standard associations formed in our minds about how things *should be*.

When we apply what we know to a present situation by reference to a similar past situation by merely applying our mind's template without adjusting for the context, we are overriding common sense. Even where this template is a bad fit, the insistent or biased mind just ignores the parts of the template that do not fit by trimming them off mentally and only seeing the parts that *match*.

Consequentially, we have our problem solved without thinking it through. This type of thinking tends to make us easily swayed by current popular theories and fads, such as the fashionable tendency in some societies to control social opinion through inflating fears of germs, criminals and terrorists, and job unavailability.

Invoking absolute certainty. Absolutist black and white thinking about the world and others in it in a way that never allows space for doubt is often a cause for forgetting to apply common sense. For such a thinker, the "one true way" is the only way and, therefore, seems like common sense even though it is not.

Embracing pigheadedness. An unwillingness to never be wrong, founded on any number of reasons, including insecurities, fear, incomprehension, anger, and fear of ridicule, pigheadedness is the cause of many an irrational and unjustifiable decision or action.

What you see is what you have programmed your brain to see. This is not an invitation to insanity. This is a request to consider that your sense of reality is not real. And once you start down the slippery slope of self-confirmation that reality is only ever what you see it as, you are open to the possibilities of bigotry, selfishness, intolerance, and prejudice because you will constantly seek to make everyone and everything else conform to your standard of reality and your standard of *what's right*.

By dissociating yourself from this one-sided reality, and learning as much as you can about how



other people perceive the world and our place in it; you begin to make room for common sense to grow because your sense is built on *common* experiences, not just your own.

Start by taking a look at your own emotions, beliefs, and practices to make sure they are not overriding your common sense. Test different scenarios in your mind to try and ascertain the sensible consequences of applying the decision or action the way you want to.

Is it practical, have you accounted for everything, and what will happen if things go wrong? If things go wrong, can you fix them, and if you can't, what will be the consequences? If your reality is clouding your judgment too much, reach out and discuss the situation with others to gain a wider appreciation of their perspectives and ideas. This is most important when you are too close to a situation and any decision or action you take might be affected by our being too closely involved.

Familiarize yourself with your reflective mind. This is the part of your thinking where true common sense resides, the part that takes a bit of time out from the cleverness, the brightness, the importance of everything rushing at you at the moment and suggests that it is time to add a dose of cold water to the excitement.

Reflective intelligence is about being able to stand back and view the bigger picture, so that you realistically appraise the situation or environment directly around you rather than end up forcing yourself to conform to its suitability or practicing wishful thinking.

After an accurate appraisal of the situation, a reflective mindset enables you to set goals that are realistic, given the parameters you are working within, and to take sensible actions toward meeting those goals. In other words, just because other people do or use something effectively is not a sign that it will suit you, too; you need to put your own pensive mind to work on each situation to decide whether it will be a fit for you, your lifestyle, and those around you directly impacted by your decisions.

Recognize the previous step has just suggested that you need to reflect more before you make decisions or act. However, the obvious flip side to reflection is the reality that some things need very fast thinking and swift decisions that will produce sound results.

How do you marry rapid cognition to reflective thinking under the rubric of *common sense*? It is simple; spend your reflecting time intelligently, so that you will react wisely when quick thinking is required. Common sense builds on your reflecting on past experiences, enabling you to refine your understanding of the world and how it works time and time again. This contrasts with a person who only ever reacts on gut reactions, biases, and has failed to reflect on prior experiences.

Remember that engaging in reflection will bring about sound "gut reactions" or fast assessments of situations because your reaction is based on having taken the time to work through errors and successes of past experiences.

How can I reason?

Reason is the mental powers and processes concerned with forming conclusions, judgments, or inferences. Proper use of reasoning is extremely important in making daily decisions.

We are all short-sighted, and we very often see only one side of a matter, while failing to see the whole picture. We see partially; we know in part, and therefore, we may draw erroneous conclusions, inferences, and judgments from our partial views. Narrow-mindedness is a great fault of reasoning that everyone must strive to avoid.



Never imagine that you know all there is to know about any subject and that there is no more truth to know. Seek the truth earnestly. Dispel all prejudices from your mind. Do not think that there is no truth except in the sciences you study.

If you prejudge another's notions before examining them, you have not discovered the truth. Be eager to discover the truth in subjects unfamiliar to you. Read widely and take an interest in many different subjects.

You can always learn something from others, from parents, siblings, friends, neighbors, ministers, etc. If you see something someone else does well, learn from it by following his example. If you see something he does poorly, learn from that as well, by finding a way to improve, so as not to make the mistake yourself.

Refuse to be offended easily but learn to view things from other's perspectives. Some people hold so fast to their own beliefs that they would not even consider they might be wrong when others question the beliefs which they hold as infallible or sacred.

No man is infallible. To suppose one is infallible is to refuse reason. Therefore, accept criticisms with eagerness, as convenient means to examine your own beliefs, ideas, and views.

On the other hand, be humble, and dispel any biases or errors you chance to uncover immediately, unreservedly, and wholeheartedly. Note that this includes all subjects and areas of your life, even in matters of religion or politics.

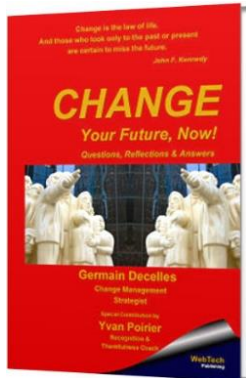
Remember that passion is a major bias that can make one blind to the facts, and distort reason, inasmuch as you become incapable of using your own or listening to others' reason. To reason appropriately, you must adopt a spirit of unbiased disinterest. Learn to strike a balance between reason and passion. There is a time for reason and a time for passion. Let one not confound the other. Furthermore, seek out the best books in every science, search the Internet for the most reliable sources, and learn from the most knowledgeable people on all subjects.

This 642-page book is the result of a four-year project called Project Tomorrow. During the four-year period, we followed more than 500 trainees, aged from 16 to 72.

The trainees were from colleges and reinsertion programs in administration and computer science. Some of the trainees that were implicated were dropouts from school districts, and others were new immigrants or unemployed workers from different economic and social backgrounds.

To graduate, the trainee had to perform during a period of three months in a business environment. At the end of that time, an appreciation evaluation was performed to determine both the amount of change the trainee experienced during the period and the impact of that change on the trainee.

Many of the questions, reflections, and answers presented in this book are issued from our findings during this period. We would like to thank all the trainees for their efforts and determination during the process.



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It is also the fruit of forty years of experience acquired with local and international organizations and companies and during consultancy, change management, transition, and marketing services. For more information go to: www.webtechpublishing.com.

About the Author

In addition to writing, Germain Decelles acts as Change Management Strategist. He has over 40 years of business and consultation experience with local and international markets, including sectors such as retail trade, distribution, information technology and communications, transportation, manufacturing, financial services, and government organizations.



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