

The Easy Way to Put Your Intuition to Work

By Leonard Lang, Ph.D.

Ever suddenly just get an answer to a problem, a new way to look at a situation, an aha experience? You may have wondered how that happened? According to scientific research that's your intuition speaking.

That ability to generate a solution when you're not even consciously working on a problem is of course, not new. But only in recent years with the explosion of brain science research in a number of fields, has intuition become something validated and better understood. Studies continue to indicate that intuition is not an unreliable or naïve way of making good decisions or coming up with new answers as is often believed. The mental work that goes on below our conscious rational thinking (often seeded by conscious working on a problem) is proving to be our most brilliant work.

A recent example of research was reported in the February 16, 2006 issue of *Science*. In brief, Dutch researchers studying intuitive vs. rational decisions concluded that rational, step by step, logical and conscious thinking produces the best outcomes for simple decisions and problems, while intuition produces the best outcomes for complex decisions and problems, any kinds of problems.

HOW TO USE YOUR INTUITION

So what can you do to employ your vast intuitive powers? First, accept your intuition as a useful part of your thinking. It's there even if you don't pay attention to it, but you are more likely to benefit from it and expand its value if you are aware of it. To tap into your intuition more regularly, follow this simple approach:

1. **Define the problem.** This is the same way you'd start for any issue, even those you want to solve more consciously, step by step. You and your intuition need focus and purpose.
2. **Become immersed in the issue.** Basically, you are familiarizing yourself with all the basic ideas more than working through them to find a solution as you otherwise might. It's like you have gathered together a bunch of jigsaw puzzle pieces. You will want to play with them and start seeing what pieces might fit together here and there until you have a "feel" for the puzzle. But you don't have to necessarily start putting together the puzzle. That's the job of your intuition.
3. Now comes the easy part. **Expect or request an answer, and then let go.** Letting go means dropping all your thinking about the issue and accepting that something is still happening even though you have stopped fiddling mentally with the issue. You've planted a seed and now, you can just wait for it to sprout and blossom as a solution or decision.
4. **Let the answer come.** After setting the problem aside, you may then find that when you next wake up or take a shower or put your mind back on the subject that an answer or decision becomes clear to you. It may be something you already knew or an "aha" new insight. Either way, there's been a shift, and you feel more clear about your situation.

INTUITION AT WORK

Let me give you an example of an intuitive "aha" solution that came within minutes of letting go of solving a problem under pressure.

It was late at night. I was still trying to put together a process to help a group get unstuck and move forward more productively. **(Step 1—Define the problem and goal)**. I had done all my preparation work with interviews, discussions, and reviewing what I had done in the past. **(Step 2—Become immersed in the issue)**.

But somehow in trying to get them unstuck, I felt stuck. Rather, I felt I did have the answer but couldn't quite see the forest for the trees. The tough part was that I needed a process for the next morning, just a few hours away, and I needed my sleep.

Typically, I would have just pushed on into the night until I had mapped out a plan for the group. This time I just felt confident I had a great solution, better than what I could force out right now plodding into the night, so I decided to just let go and trust. **(Step 3—Let it go)**. I quit working, feeling surprisingly relaxed and confident, considering I was apparently not at all prepared. I went to bed, reading for about 5 minutes to just put my mind on something else. The moment I went to turn out the light, another one switched on in my thoughts. Out of nowhere (or so it seemed) I had my solution. **(Step 4—Let the answer come)**.

I jumped out of bed, grabbed a pen and paper and jotted down just the bare minimum of notes to make sure I didn't lose it all during sleep. The next morning, fortunately, it still made perfect sense, and I went to the meeting and had fabulous results—a very happy group, excited about moving forward where they had been dreading this entire process. Chalk another one up for intuition. It may not always have the right or best answer, but it is one of our great resources.

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