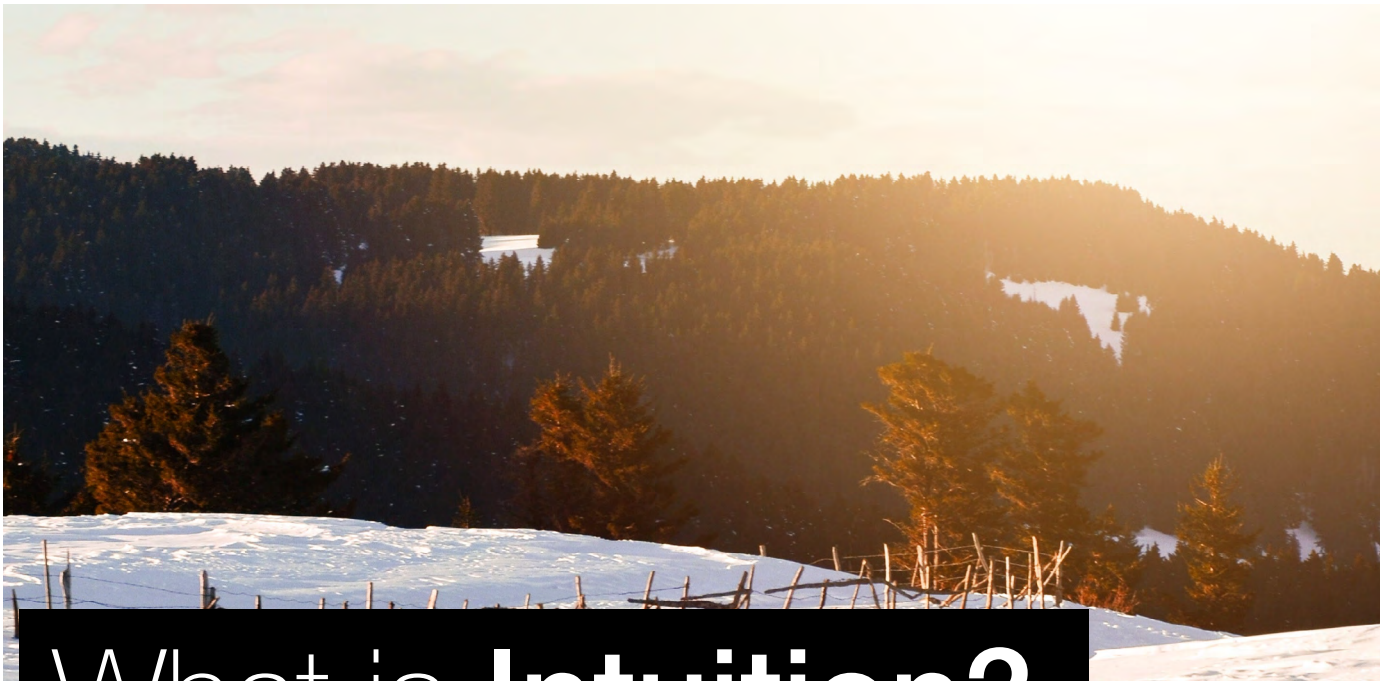


Intuition for Professionals



Integrated Mind Training

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What is Intuition?

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines intuition as:

The power or faculty of attaining direct knowledge or cognition without evident rational thought and inference.

Immediate apprehension or cognition.

Dr. Judith Orloff, psychiatrist, and author on intuition states:

“Intuition is the ability to know something from an instinctive feeling rather than simply conscious reasoning. It is an inner knowing accessible to us all that can guide us through life.”

Daniel Kahneman, Psychologist and Nobel Prize winner offers the pithiest definition:

“Intuition is nothing more and nothing less than recognition.”

Intuition is a form of nonverbal knowing that does not rely on the intellect. This form of knowing is often experienced as a gut-feeling in the body and is always available to us. Learning to harness this awareness in addition to rational analysis can help us in numerous ways in our professional lives. Cultivating intuition should not come at the expense of rational analysis. Instead, intuition can be paired with rationality to make better decisions.

The philosopher Ken Wilber states that each stage of human development “transcends and includes” all the capacities in the previous stages. For example, a child who only thinks in strict black and white rules may learn to think more abstractly as an adolescent. Being able to think abstractly is a higher cognitive capacity that younger children don’t have. In this sense, the adolescent “transcends” the previous cognitive limitations they had as a child.

This does not mean that the adolescent loses the capacity for rule-based thinking. Instead, the previous capacities are “included” in the adolescent’s development. As adults, we can go back and forth to different levels of cognition fluidly. Similarly, humans’ brains are more developed than our primate relatives, but we still retain all the cognitive capacities (both good and bad) that primates have. Thus, psychological development is always a process of transcending and including what came before.

Intuition can be conceptualized as a form of knowing that transcends the limitations of intellect. When we have a genuine intuitive experience, we go beyond the capacity of the rational mind, and know things holistically and immediately. Thinking takes time and is limited by the constraints of language: intuition is typically immediate, holistic, and non-conceptual.

When developing intuition, it is important that we don’t make the mistake of excluding our rationality. Instead, we can cultivate our intuitive and intellectual forms of knowing simultaneously. Our decisions should incorporate both forms of knowing as much as possible.

Making important decisions on gut feelings alone that don’t make rational sense is generally not a good idea. However, making what seems to be a good idea on paper when you intuitively feel something is not right is also a bad strategy.



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How to Develop Intuition

Intuition is a skill that can be cultivated. Our intuition is always with us, we just don't recognize it. In Tibetan Buddhism, there is a "pointing out" style of teaching that is based on a close relationship between student and teacher.

The teacher helps point out elements of the student's experience that have always been there: the student just never noticed it.

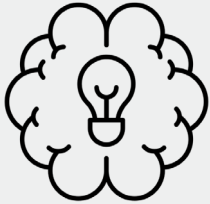
This style of teaching is like traveling with a tour guide in a foreign city. When I was in Rome, I hired a tour guide to show us around the Colosseum. Being my first time in Italy, my mind was engrossed with new sights, sounds, and smells. My guide pointed out things that were right in front of me that I would have never noticed on my own. The guide's ability to point out what I was unable to see was a result of her years of experience. What she pointed out was always right there: I just couldn't see it. Learning to tune in to our unique style of intuition is the same. **By learning to shift our focus and pay closer attention to our direct experience,** we can access intuition that is always available to us.

It is important to recognize that what we are cultivating is our awareness and sensitivity to intuitive signals, not intuition itself. We can't force ourselves to be intuitive through effort and struggle. Instead, it is a process of awareness, surrender, and listening. When we begin to pay more attention to our intuition, **it becomes clearer to us, and eventually becomes effortless to recognize.**



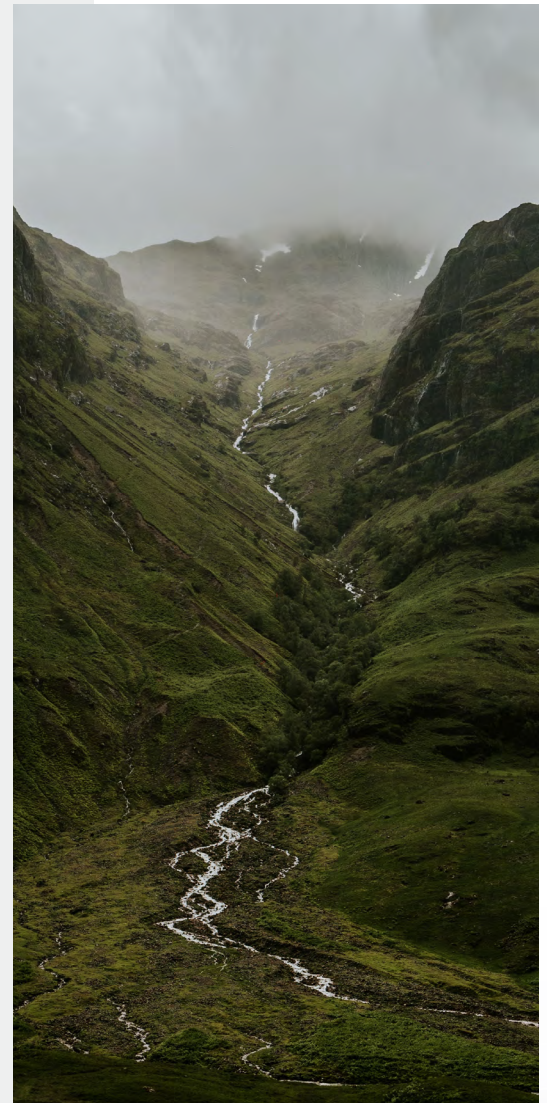
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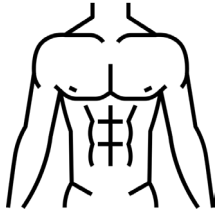
Building Blocks for **Intuition**



Meta-Cognitive Awareness

Meta-cognitive awareness is being aware of what is happening in your mind. This means awareness of thoughts, feelings, senses, and any other mental experience. Meta-cognitive awareness can be cultivated by any practice that helps us become more aware of our mental states. Studies have shown that people with certain personality disorders measure low on meta-cognitive awareness (for some of these disorders, developing meta-cognitive awareness is crucial to healing), while people who have engaged in psychotherapy have significantly higher meta-cognitive awareness. **Practices that can help develop meta-cognitive awareness include psychotherapy, coaching, mindfulness meditation, and journaling.** This is one of the most important foundational skills for cultivating intuition as it gives us the capacity to slow down and pay close attention to our experience. If we are unaware of what is happening in our minds, we won't be able to identify intuition when it arises. Similarly, if we work to know our psychological "stuff" (limiting beliefs, hang-ups, emotional patterns etc.), we can clearly notice when something is getting in the way and direct our attention back to our intuitive experience.





Body Awareness

Intuition is often experienced in the body. We have probably all had an experience when we found ourselves in a new part of town, in a novel social situation, or in an unfamiliar bar or restaurant, and something felt off. We probably couldn't articulate why something didn't feel right with the rational mind, but we had a gut-feeling that informed us. Unfortunately, our culture emphasizes the rational mind so much that we are often trained to ignore this valuable source of information. Some forms of psychotherapy and meditation can help us reconnect with this awareness, but it is common for people to not develop body awareness through these practices alone. Many westerners spend so much time in their thinking minds that it takes time to reconnect with the wisdom of the body. Yoga, tai chi, qi-gong, and a body awareness practice called focusing are great tools to help us reconnect with our gut feelings. When practicing mindfulness or therapy, we can also pay close attention to the body. Cultivating body awareness will help teach our brain to prioritize the "felt sense" in the body and will improve our intuition dramatically.



Tracking

Developing intuition requires honesty and accountability. By tracking our experiences with intuition, we can better notice when our intuition was accurate or inaccurate. A simple way to do this is to develop a routine that allows you to track the efficacy of your intuitions. To begin, start with something simple you do on a regular basis. For example, if you get new client inquiries several times a week, start recording your intuitions before you connect on the phone. Read the inquiry carefully, look at the person's name and picture, and tune in to what arises. Make a few notes and let it go. After you speak with the person, compare how the call went with your intuitions. Keeping an honest account will help you develop confidence in your intuition and learn its limitations. I am often amazed how accurate my intuition is in some areas, and through tracking I have also learned what domains my intuition is less reliable.



Staying domain specific

Coming back to Kahneman's definition, intuition is about pattern recognition. We can only develop the capacity for pattern recognition with practice. This means it is unlikely we will develop intuition equally in all domains, but will be more intuitive in areas we have expertise and experience in. Kahneman cites the example of a firefighter going into a home and having a strong intuition that he should leave. Shortly after exiting the house, the floor he was standing on collapsed, affirming his intuition, and likely saving his life. This intuition was only possible because of his many years of experience in firefighting. Something in his body recognized patterns that his conscious mind couldn't articulate, and trusting it, he left the house.

Personally, the people I know that have the most developed intuitive capacities are highly experienced in one domain. For example, psychotherapists that focus exclusively on certain client populations begin to develop a sixth sense in working with these clients. Most likely, you will find it easier to develop intuition in a domain you have some experience in and work with on a regular basis.



Keep it Simple

The more moving parts, and the more complex the systems, the more limited intuition can be. I learned this the hard way during complex B2B sales. As a trained psychotherapist, my intuition is most active during interpersonal interactions. I have had the experience of feeling a positive intuition about working with someone and felt a deal or partnership would move forward. Unfortunately, a large corporate deal is much more complex than one personal relationship. At times, my intuition about a relationship was correct but didn't consider other important factors including other stakeholders I had not met, changes in the market, the business being unexpectedly acquired etc. Being aware of the limits of our intuition will help minimize risk and not slide into wishful thinking.

Potential Roadblocks to Intuition



Desire

When our rational mind wants something badly enough, we often ignore intuition and gut feelings. This is extremely common in romantic relationships. Oftentimes, someone will notice red flags very early when dating and will ignore them because their desire is so strong. The intensity of desire can pull us away from what our gut feelings are telling us. The more we desire something, the more we must be careful that it does not cloud our intuition. We must make the distinction between what our intuition feels is true, and what our desire wants to be true, and move forward with this clarity and acceptance.



Fear/Anxiety

Like desire, intense fear and anxiety can override intuition. Generally speaking, the experience of intuition should have a neutral feeling. We can sometimes be fooled by intense anxiety or fear and believe they are intuitions. With practice, we can listen to both experiences with nonreactive awareness and notice the difference. We all have a particular style of anxiety and fear that is often accompanied by negative self-talk (I'm not good enough, this won't work, I don't deserve success etc.). This is not intuition. When we become more familiar with our style of fear, we can give it space to arise, and go back to feeling our intuition. Fear contains valuable information we should consider, but we should not confuse it with intuition.



Overthinking

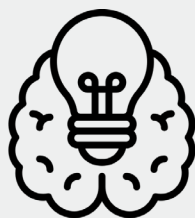
Intuition is nonverbal. If you notice yourself overthinking or trying to analyze, that probably isn't intuition. There is nothing wrong with analyzing - just notice the difference between this and intuition. Once we have a hit of intuition (for example, a gut feeling a counterpart is not trustworthy), the mind then needs to translate that feeling into a verbal/conceptual framework the mind can understand. That is normal, but we can sometimes complicate the simplicity of an intuitive experience by inserting our thinking mind. Pay close attention to intuitive information as soon as it arises and don't let the rational mind begin overthinking and distorting the message.



Old Psychological Patterns

Inevitably, old emotional patterns and limiting beliefs about the self and the world will interfere with our intuitive capacity. It is not always necessary to work through these to connect with our intuition: we just need to be aware when they are getting in the way and bring our attention back to our intuition. Therapy, coaching, and journaling can help us work through our baggage, and can help us recognize when it is getting in the way.

Sometimes, it is easier to notice psychological patterns and personality patterns in other people than in ourselves. We all know someone who is prone to catastrophizing or minimizing, and we take their input with an appropriate grain of salt. The more familiar we are with our own style of doing the same, the less likely we will get wrapped up in our habitual patterns.



Resistance

One of the biggest factors limiting our intuition is resistance. Sometimes, our intuition tells us things we don't want to hear. It takes a high level of emotional maturity to be honest with ourselves and see things as they really are. With time and experience, we realize that being honest may be difficult in the beginning, but it ultimately will cause us less suffering in the long run.

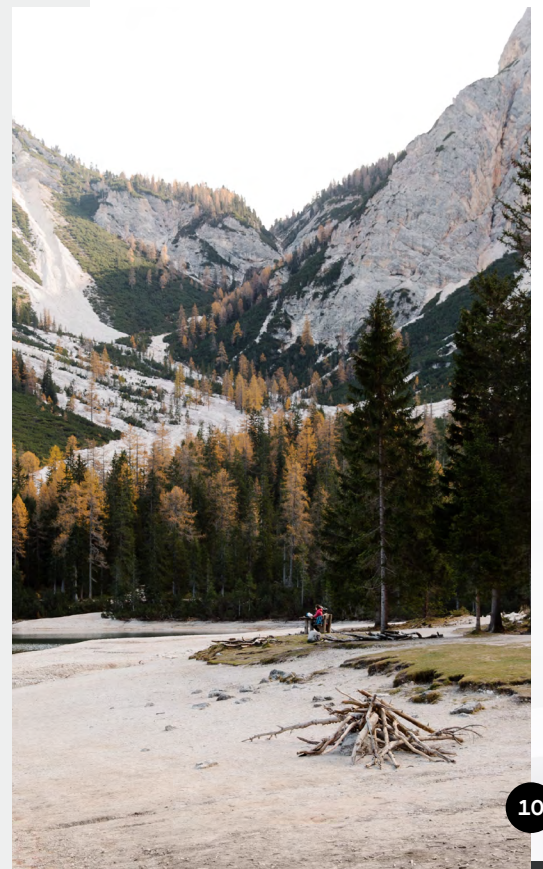
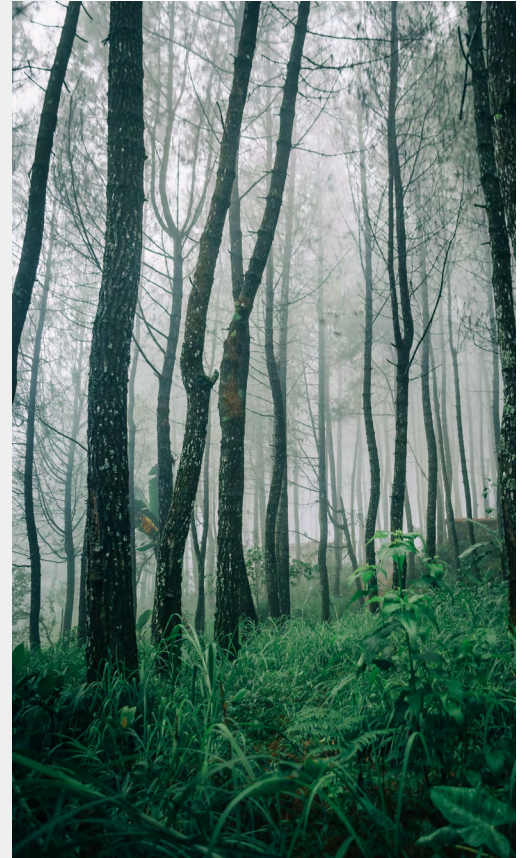
Integrating Intuition and Intellect

Advanced Sommeliers, or Wine Experts, have often trained their palates for years. To become a Master Sommelier, an individual must be able to accurately blind test wines and correctly identify them. **Watching a sommelier perform an accurate blind test taste** is extremely impressive and seems impossible to the untrained wine drinker.

How do they do this? They combine intellectual training on styles and attributes of wine alongside the training of their palate. By combining an intellectual framework with the direct experience of tasting wine, they can go through different categories until they can make a well-educated guess that combines the intellect and direct nonverbal experience.

In this case, the framework is a tasting grid that helps them identify each element they are tasting in the wine. By going back and forth between the grid and their tasting, they can clarify and categorize the nonverbal information they are experiencing. Rather than tasting a wine and immediately guessing where it came from, they tune into one category at a time, gradually limiting the possible wine options. The process is an elegant combination of intellect and intuition that is fascinating to watch. Some categories include:

- Acidity
- Alcohol Content
- Dryness
- Color/ Appearance
- Aroma





This methodology can be used in a professional setting for any task that is repeated on a regular basis. For example, when you are hiring someone new, take some time to connect with your intuition. Ideally, you can turn off all distractions and meditate for a few minutes. Then, make a list of questions and tune into each one. Take notes without analyzing and only review after. Sample questions might include:

- Is this person dependable?
- Do they have a good work ethic?
- What is their relational style?
- What are their blind spots?
- How do they communicate?
- How would the team feel around this person?
- How will they impact the culture?

What is your gut feeling on each of these? 6 months after the hire, was your intuition, right? What can you learn from the experience?

Developing an Intuition Ritual

“Enlightenment is an accident – but meditation makes use accident-prone.”

Baker Roshi

Intuition does not come from the rational mind. Because of this, any method that allows us to shift out of our ordinary state of consciousness can be helpful to intuition. Neurologically, we spend most of our waking time operating out of our “Default Mode Network (DMN)” in the brain. The default mode network is marked by mind-wandering, thinking, and not being present. When we are in the DMN, we are thinking of the past or the future. This is not an ideal state to tune into intuition.

Some studies have shown that meditation allows us to operate out of different neurocircuitry than the DMN. Finding a practice that allows us to do this on a regular basis is invaluable to intuition. **Genuine intuition does not come from the self.** From a spiritual perspective, we become more intuitive when we drop our sense of being a separate self (or ego) and tune into a deeper reality. There are numerous practices that can help us do this. What is most important is finding one that we can commit to daily. When we need intuitive guidance, meditation, yoga, walking in nature and other similar practices will help us to shift states and make it more likely that we can tune in to our intuitions.



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About the Author



Bill Belanger has worked as a psychotherapist, entrepreneur, and coach. Bill has studied numerous mind training disciplines from various traditions. As a psychotherapist, he has studied developmental psychology, CBT, ACT, IFS, Somatic Psychotherapy, Attachment-based interventions, and numerous other modalities. Bill has also studied Buddhist Psychology for close to 20 years, in monasteries in Nepal, Bhutan, and Thailand, and in the US with various teachers.

As a coach and founder at Integrated Mind Training, Bill offers individual coaching, workshops, and consulting. His work focuses on bringing his clients the best practices from various domains in a simple and accessible way. His style is collaborative and focuses on empowering his clients to develop their own wisdom and intuition.