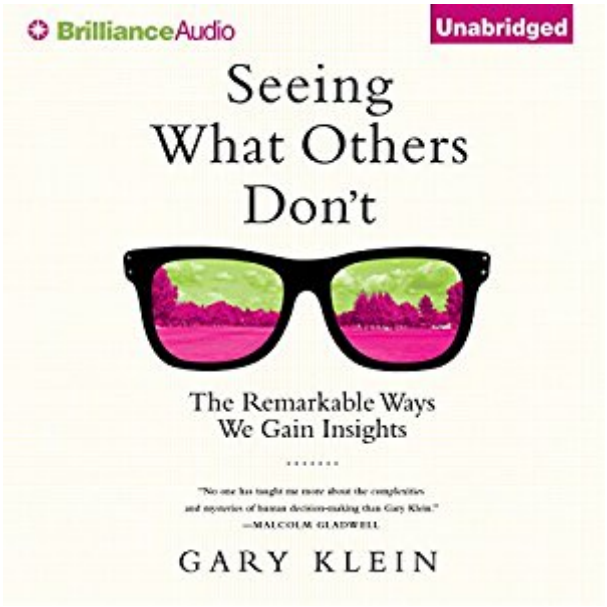
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Seeing What Others Don't: The Remarkable Ways We Gain Insights



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Synopsis

Insights-like Darwin’s understanding of the way evolution actually works, and Watson and Crick’s breakthrough discoveries about the structure of DNA-can change the world. We also need insights into the everyday things that frustrate and confuse us so that we can more effectively solve problems and get things done. Yet we know very little about when, why, or how insights are formed-or what blocks them. In Seeing What Others Don’t, renowned cognitive psychologist Gary Klein unravels the mystery.Klein is a keen observer of people in their natural settings-scientists, businesspeople, firefighters, police officers, soldiers, family members, friends, himself-and uses a marvelous variety of stories to illuminate his research into what insights are and how they happen. What, for example, enabled Harry Markopolos to put the finger on Bernie Madoff? How did Dr. Michael Gottlieb make the connections between different patients that allowed him to publish the first announcement of the AIDS epidemic? What did Admiral Yamamoto see (and what did the Americans miss) in a 1940 British attack on the Italian fleet that enabled him to develop the strategy of attack at Pearl Harbor? How did a "smokejumper" see that setting another fire would save his life, while those who ignored his insight perished? How did Martin Chalfie come up with a million-dollar idea (and a Nobel Prize) for a natural flashlight that enabled researchers to look inside living organisms to watch biological processes in action?Klein also dissects impediments to insight, such as when organizations claim to value employee creativity and to encourage breakthroughs but in reality block disruptive ideas and prioritize avoidance of mistakes. Or when information technology systems are "dumb by design" and block potential discoveries.Both scientifically sophisticated and fun to listen to, Seeing What Others Don’t shows that insight is not just a "eureka!" moment but a whole new way of understanding.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Inspired by Martin Seligman and other positive psychologists, Gary Klein turned away from studying errors in decision making and focused on how experts like firefighters solve problems successfully. He is most interested in how we have and use insights. "When we put too much energy into eliminating mistakes, we're less likely to gain insights. Having insights is a different matter from preventing mistakes."Klein began by observing instances of creative problem solving that did not fit the accepted four-stage model of creativity consisting of preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification (from economist Graham Wallas' 1926Ã Â The Art of Thought). He also saw important differences between the lab experiments and unfamiliar problems used to study problem solving and the real-life insights of experienced professionals working in their areas of expertise. Klein started from scratch, collecting his own set of critical incidents and examining them for patterns. He was careful to include instances of failed insight as well as instances of success.Klein concluded that we achieve insights by reorganizing our thinking into a new story about the problem we are trying to solve. His model highlights the importance of five factors in achieving insights. "Eventually I was able to sort these 120 cases into five different strategies for gaining insights: connections, coincidences, curiosities, contradictions, and creative desperation. Did the incident rely on a person making a connection? Did the person notice a coincidence as a trigger for the insight? Was the insight triggered by some curiosity-- an odd fact or event? Did it depend on seeing a contradiction? Or was the person stuck, desperately seeking some way out of an impasse?"The first section of the book describes Klein's research methods and how each of the five factors was identified. It also debunks common beliefs about problem solving. For example, an incubation period is unnecessary for creative insight, reasoning by analogy is productive when it involves an expert applying analogies from previously-solved problems, and computational models of searching a problems space to choose between possible solutions do not match how human experts think.The final two sections describe how insights are often blocked and what can be done to facilitate insightful problem solving. Most interesting is Chapter 12: How Organizations Obstruct Insights." It discusses how the high value many organizations place on predictability and reduction of errors discourages risk-taking and pursuing new strategies. "Insight is the opposite of predictable. Insights are disruptive. They come without warning, take forms that are unexpected, and open up unimagined opportunities. Insights get in the way of progress reviews because they reshape tasks and even

revise goals. They carry risks-- unseen complications and pitfalls that can get you in trouble. So insights make you work harder." Another nugget is Klein’s tongue-in-cheek list of methods to block insight. If you have a distaste for arbitrary deadlines and other organizational nonsense, you will find it enjoyable as well as useful.This is a useful discussion of the nature of insight and how to recognize and foster it. It strikes a good balance between research depth and practical application. Researchers will also find it useful for Klein’s candid discussion of this methods and the value of a naturalistic approach to studying decision making. Readers who enjoy Klein’s approach might also take a look atÃ Â Sources of Power: How People Make Decisions,Working Minds: A Practitioner’s Guide to Cognitive Task Analysis, andÃ Â The Power of Intuition: How to Use Your Gut Feelings to Make Better Decisions at Work.

I always wondered why it took so long for the human race to put wheels on luggage. Cognitive psychologist Klein unravels this conundrum and the more important need to more effectively solve problems and get things done. It is amazing how little we know about insights, how they are formed or what prevents them from being found. I love what Klein does for a living...observing people in their natural setting and unraveling the behavior behind their motivations and their abilities. The examples will entertain and educate. I both laughed and shook my head when he exposes businesses for their hypocritical stance of promoting creativity and innovation all the while blocking new ideas and playing it safe. There are plenty of lessons for individuals and organizations who have open minds and who recognize the need to do away with unhealthy biases.

Very academic in style, meaning a broad examination of others’ stories, without any meaningful personal stories on insight. While referee’s have better insight than those in the stands, I’d prefer coaching from a player. I’ll concede his diagnosis of how corporate CYA does not encourage pursuit of insights was spot on, there was not enough practical guidance to make this worth the effort. Interesting stories and a good structure around it, but like so many of these types of books, leaves the reader without the last mile of making it useful.

Dr. Gary Klein is a well known expert in cognitive science, and a thought leader in naturalistic decision making research. In short form, that research approach is the antithesis of controlled studies to confirm or refute hypotheses. Instead it favors observation of decisions in the wild (i.e. outside of a lab) and inferring theories from decision outcomes. His book on insight is more introspective than I was expecting, and caused me to question my own views on insight and

expertise. For those who have followed the Klein's work, Seeing What Others Don't simultaneously reinforces his influential work in naturalistic decision making and turns it on its head. It is that contradiction that makes the work compelling and even daring.Recognition-primed decision making is at the heart of naturalistic decision making research and literature. For insight that means drawing inferences from recombining frames of reference from prior experience, from intuition, and taking the ensuing steps to draw a novel insight. In his book, Klein constructs his insight framework based on the groundbreaking work of Graham Wallas from the early 1900's. Wallas' Stages of Control are comprised of Preparation, Incubation, Illumination, and Verification. The discussion on incubation is where the book really comes into its own. As a standalone subject, incubation may be addressed in the insight literature but is underrepresented in applied psychology and human factors research. It was intriguing to see how the lens of Klein's experience working through his 120 case studies casts notable work in human systems interaction by Donald Norman, Ben Shneiderman, Stu Card, and others in a different light.Dr. Klein refers to the notion of the "prepared mind" at various points in the book. Having bought this book as a gift for multiple people and also presented what I took away from reading it, what jumps out at me about the work is the range of feedback I have heard. The tone of the book is very conversational, and leaves several key questions unanswered. The prepared mind we each bring could drive the takeaways from the book in a multitude of directions. That may be frustrating to some, but for those who embrace the questions to reconsider their own experiences with insight will find a very rewarding read. A person I admire once told me the key to great research is asking the right questions, and viewed from that perspective the book is a significant achievement in case-based research. Highly recommended for technical and general audiences alike.

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