
Blink!

Last month Dr. Tim Barth from TCU addressed the ASUP Field Investigators on his part in the study of the paranormal. Most came away understanding that his field is not all that removed from our own and one book he suggested that might be of interest to us all was ***BLINK! The Power of Thinking without Thinking***, by Malcolm Gladwell, which offers a closer look at something that most of us do every day and that most “Sensitives” exercise without even thinking about, namely reaching for snap decisions based on what would otherwise be fragmented or even non-existent data.

Normally, I don't like long cuts from a book as illustration of its content, but it is inevitable here. The topic is something that takes place in an instant, while the process suggests a description of thousands of words. So, rather than talk around it, here is an example from the book itself.

In 1983, the Getty Museum was offered a rare find, an intact marble statue believed to be from the 6th Century BC, commonly called a *Kouroi*, a male nude standing about seven feet tall, one of approximately 200 known to exist in the modern world and recently unearthed in Greece. The asking price was ten million dollars, so the Getty moved cautiously, taking the work on loan for further study. In all ways this complete Kouroi was perfect, a textbook example, priceless in so many ways. Experts lined up to comment on just how great a find this really was, but the museum followed protocol, deciding it was worth spending a lot of money to hear everyone's opinion before making the purchase final. They took core samples and found this marble was from the very quarry where the others had been cut. They studied the betina, which was consistent to the earth from which it had been found after resting there for centuries. Fourteen months of study and scrutiny came to the same conclusion; the Kouroi was in fact the real thing!

But ever cautious, the Getty Directors asked Thomas Hoving, the former Director of New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, who was the premier collector of all things ancient, to come to California and take a look. Hoving agreed, he was led to a basement workshop and a giant white linen tarp was pulled from the Statue. He heard himself say, “Fresh – Fresh!” But what exactly did that mean? Even Hoving had no idea. Looking at the statue, inch by inch, it seemed perfect, but his overall first reaction was simply, “Fresh!” After a few moments more, Hoving turned to the Director of the Getty, and asked, “Have you paid for this yet?” and then added, “If you have, try to get your money back.” He could offer nothing concrete, all the pieces were acceptable, but all together there was something very wrong.

Another expert, a Director with the Archeological Society in Athens then got his turn. His first response was that he felt as if he was looking at the work through a glass partition. When asked to elaborate, his reaction was simple. When first looking upon the statue, he had a, “Intuitive repulsion.”

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The end to this story is almost anti-climactic. In all, four great art historians, out of hundreds, agreed that there was just something flawed with the Getty's Kouros, even though they could not qualify their objections. Finally, a Swiss art historian came forward and comparing the Getty work with another fragmented example, most agreed it was from the same artist... unfortunately, he was an art forger, not a pre-Christian Greek. But the jury was still officially out, other things were found to be wrong with the work, but there was no one single smoking gun to be found. Today, the Getty Kouros is officially listed in the museum's catalog, with a footnote to history, ***About 530 BCE or a modern forgery.*** The intuitive repulsion felt by that handful of great art experts has relegated this work to the scrap pile of history, not after hundreds or thousands of hours of study, but rather in their individual assessments from the first two seconds viewing the work. BLINK! is a book all about those two seconds!

OK, you are saying to yourself, that is interesting, but what does that have to do with me? In the next few pages I hope to convince you that not only do some folks exercise similar judgments when working as field investigators, but that we can all enhance that experience within ourselves. I will show you how to gauge your potential and how to improve it and in the end, I think I can show you that the really great Sensitives all exercise this potential.

BLINK! begins with a look at how a short glance at something can convey a whole lot of information, what researchers call "Thin Slicing," the objective being to look at an overall condition and then scrutinize only a tiny part of it to assess the whole. This is best reflected in the labs of Dr. John Gottman who is attempting to perfect a method where a therapist can watch short takes from a discussion to ascertain the true relationship of the two people involved. Yes, you read me correctly, the couple is asked to discuss a topic and by *Thin Slicing* the video tape, the therapists attempt to predict the nature of that couples REAL relationship.

How? Basically, by looking at the stress points. In fact, you don't even need to hear the dialogue, the thin slicing of the body language can do the trick. Not to oversimplify a very complex subject area, but statistically Dr. Gottman has an amazing hit rate. He can take a couple and in a relatively short period of time predict who will be married and who will be divorced in the foreseeable future, simply by watching them discuss otherwise mundane topics, let's say if they like the idea of owning a dog. The real interest is not in the exchange of ideas, but the way they are passed. For instance, a good number of newlyweds, without any obvious stress showing yet, can be watched and the outcome is still staggering. The prediction of future divorce is present in what the good doctor might call a marital Morse code. It isn't what they say; it is how they say it, even in the earliest part of a marriage.

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A husband might say for instance, "Well, I think I am doing better with that...." But if the wife responds, "Well, yes, but...." The overall response is not really positive at all and certainly not supportive. Going back to the "dog" discussion for instance, the husband may say that he likes dogs, always had dogs and that they are no real bother in a relationship. But if the wife responds with, "Well, yes, but I just don't like them," the entire discussion is moot. She has already made her decision, no matter how rational or reasonable it might be. When a couple falls into this cycle of, "Yes, but..." the chances of marital survival drops considerably according to this study. And the overall statistics seem to bear that out! Scary, but true!

Of course, you don't need to video tape discussions to read a couple. We do it every day and you know it, although not wished to seem judgmental, you probably shy away from verbalizing those assumptions and those assumptions are not based on major events you witness in another person's life, but rather the plethora of little ones. I like to use my own relationship as a perfect example, it is after all already out there in the public, so there are no real surprises. Simply put, my wife and I argue incessantly. We have been married for a long time, nothing has changed, in fact, it would be fair to suggest that we argue far less than we once did. If you were looking at us under the microscope, you might just jump to the conclusion that we were headed towards a divorce. In fact, we did that once a long time ago and after 30 plus years, that is not going to happen again. If you *thin slice* our conversations you would know that is true; at the molecular level of our relationship you would learn several lessons, including the fact that opposites attract, and when it comes to the really important stuff, we have learned to come to rational decisions that we both can live with. And, at our ages, who would want to upset the apple cart.

On the other side of the equation, you constantly meet people who seem perfectly attune. (Come on, limiting your choices to just people you have met in this organization in let's say the last year, were you always surprised at how the relationships grew or fell?) It is not whether the couple is the "Hon and Dearie," Hall of Fame or not, how they might reflect public displays of affection or what they talk about in polite conversation. We all sometimes meet a couple and get the "Hoving" response... it may be cute, but it just doesn't fit all that well. The word that comes to mind may not be, "fresh," of course, but it does come bubbling up from your brain in those first delicate minutes.

Now comes the big problem, is your first impression the correct one? Every waking minute of every day we are dealing with rapid cognition. When someone says, "I love you," we instinctively look into the person's eyes. When we meet someone new, we may later say, "I don't think they liked me," even though there was no substantive reason to believe it. This is happening constantly in our lives.

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While I am not suggesting you readjust your life to accommodate these responses, I am suggesting that at least when dealing with the paranormal, you consider cultivating them.

For starters, you have to calibrate your own mental processes; kinda like checking to be sure your speedometer to be sure it is reasonably accurate. To accomplish this, you can take a simple series of tests, called the IATs, or Implicit Association Tests. There are several of these tests, looking at family relationships, race relations, etc. To do this correctly, you have to use a computer, because you are not just looking at matching answers, but the speed at which you can do it. Without dwelling too long on the test, I will refer you to a web page that will allow you to test yourself at :

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/demo/>

One word of warning, be prepared for some surprises, some of the tests available will challenge your basic beliefs about how you see issues like race for instance. Don't panic, that is a very natural response. Other IATs can look at job performance; even show a car salesman how to modify his customer behavior to boost sales. This is a fascinating area of study, too large to adequately address here, but well worth your consideration for future reading and experimentation.

Back to our discussion, BLINK! can open your eyes to a whole new way of looking at life around you... literally in the blink of your eye! Keep in mind that when you do something unexpected with a young child, for instance place you cupped hands over their ears, they instinctively turn to look into your eyes... they are looking for basic guidance... why are you doing that? As we grow, those reactions become more subtle, but the need is the same and recognizing response is a key to our discussion.

Do you mull over and contemplate every small decision in your life? If so you will probably find the application of the BLINK! principal difficult; in fact decision making has to be divided into the simple vs. the complex. According to Freud, "When making decisions of minor importance, I have always found it advantageous to consider all the pros and cons. In vital matter however, such as the choice of a mate or a profession, the decision should come from the unconscious, from somewhere within ourselves; we should be governed by our deep inner needs of our nature." In other words, when considering the purchase of a blender, you might well devote more time to considering the options and reading *Consumer's Digest*, than when you are choosing a date for the prom! To be happy with your selection of that blender, you don't want any surprises, you want it to do exactly what you want it to do. But when it comes to that prom date, well a few little surprises are not a bad thing and it is after all just one night! Of course if you absolutely have to apply the same standards to that prom date as you do your selection of a blender, you probably have some very interesting problems to work out in the future, which we should not be discussing here.

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BLINK! is an interesting book. I do not always agree with the author, that is natural. To be truly effective, that initial response has to be based as much on experience as anything else. At my age, I know that I exercise the principals discussed in BLINK! almost to a fault...I have learned to trust my instincts because I trust my life experiences. Does that mean that a teenager can't apply the same principles? No, not at all, but not to be too flip, I also remember the basic rule of computer technology, namely, "Garbage in, Garbage out!" Without a fair amount of prior experience, the system will be lacking; remember Hoving... he had years of art history and archeology behind his initial comment on the statue before him. I don't think it would bear the same weight if the comment was made by the museum's publicity director!

So, how do we apply the BLINK! principal to our work in paranormal investigations? Basically, we have to learn to trust our instincts and gauge them by what we know. If it waddles like a duck, quacks like a duck and swims like a duck... it's probably a duck, so go with your initial instincts! Yes, it could be a goose, but what the hell? It is very much like playing a word association game, as you will learn from the web link I provided. Your instinct may be a bit uncomfortable at first, but don't rule it out and always be ready to compare that initial reaction to everything else that follows.

I am reminded of a TV show I caught last week, one of the ghostie variety. The introduction said that the team was going to a house where the family believed there was something demonic in residence. The entire family was nauseated, light headed at times, seeing apparitions and hearing faint voices. The house was in an old coal mining town in Pennsylvania. As they rambled on, my first impression was "Poisoning!" I had no doubt. Secondary to that first impression, I though probably CO₂, maybe Radon, possible mine gas seepage. An hour later, the TV team came to the same conclusion after their noted psychic said he failed to pick up anything paranormal. Hmmm... experience does it again, of course it helped to have been a trained paramedic admittedly, but that first impression was the right one.

We all have first impressions, we just have to learn to trust them and whenever possible work to improve them. This is not something "Psychic," it is part of the natural human condition, which we probably were much better at several thousand years ago, than we are today. The trick is to get back to utilizing those first impressions. We all have walked into a home, met a client and felt that things were not quite right. Trust those instincts. Don't crumble into a lump if your first impression is extremely negative, you have a job to do, but take that first impression as a warning to be on guard and act accordingly. Use your notebook, make a record of that first impression, so that we can look back on it later. Most likely it will be important.

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Trust yourself! When Hoving entered that work room and saw the Kouroi for the first time he had two things going for him. First was years of experience, the second was faith in himself. Interestingly, Hoving had been training for just that moment for years at the Metropolitan. He had made it a rule with his staff to place new items in unlikely places to surprise him when he least expected to see them. Fine works of Flemish art hung in a walkway just outside a hall filled with modern sculpture; a pre-Columbian vase sitting alone on a table in a coat closet in his office. He constantly challenged himself to see new things in new places. When seeing a piece of art for the first time, it was always in a stark room with black walls and initially covered with a black cloth until the moment of viewing. So when he went to the Getty to see the Kouroi for the first time, he was prepared to experience that initial reaction!

That is exactly how we have to do it. Accept that our first initial reaction will be important and make note of it. It should be the first thing you write in your report. Sometimes the reaction is not as obvious as you might think. Maybe it is an odor, an overwhelming sense of color, temperature, humidity, stuffiness, freshness, etc. It can be anything, but do not just dispose of it as so much background noise, it could be the sound of something very special.

Obviously, I stress the importance of all of our tools, gauges, meters and telemetry; our photo equipment, audio gear and the like and this is not to lessen any of their importance, but nevertheless, the mind is the foremost tool we have available in our work and should never be discounted. There is a place for everything. If you feel a cold spot and all of our environmental tools say that the temperature is stable at a constant ambient reading of 72 degrees, that does not mean that your observation is any less valuable. In fact, under those conditions, my only hope is that more than one of the field investigators reports the same cold spot, no matter what the instruments say.

Likewise, when you enter a home and smell the odor of fresh baked bread, that observation is important, even if the other eleven investigators do not share that observation. It is all important, all noteworthy.

I would suggest BLINK! as a good piece of reading for those truly interested in the human condition and how we observe it. As I said earlier, I do not agree with everything the author offers, but it certainly covers the topic well and will be an eye opener to anyone who has been oblivious to this part of our world to date.

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