Application Guide

GREAT LEADERS TRUST THEIR GUT, PART 1



BOTTOM LINE:

Great leaders learn to leverage their intuition by balancing lived experience with information and humility to make better decisions.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

I. Great leaders learn to distinguish intuition from opinion.
   - A. **Instinct:** a physical reaction connected to the physical world.
   - B. **Intuition:** stored knowledge gained through lived experience that surfaces when a situation, question, or decision triggers it. It's knowing without knowing how we know.
   - C. **Unlike an opinion, intuition is based on lived experience.**
     1. Humility is essential to recognizing the difference between intuition and opinion.
     2. Opinions may be right or wrong, but leaders should be careful not to press an opinion that isn't anchored in relevant experience.
   - D. Great leaders recognize their **intuition lane**—the areas where their accumulated experience gives them insight they can trust. Outside that lane, they acknowledge that their perspective may be more opinion than intuition.

II. Intuition is experienced as a **sudden clarity combined with unusual confidence.**
   - A. Intuition is accumulated, experience-based insight applied to a current problem faster than conscious reasoning can explain it.
   - B. It's like having the solution to an equation without the equation.
     1. Some of the biggest breakthroughs in an organization begin with a solution before there's a clear roadmap for achieving it.
     2. Organizations that make room for these insights, rather than dismissing them because the reasoning isn't immediately clear, create opportunities for ideas to develop. When the ideas sit long enough, the equation eventually becomes clear.

III. Great leaders **create space for intuition, even when the reasoning isn't immediately clear.**
   - A. Leaders should create an environment where people feel comfortable expressing a hunch, concern, or potential solution without having all the answers. Otherwise, some of the best ideas may never surface.
   - B. When something doesn't feel right during a discussion, be patient and sit with the tension.
     1. Often, if you wait long enough, someone else will express a similar concern because the discussion has triggered their intuition as well.
     2. Their perspective may help confirm what you've been feeling.
   - C. If you're the point leader, **save your intuition for last.** Your words carry more weight and can unintentionally shut down further discussion.
   - D. If you're not the point leader, don't allow the fact that you're the contrarian—the outlier—to keep you from speaking up.

IV. A great question can trigger someone's personal intuition. Rather than directing someone toward a conclusion, a **well-placed question** invites them to consider possibilities they may not have recognized.

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V. Great leaders find a balance of intuition and data.
    A. With so much data available today, it's easy for intuition to get overlooked or dismissed.
    B. However, intuition isn't always right. Leaders must distinguish between an informed hunch and an unsupported opinion.
    C. The formula for good decision-making: **information + intuition – ego**
        1. **Information:** gather the data and consider your reality.
        2. **Intuition:** lean into whoever has lived experience with the context of the decision at hand.
        3. **Ego:** remain humble and willing to be wrong sometimes.

VI. Don't let uncertainty keep you silent.
    A. When something doesn't feel right about a decision or direction, resist the temptation to dismiss that tension simply because you can't explain it.
    B. When appropriate, speak up. You don't have to present a fully developed solution to contribute something valuable.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR TEAM DISCUSSION

1. Think about a time when you had a strong feeling about a decision but couldn't immediately explain why. How did you respond, and what did you learn from the experience?
2. In what areas of leadership has your accumulated experience given you the ability to recognize problems or solutions quickly?
3. How does your team respond when someone offers an idea or concern without the data or reasoning to support it? What could you do to create more space for those insights?
4. Is there a current decision or situation where something doesn't feel quite right? What might change if you paid attention to that tension instead of reasoning your way around it?

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