



# Collaborations

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## Book Corner

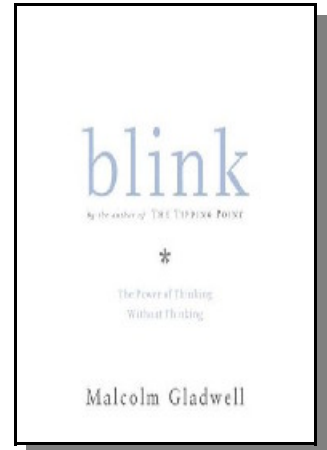
### *Blink* by Malcolm Gladwell

When I read a business book, I usually am looking for something practical -- a model or process -- that I can use in my life or in my work. I take notes as I read and then use those notes to summarize the book and to apply my learning.

In the case of *Blink*, I finished the book and had no written notes or immediate ideas of how to apply the material. Yet, in the first week after reading the book, I've already used examples from it and have shared the concepts in workshops and in conversations.

The power of the book is in the examples and in the awareness one gains about oneself and about the US culture. We make judgments every day in the blink of an eye -- and we can learn to do a better job of judging by learning to better "read" what we see.

This is a quick read and a fascinating book -- no wonder it's another best seller for Gladwell.



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## Group Think

**Question:** *We seem to be having difficulty with our team decisions lately. I wonder if our problem may be “Groupthink”. What exactly is “groupthink?” How can we guard against it?*

**Collaborations response:** While you haven’t very clearly defined what your group’s decision-making problems are, you have mentioned “groupthink.” In this issue we’ll discuss “groupthink” and in our next issue we will discuss more effective decision-making strategies.

**Groupthink** is a term coined by psychologist Irving Janus in 1972 to describe a process by which a group can make bad, faulty or irrational decisions. His original definition was “a mode of thinking that people engage in when they are deeply involved in a cohesive in-group, when the members’ strivings for unanimity override their motivation to realistically appraise alternative courses of action.”

(The word “groupthink” was intended to be reminiscent of terms such as “doublethink” and “duckspeak” invented by George Orwell in his novel *1984*.)

Groupthink usually occurs in large organizations and committees. Janis originally studied the Pearl Harbor bombing, the Bay of Pigs Invasion, the Vietnam War. Others have cited the Space Shuttle *Challenger* and *Columbia* disasters, the

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## Group Think

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bankruptcy of Enron and more recently the decision to go to war in Iraq in 2003 as continuing examples that groupthink is alive and well.

In the Senate Intelligence Committee's "*Report on the US Intelligence Community's Prewar Intelligence Assessments on Iraq* they write:

"The intelligence Community (IC) suffered from a collective presumption that Iraq had an active and growing weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program. This "group think" dynamic led IC analysts, collectors, and managers to both interpret ambiguous evidence as conclusively indicative of a WMD program as well as to ignore or minimize evidence that Iraq did not have active and expanding WMD destruction programs. This assumption was so strong that formal IC mechanisms established to challenge assumptions and group think were not utilized."

Janus cited a number of **antecedent conditions** likely to encourage groupthink.

- Insulation of the group
- High group cohesiveness
- Directive leadership
- Lack of norms requiring methodic procedures
- Homogeneity of members' social background and ideology
- High stress from external threats coupled with a low hope of a better solution than one offered by the leader.

He listed the following **eight symptoms indicative** of groupthink.

- Having the illusion of invulnerability
- Unquestioned belief in the inherent morality of the group
- Collective rationalization of group's decisions
- Shared stereotypes of the out-group, particularly opponents
- Self-censorship: members withhold criticisms
- Illusion of unanimity
- Direct pressure on dissenters to conform
- Self-appointed "mindguards" protect the group from negative information

Finally here are **seven symptoms of decisions** being affected by groupthink:

- Incomplete survey of objectives
- Incomplete survey of alternatives
- Failure to adequately examine the risks of preferred choice
- Failure to re-appraise initially rejected alternatives
- Poor information research
- Selective bias in processing information at hand
- Failure to work out contingency plans

We trust that all of the above discussion is adequate for you to think about how decisions are made in your group and if groupthink is a problem. Next issue we will discuss some various decision-making strategies.

Meanwhile, if in the above groupthink discussion you have seen your group, here in brief are some **steps you might try.**

- Use a policy-forming group that reports to the larger group.
- Have the leaders remain impartial.
- Use different policy groups for different tasks.
- Avoid insulation of group by bringing in outside experts or new members.
- Generate multiple scenarios.
- Develop criteria to evaluate options.
- Use or appoint a devil's advocate to question all of the groups ideas (rotate this duty so individuals don't get stereotyped).
- Break into sub-groups to generate more alternatives.
- Discuss within sub-groups then report back.
- Conduct a "what if" analysis to explore unexpected outcomes.
- Once a solution is reached, develop a second one – it is often better than the first.
- After a decision is made hold a "second chance" meeting to offer a "last" chance to decide otherwise.
- Foster an open climate by encouraging disagreement, raising objections, concerns and misgivings.

## What's New?

Susan's 2nd book will be out in June! Co-authored with Dr. Linda Berens, this second book is called *The 'I' in Team ... Accelerating Performance in Remote and Co-Located Teams*. Watch for more information once it's available.

Susan will be speaking at:

- **June 7th—American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) International Conference** in Orlando, FL.  
The topic -- "If I Can't See 'Em, How Can I Lead 'Em?"
- Susan's session will be followed by a book signing.
- **July 27th—Association for Psychological Type (APT) International Conference** in Portland, OR.  
She will be co-facilitating a pre-conference workshop with Scott Campbell.  
The topic -- "Not All Teams Are Created Equal."

If you are going to be at either conference, look Susan up.

Two printings of Dave's book, *The Ways We Choose: Lessons For Life From A POW's Experience*, have sold out. It is now being released in its third printing. His publisher is now Arnica Publishing. The book has a new cover and some slight revisions. It is available through bookstores or on Dave's web site at [www.davecarey.com](http://www.davecarey.com).

## Time Management

Do you run your day, or does it run you? The key is NOT to prioritize your schedule -- but to schedule your priorities.

What's really important? List the three things most important to you. Then note next to each how much time you spend each week focused on each. Are you spending your time on what's important? What if by tightening up your time management, you could gain back 15 minutes a day to apply to what's most important to you? Try one of the following tips for the next 21 days, and see if you don't get that 15 minutes a day.



### TIP 1

By knowing what's important, we can more easily determine what to spend time working on. Start asking yourself "Is this what I want/ need to be doing right now?" If the answer is "yes" -- do it. If the answer is "not now" -- put it off. If the answer is "no" -- stop.

### TIP 2

Who's setting your agenda? What someone asks "Got a minute?" and you say "yes," what are you giving? List the reasons you said yes to a recent request for your time. For many of us it's one or more of the following:

- we like the approval of others
- we feel guilty
- we like feeling indispensable
- we fear expandability

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## Time Management ~ continued

Sometimes it's just easier to say "yes" than it is to say "no." Before you say "yes," be sure you know 1) what is the subject and 2) how much time will it take. Don't say yes until you know what you are saying yes to and how it will impact what else you are committed to doing.

### TIP 3

Are you able to say "no" when you should? Some phrases to use to say "no" include:

- Help me understand ...
- I'm working on \_\_\_\_\_ right now.
- Where does this fit strategically?
- I'm happy to, but I'm concerned about what should drop in priority while I do this.



If the answer is "no," say "no."

In the next issue, we'll offer tips for creating healthy To Do lists and for controlling clutter.

### We'd Like to Hear From You

If you'd like to contribute to Collaborations or if you have a question or topic for us, we'd love to hear from you. Send an e-mail to [sgerke@sbcglobal.net](mailto:sgerke@sbcglobal.net) with your ideas or questions. We will respond based on topics of most interest.