

Why Emotion—Not Logic—Dominates Our Decision Making

People don't ask for facts in making up their minds. They would rather have one good, soul-satisfying emotion than a dozen facts.

—ROBERT KEITH LEAVITT

Acknowledging up front that there are exceptions to any rule, I want to talk a little bit more about why we are primarily emotion-driven creatures. Why is this so? After all, we do have the most sophisticated reasoning powers of all the animal kingdom. What are the main reasons we choose not to think?

First of all, the amount of available information is so overwhelming that we don't attempt to digest any of it. Have you ever heard the saying: "A confused mind says no"? Marketers very deliberately make sure their advertising is clear, direct, and succinct. If there is too much information, or if it takes more than a few seconds to process, the ole brain pretty much just reads it as clutter and tunes it out.

Another reason we don't take the time to think things through is because most of our decisions simply aren't weighty enough to warrant the effort. Both consciously and subconsciously, we selectively choose what we will acknowledge and what we will ignore. This built-in filtering system has been called selective attention or selective avoidance.

People also may ignore certain information when it goes against what they want to believe. The human mind has a great need to always be right. People will tune out conflicting arguments or ignore voices that oppose their ideas or values. Many people will even distort information that goes against what they are looking for. On the flip side, when you find agreement, you have your audience's full attention, support, and interest. In one study, twenty-one students prepared speeches that were written from either a logical or an emotional standpoint. The speeches were presented, recorded, and then evaluated by other college students. Interestingly, there was no real consistency in the findings except that speeches bearing a message that the evaluator agreed with were rated

as more rational (even if they were intended to be emotional), while those the evaluator did not agree with were considered to be more emotional (even though some of those were intended to be logical). It seemed that whether a speech was considered logical or emotional depended on the listener. Researchers also concluded that, as a general rule, people seem unable to consistently distinguish between logical and emotional appeals.

So whether we realize it or not, we love shortcuts to thinking. Think about a time when you bought an item, but you didn't take much time to research the product or read the latest consumer guide's ratings. Most of us do it all the time. Instead, we might rely on the persuader's advice, or we might just buy the most popular brand, or we might bring a friend along for his or her opinion. Although we would never admit it, we sometimes even buy an item just because of its color or packaging.

We take mental shortcuts in other situations, too, not just when we're looking to buy. When we decide we like someone, we don't run off and do background checks. If we thoroughly considered every single decision, we would constantly be overwhelmed and never get anything done. Businesses are well aware of this fact. They capitalize on the fact that we are all busy and preoccupied with other things. Great persuaders use this to their advantage as well.