

IS DIAGNOSIS BIAS KEEPING YOU FROM READING THIS ARTICLE?

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You probably decided to read this article based on the headline. In nine words, you made a snap decision based on what you saw. There wasn't enough evidence from the headline to tell how much time it would take, whether or not it was useful to your business, or whether it was simply entertaining. Objectively, those may all be important things but what it came down to was a snap judgment about the headline.

There is a growing body of work about snap judgments and how they affect decision making in every area of our lives. Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink* contained insights on the topic and used with research like that done in Jim Collins *Good to Great* there is proof that a lot of these snap judgments are simply wrong.

Add to this body of work Ori Brafman and Ron Brafman's, [*Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior*](#). There are many nuggets of wisdom in the book, but one of the best is their definition of diagnosis bias which they state as "our propensity to label people, ideas or things based on our initial opinions of them – and our inability to reconsider those judgments once we've made them." Thinking about how susceptible we are to diagnosis bias can be a powerful tool in helping leaders reframe the way they look at problems and lead to solutions.

In the current environment few of us suffer from too little data. Whether we just Google everything or have complex sets of business metrics provided to us through company databases, we have far more data than we are able to process. This in fact makes the problems that Brafman and Brafman are talking about worse. Without giving away the whole story, the example of the Portland Trailblazers draft when they passed on Michael Jordan is worth the price of the book.

Think of it in terms of building a house. In ancient times, it was the cornerstone that set the entire foundation. If that stone was off just a little, the entire stone structure would be out of plumb and would be likely to collapse. Many split decisions are just that; split decisions. My lunch choice has very little bearing on the rest of my life. It does cause me to pause for a moment when I think about what decisions I am making that could be cornerstones. And, if the snap judgment I am making today lays a bad cornerstone, how can the rest of the project or relationship ever get back in line if I have laid a poor foundation?

What a good leader has to do is figure out how to avoid the snap decisions that lead us in the wrong directions. One of the tools that I help users with is the [Insights Discovery System](#). Not only is it the kind of diagnostic that can help reframe a team, but it can help a senior leader see how they fall prey to diagnosis bias. It causes a leader to confront what they really think they know and step back and use a new diagnostic.

As the data piles up this is where leaders can separate themselves. This is how we can see new opportunities and markets. Brafman and Brafman probably come up on the best illustration for how a leader can do this in the story of Odysseus. For those not up on their ancient Greek, they provide a good synopsis, "Knowing that he wouldn't be able to help but follow the siren's song, jump from the ship, and drown, he had his crew tie him to the mast."

Many leaders need to figure out who is going to tie them to the mast. That is, who is the voice either in the organization or in their life that can help them look at the facts and then lay a solid cornerstone.