

## **“Echoes of the Heart”**

*Reflections on Life and Community Living*

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**First impressions.** All the time we hear: *you only get one chance to make a first impression.* With insights and observations from *Blink*, a book by Malcolm Gladwell, these *first impressions* may well carry more information and truth than we are aware.

The thesis of *Blink* is that brief or instantaneous experiences give us information and *powers of discernment* for decision making well beyond what we might normally think to be the case.

This is true in relationships of all kinds where we have to assess the strengths and weaknesses of people for particular roles and responsibilities. In certain situations—for example, playing poker or playing tennis or golf—people reveal more about themselves than might otherwise meet the eye.

How we respond to the challenges these *games* present is telling. The comments we make, the way we accept our successes and failures. All of this reveals aspects and dimensions of our spirit, our character, and our general disposition towards the big picture of life.

The big picture is how we sink or swim through whatever life sends our way; but always, with an eye on the future. As it turns out, much of *how things play out* is in the details of our daily living: what we do or do not do; what we say or do not say.

**Marriage and blink.** *Blink* suggests that valuable insight can be gained for married couples from brief glimpses into their relationship. Which means that long-term interviews and evaluations are not necessarily needed.

Applying a technique known as *thin-slicing*, psychologist John Gottman contends that, from brief video tapes of couple-interaction, significant knowledge and insight can be attained. *Thin-slicing* refers to *the ability of our unconscious to find patterns in situations and behavior based on very narrow slices of experience.*

Gottman has learned that, from three minute taped interviews, if he focuses on what he calls the Four Horsemen: *defensiveness, stone-walling, criticism* and *contempt*, he can discover (through *thin-slicing*) much of what he needs to know in predicting marital success or failure.

In particular, he has noted that *contempt* is the major predictor, to the point even of predicting health condition and stress level. Contempt is *any statement made from a higher level.* Much of the time it is an insult, or an expression of disgust. Also, it may be elitist or hierarchical.

The problem with *contempt* is that it aims at marginalizing and excluding from the community. With regard to gender, Gottman adds, while women tend to be more *critical* and men more likely to *stonewall*, there is no gender differentiation with *contempt*.

Interestingly enough, Gottman says, if you can measure *contempt*, you don't need to know every detail of a couple's relationship.

**Intuition as teacher.** What *Blink* unpacks for us is the extent to which intuition and *having a sense* about a person or a situation can be helpful in making final decisions. Simply put, there are things we *know* (on a particular level or in a certain way) that we have difficulty bringing to speech. Yet, we *know* them.

It may be the suitability of a certain person for a job. Is it a good fit or a bad fit? Or it may be an investment possibility. Or it may have to do with a strategy for victory in team sports, in business or in politics.

We think of our intuition as resting on feelings and impressions. But these feelings and impressions are often linked to our unconscious. To some extent, they are *truth-tellers from within* or from down under. But we have to sort them out—grant them their moment in the sun while, at the same time, not giving them absolute power to rule the moment.

Think about your life! All the time, we have feelings about things, about people, about situations. And much of the time (this is where we have to be wise and discerning), they reveal bottom line truths that endless hours of analysis cannot unveil.