

# Your Wonderful Wits

**F**act: Humans are the only species that factor judgment into a decision that instinct has already given sufficient information to make. The rest of the animal kingdom flees at the first sense of peril instead of pondering whether it would seem rude or paranoid to heed its intuition. This is the premise of the book *The Gift of Fear* by Gavin De Becker (1997, Delta Publishing) in which the reader is educated to recognize warning indicators and to respect his or her gut feelings and act upon them. It convinces that we ignore the simplicity of something pure (instinct) with logic or worry. Logic is only a usage of one's own experience and knowledge, neither which are flawless or complete. Worry isn't even as good as logic, yet we are conditioned to behave in a politically correct, socially open-minded, benefit-of-the-doubt manner that could kill us. *Worry is often used as a substitute for action.*

Using only our five conscious senses is inadequate for predicting violence. Criminals are most often appealing in appearance and engaging in conversation. Our sixth sense, instinct, which quickly processes the whole of any situation, is what delivers the facts upon which we need to operate – *without the cloudiness of rationalization.*

We once worked with a person who was hired during our engagement at a major company. He was clean and neat; had big bright blue eyes and a ready smile. But his stance was odd, his focus too intense. Our very first reaction to him was that something was off beam, but we couldn't isolate it, so dismissed it as being too judgmental. In short order, we realized that our initial apprehension was well-founded. He began to make alarming comments. He was labeled as "Out there" and a "Piece of Work" among co-workers. He became increasingly aggressive and outspoken; those in his presence felt discomfort. He had problems with girlfriends and complained frequently about his salary. He was very secretive about his activities away from work.

Luckily for the company, he moved to another state for "a better opportunity". Looking back, his very unpredictable behavior was in itself predictive of potential problems, including violence. People had joked about him "going postal" yet there was the fear of real truth in their statements.

In his book, De Becker lists survival signals and encourages readers to indulge their awareness and diligence. There is a specific chapter dedi-

cated to workplace situations and what employers need to do to mitigate risk to employees and the company. As you might imagine, it starts with the hiring process, and the book lists some excellent questions to ask applicants that just might reveal a future workplace thief, terrorist or basket case. He points out that the answers given to pointed questions are excellent indicators of potential problems. Interviewers don't ask direct questions like "Have you ever stolen from an employer?" or "Have you ever become violent at work?" because they are convinced that the candidate would simply lie. But what have you got to lose? Some might answer evasively with responses like "I don't know what you've heard, but..." or "It depends on what you consider the definition of theft/violence is..." These statements tickle your instincts and beg further questions. You wouldn't marry someone you'd only met for an hour or two, would you?

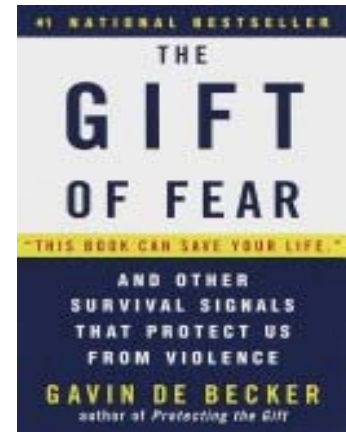
De Becker's firm consults with the government, celebrities, public officials, and individuals in the assessment of threat. He provides a glut of anecdotal examples in the book to substantiate how our initial interface with another person is wholly captured and processed in our subconscious; how to tap into that reserve of untainted information to make better, safer decisions.

The book contains startling insights that reveal that many conventional approaches are ineffective for dangerous situations. In chapters about spousal abuse, date rape, stalking, etc., he cautions readers that the only time to obtain a temporary restraining order is when you believe the person will actually honor it. If the person has already demonstrated determination to stay in contact, threatened or used violence, he likens the measure thusly: If a doctor told you that you needed surgery immediately to save your life, would you ask for a piece of paper instead?"

Recalling the deaths of victims of the Unabomber, a few were quoted as having joked that the unexpected package they received without a return address and with too much postage "might be a bomb" before opening it and being killed.

### The Messengers of Intuition

Nagging feelings	Humor
Persistent thoughts	Wonder
Anxiety	Curiosity
Hunches	Suspicion
Doubt	Hesitation
Apprehension	Fear
Gut feelings	



This book is excellent! It is a gift in itself and discredits many common beliefs with astonishingly simple reason.

Some of the nuggets include:

- ◆ "We must learn and then teach our children that niceness is not goodness"
- ◆ "Think of charm as a verb, not a trait. To charm is to compel, to control by allure or attraction. If you tell yourself 'This person is trying to charm me' instead of 'This person is charming', you'll be able to see around it. It is not always sinister, but when it is, you'll recognize it."
- ◆ "Why does America have thousands of suicide prevention centers and not one homicide prevention center?"

Get scared INTO your wits. Reverse the order of your thinking and pamper your instincts first. Get this book and share it with your co-workers, family and friends. You might save someone's life...including your own.

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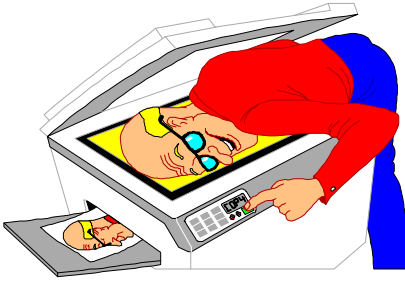
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We could make this article really brief by describing the difference between a meeting and an agenda thusly: it takes two to have a meeting but only one to have an agenda.

Back in the day, as the young people like to refer to times we lived and they didn't, meetings were generally accompanied by a written agenda. But everything was much more formal then: more methodical and respectful. Nowadays, unless you have a big word in your title, just getting a meeting to occur can require a project plan and a sales strategy.

A meeting is usually a scheduled gathering at a designated time and place. An agenda, whether on paper or in one's devious mental machinations, is always there. And that agenda is not limited to the person who organized the thing. Those who decide to attend have a purpose in mind—an agenda. It would serve everyone well to remember this and to anticipate and prepare for what those agendas might

be. It is a fool who believes that calling a meeting will solve everything. It is a realist who sees an opportunity a meeting contains and who exploits it. In other words, the hidden agendas are more powerful and can significantly alter the intended results.

A political debate is an example. The opposing candidates have an agenda: to score points with pundits and voters, often at the expense of the opponent. The moderator, who has assembled thoughtful questions for the session, has no control over the answers and the extraneous sparring that the contenders instigate.

Back at the office, the same thing happens. There are opponents—sometimes for valid reasons and sometimes for petty ones. Even so, it is no excuse not to consider the agendas and perspectives of those planning to attend.

Another thing to remember is that if you line up support for your grand or controversial idea and expect those people to actually stand up in the meeting and pledge their backing to you,

you are delusional. We have seen this over and over. Once in the meeting, those who are privately stalwart in their dedication to your cause quickly calculate the personal consequences of leaning in the opposite direction of the prevailing winds and go with the breeze. You'll be twisting all by your lonesome.

The bottom line about meetings is that they are not about the organizer and his/her original purpose. When disparate points of view converge, that purpose can be altered, especially if there are persons of authority and influence in the room. The best strategy is to plan and anticipate the agendas of the others.

Some of the most powerful points to contemplate, if you want *your* agenda to succeed are: (1) impact to customers; (2) costs; (3) extent of change to existing practices; (4) necessity in relation to other priorities; (5) risks of doing and not doing; (6) who the "winners" will be; (7) a good Plan B.

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## BIG DESK / LITTLE CUBE:

*(a look at the varied perspectives of managers and employees)*

### The Yakker

They come in all sizes and shapes and span all levels of the organization. Their mouths, physically, are no bigger or noticeable than anyone else's, but when in use, they inflict misery upon their targets. Yes, everywhere you go, there is a Yakker: the person who responds to "How are you?" with a discourse of the past 10 years or a rundown of bodily functions and malfunctions.

Clearly, these people crave recognition or validation. They are generally harmless people who want to be accepted and who find among co-workers an audience they lack elsewhere. They might be married to voluntary (or actual) deaf mutes or they live alone, but they won't miss an opportunity to regale their hapless victims with a stew of conversa-

tion that can irritate, waste time, and induce slumber.

Don't confuse these people with the Grandstanding Loudmouths (GL) who also pepper the organization; there are two factions here. The Yakker's more outspoken counterparts seek status with the brass as well as with colleagues. The Yakker is not so inclined or comfortable with executives as are their more raucous constituents.

Both are disruptive to productivity. The GL usually gets into more trouble because he or she says louder or more audacious things in the presence of bigwigs. But the Yakker can frustrate the rank and file even more, because they are not as visible on management's radar, so yak on in seeming justification because they are not told to zip their lips.

#### Little Cube Dwellers:

Sometimes you have to take the reins when a situation runs amok. You have to work in relative harmony with the Yakker, despite your misgivings, so screaming "For the love of God, please, just this once, shut your pie

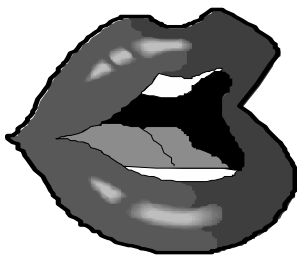
hole!" will create a different problem. Here are some tried-and-true actions you can take to preserve the offender's feelings and get back to work:

- ✧ Have a pre-arranged SOS with nearby sympathizers to call or come over under the guise that you are needed elsewhere. Evasive, but it works.
- ✧ Kindly ask if you can get together later to get caught up because you are on a short deadline.
- ✧ Excuse yourself with a sudden bout of diarrhea and head to the head.
- ✧ Blame the boss: boldly state everyone is being watched and you don't want to get into trouble by spending company time on personal chit-chat.
- ✧ Suggest that the Yakker send you an email—he or she will definitely find a way to truncate the diatribe.

#### BIG DESK PEOPLE:

Please understand that fair or not, whatever grievances are felt by your staff are blamed on you. This is because you are in charge. If you don't fix something that rankles, it is condoned by your inaction. Your Yakkers, although valued for other talents and abilities, are easy to spot if you don't already know who they are: the people to whom they are talking ❶ are nodding, repeatedly uttering "Uh huh" ❷ eyes have glazed over ❸ are running their hands through their hair or scratching their necks ❹ waving little white flags ❺ running to the restroom.

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# Light Touches

Service Extras That Linger Long After the Experience  
LOOKING WITHIN

We are bothered to report that this is the most difficult section of our quarterly newsletter to write because of the dearth of great service as opposed to the frequency in affronts of the bad kind.

But this is the first time we have had to scrounge for a remarkable *external* experience. Have we become too demanding? Too jaded? We don't think so. To conjure something pleasant by a service provider should not be difficult, but sometimes it is.

Then we started thinking about the service we give to and receive from co-workers. It was easy to come up with quite a few nice things that have made a lasting impression in our memories. Here are some.

The structure where we park in Beverly Hills does not open until 6:30 AM. Early birds can get in, though, but need to climb out of the car and punch in a secret code to trigger the opening of the metal gate. On two or three occasions, a very nice man we don't even know but

who works in the same building has seen us drive up on his way out of the structure. He smiles and gestures to stay in the car while he enters the code for us. It may seem a small thing, but it is a kindness we really appreciate and remember.

Emily Wunderlich at City National brings pet store coupons to work for us dog lovers who are thankful to save few bucks on treats. At holiday time, she makes amazing cookies (for the humans).

Our co-worker Marc Vasquez brings in magazines with interesting socio-economic articles to share with the team.

Wyethia McCoy makes sure everyone's birthday is celebrated every month by baking cakes and bringing goodies.

All of this thoughtfulness within will doubtless make us pay it forward. Do some small thing for someone or go and thank someone you appreciate! It won't hurt—we promise.

## pArticle Piques

Irksome iotas that cost:  
Sales without Service

One of the most sure-fire blood-boilers we experience is the drop-off in pleasure once our debit has posted or credit card has been charged. This happens at hotels, cable companies, retailers and service providers. Too many companies focus all of their training and reward dollars on the sale and not on the service of whatever was sold. And when that service is touted as a part of the value, it is even more maddening.

This giant disconnect between a good product and the bad service of it can only be changed by consumers who demand improvement. The whole of any buying decision should include wanting to keep it, not just wanting to get it.

The mythical Maytag Repairman is one of those touted as bored because the quality of the product precludes the need for repair. For 25 years, the lonely Maytag Repairman convinced that the Maytag brand was dependable. And, generally speaking, it is true. That is the good



news. The bad news is that when there is a problem, the customer has to go through the dreaded call-center automation to reach a person who tells him he can fix it himself or wait a week for a contract repairman who bears no resemblance in demeanor to the friendly bloke we all came to love in TV commercials.

Almost every company has a cadre of warm and welcoming salespeople to convince you to buy, but few have any visible staff of equal number to help you out once the deal is done. Does this send a message to service personnel that they are to be heard and not seen? That their role is one of less importance? Is it any wonder that the level of service is unequal to that of sales?

It is bad enough to be relegated to a phone number with a bunch of options that do not describe your particular issue. Layer the outsourcing of call centers to countries where cows could be more sacred than clients and you have a recipe for buyer's remorse.

If we want to spend less time with scripted people who really do care less, we need to factor into any buying decision what the post-purchase experience will be.

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## Bright Ideas: The Office Olympics

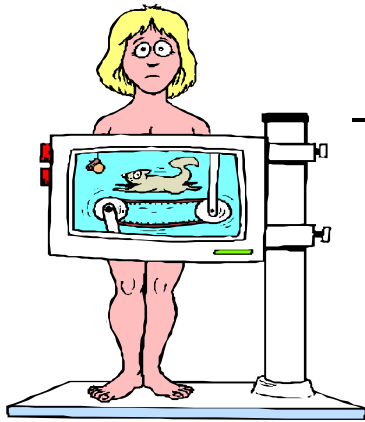
What if your company were to sponsor an internal series of events that allowed its employees to compete and win; to stand at the corporate podium to earn gold, silver and bronze medals in their given "sport"?

We bet you already know who'd win in games such as Dodging Responsibility, Passing the Buck and Verbal Volleyball. But who are the real performers with the honed skills and talents that deliver, in so very many ways, the gold to your bottom line? There are lots of champions among us—but who are they and what are their special talents that make work better?

Back in good ole First Interstate Bank days, some smart person (we don't recall who) created the Teller Games and they were a HUGE hit. Contestants who met performance criteria then went through several elimination rounds. Finals were big and well-attended by co-workers and bosses. Since tellers were among the largest of job families in the organization, scores of people got a chance to participate, have fun and show off their stuff. It was one of the most brilliantly executed and talked-about series of workplace activities that ever occurred. Supported/sponsored by David Holman, the then-EVP of the Southern California Division, it motivated countless people to bone up on product knowledge; to balance more often, etc.

The concept need not be limited to banks or to certain job groups. Sales people get lots of kudos for new business, but what about everyone else? Events can be for aspects of work that are important to your company in categories such as safety, quality, compliance, customer and employee retention, ownership, morale-building, technical support, integrity, service, etc. that allow cross-organizational participation. Customer feedback can be used, if or when appropriate.

Everybody is really good at something! Why not find out who will be scoring 10's and wearing medals in your company? Stimulate some enthusiasm for being the best of the best! \* \* \* \* \*



**They Clap for Cheese!**

During her assembly of yet another awesome dish on her talk show, Rachel Ray enthused over topping everything with cheese. The audience broke into applause. Whether motivated by flashing signs or of their own free will, clapping for cheese struck us as a sad allegory. We just couldn't imagine that something so basic could invoke such zeal. But it got us thinking that perhaps it is the very lack of unpretentious pleasures in life that brings this kind of spontaneous appreciation. Are we all so immersed in technology and complication that we are starved for the basics? Could business leaders inspire with such simplicity? Why do people smile at the thought of cheese?

For the record, lore suggests that the reason picture-takers extract smiles with "Say 'cheese!'" originated in the early 1900's, when portraits were taken of people in grim poses. When a gaseous photographer emitted an audible posterior emission that induced laughter by the family whose photo was being taken, the end result started a new trend in photography. The story of the poor sucker who cut the cheese was then used to generate amusement on the faces of new subjects. It

**Insider Insights**  
*Thoughts and Information We Felt Like Sharing*

was later shortened to "Say 'cheese!'"

Anyway, we started asking people we've worked with what gave them good old-fashioned joy at work. Other than the expected responses that included "lunchtime", "leaving" and "free loot", we heard several things that bosses should think about doing with sincere regularity.

In our unofficial poll, we inquired "what occurred at what that you remember as making a positive difference/pleasant memory?"

The results were extraordinary, but only because the following things stand out as irregular instead of usual experiences:

- ◆ Being thanked in front of others or in a company publication for work well done.
- ◆ Being treated to breakfast, lunch, or cocktails.
- ◆ Leaving a meeting without a new To Do list.
- ◆ A trip to the copier that has enough paper and toner and doesn't jam.
- ◆ Knowing that one's work improves the quality of lives for the people on the receiving end.
- ◆ Receiving a written thank you note from the boss or a co-worker.
- ◆ Being asked for one's opinion or for suggestions.
- ◆ Being rewarded with paid time off for hard work or perfect attendance.
- ◆ When the boss doesn't keep you waiting but respects your time as much as his/her own.
- ◆ Feeling like all of the effort (research, preparation, etc.) was worth it: being validated.
- ◆ Exchanging store coupons or recipes with others at work.
- ◆ Spontaneous compliments about a trait for which one is proud.

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**Beacon Bits**

Quotations to cast rays of humanity across everyday business life

"Even if you're on the right track, you'll get run over if you just sit there."  
- Will Rogers

"Human beings are the only creatures who are able to behave irrationally in the name of reason."  
- Ashley Montagu

"Big shots are only little shots who keep shooting."  
- Christopher Morley

"A fanatic is one who can't change his mind and won't change the subject."  
- Winston Churchill

"I think the one lesson I have learned is that there is no substitute for paying attention."  
- Diane Sawyer

"Who thinks an inch, but talks a yard, needs a kick in the foot."  
- Chinese Proverb

**Last Laughs:  
Lesson of the Quarter**

(Received from Dan Esau)

One day a farmer's donkey fell down into a well. The animal cried piteously for hours as the farmer tried to figure out what to do.

Finally, he decided the animal was old, and the well needed to be covered up anyway; it just wasn't worth it to retrieve the donkey.

He invited all of his neighbors to come over and help him. They all grabbed shovels and began to heave dirt into the well. At first, the

donkey realized what was happening and cried horribly. Then, to everyone's amazement, he quieted down.

A few shovel loads later, the farmer finally looked down the well. He was astounded to see that with each shovel of dirt, the donkey would shake it off and take a step up.

As the farmer's neighbors continued to shovel, the donkey continued to shake it off and step up. After a while, everyone was amazed when the donkey stepped up over the edge of the well and happily trotted off!

The donkey later came back and bit the farmer who had tried to bury him. The bite got infected and the farmer eventually died in agony from

septic shock. MORAL: When you do something wrong and try to cover your ass, it always comes back to bite you.

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