

Part Three: Groups and Social Processes

13 Decision Making Overload

01:15:40:15 --:--:--:--

- Eggs or pancakes?

01:15:41:17 --:--:--:--

Golf or church?

01:15:42:15 --:--:--:--

The front page
or the crossword puzzle?

01:15:44:12 --:--:--:--

Even on Sunday morning,

01:15:45:20 --:--:--:--

it's decisions,
decisions, decisions.

01:15:47:18 --:--:--:--

- You know, I like
to think of life

01:15:49:07 --:--:--:--

as just one decision
after another.

01:15:51:00 --:--:--:--

I mean, this is everything
from the most mundane decisions,

01:15:53:19 --:~:~:~:~:~

what kind of toothpaste to buy
all the way up to who to marry.

01:16:05:24 --:~:~:~:~:~

- Science writer Jonah Lehrer
sees every one of those choices

01:16:08:16 --:~:~:~:~:~

as a tug of war--

01:16:09:14 --:~:~:~:~:~

an exhausting battle
between our gut feelings

01:16:11:19 --:~:~:~:~:~

and our reasoned thoughts.

01:16:13:01 --:--:--:--

- For a long time
people have said

01:16:14:15 --:--:--:--

the best way to make a decision
is to be rational.

01:16:17:05 --:--:--:--

And yet, in recent years,
scientists have discovered

01:16:19:14 --:--:--:--

that the rational brain
can only take in a few bits

01:16:21:15 --:--:--:--

of information
at any given moment.

01:16:22:27 --:--:--:--

So you start giving it
too much information,

01:16:24:23 --:--:--:--

and it starts to short-circuit
and sputter.

01:16:26:21 --:~:~:~:~:~

- To eliminate the sputtering
when buying a car,

01:16:28:22 --:~:~:~:~:~

a computer, a house,
or making any complex decision,

01:16:29:21 --:~:~:~:~:~

Lehrer says stop all
the thinking.

01:16:33:01 --:~:~:~:~:~

Just go for it.

01:16:33:28 --:~:~:~:~:~

- Our emotional brain
is actually much better

01:16:35:26 --:~:~:~:~:~

at taking in lots

and lots of information,

01:16:38:00 --:--:--:--
summarizing lots of data very
efficiently and saying,

01:16:40:08 --:--:--:--
"Here's a feeling.

01:16:41:09 --:--:--:--
"Don't worry about
all the details.

01:16:42:29 --:--:--:--
"Here's a feeling.

01:16:44:00 --:--:--:--
We've already taken those
details into account."

01:16:46:10 --:--:--:--
- We process emotions
in the front part of the brain,

01:16:48:17 --:--:--:--
and damage
to those frontal lobes

01:16:50:01 --:--:--:--
can spell disaster
for decisions.

01:16:51:07 --:--:--:--
Take the strange case of a
brilliant former business exec

01:16:53:16 --:~:~:~:~:~
known only as Elliot.

01:16:54:18 --:~:~:~:~:~
Surgery for a brain tumor left
his intellect intact.

01:16:56:29 --:~:~:~:~:~
His doctors were thrilled,

01:16:58:29 --:~:~:~:~:~
until they realized what
the surgery had not spared.

01:17:02:04 --:--:--:--
- He lost the ability
to experience emotions.

01:17:13:11 --:--:--:--
It turned out, though,
that Elliot

01:17:14:27 --:--:--:--
became pathologically
indecisive.

01:17:17:02 --:--:--:--
He would spend all day trying to
figure out where to eat lunch,

01:17:19:16 --:--:--:--
or which pen
to sign his name with.

01:17:21:03 --:--:--:--
I think the larger point here

01:17:22:14 --:--:--:--
is about just how essential
our emotions are

01:17:24:09 --:--:--:--
in the decision making process.

01:17:25:16 --:--:--:--
- Essential and unavoidable.

01:17:28:03 --:--:--:--
- You know how,
when a storm comes in,

01:17:29:20 --:--:--:--
it affects everything
in its path?

01:17:31:05 --:--:--:--
That's what an emotion does.

01:17:34:03 --:--:--:--
- The work of psychologist
Jennifer Lerner

01:17:35:04 --:--:--:--
at the Harvard Decision

Science Laboratory

01:17:37:01 --:--:--:--
shows how impossible it is

01:17:38:08 --:--:--:--
to make the rational decisions
we all think we make.

01:17:40:18 --:--:--:--
- This is a band
that's going

01:17:42:01 --:--:--:--
to measure your respiration.

01:17:39:25 --:--:--:--
- She demonstrated an experiment
for us

01:17:41:19 --:--:--:--
in which she shows subjects
emotional movie clips...

01:17:44:01 --:~:~:~:~:~
No one could watch this
and not feel sad.

01:17:49:16 --:~:~:~:~:~
Once subjects are sad,

01:17:50:20 --:~:~:~:~:~
she gives them a decision
to make,

01:17:52:05 --:~:~:~:~:~
like how much they'd pay
for something.

01:17:53:21 --:~:~:~:~:~
And she's found she generally
can predict their answers

01:17:55:27 --:~:~:~:~:~
just based on their mood.

01:17:56:24 --:~:~:~:~:~
- These are feelings you
just happen to have

01:17:58:21 --:--:--:--
at the time you're making
a judgment or a decision,

01:18:00:27 --:--:--:--
but they really should not be
an input to your decision.

01:18:03:14 --:--:--:--
And these are things like,
you're cut off in traffic.

01:18:05:29 --:--:--:--
- Get mad about the commute,

01:18:07:08 --:--:--:--
and you're more likely to make
a risky decision at the office.

01:18:09:20 --:--:--:--
And oddly enough,
being happy works the same way.

01:18:12:15 --:--:--:--
- Happiness and anger
are remarkably similar;

01:18:14:15 --:--:--:--
they both make you
under-perceive risk,

01:18:16:23 --:--:--:--
they both make you
take more risks,

01:18:18:15 --:--:--:--
and they both are associated

01:18:19:24 --:~:~:~:~:~
with this sense
of certainty and control.

01:18:21:18 --:~:~:~:~:~
- Which can be
downright dangerous.

01:18:23:08 --:~:~:~:~:~
Take seatbelts.

01:18:24:29 --:~:~:~:~:~

If you're happy or angry,
you're less likely to wear one.

01:18:27:14 --:--:--:--
You're also less likely
to use a bike helmet,

01:18:29:10 --:--:--:--
lock your car,

01:18:30:03 --:--:--:--
or buy life insurance.

01:18:30:28 --:--:--:--
And if you're sad,
stay away from the mall:

01:18:32:26 --:--:--:--
You'll probably spend too much.

01:18:34:13 --:--:--:--
But sadder still?

01:18:35:14 --:--:--:--
- We've never succeeded,
never,

01:18:37:00 --:--:--:--
in having people recognize
the irrational influence

01:18:39:08 --:--:--:--
of incidental emotion.

01:18:40:22 --:--:--:--
- Never?

01:18:42:00 --:--:--:--
- And then to make steps, no.

01:18:43:12 --:--:--:--
Never

01:18:43:29 --:--:--:--
- I'm sorry.
- Yeah.

01:18:45:03 --:--:--:--
- [laughs]

01:18:44:02 --:--:--:--
Baseball legend Yogi Berra

01:18:45:10 --:--:--:--
once had some great advice
for making decisions:

01:18:47:11 --:--:--:--
"When you come to a fork in the
road," he supposedly said,

01:18:49:17 --:--:--:--
take it."

01:18:50:03 --:--:--:--
But what if you have more
than two choices?

01:18:52:01 --:--:--:--
What if you have five or ten
or 100

01:18:53:20 --:--:--:--
or, as they claim at Starbucks,

01:18:55:01 --:--:--:--
87,000 choices
for a cup of coffee?

01:18:56:23 --:--:--:--
Then what?

01:18:56:16 --:~:~:~:~:~
- There's a mocha, a latte,
a cappuccino,

01:18:58:06 --:~:~:~:~:~
a peppermint mocha,
Frappuccino,

01:18:59:20 --:~:~:~:~:~
a Vivanno, a smoothie,
a cafe au lait...

01:19:01:04 --:~:~:~:~:~
- Americans certainly love
choice more

01:19:02:28 --:~:~:~:~:~
than anywhere else in the world.

01:19:04:13 --:--:--:--
- Columbia University professor
Sheena Iyengar

01:19:06:18 --:--:--:--
says her experience as a blind
person gives her

01:19:08:16 --:--:--:--
a different take
on all those choices.

01:19:09:23 --:--:--:--
Her book, The Art of Choosing,

01:19:11:01 --:--:--:--
argues more
isn't always better.

01:19:12:19 --:--:--:--
- Certainly, in theory, the more
choices I have out there,

01:19:15:02 --:--:--:--
the more likely I am to find
that perfect dress

01:19:17:03 --:--:--:--
or that perfect ring
or that perfect food item

01:19:19:02 --:--:--:--
that I want to eat
or that perfect job.

01:20:37:18 --:--:--:--
- Is that true?

01:19:20:26 --:--:--:--
- For the most part, we don't
have the resources to find it.

01:19:23:28 --:--:--:--
I mean, we get overwhelmed.

01:19:25:10 --:--:--:--
- Two-pump sugar-free vanilla,

01:19:26:27 --:--:--:--

01:19:49:04 --:--:--:--
with her supermarket

jam experiment.

01:19:49:23 --:--:--:--

In one display,
she put out six samples of jam.

01:19:51:26 --:--:--:--

In another, 24.

01:19:52:24 --:--:--:--

Result:

01:19:53:14 --:--:--:--

Shoppers mobbed the table
with 24 varieties,

01:19:56:09 --:--:--:--

but they were 10 times
more likely to buy jam

01:19:58:03 --:--:--:--

when they were staring
at only six.

01:19:59:19 --:--:--:--

- I know everybody wants
to go to that store

01:20:01:15 --:--:--:--

that offers you 1,000 options,

01:20:03:04 --:--:--:--

and that's the best recipe

01:20:04:11 --:--:--:--

to walk into that store,

01:20:05:19 --:--:--:--

get completely overwhelmed,

01:20:05:13 --:--:--:--

and walk out and buy nothing.

01:20:06:05 --:--:--:--

- What is
the accumulative effect

01:20:07:20 --:--:--:--

of, you know, having
to make all these choices?

01:20:09:25 --:--:--:--

- Essentially what happens is,
they get so tired

01:20:11:27 --:--:--:--

and emotionally drained
that we even find

01:20:13:21 --:--:--:--

that their immune system drops.

01:20:15:08 --:--:--:--

- Come on--because they've had
to make too many decisions?

01:20:15:13 --:--:--:--

- Yes, they even more likely
to get a cold, to get a flu.

01:20:17:20 --:--:--:--

- We're very fragile beings,
aren't we?

01:20:19:16 --:--:--:--

[laughs]

01:20:32:03 --:--:--:--

- I think there's this
tug-of-war in our brain

01:20:34:02 --:--:--:--

that we've all experienced,
perhaps most clear on a diet.

01:20:37:01 --:--:--:--

You've got part of you
that wants

01:20:38:16 --:--:--:--

to lose that last ten pounds,

01:20:39:26 --:~:~:~:~:~

and then there's another part
of you

01:20:41:15 --:~:~:~:~:~

that wants to gorge on
double-stuffed Oreos.

01:20:42:29 --:--:--:--

- When it's literally a battle
between our guts and our heads,

01:20:45:15 --:--:--:--

the Heath brothers recommend,
well, tricking yourself.

01:20:48:17 --:--:--:--

- And so, if you want
to go on the diet,

01:20:50:07 --:--:--:--

store away the dinner plates

01:20:51:18 --:--:--:--

that you feel like you have
to fill up

01:20:53:08 --:--:--:--

in order to have a good meal,

01:20:54:16 --:--:--:--

and eat off your salad plates.

01:20:55:16 --:--:--:--

And studies have shown that
you eat 20, 25 percent less

01:20:57:20 --:--:--:--

by doing that.

01:20:58:12 --:--:--:--

If you're having
trouble spending

01:21:00:03 --:--:--:--

because you're being bombarded
with messages

01:21:02:05 --:--:--:--

about the things
that you should have,

01:21:03:28 --:--:--:--

then freeze your credit cards
in a block of ice

01:21:05:28 --:--:--:--

and force yourself to go through

a warming-up period

01:21:08:03 --:--:--:--
before you actually spend.

01:21:08:09 --:--:--:--
- By now, you may feel
decidedly decisive,

01:21:10:02 --:--:--:--
so start a diet,

01:21:11:00 --:--:--:--
choose a new toothpaste,

01:21:12:09 --:--:--:--
buy a house.

01:21:13:03 --:--:--:--
What will it be?