

"A timely guide to restoring the
lost art of civil discourse."

Daniel H. Pink

#1 New York Times bestselling author
of *Drive* and *To Sell is Human*

"A must-read if you want to
make a greater impact!"

Mel Robbins

New York Times bestselling author and
host of *The Mel Robbins Podcast*

MINDSTUCK

MASTERING THE ART OF
CHANGING MINDS

MICHAEL McQUEEN

"Mindstuck is a must-read guide to persuading even the most stubborn and strong-willed individuals."

Jonah Berger, PhD, Wharton professor and author of *The Catalyst*

We're told you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make it drink. But what if you could?

Having spent the past two decades helping Fortune 500 brands and leaders embrace the changes they'd rather fight or ignore, Michael McQueen understands what it takes to change even the most stubborn minds.

But persuading others is getting harder and harder. In our ideology-driven and polarized age, certainty has taken the place of curiosity and open-mindedness has given way to obstinance.

Drawing on the latest discoveries in disciplines ranging from neuroscience to behavioral economics, McQueen suggests that we are too often using nineteenth- and twentieth-century techniques to change twenty-first-century minds—and are wondering why it's not working. What we need is an upgrade in our understanding of what it really takes to influence others.

Whether you are a leader trying to help your team keep pace in changing times, a businessperson who needs a potential partner to see your value proposition, or a parent who wants to get your teenager away from their screen, this book will show you how to persuade even the most mindstuck people in your world.



Michael McQueen is a multi-award-winning keynote speaker and bestselling author of nine books. He specializes in helping clients navigate uncertainty and stay one step ahead of change.

WWW.MINDSTUCK.NET

 **DEAN
PUBLISHING**



Praise for *Mindstuck*

“With its deft mix of research, humor, and practical advice, *Mindstuck* offers a timely—and much-needed—guide for restoring the lost art of civil discourse. If you want to learn how to change minds, Michael McQueen opens the door.”

Daniel H. Pink, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *To Sell is Human*, *Drive*, and *The Power of Regret*

“Michael McQueen shows readers how to master the art of healthy persuasion. He shares a range of proven techniques that are invaluable and easy to implement. *Mindstuck* is a must-read if you want to make a greater impact!”

Mel Robbins, *New York Times* bestselling author and host of The Mel Robbins Podcast

“In *Mindstuck*, Michael McQueen dispels many common myths about what it really takes to move others. This book is a must-read guide for anyone looking for practical insights into how to persuade even the most stubborn and strong-willed individuals.”

Jonah Berger, PhD, Wharton professor and bestselling author of *Contagious*, *Magic Words*, and *The Catalyst*

“*Mindstuck* shows readers how to gain and wield the superpower of persuasion using clear examples and the latest science. You, too, can be a persuasion pro when you read this book.”

Paul J. Zak, PhD, professor of neuroeconomics and author of *Immersion: The Science of the Extraordinary and the Source of Happiness*

“Saturated with science yet practical and funny! *Mindstuck* grabbed my attention from the very first page. This book will help you win hearts even when minds are on the defensive.”

Zoe Chance, PhD, senior lecturer, Yale School of Management, and author of *Influence is Your Superpower*

“Prepare to have your mind blown as Michael McQueen dives into the inner workings of human cognition. *Mindstuck* is like a rollercoaster ride for your brain with unexpected twists and turns that will have you laughing out loud and re-evaluating everything you thought you knew about thinking.”

Jay Van Bavel, professor of psychology, New York University

“In an age where it’s harder than ever to inspire change in people who are fixed in their ways or thinking, this book is incredibly timely. *Mindstuck* is a refreshingly practical look at what it takes to meaningfully persuade others.”

Josh Linkner, *New York Times* bestselling author, serial tech entrepreneur, venture capital investor

“*Mindstuck* serves up a firehose of facts and insights about how to help yourself to become more open-minded and how to help others take on new perspectives. In a time of heated intransigence based on ideology more than evidence, this book reviews a formidable amount of research about what drives opinion and how to deploy that research to make the truth more likely to prevail.”

Steven Sloman, PhD, professor of cognitive, linguistic, and psychological sciences, Brown University

“Michael McQueen has done it again! This intriguing book confronts and examines how people form perspectives and how those can be challenged or changed. As the leader of an international non-profit organization, I can say *Mindstuck* has powerfully shaped my thinking too.”

Stephanie Urchick, Rotary International global president, 2024-2025

“This lively read pulls back the curtain on the hidden forces that lead people to embrace change. Essential insights for anyone in the business of bringing new ideas into the world.”

Loran Nordgren, PhD, Kellogg professor of management and bestselling author of *The Human Element*

“This thoroughly engaging book provides a highly accessible summary of the latest research in psychology and neuroscience. Readers wanting to gain a better understanding of attitude change will not find a more clearly written, comprehensive, and thought-provoking summary. Better yet, Michael McQueen provides many concrete and practical recommendations based on empirical research.”

Frank Keil, PhD, psychology professor and director of the Cognition and Development Lab, Yale University

“Michael McQueen’s book is a contemporary masterpiece. The extensive use of literature, academic resources, and quotes to underpin the ideas is impressive. The real-world applications of tools and tips are a unique and invaluable resource. I found myself constantly engaged and challenged by the information presented, unable to put it down.”

Professor Mark Hutchinson, PhD, president of Science & Technology Australia and director of the Australian Research Council Centre of Excellence for Nanoscale BioPhotonics

“The challenges in our societies require all of us to change the way we think, act, and see the world. Many of us want change but few want to be changed. This book leads to the roots of wisdom and provides evidence for how change can be realistically achieved.”

Olli-Pekka Heinonen, director general of the International Baccalaureate and former Finnish Minister of Education

“In an era of half-truths and increasing polarization, *Mindstuck* shows readers how to harness the power of persuasion to bring people closer together. With engaging stories and insightful research, Michael McQueen reveals how even the most stubborn of minds can become ‘unstuck.’”

Dr. Sander van der Linden, Cambridge University professor of social psychology and author of *Foolproof: Why We Fall for Misinformation and How to Build Immunity*

“*Mindstuck* is an incredibly timely book for leaders trying to navigate a changed world. Michael offers a toolkit for making better decisions ourselves and influencing others to do the same.”

Neil J. Solomon, vice president, Asia Pacific/Latin America, UKG

“This book is an incredibly enlightening, timely, and essential read. In this polarized age, Michael McQueen lays out a compelling roadmap for how we all can approach dialogue and persuasion more productively.”

Jun Sochi, former APAC COO, Cushman & Wakefield

“*Mindstuck* is essential reading in a world where our attention and opinions are constantly under bombardment. With a skillful blend of philosophy and science, Michael provides readers with real and usable tools to improve their critical thinking.”

Foad Safari, e-Commerce Leader, Optus

“If you are trying to drive organizational change in the face of resistance, *Mindstuck* is the book for you. I am not in ‘two minds’ about the value of this book and its learnings—it is well researched and packed with practical tools.”

Kylie Bromley, PhD, vice president and managing director, Biogen United Kingdom & Ireland

“Michael McQueen has done a masterful job of conveying a wealth of evidence-based knowledge about the ways our minds deceive us as we struggle to make rational decisions in today’s complex, deceptive, and dangerous world.”

Dr. Paul Slovic, professor of psychology, University of Oregon

“Insightful and delightful. *Mindstuck* is a fabulous and practical evidence-based guide to understanding why we think the way we do and how to shift perceptions for the better.”

Dr. Justin Coulson, four-time bestselling author, television host, and parenting expert

“*Mindstuck* is a wonderful blend of straight talk and neuroscience. This is one of those rare books that is both enjoyable and enlightening. It is simple enough to understand and technical enough to trust. Highly recommended.”

Thomas R. Verny MD, DHL (Hon), clinical psychiatrist and author of *The Embodied Mind*

“If you ever wonder why it’s so hard for people to calmly and rationally discuss their differing viewpoints, then *Mindstuck* is for you. Michael McQueen engagingly explains how the process of changing people’s minds relies less on rationality than we realize—and how to use this knowledge to become more effective persuaders.”

David B. Strohmetz, PhD, professor of psychology, University of West Florida

“*Mindstuck* is an engaging take on the complicated and often counterintuitive world of influence. Michael McQueen smartly reminds us that we can’t fully understand persuasion without understanding why people resist it.”

Josh Compton, professor of speech, Dartmouth College

“Michael has a unique ability to translate complex psychological insights into practical tools. Engaging, entertaining, and inspiring, *Mindstuck* is a master-class in human judgment and decision making.”

Phil Slade, psychologist and author of *Behavioural Economics for Business*

“Michael McQueen has really nailed it again with *Mindstuck*. Whether you are transacting an idea, pitching an argument, or making a sale, this is one book everyone needs to read and put into practice.”

David Mulham, global chief sales officer, Usana Health Sciences

Published by Dean Publishing
PO Box 119
Mt. Macedon, Victoria, 3441
Australia
deanpublishing.com



Mindstuck: Mastering the Art of Changing Minds

©2023 Michael McQueen. All Rights Reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form by any means electronic, mechanical, or photocopying, recording or otherwise without the permission of the author.

Although the author and publisher have made every effort to ensure that the information in this book was correct at press time, the author and publisher do not assume and hereby disclaim any liability to any party for any loss, damage, or disruption caused by errors or omissions, whether such errors or omissions result from negligence, accident, or any other cause.

The views and opinions expressed in this book are solely those of the author. These views and opinions do not necessarily represent those of the publisher or staff. The advice and strategies found within may not be suitable for every situation. This work is sold with the understanding that neither the author nor the publisher is held responsible for the results accrued from the advice in this book.

ISBN: 978-1-92545-273-0

Printed in Victoria, Australia

MINDSTUCK

MASTERING THE ART OF
CHANGING MINDS

MICHAEL McQUEEN

 DEAN
PUBLISHING

To receive weekly tips for thinking
well—and helping others do the
same—scan the QR code below or visit
www.MondayMindhack.com.





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael McQueen has spent the past two decades helping organizations and leaders win the battle for relevance. From Fortune 500 brands to government agencies and not-for-profits, Michael specializes in helping clients navigate uncertainty and stay one step ahead of change.

He is a bestselling author of nine books and a familiar face on the international conference circuit, having shared the stage with the likes of Bill Gates, Dr. John C. Maxwell, and Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak. Michael has spoken to hundreds of thousands of people across five continents since 2004 and is known for his high-impact, research-rich, and entertaining conference presentations.

Having formerly been named Australia's Keynote Speaker of the Year, Michael has been inducted into the Professional Speakers Hall of Fame.

He and his family live in Sydney, Australia.

WWW.MICHAELMCQUEEN.NET

CONTENTS

About the Author	ix
Introduction: There's Something in the Water	1

PART I

What Makes Up a Mind

1. A Tale of Two Minds	13
2. How Can You Be So Sure?	25

PART II

A Toolkit for Persuading Stubborn People

3. Relativity	67
Persuasion Tool #1: Take the Time to Prime	78
Persuasion Tool #2: Use Contrast to Bring Clarity	91
Persuasion Tool #3: Let Your Words Do the Work	105
4. Affinity	117
Persuasion Tool #4: Don't Be In It to Win It	120
Persuasion Tool #5: Put Your Worst Foot Forward	133
Persuasion Tool #6: Concentrate on Commonality	140

5. Dignity	151
Persuasion Tool #7: Lessen the Loss	158
Persuasion Tool #8: Become a Master Asker	170
Persuasion Tool #9: Allow for Autonomy	183
6. Conformity	193
Persuasion Tool #10: Defer to the Power of "They"	197
Persuasion Tool #11: Harness the Herd Instinct	206
Persuasion Tool #12: Rely on Reciprocity	219
7. Empathy	229
Persuasion Tool #13: Make Principles Personal	236
Persuasion Tool #14: Harness the Hypothetical	247
Persuasion Tool #15: Let Experience Do the Explaining	254
Epilogue: Leaving our Trenches Behind	265
Endnotes	269
Acknowledgments	289

INTRODUCTION

THERE'S SOMETHING IN THE WATER

“My colleagues call me the poo lady,” Danielle said with a wry smile. This was not quite the response I expected when I asked one of the parents at my son’s day care what they did for work.

I vaguely knew that Danielle worked for one of Australia’s major water utilities but had no idea what this had to do with effluent. I soon found out.

Danielle explained that she had spent the last few years working with a team trying to get funding approval for a wastewater recycling program in Sydney. When she explained the science behind purified recycled water and how safe it was, I couldn’t help but agree it was a fantastic idea. In theory, that is.

“Would you like to try some?” she asked. Having just come from a presentation to a community group to raise awareness, Danielle had a few leftover sample bottles of recycled water in her car.

With a mixture of curiosity and caution, I put on a brave face. “Sure, why not?”

When Danielle returned a few minutes later, I knew I had a choice to make. The idea of drinking recycled effluent made logical sense to me, but as I cracked the screw cap on a bottle of the stuff, being willing to take a gulp was a different matter entirely.

As you might expect, there was nothing remarkable about the water at all. In texture, color, and taste, it was identical to the water you’d normally pay a few dollars a bottle for. “In fact, it’s even cleaner than bottled spring water,” Danielle informed me. “But it’s no easy task to get people on board with the idea. The resistance has been enormous.”

I learned that the concept of recycling wastewater for human consumption actually dates back decades with one of the early projects being trialed during the late 1960s in Namibia's arid capital city, Windhoek. One of the key proponents for Namibia's project, Dr. Lucas van Vuuren, had argued that "Water should not be judged by its history, but by its quality." Eventually, van Vuuren won over the local regulators and a few years later had successfully proved to the world that recycled wastewater was both a safe and incredibly sensible idea.

However, the road to acceptance in other parts of the world has been far tougher and remains an uphill battle.

In Los Angeles, for instance, plans to begin recycling drinking water in the early 1990s were met with fierce opposition. The media and several local politicians dismissed the idea with the pithy but ultimately misleading term "Toilet to Tap." Even the National Academy of Sciences flinched at the idea, deeming recycled wastewater as the "option of last resort" for shoring up water supply.

It was much the same experience in the Australian city of Toowoomba when the prospect of wastewater recycling was suggested in 2006. Despite a record-breaking drought making the pressing need clearly evident, community opposition was fierce and effective. Various false claims were made by those opposing the idea including that it would shrink men's penises, cause fish to change gender, and that the city would become known as "Poowoomba." The scare campaign worked so well that the proposal was decisively defeated in a referendum.

Fear trumps facts

Reflecting on the implications of this experience, Australia's former Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull lamented, "You don't need to have facts on your side to mount a vigorous political campaign. Science denial and scare campaigns" are more than enough to halt the march of progress.

To Turnbull's point, both the science and common sense of recycled wastewater is irrefutable. After all, anyone who understands even basic hydrology knows that *all* drinking water is essentially recycled wastewater. Yet most of us operate as if this were not the case. We tend to think of water use as a linear process where water is received, used, and then disposed of when dirty.

Even outside of the natural water cycle, the reality is that the reuse of wastewater has been common practice for many decades. It's just that most of us have

never connected the dots. For instance, anyone living on inland river systems already consumes water that has been used and then treated by communities upstream. The technical term for this is “unacknowledged reuse,” and it gives rise to the commonly used industry adage that water goes through “seven sets of kidneys” between falling as rain and being evaporated again.

This dynamic was certainly the case in the U.S. city of San Diego. Owing to its dry climate and lack of groundwater supplies, 85 percent of San Diego’s water has been piped from the Colorado River for decades. Given the fact that this river system has 400 intakes upstream of San Diego’s supply, much of the city’s drinking water was already recycled wastewater—and had been for years.

With costs for importing water having increased threefold in a decade and the supply pipes themselves dangerously crossing numerous active seismic fault lines, San Diego’s governing officials realized the need in the early 2000s to become water self-sufficient by way of wastewater recycling. The key challenge was to get the public on board with the idea.

When independent polls were conducted in 2004, just 26 percent of people were open to the possibility. Indicative of the public sentiment, a 2006 headline in *The San Diego Union-Tribune* read “Yuck! San Diego should flush ‘toilet to tap’ plan.” The article itself began with the words, “Your golden retriever may drink out of the toilet but that doesn’t mean humans should do the same.”

On top of this general sense of repulsion, a rumor gained traction that sensationally claimed that the effluent of San Diego’s wealthy suburbs would be treated and piped to the poorer areas of the city for consumption. While this was not remotely true, it added to a feeling of disgust at the whole plan.

Stigma sticks

Industry expert Linda Macpherson suggests that part of the challenge is that the descriptions and imagery associated with recycled wastewater have traditionally had a “poisoning” effect for the general community. As Macpherson describes it, they have led to “gut-based reactions and stigma” that make reasoned, evidence-based judgments near impossible. She added, “We’re all fearful of things we don’t fully understand. It’s become really clear that without education, stigmatized reactions will continue to kill otherwise sound and sustainable (wastewater) projects.”

In an effort to turn the tide of public opinion, authorities in San Diego realized that a multifaceted approach would be necessary. The first step was to change the language of reused water. In addition to avoiding industry jargon such as “indirect potable reuse” and “microconstituents,” they recognized that using terms such as “wastewater” and even the word “recycled” were part of the issue. Their focus on calling the initiative Pure Water was a step in the right direction as was the decision to focus on talking about “reused” and “purified” drinking water.

Proactive educational initiatives also played a key role in addressing misconceptions and fear. Chief amongst these was the Pure Water visitors center, which gave people the chance to understand the process of treating reused water and also the opportunity to try some. A series of online educational videos and resources were also created which reduced stigma and heavily used images and language of cleanliness and purity to counteract the imagined notions of disgust. Researchers and educators quickly discovered that information for the public needed to be “Simple enough to understand and technical enough to trust.”

In an ingenious move, the team in San Diego also joined forces with an initiative in the U.S. state of Oregon to use reclaimed drinking water to produce special craft-brew beer. Not only did this reframe recycled drinking water in a completely new way, it also increased familiarity and led to ample opportunities for light-hearted community engagement.

The impact of these combined efforts was extraordinary. Polls revealed that by late 2019, public acceptance of purified recycled drinking water stood at 79 percent and the very newspaper editors that so actively ridiculed the idea in 2006 had certainly changed their tune.

A *San Diego Union-Tribune* headline in 2017 proclaimed “San Diego Will Drink Water Recycled from Sewage. Cheers.” The article began with something of a confession: “The San Diego Union-Tribune Editorial Board used to be among the skeptics who maligned ‘toilet to tap’. Then six years ago we changed our minds.”

This about-face is as incredible as it is instructive.

If San Diegans could be persuaded to change their minds and eagerly drink water that had repulsed them for no logical reason just a few years earlier,

there are powerful lessons for us all when it comes to shifting even the most stubborn views.

This is a theme that has grown to fascinate me in recent years. Having spent two decades researching the trends and technology that will rewrite the future, my work has centered on helping organizations and individuals stay at the cutting edge.

As I have worked with clients over those years, there's one question that I've come back to time and time again: what stops people from changing—even when they want to change and know they should?

Recent years have provided plenty of cautionary tales of what happens when organizations and leaders don't keep pace with the rate of disruption around them. But while it may be convenient to assume that the likes of Kodak, Blackberry, or Sears failed as a result of ineptitude or incompetence, this is simply not the case. In these and many other instances, those at the helm of formerly successful organizations were well-read, well-informed, and had incredibly sharp minds.

Instead, I'd suggest it is mental inflexibility—or being “mindstuck”—rather than a lack of intelligence or insight that most often trips us up. Something about the process of making up our minds gets in the way of us making good decisions. Failing to account for this in ourselves and others is dangerous indeed.

While stubbornness is nothing new, we live in an era when it is more prevalent than ever. You could almost describe obstinance as one of the hallmarks of our age.

Of course, it's not you or I that are stubborn. *Our* views are completely reasonable and sensible, and we pride ourselves on the fact that we're always open to different opinions or perspectives. We'd like to assume that we willingly embrace the best thinking, the smartest ideas, and the soundest reasoning. The problem is that *everyone else* is so stubborn, pig-headed, and close-minded.

The reality is that stubbornness is much like arrogance—we can spot it in other people from a mile away but can find it near-impossible to detect in ourselves.

In fairness, it's not that people today are inherently less rational or reasonable than previous generations. Rather, our modern epidemic of stubbornness is largely due to the fact that we tend to have very little real understanding of how humans actually think, reason, and arrive at points of judgment. And it's far

from the linear and logical process we'd like to imagine is the case.

On top of this is the fact that we've never had to make up our minds about so many things, so quickly, and with access to so much information. Overwhelm and obstinance go hand in hand.

Please make up your mind

At any given moment, modern society demands we form and defend a view about pretty much everything. From the ethics of where we buy our clothes to whether we should get vaccinated, wear a mask, drink fluoridated water, or buy an electric car, it's mandatory that we pick a side, form an opinion, and make up our minds.

According to Timothy Wilson, professor of psychology at the University of Virginia, the sheer volume of ideas and input we are exposed to in modern times has a huge influence on this process.

Wilson cites data showing our brains are exposed to roughly 11 million pieces of information at any moment. Given that we can only consciously process forty of those inputs, we are left with little choice but to go with our gut or defer to tribal instincts. Our minds become made up depending on whether an idea feels intuitively right, or based on a vague sense of what people like us think about things like this.

But what matters more than the way we make our minds up is what happens next. Once we've formed a view or an opinion, we immediately start fortifying it.

Mark Stephens in his book, *The End of Thinking*, describes this very dynamic. "Our initial responses are pretty automatic, what we might call a gut-level reaction. And then our reasoning follows our gut, playing the role of an 'inner lawyer' who defends our intuition." As a result, when we are confronted with an idea that challenges our opinions, our reaction isn't "think and then respond. It's respond and then defend."

It's this defensive reflex that we've honed into a fine art in recent years. And it's something that has enormous implications for anyone in the business of persuasion—which is, of course, every single one of us.

Impact at the speed of influence

Whether we realize it or not, our success and effectiveness in most areas of life is determined by how good we are at changing the perspective of others. The

level of our impact will be determined by our ability to exert influence.

It is estimated that the “soft skill” of persuasion is responsible for generating a quarter of economic output in today’s “knowledge economy.” In fact, 40 percent of our professional time is spent trying to influence and convince others to make certain decisions or adopt new perspectives. As Dan Pink observes in his brilliant book *To Sell is Human*, roughly twenty-four minutes of every hour of the workday is dedicated to “moving people.”

To this point, the only diploma that Warren Buffett displays on the wall of his office is one from a Dale Carnegie course that he credits for teaching him how to influence others. Buffett routinely advises young professionals to improve their persuasion skills—something he suggests will immediately boost their professional value by 50 percent.

Beyond the professional arena, mastering the art of changing minds is an indispensable skill in everyday life. Perhaps you are a father attempting to persuade your teenager to stop playing video games long enough to get his homework done. Or perhaps you are the adolescent trying to get your parents on board with the idea of you getting a nose ring. Maybe you’re an adult child trying to convince your elderly parents to take their medication or consider going into care. You might be trying to get your husband to fix the light on the back porch or put the toilet seat down.

Then there are those delicate situations when you want your neighbor to cut back the tree that’s overhanging your fence. Or maybe you’re an apartment-dweller wanting the people living upstairs to stop playing music at 2 o’clock on a Sunday morning.

Regardless of the context, our ability to persuade stubborn people can make all the difference. And that is the focus of this book.

In examining the latest research and thinking in disciplines ranging from neuroscience to behavioral economics, I’d suggest what we need is a total upgrade in our understanding of what it takes to shift the thinking of other people (and ourselves).

Many of the persuasion strategies we have been taught are fundamentally flawed in that they are based on a notion of what we’d like human nature to be—not what it is. We are still using nineteenth- and twentieth-century techniques for trying to persuade twenty-first-century minds and are wondering

why it's not working.

In the chapters ahead, we'll look at the surprising truth about how we actually make up our minds. We will explore the psychology of stubbornness and look at the factors that *really* shape our opinions, beliefs, and judgments—often in ways we don't understand or are not aware of.

But while we may be more stubborn than ever, this need not be the end of the story. Even the most mindstuck people can be persuaded to change their minds.

As we will see, the art of persuasion dates back to ancient Athens and the original masters Aristotle and Plato. In describing the art of influence and its importance, Plato once suggested that the entirety of world history is the story of “the victory of persuasion over force.”

And yet recent times have seen us forget and, in many instances, flip this axiom on its head. Today when we encounter those who disagree with or resist our efforts, we tend to resort to force in an attempt to bend others to our will. We shout, we get offended, we get upset, or we play power games.

Then there are those who try motivating others to change through the dangling of carrots or the waving of sticks. And although coaxing and coercing others can seem to get results, the change tends to only last as long as the threats or incentives that motivated it do.

Making this sort of change stick is both costly and exhausting. It requires constant monitoring and intervention. What's more, even if someone conforms to our wishes out of grudging compliance or incentivized self-interest, it's highly unlikely their mind has changed in the slightest. As Dale Carnegie famously observed in his iconic bestseller *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, “A person convinced against their will is of the same opinion still.”

Those with a more intellectual bent tend to try and get the upper hand in persuasion by resorting to logic. Part of the reason we make this mistake can be traced back to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment which was dubbed by Immanuel Kant as the “Age of Reason.” This was a period when presenting your argument or views in the most rational possible way became highly important.

As inheritors of this philosophical paradigm, we too easily fall into the trap of assuming that someone who holds an unenlightened to uninformed view must lack the information they need to “see reason.” We therefore imagine that if we can present someone with better evidence or watertight logic, they'll

come to their senses and change their minds.

In their bestselling book *Switch: How to Change Things When Change Is Hard*, Chip and Dan Heath pick up on this theme. They suggest that many of us operate under the assumption that if we present an “impeccably rational case for change,” the other person will have no choice but to see reason and joyfully exclaim ‘You’re right... how could I have not seen this before!’

If only the human mind worked this way.

As the legendary American comedian and talk show host Dick Cavett once observed, “It’s a rare person who wants to hear what he doesn’t want to hear.”

As we will see in the coming pages, even the most flawless logic tends to be of little value and can even be counterproductive. In the words of Irish essayist Jonathan Swift, “It is useless to attempt to reason a person out of what they were never reasoned into.”

However, this is not a book about what doesn’t work in persuading others but rather what does. We will explore a host of practical and proven techniques for shifting even the most mindstuck people. And be forewarned that you are likely to have many of your own preconceptions about persuasion challenged along the way.

The old proverb tells us you can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make it drink. But what if this is not true?

The good news is that persuading others need not be an onerous or overwhelming task. Just as horse whisperers know how to win over even the most rebellious or obstinate bronco, so master persuaders know how to shift even the most stubborn mind.

Let’s explore how.

PART I

WHAT MAKES UP A MIND

Behavioral scientist Kurt Lewin once noted, “If you want to truly understand something, try to change it.” But the reverse is also true. Before we can try changing anything, it helps to understand how it works.

Given that this book is about changing minds and shifting stubborn opinions, we’d do well to start by looking at the very nature of thinking itself.

When it comes to any one of a million subjects, if I were to ask you *what* you think, the answer would be fairly straightforward. Whether it’s the most reliable carmaker on the market, the best smartphone brand, or the perfect wine to serve with steak, you’d be able to come up with a fairly certain answer in the blink of an eye.

This answer will seem infinitely sensible to you and it might even seem to you like the only answer that a reasonable person would give. And that would be an entirely human thing to do. It’s worth remembering that everything a person thinks or believes makes perfect sense to them. No matter how crazy, irrational, or strange another person’s ideas may seem to us, for them it is an entirely sensible way to view the world.

But before we explore *why* you and I might hold the opinions, views, and beliefs that we do, it’s helpful to first examine the all-important question of *how* thinking happens.

When people say they have “made up their mind” about a certain idea or issue, this is more than simply stating that they have accumulated sufficient information or activated enough neurons to trigger a point of judgment or decision. The process by which our minds get made up is nowhere near this neat.

The truth is that much of what shapes our conclusions and choices has less to do with our rational faculties than most of us would assume. The influence of subliminal instincts sees us arrive at points of stubborn certainty that often have little to do with the rational parts of our brain. Further still, we’re coming to realize that the human mind itself is multifaceted and prone to drawing conclusions that *feel* right but can be wildly inaccurate. As we will see, you and I would do well to not believe everything we think.

Returning to the words of Kurt Lewin, understanding what makes up our minds—both figuratively and literally—is the essential first step in discovering how minds can be changed. So, let’s start there.

CHAPTER 1

A TALE OF TWO MINDS

When my wife and I were doing the research to purchase a new car recently, the decision ended up coming down to two models. One was a reliable and fairly boring option, while the other was a sexier car with mixed reviews online. As we tried to make a choice, I remarked, “I’m of two minds about the whole decision...”

As soon as this familiar phrase came out of my mouth, I was struck by the profound truth it contains.

The reality is that in so much of life, we *do* operate in two minds—and not just in an indecisive sense. Plato described the difference between our two minds as the distinction between the “rational charioteer” who had to rein in the “unruly horse of emotion.” Freud described the two-mind reality as the difference between our selfish and conscientious egos. Numerous Eastern philosophies speak of the “monkey mind” that must be trained through discipline and focus, while Christian theology distinguishes between the mind of the Spirit and the mind of the Flesh.

In recent decades, an important new distinction has been drawn between the two minds we operate in as humans—a distinction that has profoundly shifted our understanding of what drives our judgments and how they can be influenced. Nowhere has this revision of thought been more significant than in the relatively young discipline of behavioral economics. This field of study emerged out of a recognition that traditional economic theories failed to account for the reasons people make the decisions they do.

For centuries, the world of economics had operated under the assumption that when confronted with a choice, humans would always make the most rational and reasonable one. In the field of economics, this became known as Expected Utility Theory.

However, you don't have to look far to see evidence that we often make decisions that go against common sense or even self-interest. In fact, we frequently make decisions that are highly irrational, to our own detriment, and just plain absurd. Behavioral economists set out to understand why this is the case.

Two of the founding fathers of behavioral economics, Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky, were the first to methodically challenge centuries of economic assumptions and propose a new way of understanding human thinking. For his part, Kahneman's most important contribution to the field was the concept that humans have two distinct ways of thinking. These two minds, so to speak, shape the way we process information and therefore make decisions.

Building on Kahneman's ideas and the work of psychologists Keith Stanovich and Richard West, much of this book is going to revolve around the notion that the two minds you and I operate in every day could be referred to as our Inquiring Mind and our Instinctive Mind.

The reason the distinction between these two minds matters is that the vast majority of our most stubborn opinions, judgments, and beliefs are informed by our Instinctive Mind. Yale academic Zoe Chance suggests in her book *Influence is Your Superpower* that the Instinctive Mind is responsible for up to 95 percent of our decisions and behavior. Harvard marketing professor Gerald Zaltman agrees, suggesting that over 90 percent of our thoughts, emotions, and learning occur without our conscious awareness.

While these numbers may be hard to prove, they are also hard to ignore. What's clear is that our Instinctive Mind plays such an outsized role in how we respond to the world and to each other. For instance, it was San Diegoans' Instinctive Minds that initially reacted with disgust to the idea of recycled wastewater despite logical evidence that there was nothing to fear. Then there are the numerous studies over the years which have revealed that voters tend to primarily use their Instinctive Mind when making decisions at the ballot box. As a result, many of us cast our vote based on, for instance, whether or not we like the look of a candidate or whether we get a good vibe about them.

Whether it's who we choose to vote for or any number of the other 35,000 decisions we make each day on average, our Instinctive Minds shape more of who we are and what we do than most of us realize.

So, what are these two minds and how do they work?

The Inquiring Mind

Our Inquiring Mind is typically the one we associate with “thinking” in the classic sense. It is characterized as being:

1. **Meticulous** – Detail and precision matter when processing information.
2. **Effortful** – The process of inquiry is taxing and time-consuming.
3. **Self-aware** – Making sense of thought processes is easy because they are linear and sequential.
4. **Reasoned** – Processing information is about employing logic and rationality.
5. **Deliberate** – Engaging the Inquiring Mind requires an active choice.
6. **Cerebral** – Gut reactions are discounted and viewed with suspicion.
7. **Nuanced** – Complexity and uncertainty are embraced as a key component of quality thought.

The Instinctive Mind

Unlike our methodical and critical Inquiring Mind, the Instinctive Mind tends to be:

1. **Quick** – Highly efficient at processing information.
2. **Effortless** – Isn't mentally taxing.
3. **Opaque** – We are generally unaware of its processes.
4. **Emotion-driven** – How an idea feels matters in how we evaluate it.
5. **Automatic** – We don't need to decide to use our Instinctive Mind.
6. **Relies on gut reaction** – Impressions and inclinations are core.
7. **Simplistic** – Ambiguity and nuance are ignored or dismissed.

While thinking and making decisions with our Instinctive Minds has its limitations, there are scores of good reasons we do so. For a start, using our Instinctive Mind requires much less effort and concentration than engaging our Inquiring Mind. As Daniel Kahneman points out, our brains are not just busy, they're lazy. Or, as Carl Jung is often credited as saying, "Thinking is difficult, that's why most people judge."

This shouldn't necessarily be considered an indictment of our thinking habits. In fact, Wharton School professor Katy Milkman goes as far as suggesting that our mental preference for the path of least resistance can work in our favor. "Instead of seeing our inherent laziness as a bug, I regard it as a feature with many upsides." Psychology professors Erin Devers and Jason Runyan agree, pointing to the fact that using our Instinctive Mind frees us up to think slowly and deliberately about certain matters. "Deliberate thinking is a limited resource that needs to be used wisely," they suggest.

The two minds in action

In their bestselling book *Nudge*, celebrated behavioral economists Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein examine how our two minds function in practice.

They point to the fact that it's the Instinctive Mind at work when you duck because a ball is thrown at you unexpectedly or smile when you see a cute puppy. Spontaneous and creative ideas like the ones we tend to have in the shower or just as we drift off to sleep are also our Instinctive Mind at work.

In comparison, if you were asked to multiply 17 times 34, figure out how to navigate from point A to B in an unfamiliar city, or to speak a language that is not your native tongue, it'll be your Inquiring Mind that swings into action.

While the Instinctive Mind has a genius of its own, it also has numerous shortcomings we'd do well not to ignore.

As an illustration of this, try reading the text below and pay attention to anything that stands out as you do:

A BIRD IN THE
THE HAND IS WORTH
TWO IN THE BUSH

Did you notice anything unusual?

Perhaps try reading the three lines again but this time look out for the duplicate of the word “the” at the beginning of the second line. Now that you’re engaging your Inquiring Mind, it becomes obvious, doesn’t it?

In his bestselling book *The Black Swan*, Nassim Nicholas Taleb points out that we fail to see the error in this above example because our Instinctive Mind so easily operates without conscious awareness. As this exercise shows, we tend to read with our Instinctive Minds—seeing what we expect to see and believing it unquestioningly when we see it. Beyond making proofreading our own work perilously difficult, it also makes us vulnerable to drawing inaccurate conclusions.

Speak to the Instinctive Mind first

The sequence in which our two minds process information has a significant impact on the judgments we make. If the Inquiring Mind is activated first, it can actually *prevent* our Instinctive Mind from having too much influence on our decisions and thinking.

In comparison, something powerful happens when our Instinctive Mind forms an impression, inclination, or sense of certainty, which is then logically reinforced by our Inquiring Mind. This process of reverse-engineering reason is a surefire path to stubbornness.

According to critical thinking researcher Peter Ellerton, the key in persuading or influencing others is to follow this same pattern. We must start by creating, modifying, or reinforcing a narrative in the other person’s Instinctive Mind and then give them logical Inquiring Mind reasons why their judgments are accurate.

Research by behavioral psychologist Susan Weinschenk shows just how important this sequence is when it comes to influencing others. Weinschenk suggests that appealing to the wrong “mind” or in the wrong order could see persuasive attempts backfire entirely.

Salespeople know this well. For instance, if someone is looking to sell you a car, they will appeal first to the features that stimulate your emotions and ego. They’ll have you imagine how you’ll look in the car, the heads that will turn as you drive down the street, or the roar of the car accelerating from a standing start. Only then will they turn your attention to the logical elements of the

decision such as fuel economy and safety ratings. In comparison, the same salesperson knows that if we start the buying consideration process in analytical mode, it's very hard to engage the gut-level emotions as a secondary motivator.

None of this is to say that our Instinctive Minds are somehow inferior when it comes to thinking and decision-making. On the contrary, there are times when our Instinctive Mind will help us make the best decision and arrive at the most sensible conclusion.

This was the central theme in Malcolm Gladwell's bestselling book *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking*. According to Gladwell, there are times when instinctive decisions are in fact best. "There are moments, particularly in times of stress, when haste does not make waste, when our snap judgments and first impressions can offer a much better means of making sense of the world."

That said, there are many instances when our Instinctive Minds do not serve us well and can even work against our best interests.

When our Instinctive Minds don't serve us well

When asked in a 2014 interview what the greatest challenge facing the modern world was, famed science educator Dr. Bill Nye wasted no time in singling out the accelerating rate of climate change. "The problem is the speed at which things are changing," said Nye, lamenting the apathy toward taking action. "We are inducing a sixth mass extinction event."

While it's hard to argue with Nye's point, you might be surprised to learn that there's growing research that shows that the biggest challenge in garnering commitment to taking action on climate change is that it is actually happening too *slowly*.

According to Harvard psychology professor Daniel Gilbert, the issue is that our Instinctive Minds are ill-equipped to process information that is abstract, complex, and slow. "We can duck a baseball in milliseconds and while we have come to dominate the planet because of such traits, threats that develop over decades rather than seconds circumvent the brain's alarm system." Gilbert concludes that "Many environmentalists say climate change is happening too fast. No, it's happening too slowly. It's not happening nearly quickly enough to get our attention." That is, the attention of our Instinctive Minds.

Speaking to this same theme, Greg Harman wrote in an article for *The*

Guardian that our Instinctive Mind isn't "wired to respond easily to large, slow-moving threats." Nor is it very good at assessing probability when risks are extreme—either very high or very low. As science and technology journalist Liam Mannix observes, "It's hard to imagine what 0.00009 percent means, so our (Instinctive Minds) think 'very low risk,' when the risk is actually much lower than that."

Added to this is the fact that our Instinctive Minds are also prone to confuse probability with plausibility. Put simply, just because something is plausible (i.e. it could happen), doesn't necessarily mean it is probable (i.e. likely to happen).

This helps explain why few of us think twice about driving a car while roughly 40 percent of people get nervous when boarding a plane. This is despite the statistical fact that we have a 1 in 84 chance of dying in a car accident in our lifetime, as opposed to a 1 in 5,000 chance of meeting the same fate in a plane crash. Similarly, we are more likely to die from falling down the stairs than at the hands of a terrorist, but that doesn't correlate with our real fears.

The work of Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein is helpful in understanding why our Instinctive Minds tend to get probability mixed up with plausibility. In their book *Nudge*, Thaler and Sunstein presented research participants with the following two scenarios and asked them to forecast the probability or likelihood of each:

- A massive flood somewhere in North America next year, in which more than 1,000 people drown.
- An earthquake in California sometime next year, causing a flood in which more than 1,000 people drown.

While the notion of an earthquake in California may seem more plausible given that it straddles the San Andreas Fault, the first option is statistically more probable. And yet, significantly more people believed that the probability was higher for option 2.

This research illustrates one of the key limitations of our Instinctive Mind and its judgments. By including additional qualifying details to a scenario, our perceptions of plausibility increase despite the fact that this causes the scenario's actual probability to decrease. In practical terms, this means additional details

don't necessarily bring clarity or context when making decisions—rather they can deceive us by creating a narrative that *seems* more likely.

The anatomy of thought

Beyond outlining the attributes of our two minds, it's worth taking a few moments to examine their physical anatomy too.

Our Inquiring Mind, for instance, tends to be dominated by our brain's frontal lobe, which biologists will tell you is the part of the brain that developed most recently from an evolutionary standpoint. The frontal lobe is associated with things such as rational consideration, concentration, and planning. Because these activities require focus, self-control, and energy, our frontal lobe tends to be the last port of call when thinking and making decisions unless it is engaged deliberately.

In contrast, our Instinctive Mind is driven and defined by some of the more “ancient” parts of our brain. Chief among these is our limbic system, which is the part of our brain responsible for many of our primal impulses. First conceptualized by American neuroscientist Paul MacLean in 1952, our limbic system consists of brain regions including the amygdala, hippocampus, and basal ganglia. Buried close to the back of the brain and underneath the cerebral cortex, the limbic system plays a big role in emotion processing, tribal instincts, and our fight/flight reflexes.

Our Instinctive Minds keep us safe

In functional terms, one of the things our Instinctive Mind does best is protect us. After all, it is our limbic system—and our amygdala in particular—that swings into action at the first hint of a threat.

One of the complicating factors, however, is that our Instinctive Minds react in much the same way whether a threat is physical or psychological. If confronted with information or ideas that are perceived as threatening, our neurological instinct is to batten down the hatches and retreat to stubbornness. When this happens, even the best evidence and logic will struggle to get a fair hearing. As leadership author and pastor Andy Stanley suggests, our actions may speak louder than our words, but our reactions speak louder than both.

In an effort to observe the mechanics of this very process, Emory University

psychologist Drew Westen monitored which parts of people's brains lit up when they were exposed to negative information about a political party or candidate they supported. Weston expected the brain's frontal lobe (the Inquiring Mind) to swing into action as individuals processed the information and considered how they could refute or dismiss it.

But this isn't what happened at all.

Instead, the frontal lobe stayed dormant while the limbic system (Instinctive Mind) roared to life. Weston's conclusion was that we don't really engage objectively or intellectually when confronted with disconfirming or inconvenient evidence. Instead, we instinctively defer to bias and emotion. This is something commonly referred to as an "amygdala hijack."

Even if you are unfamiliar with the term, you probably know what an amygdala hijack feels like. We've all had the experience of jumping to the defensive or going on the attack when our opinions or beliefs are challenged—even when part of us knows that we are overreacting. But once an amygdala hijack gets under way, it can be hard to back down. Our pulse races, our hands get clammy, our face reddens. We are angry, incensed, and ready for a fight.

When we are in this state, our focus narrows, our memory becomes compromised, and, as award-winning mediator Diane Musho Hamilton observes, "We find ourselves trapped in the one perspective that makes us feel the most safe: 'I'm right and you're wrong.'"

Although this dynamic is an entirely natural response and nothing new, there is little doubt that the digital age and social media in particular has heightened the "fight" instincts of our limbic system as we will see in Chapter 2.

Naturally, we are not powerless victims of our Instinctive Mind and its response reflexes. In an ideal world, our brain's frontal lobe ought to evaluate our instinctive responses and apply a good dose of reason, consideration, and judgment. However, recent research by University of California Professor Matthew Lieberman has shown just how powerful a role the amygdala plays in helping sustain and safeguard our deeply held beliefs—and how increasingly hard it is to fight this.

Interestingly, neuroscientist Bridget Queenan of UCSB's Brain Initiative points to evidence that the reflex to resist ideological threats is largely absent in young children and only kicks in and strengthens as we age. "Kids do not

appear to be emotionally or cognitively shattered by new or contradictory information. (Children) are perfectly capable of updating their belief systems and behaviors based on evidence. In fact, they find new and contradictory things really appealing.”

“So why do we stop?” Queenan ponders. “Why do we suddenly say: That’s it, I’m done, I don’t want to learn anymore. The world continues to be fascinating and unpredictable and open for exploration. So why do we as adults decide that we don’t care anymore?”

These are important questions and ones we will explore in the coming pages.

The impact of isolation

While it might be a natural, adult instinct to reject ideas that threaten our beliefs and opinions, there are certain factors that can cause our Instinctive Minds to be more sensitive to threat than is otherwise reasonable. The first of these is isolation.

Numerous studies in recent years have pointed to the power and importance of social connectedness. Not only has loneliness been shown to negatively impact our immune systems, cardiovascular health, and general well-being, new research indicates the degree to which it impacts the functioning of our Instinctive Minds too.

For instance, a study conducted by the University of Chicago in the early stages of the COVID pandemic sought to examine how lockdowns and social distancing were impacting our brains. The results confirmed that the size of an individual’s amygdala grew or shrank in proportion to how socially connected that individual was.

The reason this matters is that a smaller amygdala appears to be correlated with a more acute fight/flight response. Given this, is it any wonder that the pandemic years of social isolation were marked by a sense of trigger-happy outrage?

The important principle here is that lonely brains lash out. Isolation has a physical and psychological impact that makes our Instinctive Minds more stubborn and reactive. Significantly, the sort of connections that nurture healthy minds tend to be in-person ones. Video conference calls and digital interactions might make us feel connected to others but they just don’t cut it when it comes

to having balanced and healthy brains.

How fatigue makes us foolish

While loneliness can prevent our Instinctive Minds from thinking clearly, fatigue can cause just as many problems.

In an indication of just how consequential this can be, consider a study reported in Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences looking at how fatigue affects legal judgments. In the study, the decision-making processes of eight parole judges were monitored. These judges have the unenviable task of reviewing an enormous quantity of parole applications on any given day. On average, each application is considered for six minutes by each judge, and only 35 percent are approved on an average day.

On this particular day, researchers measured the parole evaluations and judgments across the course of the day taking into account three food breaks—a morning break, a lunch break, and an afternoon break. An interesting pattern emerged. It turns out that approvals for parole spiked significantly straight after each meal break. In fact, it turned out that 65 percent of all approvals are granted shortly following a break.

This finding, while confronting ethically, is a clear indication that even the most rational and logical among us can fall into the trap of deferring to our Instinctive Mind when fatigue comes into play.

It's worth noting that although taking regular breaks may cause us to feel fresher and think more clearly, what we consume while on a break can have a big impact on our reasoning skills too.

The trouble with trimethylxanthine

You might be surprised to learn that there is a legal and widely available drug called 1,3,7-trimethylxanthine that makes you more gullible if you take it—and makes you more persuasive if you give it to others. This drug is routinely dispensed through what are essentially “trimeth labs” that you'll find in almost every neighborhood.

While you've probably never heard of 1,3,7-trimethylxanthine, you've definitely heard this drug called by another name: caffeine.

The impact of caffeine on our evaluations and judgments was first examined

back in 2005 by Pearl Martin at the University of Queensland in Australia. In Martin's research, attempts were made to convince participants to change their opinions about the controversial topic of voluntary euthanasia.

Participants for the study were already of the view that voluntary euthanasia ought to be legalized and Martin was curious as to what it would take to change this opinion. Before the persuasion attempt began, the participants were asked to consume an orange beverage that resembled juice. What they didn't know is that half of the group's drinks contained a moderate dose of caffeine (the equivalent to two espresso shots) and the other half were given a placebo. Each group was then exposed to six moving stories that made the case for not allowing euthanasia.

After reading each of the stories, the attitudes of the group were surveyed and those who had consumed the caffeine were found to be 35 percent more favorably disposed toward the arguments they'd read than those who'd consumed the placebo.

In explaining the results, Pearl Martin suggests that caffeine increases arousal leading our Instinctive Minds to be more open to new ideas and information. Numerous studies have since confirmed this finding.



While an awareness of the nature and limitations of our two minds is powerful in itself, this is only the beginning.

As we have explored, the vast majority of our deeply held opinions and views are formed by our Instinctive Minds. But how exactly does the Instinctive Mind get made up? What's the process by which we arrive at points of stubborn certainty and conviction?

This is where we will turn our attention next.

In the coming pages, we'll examine the mechanisms by which we become mindstuck. And as we will discover, not only does the Instinctive Mind extend well beyond our physical brains, it tends to operate at a powerfully subliminal level too.

We hope you have enjoyed this complimentary
chapter of Michael McQueen's book,
Mindstuck: Mastering the Art of Changing Minds.

To order your copy of the complete book,
visit the links below or scan the QR codes:

Australia and NZ:

<https://amzn.asia/d/90q1XQp>



US, Canada and worldwide:

<https://amzn.to/3sYHiA7>



For more information on the book and Michael's work,
visit www.mindstuck.net.