



How Intuition Works

by Brad Fregger

Intuition (insight, realization) comes from the subconscious and is a significant factor in our survival. To understand the critical role that the subconscious plays, we must first understand that:

The subconscious controls what we perceive.

The mind is made up of two major areas, the conscious and the subconscious. The conscious mind is responsible for everything we are aware of; the subconscious handles everything else. This is the critical part: *the subconscious controls what we perceive.*

The five senses (hearing, sight, touch, taste, and smell) don't filter out anything. They don't have the capability of filtering anything; they are only capable of receiving data and passing it on to your brain. Due to the sheer volume of information, it is literally impossible for the conscious mind to handle all of the sensory data it is continually receiving.

Next, we need to understand that:

The subconscious mind receives the data supplied by the senses, analyzes it to determine how critical it is, filters out that which is not critical, and brings critical information to the attention of the conscious mind.

How does the subconscious decide what is critical and what isn't, what to filter out and what to allow to surface? I suspect there are many different reasons the subconscious decides to filter or not filter, as well as when make us aware of specific information. For example, if there's a gas leak, it's critical that you have that information immediately. However, if it's a solution to a problem that isn't particularly urgent, the needed information may not have as high a priority. In these instances, the information comes forward at a time when we are open to it, possibly in a relaxed state or thinking about something else that doesn't take a lot of concentration.

Knowing the subconscious is controlling the process, doesn't help us understand how it works. If I was going to be able to help others use their powers of intuition effectively, I would need to know, at least have a workable hypothesis as to how the process operates and might thereby be controlled. I got my first solid lead when I became involved with a data mining company and needed to have the basic concept of data mining explained to me.

It Works Like Human Intuition

In January of 1999, I became Chief Product Officer for Austin's Dryken Technologies, a data mining company with research offices in Knoxville, Tennessee. I was picked because I'm good at creating product, not because I'm expert in the area of data mining. In fact, when I took the job, I didn't have a clue what data mining was all about.

My first task was to get to Knoxville as soon as possible and have a long learning session with the data-mining scientists. The chief scientist, Dr. Nancy Grady, was still working at Oak Ridge National Labs at the time.

We sat down across from each other at the conference table and I said, "Nancy, you're going to have to start at the beginning. I don't know anything about data mining."

“No problem,” she replied. “Basically it works like human intuition. Our mind takes in a tremendous amount of data continually; data about everything we experience, in every way we experience it. It categorizes the data and determines relationships of which we are not consciously aware. Then at the appropriate time, it feeds only specific, relevant information to us in the form of intuition. Data mining works the same way. The algorithms look at massive amounts of disparate data, determining relationships that could never be determined by human analysis; they report out those specific relationships.”

I sat there in silence for a minute. If I understood what she was saying, this answered questions that I had concerning intuition. I looked over at her and said, “Let me tell you a story about myself; you tell me if it fits what you just described.” She nodded to go ahead.

“As the manager of a men’s store in San Jose, California, I developed a very interesting talent. I would watch a customer enter the store and walk toward me. I was usually standing in an area of the store about one hundred feet from the front door. When the customer reached me, I’d say, ‘The Shoe Department is down that aisle to your right,’ or ‘Can I help you find a suit?’ or ‘Looking for a gift?’

“The customer would often look at me and say, ‘How’d you know what I was looking for?’

“I couldn’t answer ... I didn’t know how I knew; I just seemed to know. I wasn’t right all the time, but I was right often enough to make me wonder what was going on. Part of me wondered if an angel was standing beside me giving me this information, but I had trouble with this explanation. Angels must have more important things to do than tell me that Joe Blow is looking for the Shoe Department.

“I think you’ve finally given me the answer I’ve been looking for. From what you’ve said, it seems to me that from the moment the customer entered the store, my subconscious was categorizing and analyzing everything he did, where he looked, what he reached out and touched, how quickly he walked, what he was wearing, and on and on. It had done this hundreds of times as customer after customer entered the store and then made a request. At some point, through this natural data mining process, my subconscious figured out that people who behaved as this one was behaving usually were looking for the shoe department, or the suits, or for a gift ... whatever.

“Then I would receive an intuitive thought, a thought stimulated by my subconscious but determined by the data my senses had provided as the customer walked through the store to where I was standing. Right?”

“Right!” Nancy responded. “That’s exactly what happened and exactly what data mining is all about. Our algorithms look at massive amounts of disparate information and discover, through the use of neural networks and other advanced data mining technologies, relationships that cannot be determined in any other way.”

This was fascinating ... I sat down to learn about data mining and discovered invaluable information about the human mind and how it operates, what intuition is and how it works.

The subconscious mind “mines” the data it receives for unknown relationships and then delivers that information, at the appropriate time, to the conscious mind as realization, insight, or intuition.

This was the answer I’d been looking for: A theory of the intuitive process that worked and could be used to enhance intuitive skills in others. This took intuition out of the realm of the mystic and provided a strong scientific basis for its existence. This was something even the most doubting could accept.

By the way, personally, I’ve had too many experiences not to believe that there’s something else going on, beyond the workings of the mind. That’s what I call synchronicity ... but, that’s a subject for another day.