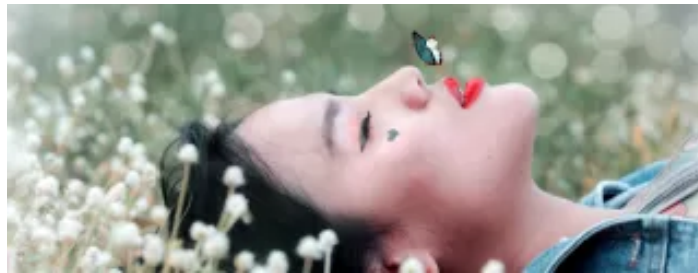


# Your Intuition Is Real. Here's How to Access It.

Since you can't turn it off, learn how to consult it.

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Ever ignored a gut feeling? We all have.

Sometimes the consequence is trivial, at other times—say you marry someone you knew wasn't right for you—it can severely affect your life.

When you're making decisions, should you listen to your gut or only lean on reason? Although society often calls intuition *magical thinking*, new studies I [re-searched](#) suggest it's a finely tuned form

of [cognition](#) worth paying [attention](#) to and designed to save our lives.

## Lynn's Story: The Turnaround Queen

Lynn Tilton lost her father as a [teenager](#) and experienced firsthand what the loss of the main income provider can do to a family. She got herself into Yale on a tennis grant, married while at Yale, became [pregnant](#) shortly after graduation, and soon became a single mom. It was the '80s and she launched into a [career](#) on Wall Street to support her child.

Successful financially but sexually harassed daily, she planned to retire young once she had made enough money.

But when she did, she had a dream that changed everything. A vision that came to her as an intuition that changed the course of her life and those of the hundreds of thousands of people her life would touch.

In her dream, her late father appeared to her and said, “This is not what I had in mind for you.”

Lynn realized that she needed to make her life about more than herself and to

dedicate the rest of her career to making sure others would not have to go through the kind of suffering she and her family had when her father, the family's primary provider, died.

Lynn founded Patriarch Partners, a company that bought organizations on the brink of bankruptcy—companies that consulting firms and others had completely given up on—and turned them around—think Stila Cosmetics, for example.

Because she followed her intuition instead of squelching it as *magical* or *irrational* thinking, the Turnaround Queen, as Lynn is now known, became the owner of the largest woman-owned business in America, at one point overseeing 700,000 employees whose jobs she had saved.

Lynn isn't alone. [Eighty-five percent of CEOs](#) use intuition when making decisions. And for good reason.

While most of us have had [gut feelings](#), instincts, or intuitions in our lives, we learn to brush them off as irrational. Yet research supports that intuition is an ele-

gant, fine-tuned, and incredibly rapid form of perception we are wired for and that can help us make better decisions.

## The Science of Intuition and Why the Military Is Researching It

Staff Sergeant [Martin Ritchburg](#) was at an Internet café on a military base in Iraq, speaking to his wife back home when he got a weird feeling about a man who walked into the café. Ritchburg saved the lives of 17 people that day because his hunch was right and the man had planted a bomb.

Accounts like this and others spurred the U.S. military to investigate intuition and even have training programs to develop it further.

- **One form of intuition is highly cognitive.** You could think of it as hyper-awareness. Marine Corps officer Maurice Chipp Naylor, author of *The New Ministry of Truth*, described his experiences in Afghanistan. He shared with me that the U.S. Marine Corps combat hunter training is a way the Marine Corps has formalized the instruction of honing into your gut. It involves becoming an acute observer. You train your observation skills for deviations from the norm in your environment. When Chipp was in

Afghanistan patrolling, for example, noticing that a usually busy playground was empty would indicate a deviation from the norm and be a sign of potential danger.

- **Another form of intuition is more of a feeling.** [Neuroscientist](#) Joseph Mikels, professor of psychology at DePaul University, studies intuition more as an emotional or gut feeling. After all, when we speak about our intuition, we often talk about it as something *feeling right* or *feeling off*.

Kushal, a trader on Wall Street, had just entered one of the Twin Towers on 9/11. A guard's orders were to remain in the building. A lot was going on and Kushal didn't have time to deliberate rationally about what he should do. He had to make a decision and fast. His gut feeling told him to run. He followed his intuition rather than the guard's order, and he saved his life seconds before the building collapsed, something he documented in his book *On a Wing and a Prayer*.

Mikels' research shows that in situations—like Kushal's—where matters are complex, you'll make a better decision by following your feelings. He found this to be especially true for older adults whose cognitive faculties might not always be as sharp as younger people's, showing

that intuition is even more important with age.

## **Should You Always Follow Your Gut?**

When I interviewed Lynn, The Turnaround Queen, on her experience with intuition for my research, she shared: “I definitely move from my intuition. But intuition without intellect is like buying a plane without any propulsion. I do the analysis, but my decision comes from my place of knowing. You can’t shut off your intuition.”

And because she followed her intuition, she saved hundreds of thousands of working-class families from succumbing to unemployment.

Joe Mikels gives good advice similar to Lynn’s. Given his research on intuition and how it can help you make a better decision in complex situations, he says he makes sure to “consult” it and consider it along with all the other information he has.

## **Strengthen Your Intuition**

How can you train yourself for intuition? Intuitive thoughts or a-ha moments are

more likely to come when your brain is in *alpha-wave* mode, i.e. you are not concentrating on something, nor are you so relaxed that you could fall asleep. You're in a meditative state of mind. Making time and room for alpha-wave moments will help you access it:

- **Meditation**. Research shows meditation makes you more creative and insightful. Meditation also increases your awareness.
- **Nature**. Research shows you're more likely to come up with innovative insights after spending time in nature
- **Time Off and Unplug**. Make time to be off your devices and in a more relaxed state. Although you may feel idle, your brain is actually in active problem-solving mode.
- **Breathe**. Learn to use your breath, you can significantly reduce your stress levels and cultivate a calmer, more meditative state of mind; primed for intuitive insights.

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