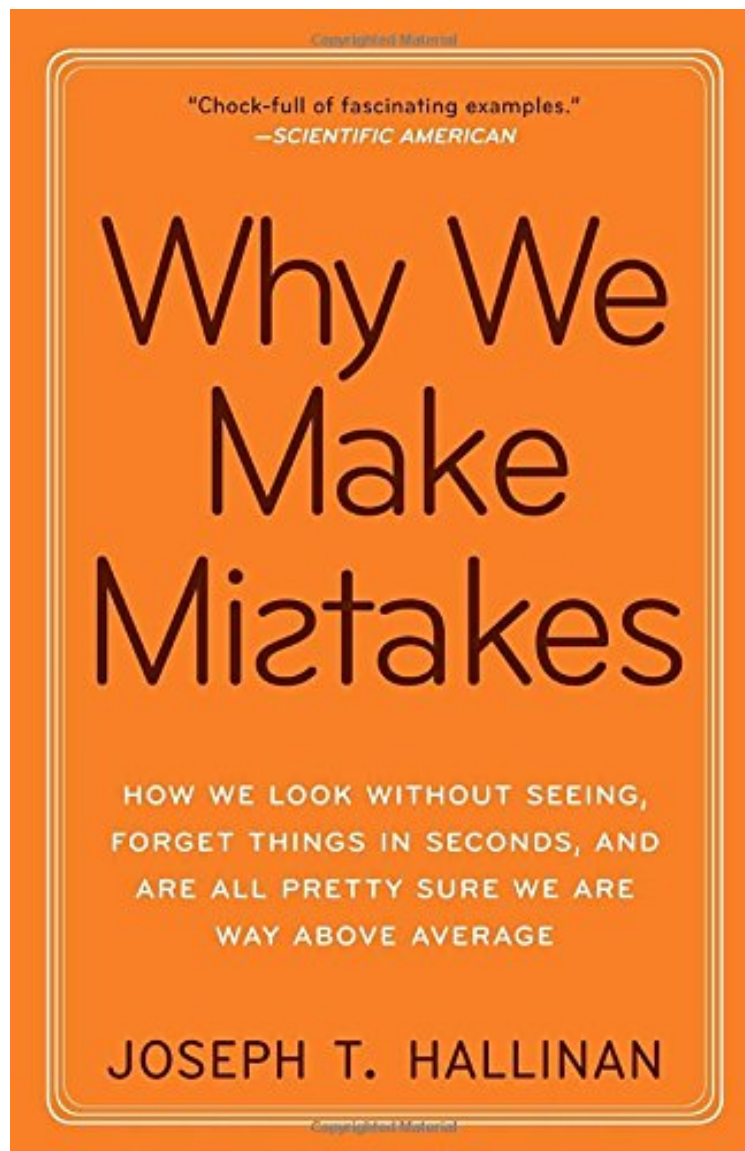


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Why We Make Mistakes: How We Look Without Seeing, Forget Things in Seconds, and Are All Pretty Sure We Are Way Above Average

Joseph T. Hallinan

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Joseph T. Hallinan : Why We Make Mistakes: How We Look Without Seeing, Forget Things in Seconds, and Are All Pretty Sure We Are Way Above Average

before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *Why We Make Mistakes: How We Look Without Seeing, Forget Things in Seconds, and Are All Pretty Sure We Are Way Above Average*:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Amusing Take on Our Mistakes By Jennie I'm really only about halfway through this book. If I find anything in the second half that radically changes my experience or opinion of it, I'll revise this review, but I don't expect that to happen. The author covers the topic pretty well, in a fairly entertaining fashion. There is enough material included that was new to me, that it's worth my time. My main complaint would be that the author, in my opinion, padded out the book with a series of little gray boxes, each of which repeats a point made in the text. These little quotes occur about every 2 to 4 pages, and sometimes consist of material that first appeared IMMEDIATELY BEFORE the box. So one finds oneself reading the same sentence(s) twice in succession! This rapidly grew "old". An amusing "mistake" made by the author, which actually caused me to write this review, appears in a section on the topic of memory. It is concerned with an experiment to find out how well people remember the words of our national anthem, "The Star-Spangled Banner". The author mentions that the song consists of 81 words. When I was in junior high school, we were required to memorize all 4 verses, 312 words of it. The author appears to think it consists of only one verse. And even if that were true, a careful count of the words he gives in the book shows that they number only 80. (My guess is that he counted "star-spangled" as 2 words.)

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. A MANS GOT TO KNOW HIS LIMITATIONS. Dirty Harry Callahan By Paul Froehlich We make certain mistakes because of the way we are wired. That's the thesis of Joseph T. Hallinan, who gives a readable summary of research on brains and behavior, along with entertaining anecdotes, to make his point. Studies show human beings have any number of systemic biases that make us prone to certain kinds of errors, in part because we aren't aware of our biases. Here are a few of them: We are powerfully influenced by our first impressions. Consequently, we are reluctant to change answers on tests, even though we would usually get higher scores if we did. A related bias is a reluctance to change our minds, even about bad information, and even when we know it is wrong. When people do change their minds, however, they often reconstruct their past opinion to make it consistent with the present one. We miss much of what we see because we skim, so we often miss significant things. When we recognize patterns, we tend not to pay close attention to the details. We pay more attention to the beginning of a word than to the end. The more expertise or familiarity we have with something, the more skimming we do. This tendency can have dire consequences when the skimmer is a radiologist looking at an x-ray or a baggage screener looking for a gun. We are influenced by the first number we see. Grocery stores know this when they advertise a product 4 for \$2 instead of 1 for 50 cents. The number 4 acts as an anchor, resulting in an average 32 percent increase in sales compared to single-unit pricing. A quantity limit also boosts sales -- the higher the limit, the higher the sales. Being listed first on the ballot results in up to 3 percent more votes. Studies show that making the first offer in a negotiation tends to result in a better outcome for the party who makes it. People usually feel more responsible for their actions rather than inactions, so we would rather err by failing to act. Doing nothing is less regrettable. Ergo, students have greater regret about making a mistake by changing a right answer to a wrong one than they do about failing to change a wrong answer. By the same token, a consistent pattern in decision making is to take risks in situations where we expect a loss, but to get conservative when it comes to gains, where we want to hold on to a sure thing. A study of NFL teams facing fourth downs concluded that 40 percent of the time, teams would do better by taking the risk of going for it; coaches actually go for it only 13 percent of the time, preferring the safe thing and kicking. We think we can multitask better than we actually can. Our brains slow down when it has several tasks, and we are more likely to forget. One example of the risk of multitasking is the traffic hazard caused by talking on the cell phone while driving. Inattention blindness is when multitasking drivers look directly at something but do not see it. Cars rigged with cameras show that nearly eight of ten crashes are due to driver distraction, though only one in four drivers admits to those distractions. BTW, older drivers 60 and up can take twice as long to recover from distractions as younger ones. We like to believe we are impartial, when the reality is we have strong tendencies shaping our judgments. When people are asked about judgmental biases, they claim they are less biased than average. Most doctors, for example, believe they are not influenced by gifts from drug companies, though they don't think the same about their colleagues. When recalling our own actions, we tend to put them in a more favorable light than a neutral observer would. This self-serving tendency is so ingrained, writes Hallinan, that we aren't aware of it. College students recall getting higher grades in high school than they actually did, and showed a far better memory for good grades than bad. Almost none underestimated their grades.* Overconfidence is a leading cause of error, and most of us men in particular -- tend to be overconfident. Men overestimate their IQ and attractiveness, while women underestimate theirs. Men also forget their mistakes more readily than women. The conceit that we are above average leads to many mistakes. Overconfidence is high when there is little corrective feedback. Weather forecasters have gotten more accurate over the decades since they started giving the probabilities of various weather events. Their predictions are highly accurate in part because they get quick feedback. Ironically, overconfidence rises along with the difficulty of the task. As we gain more information about a topic, we gain confidence, albeit more information does not necessarily make people better informed. One study found

that students learned more from summaries than from reading whole chapters. Another study found that professional horse handicappers were no more accurate with forty pieces of information than with five, though they were 50 percent more confident in their predictions using forty. A PGA study found that golf pros sank only 54.8 percent of their six-foot putts, though the pros thought their success was 80 percent. Experts in various fields believe their predictions are right, though studies show they have less reason for confidence than they think. Another example of overconfidence is that when putting something together we generally fail to read the directions. People prefer to follow their intuition than reading a manual. That leads to mistakes, even injuries in the case of do-it-yourselfers using nail guns. A further problem is that if we learn to do something a certain way, we are resistant to change, ignoring simpler solutions the next time. How can we reduce mistakes? If we were aware of our biases, then we would have a better chance of avoiding the mistakes they lead to, which is why this book is useful. Hallinan suggests we can moderate overconfidence by asking what could go wrong? There is a power to negative thinking so that pitfalls can be discovered instead of ignored. He also advises we do less multitasking, be less resistant to new ways of doing something, and get more sleep, since sleep-deprived people take more risks. He also recommends we give less credence to vivid anecdotes like diet testimonials; averages are more useful than testimonials. Finally, be happy. Happy people tend to be more creative and less prone to the errors induced by habit. #####1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Spotlighting our Mistakes By Geoff Garland Are you watching the World Cup Soccer matches? The USA Team had two goals taken away from them; the consensus is the referee calls were baseless--and wrong. How about the Major League Baseball umpire who ruined a perfect game recently? He admitted afterward that he made the wrong decision; then the league's president upheld the wrong call, denying the pitcher his rightful place in immortality--and possibly affecting his financial future. It was estimated he would lose over two hundred thousand dollars in his lifetime from lost income at baseball signing shows. But those are games we play. What about the BP oil disaster? The question asked over and over is: How could this gross mistake happen? Wasn't anybody, even the government watchdog agency, modeling a cataclysmic deep-water event? Obviously, no one did. Joseph T. Hallinan's "Why We Make Mistakes" sheds light on "how we look without seeing, forget things in seconds, and are all pretty sure we are way above average." Hallinan's book illuminates our mistakes--from anchor decisions to hindsight bias to framing and calibration. Are you pounding big hours at work with less than adequate sleep? Chances are you are making reckless gambles. How about overconfident? Be careful, "overconfidence is a leading cause of human error." Not reading this fast-moving and engaging book could be one more mistake you make.

We forget our passwords. We pay too much to go to the gym. We think we'd be happier if we lived in California (we wouldn't), and we think we should stick with our first answer on tests (we shouldn't). Why do we make mistakes? And could we do a little better? We human beings have design flaws. Our eyes play tricks on us, our stories change in the retelling, and most of us are fairly sure we're way above average. In *Why We Make Mistakes*, journalist Joseph T. Hallinan sets out to explore the captivating science of human error--how we think, see, remember, and forget, and how this sets us up for wholly irresistible mistakes. In his quest to understand our imperfections, Hallinan delves into psychology, neuroscience, and economics, with forays into aviation, consumer behavior, geography, football, stock picking, and more. He discovers that some of the same qualities that make us efficient also make us error prone. We learn to move rapidly through the world, quickly recognizing patterns--but overlooking details. Which is why thirteen-year-old boys discover errors that NASA scientists miss and why you can't find the beer in your refrigerator. *Why We Make Mistakes* is enlivened by real-life stories of weathermen whose predictions are uncannily accurate and a witness who sent an innocent man to jail and offers valuable advice, such as how to remember where you've hidden something important. You'll learn why multitasking is a bad idea, why men make errors women don't, and why most people think San Diego is west of Reno (it's not). *Why We Make Mistakes* will open your eyes to the reasons behind your mistakes and have you vowing to do better the next time.

.com Book Description We forget our passwords. We pay too much to go to the gym. We think we'd be happier if we lived in California (we wouldn't), and we think we should stick with our first answer on tests (we shouldn't). Why do we make mistakes? And could we do a little better? We human beings have design flaws. Our eyes play tricks on us, our stories change in the retelling, and most of us are fairly sure we're way above average. In *Why We Make Mistakes*, journalist Joseph T. Hallinan sets out to explore the captivating science of human error--how we think, see, remember, and forget, and how this sets us up for wholly irresistible mistakes. In his quest to understand our imperfections, Hallinan delves into psychology, neuroscience, and economics, with forays into aviation, consumer behavior, geography, football, stock picking, and more. He discovers that some of the same qualities that make us efficient also make us error prone. We learn to move rapidly through the world, quickly recognizing patterns--but overlooking details. Which is why thirteen-year-old boys discover errors that NASA scientists miss and why you can't find the beer in your refrigerator. *Why We Make Mistakes* is enlivened by real-life stories--of weathermen whose predictions are uncannily accurate and a witness who sent an innocent man to jail--and offers valuable advice, such as how to remember where you've hidden something important. You'll learn why multitasking is a bad idea, why men make errors

women dont, and why most people think San Diego is west of Reno (its not). Why We Make Mistakes will open your eyes to the reasons behind your mistakes--and have you vowing to do better the next time. A QA with Author Joseph T. Hallinan: Which Penny is Correct? (Click on Image to Enlarge) Can you pick out the real penny? (Answer Below) Question: Weve seen pennies so many times--why is it so difficult to recognize which of these drawings accurately represents a penny? Joseph T. Hallinan: Partly, it has to do with how our memory works. Our long-term memory, even for things weve seen thousands of times, is limited. Most of the time, we recall meaning but not surface details. Its the same reason we remember faces, but not the names that go with them. Q: Are there other real-world examples of this? JTH: Sure. We just watched as Chief Justice John Roberts and President Barack Obama muffed the words to the Inaugural Oatheven though the oath has only 35 words and even though both men no doubt rehearsed it many times. Its actually very hard to remember things verbatim. Take the National Anthem, for instance. Youve sung it hundreds of times. But how many of the Anthems 81 words can you remember without singing it? Q: How does this limitation lead to mistakes? JTH: Because we think our memories are much better than they are, and rely on them more than we should. Consider how many times an eyewitness has mistakenly identified a criminal and you begin to see the significance of this type of error. Basically, we look but dont always see. Q: Alright then, weve waited long enough: which of the pennies above is the real McCoy? JTH: That would be penny A. But when researchers conducted this experiment, fewer than half of the people in the study picked the right one. (Photo Andrew Collings)From Publishers WeeklyA Pulitzer winner for his stories on Indiana's medical malpractice system, Hallinan has made himself an expert on the snafus of human psychology and perception used regularly (by politicians, marketers, and our own subconscious) to confuse, misinform, manipulate and equivocate. In breezy chapters, Hallinan examines 13 pitfalls that make us vulnerable to mistakes: "we look but don't always see," "we like things tidy" and "we don't constrain ourselves" among them. Each chapter takes on a different drawback, packing in an impressive range of intriguing and practical real-world examples; the chapter on overconfidence looks at horse-racing handicappers, Warren Buffet's worst deal and the secret weapon of credit card companies. He also looks at the serious consequences of multitasking and data overload on what is at best a two- or three-track mind, from deciding the best course of cancer treatment to ignoring the real factors of our unhappiness (often by focusing on minor but more easily understood details). Quizzes and puzzles give readers a sense of their own capacity for self-deception and/or delusion. A lesson in humility as much as human behavior, Hallinan's study should help readers understand their limitations and how to work with them. Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.From Booklist*Starred * What an eye-opener! If youre someone who has trouble remembering the names of people (or common objects), if you seem to forget things almost immediately after you learn them, if your memory of past events frequently turns out to be drastically at odds with the facts, relax: youre not alone. Its a truism that we all make mistakes, but Hallinan is more interested in why we make them, in what quirks of our mental makeup allowand even frequently encourageus to misremember important events, forget passwords, mistake strangers for friends, buy more groceries than we actually need, fall for optical illusions, and so on. Turns out these arent sign of illness. Just the opposite: our minds behave this way because our brains are wired this way. Hallinan cites numerous studies and experts (there is a lengthy bibliography), but he keeps the book from becoming a stodgy recitation of facts and statistics through the frequent use of illustrative examples and snappy prose. He also throws in a few big surprises, such as the revelation that multitasking is a myth (we dont do several things at onceswitch between various tasks without really focusing on any of them). A vastly informative, and for some readers vastly reassuring, exploration of the way our minds work. -- David Pitt