

## Eureka!

In June 2012, a group of educators were in a Mississippi conference room, trying to determine how to provide high-quality sex education in the state. The statistics were abysmal, and some health educators were trying to implement research-based curricula. However, they were struggling with an antiquated state law that said not only could you not use actual condoms in demonstrations, but that you couldn't even pantomime the demonstration. One official had interpreted the law so severely that a national online program that simply included a cartoon condom reading safety precautions had to be edited before it was permitted to be used in the state.

While the group was discussing this obstacle, someone mentioned socks. Sanford Johnson, one of the participants, remembers it this way: "There's that old story about college students putting socks on their dorm doors when they want to be undisturbed. So for whatever reason, socks tend to come up a lot in conversations about sex ed." But this time, it hit Sanford differently.

Sanford ran home to grab sneakers and socks. When he returned, he handed his friend his phone and asked him to record. In the video, Sanford gives a presentation about how to put on a sock. "If you're going to be engaged in a sock activity," he says, "[make sure] that your foot is protected." He pinches air out of the sock, puts the sock on the tip of his foot, and rolls it down. He points out that some people make a mistake by not putting their sock on the entire way. He reminds people to roll the sock all the way down your foot. "And then you can put it inside your shoe," he says. He also tells viewers that when finished with "shoe activities," you should carefully grab your sock while pulling it from your shoe, then take the sock off, twist it up, and throw it away.

The video was less than two minutes. It has the vibe of a spur-of-the-moment production, and it was. It wasn't professionally produced, and Sanford stammers a bit at the beginning. "I kind of did it as a joke, just to make fun of the strict rules," he says. "I uploaded it to YouTube to share with a few friends - I didn't really expect it to go anywhere."

But, it blew up. The video ([here](#)) got picked up and shared around Buzzfeed, Reddit, local news outlets, national media outlets, and - eventually - John Oliver's "Last Week Tonight." Millions have seen his video, and it has done a lot to teach Mississippi teens safe sex strategies.

And here's the thing: It didn't come from laborious decision-making models. Sanford didn't lay out a series of choices (for example: create a video comparing putting on condoms to wearing socks, coordinate a letter-writing campaign, or pursue legal options). He didn't analyze those options, make pro/cons lists, and then make a final determination.

To Sanford, using socks as a way to teach effective condom use was, in a word, intuitive.

In [my last newsletter](#), I discuss the ridiculous and even dangers of "trust your gut." That co-opting of intuition is problematic, even though it is popular amongst a certain subset of self-help gurus. That form of decision-making alchemy should be avoided, but there is a place for intuition in decision-making. Just: A different way of thinking of intuition.

I think of intuition as the opposing twin of cognitive biases. Both biases and intuition are parts of decision-making that aren't analytical or fully conscious. With biases, at no fault of your own, your mind fails you, or plays a trick on you. With intuition, at no credit of your own, your mind *helps* you. It's the "Eureka!" moment that led Sanford to his brilliant shoe decision.

Importantly, just as there are ways to reduce cognitive biases, there are ways to boost intuition. That's why understanding what intuition *really* is is important.

Make good choices, -Kevin

**Bad decision of the week:** Principal placed on leave after hosting assembly only for Black students, who were collectively told to improve

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