

THINK LIKE A FREAK

The Authors of Freakanomics Offer to Retrain Your Brain

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The Web site for this book is at www.freakanomics.com

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MAIN IDEA

"Freakonomics" is both a well-known expression and an ideology which was introduced to the world in two bestsellers titled *Freakonomics* (2005) and *SuperFreakonomics* (2009). These two books have now sold more than 7 million copies worldwide in 35 languages.

The essence of Freakonomics is that the theories economists develop and use can be applied to problems in society at large with equal relevance and effectiveness. Economists insist on letting the data speak for itself rather than applying their own hunches, preferences or ideologies.



Put another way, Freakonomics is the art and science of thinking for yourself and letting the facts speak for themselves. If you can apply Freakonomics consistently well – or in other words if you can learn to "Think Like a Freak" – you stand a better chance of solving the really difficult problems other people generally ignore and hope they will go away.

"The fact is that solving problems is hard. If a given problem still exists, you can bet that a lot of people have already come along and failed to solve it. Easy problems evaporate; it is the hard ones that linger. Furthermore, it takes a lot of time to track down, organize, and analyze the data to answer even one small question well. We'd like to bury the idea that there's a right way and a wrong way, a smart way and a foolish way, a red way and a blue way. The modern world demands that we all think a bit more productively, more creatively, more rationally; that we think from a different angle, with a different set of muscles, with a different set of expectations; that we think with neither fear nor favor, with neither blind optimism nor sour skepticism. That we think like—ahem—a Freak."

– Steven Levitt and Stephen Dubner

How to Think like a Freak – and Solve Hard Problems

- 1 Start by putting away your moral compass
- 2 Be quick to admit and to say: "I don't know"
- 3 Attack the root causes of problems, not the symptoms
- 4 Think like a child – don't be afraid to ask obvious questions
- 5 Always remember incentives work – they drive behavior
- 6 Make your garden weed itself
- 7 Tell more stories
- 8 Quit sooner rather than later – as soon as the results are in



0. A primer in Freakonomics Page 2

1. Start by putting away your moral compass Page 2

It's hard to solve problems if you approach them with your mind already made up. Insist on letting the facts speak for themselves and always test your assumptions.

2. Be quick to admit and to say: "I don't know." Page 3

To get good answers, you usually have to redefine the question or questions you ask. Often, the first step to discovering something interesting is to admit you don't know.

3. Attack the root causes of problems, not the symptoms Pages 3 - 4

It's easy to get sidetracked into treating the symptoms of a problem rather than its root cause. If you do that, all you end up with is a band aid. Always go for the roots.

4. Think like a child Page 4

When it comes to generating fresh ideas and asking questions that make you think, it can be helpful to have the mentality of an eight-year-old. Question everything.

5. Incentives work Page 5

People respond to incentives. They always have and they always will. Yet it's amazing how quickly people forget this. Get incentives right and you can get people to do anything.

6. Make your garden weed itself Page 6

People with different motives respond to the same incentive in different ways. If you're smart, you will use this to your own advantage by getting people to reveal their intentions.

7. Tell more stories Page 7

When you think like a freak, people will get upset. Don't waste your time trying to persuade people who don't want to be persuaded. Instead, tell them stories.

8. Quit sooner rather than later – as soon as the results are in Page 8

The sooner you abandon what doesn't work, the more resources you will have left to try something new. Be quick to run experiments and even quicker to quit what doesn't work.

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