

### **Weird Leonards: Intuitors Need Experience**

I enjoyed the irony in “Weird Leonards in History” [January-February 2008 issue of *Defense AT&L*]. Dan Ward and Chris Quaid took Gladwell’s idea about intuition and pursued it to an extreme while also making some valuable points.

As a scientist, however, I must point out that the term intuition, although it helps to sell books, really clouds an important point. The common meaning of *intuition* is a thought that appears in the absence of a deliberate thinking process. But the scientific evidence showing that intuition is of value in decision making is based on studying decision makers who have many years of experience in their fields. These people benefit sufficiently from that experience so that they can often make good decisions even without a deliberate thinking process. Others, like Weird Leonard—who lacked experience with the strength of mechanical structures, the power of jet packs, and the workings of brakes—do significantly less well using their untrained intuition. Many of the other examples that Ward and Quaid provide do, indeed, indicate that successful intuitors have considerable experience in the fields where they are operating.

One of the more important things that we can do is to make clear to military decision makers that their intuition, if it is not based on years of relevant experience and training, is likely to prove to be the very worst way for them to make decisions.

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**The authors respond:** *We basically agree with everything Dr. Drillings wrote.*

*Successful intuitors typically draw on significant experience to support their mysterious decision-making process. And, as Dr. Drillings pointed out, the examples we provided support that hypothesis. We think it’s cool that we intuitively arrived at a conclusion that his scientific approach supports!*

*Ultimately, the article was about two things: the courage to follow your hunches and the danger of following a hunch (for what need is there for courage in the absence of danger?). Those who fearfully or analytically rejected their intuition failed just as surely, albeit less spectacularly, as those who bravely or foolishly followed their intuition. And those timid souls who shunned failure and sought certainty before experimentation learned and discovered much less than they could have. The world is a poorer place because of their reticence.*

*In the end, successful outcomes are typically the result of persistence, experience, guts and intuition—all of which necessarily come before scientific certainty and precision. That is to say, a correct idea arrived at intuitively is correct, even before it is scientifically supported. Similarly, an incorrect idea with scientific support is still incorrect, even before science corrects itself, as it so often does. And as Octave Chanute points out in his book, *Progress in Flying Machines*, the path to success is paved with necessary, enlightening, and productive failures.*



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