KESTON SCHOOL

PSYCHOLOGY · FREE SAMPLE

Everyday Thinking Traps

Spot the mental shortcuts that mislead you and choose more clearly

CHAPTER 1 + WORKBOOK SECTION

BEFORE YOU START

How to use this book

By the last page you will recognize five common thinking traps in your own choices, know the moments they strike, and have three simple checks that help you slow down and decide more clearly at work and at home.

1. Read one chapter at a time. Each one gives you a single idea and a single action.
2. Open the Everyday Thinking Traps Workbook and complete the matching section while the chapter is fresh.
3. Do the “Try this” action within seven days. Reading changes what you know; the action changes what you do.
4. Finish with the checklist in chapter 12 and come back to it whenever you slip.

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CHAPTER 1

Why Smart Choices Go Wrong

Recognize the confident mistakes capable people make, meet the five thinking traps in this book, and see why trying harder does not fix them.

Priya is good at her job. She runs a small team, she reads the reports and she prepares for meetings. So when she picked a new supplier last spring, she felt sure. The first quote she saw set her sense of a fair price. The supplier's sales rep reminded her of a colleague she trusted. Every review she read afterward seemed to confirm her choice. Six months later, deliveries were late, costs had crept up and she had already spent weeks on the switch. She kept going, because changing again felt like admitting a mistake. Looking back, she told herself the warning signs had been obvious all along.

Priya did not make one mistake. She made five small ones, and each one felt like good thinking at the time.

The confident mistake

Most bad decisions do not feel bad while you make them. They feel reasonable. You have reasons, you have a little evidence and you have a gut sense that you are right. That is exactly what makes them hard to catch.

This book is about a particular kind of error: the predictable ways a normal, healthy mind takes shortcuts and lands in the wrong place. These are not signs that you are foolish or careless. They are side effects of a brain that is built to save effort. Most of the time the shortcuts serve you well. Sometimes, in the same predictable situations, they lead you astray.

A thinking trap is a mental shortcut that misfires: it gives you a quick, confident answer that is tilted in a predictable direction. The key word is predictable. Because the traps follow patterns, you can learn the patterns and catch yourself.

Five traps you will meet

You will meet five traps in this book. Here they are in plain words.

1. **The confirmation trap.** You notice and remember what supports what you already believe, and you skim past what does not. Priya's reviews all seemed to agree with her because she read them looking for agreement.

2. **The sunk-cost trap.** You keep putting time, money or effort into something because of what you have already spent, not because of what it will give you from here. Priya stayed with the supplier partly because switching would "waste" the weeks she had invested.
3. **The anchor trap.** The first number you hear becomes a reference point, and later judgments stay close to it, even when that first number was random or chosen by someone else. Priya's first quote shaped what felt fair.
4. **The hindsight trap.** Once you know how something turned out, it seems as if the outcome was obvious from the start. Priya now remembers the warning signs as clear. At the time, they were not.
5. **The overconfidence trap.** You feel more certain than your evidence allows, and you guess too narrowly about how long things will take or how they will go. Priya felt sure, and that feeling ended her search early.

You have probably recognized at least one of these in your own week. Most people recognize all five once they know what to look for.

Why trying harder fails

When people learn about thinking traps, their first instinct is to promise themselves they will be more careful. It rarely works, for three reasons.

The traps feel like clear thinking. You cannot fix an error that feels exactly like being right. When the confirmation trap is working, you do not feel biased. You feel informed.

Knowing about a trap does not switch it off. Reading a description of the anchor trap will not stop the next price tag from pulling at your judgment. Awareness helps you spot the trap afterward. On its own, it does little in the moment.

Careful people often fall harder. If you are good at building arguments, you are also good at building arguments for what you already wanted to believe. Intelligence gives the traps better tools to work with.

What does work is smaller and more practical: a few simple checks, used at the specific moments when the traps are most likely to strike. That is what the rest of this book gives you.

> **Key idea:** You do not need a better brain to avoid thinking traps. You need a few simple checks and the habit of using them at the right moment.

What this book is and is not

This is a practical book about everyday thinking. It covers the kinds of choices most adults make every week: buying things, planning projects, judging what other people meant, sticking with or dropping commitments, and learning from how things turned out.

It is not a textbook. You will not find study citations, numbers about how often people make these errors or technical terms beyond the few explained here. The ideas are described in plain language, and every chapter ends in something you can try this week.

It is also not professional advice. Nothing here replaces a qualified professional. If a decision involves your health, your mental health, money you cannot afford to lose, legal matters, taxes or your employment rights, use the checks in this book to organize your thinking and then speak with a qualified professional or an official source. If worries or racing thoughts are affecting your sleep, mood or daily life, talk to a doctor or a licensed mental health professional.

The book follows a simple path. Chapters 2 and 3 explain how the traps work and what they cost. Chapter 4 sets out the one principle everything rests on. Chapters 5 to 7 give you three tools. Chapters 8 to 11 apply them to real situations, the hard moments and your daily routine. Chapter 12 collects the most common mistakes and a one-page checklist. The workbook gives you a page for each chapter.

Try this

Over the next seven days, spend five minutes each evening on a trap hunt. Think back over your day and pick one choice or judgment you made. It can be small: what you bought, how you read a message, whether you kept going with a task that was not working.

For that one choice, write down:

- What you decided or concluded.
- Which of the five traps might have been involved, if any.
- One thing you might have checked, if you had paused.

Do not judge yourself. The goal is only to start noticing. By the end of the week, you will likely see one or two traps that show up for you again and again.

To catch them, it helps to know where they come from, and the next chapter explains why your mind takes these shortcuts in the first place.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Thinking traps catch capable, careful people, not only careless ones.
- Five traps show up again and again in everyday choices.
- Trying harder fails; simple checks at the right moment work.

→ Workbook, section 1

01 Why Smart Choices Go Wrong

Get an honest first picture of which traps show up in your choices.

CHECKLIST

Traps I recognize in myself

- [ ] I notice what supports my view
- [ ] I keep going because of what I spent
- [ ] The first number shapes my sense of fair
- [ ] Outcomes look obvious afterward
- [ ] I feel sure before I have checked

FILL IN

Seven-day trap hunt

Day	Choice or judgment	Possible trap	What I could have checked

The trap that showed up most this week, and one example:

A decision ahead where I may need a professional or official source:

YOUR NEXT STEP

Want the whole book?

You just read chapter 1 of Everyday Thinking Traps and tried the first workbook section. The full e-book has 12 chapters, a complete workbook and a final checklist. Here is everything inside:

01 Why Smart Choices Go Wrong

02 Shortcuts Your Mind Takes

03 What Thinking Traps Cost

04 Pause at the Right Moment

05 Argue the Other Side

06 The Fresh Start Test

07 Write It Down First

08 Four Everyday Trap Scenes

09 When Traps Hide Well

10 Build Checks Into Routines

11 Clearer Thinking Over Time

12 Mistakes & Checklist

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