

Strays – Gut feel

Ever get that feeling you forgot something on your way out of town for a family trip, only to remember you left the baby at home? I hope not, yet it seems that our subconscious is often attempting to assist us by producing some sort of *discontented feeling* in the event that we should have done something we had originally planned. We often refer to that physiological reaction a *gut feeling*, an instinctive emotional intuition.

Contrast that to another western English idiom that exhibits a subtle but practical difference from the previous phrase. A *gut feel* is also an instinctive emotional reaction, but is thought to be the result of past performance rather than a forgotten pre-planned task. At first glance, gut feel seems to be the result of *guesswork*, which is a semi-random act of producing a conclusion or action without the benefit of concrete data. It turns out that gut feel is much more than a guess, and has practical value.

For example, as a manager you've narrowed the list of job candidates to two people that seem equally qualified. Candidate A has an impressive resume, perfect technical scores, and gave polished, rehearsed answers. Candidate B has slightly less direct experience, but solid skills and good interview scores. Both candidates passed the skills test easily, yet on paper Candidate A appears to be the safer, stronger choice.

During the second round of interviews, you feel a sudden wave of ease and warmth while interviewing Candidate B. While interviewing Candidate A, however, you feel a subtle tightness in your chest, and noticed the conversation felt stiff and guarded. Why did you feel this way about each? It's possible that you sensed Candidate A might hide mistakes to appear infallible, while you sensed that Candidate B was deeply honest, adaptable, and would own up to a mistake without hesitation.

In each case, a gut feel is an *unspoken, rapid emotional and physical reaction triggered as your brain processes past experiences without you actively thinking about them*. In other words, gut feel can be another term for *experience*, and is much more useful and quantifiable than guesswork. You've seen this in action while watching an experienced person rely on past occurrences to draw conclusions about specific actions to take moving forward.



Relevance to ham radio

While operating a net on your mobile VHF radio in your shack, you hear an unusual slight squeal that's not coming from the speaker. Within a couple of seconds, the squeal starts going higher in pitch, and instinctively you power off your radio. You have no immediate idea what's wrong, or whether anything is wrong at all. But now that you have twenty seconds to think about it, you seem to recall a similar but forgotten sound from more than thirty years back, and it had originated from a final power transistor announcing its earthly departure.

Now that the power is off, you wonder what you should check next, since you fear that restoring the power to the mobile radio could spell the end of its life. Then the thought comes to you that you should probably check the coax to start with. Sure enough, it turns out that your coax just got chewed through by a squirrel, leaving you to transmit into an open circuit. After replacing the damaged coax, you power up your mobile, and all is well once again.

Did pure guesswork or a mysterious force from the unseen world spare your radio? Maybe, but its salvation was more likely due to your experience, your *gut feel*.

Conclusion

Gut feel is the intuitive integration of experience, environmental awareness, and subtle sensory cues. While amateur radio relies on science, math, and technical specifications, seasoned operators use this intuition to make rapid decisions when conditions change unpredictably. So, the next time your "gut" gnaws at you, it might be telling you something more important than a desire for pizza; it might just pay to listen to your gut.