

The Halo Effect - How the Halo Effect Affects Your Decisions

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Gentlemen, Antonio here. Okay. Welcome to the Science of Style and we're going to focus today on the Halo Effect.

You've probably heard this, but let's go back about a hundred years. A guy named Edward Thorndike did a study in 1920, figured out that there was something going on in the way military officers were ranking their peers. He was seeing some type of statistical correlation between actually certain attributes and other attributes, and it didn't really make sense. He saw this again and again. He called it the Halo Error in military rankings, wrote up about it, but then it led to him doing more research into what today is known as the Halo Effect.

This is basically that there is a cognitive bias where our overall feelings of a person are in many ways, they influence other properties. I'll use a real world example. Any of you guys use a smart phone, maybe an iPhone, you've got one in your pocket? If you enjoy the iPhone, if you like the iPad, you've enjoyed the rise and fall of Steve Jobs and what he's created there now that he's passed away.

This is a guy that the vast majority of the world, they have in some way interacted maybe with some of his products, but they never knew the man, yet if you ask them, "What's your opinion of Steve Jobs? What was he like?" all of a sudden, boom, you're going to see this halo appear and people will come up with stories with ways that they really can't justify why, but they think he's a good person. They liked it. They think that this guy changed the world. He's a modern day Newton or something like that.

Some of those, they may be right. I never knew the man, but what we're seeing again and again is that people, without enough information really to go off of, they're making a judgment of what type of a person he was. This is the Halo Effect where based off of their interaction with his products, most people saying good things were going to have a very positive reaction with these products. If they are saying something negative, it could be because they've never enjoyed the Apple product. Even though some people actually grudgingly respect his business products, they may say great things about him.

It's really interesting though when you start doing the research and you learn about people that were close to him, people that worked directly for him for years, people that were former business partners. Do they still have that Halo Effect around him? Not so much because they knew the man. They realized he was just as human and as fallible as all of us, yet that Halo Effect is a real thing and it can affect us in work, in business.

Think about the importance of first impressions. It's not so much that they're always going to give you the benefit of the doubt, but for the most part, they are and especially at the very beginning. Before you have a chance -- and all of us are going to make mistakes. All of us are going to screw things up, but you want to be in that better position of people saying "You know, that just doesn't seem like him" versus people saying "You know, I suspected we would run into something like this at the very beginning. Why did we make that hire?"

You go in there, you kick butt your first 90 days on the job, and I'm talking maybe someone who's just recently got hired. You look the part, you act the part, you speak the part, and then you have a snag if you've got a problem or if something pops up especially if it's out of your control. All of a sudden, they realize "This is out of his control" versus "Maybe this guy had something to do with it because we didn't have this until he or she showed up."

The thing about the Halo Effect that you want to know is that it's real and that you want to make the best first impression so that if you're in a position in which others are going to have to make a decision based off of a very light knowledge of who you truly are, they're going to think positive of you and they're not even going to know why.

Again, larger companies, this could actually come to play especially two or three levels up. The president of the company, he's saying, "Who is that guy? I'm trying to figure out who he is, but I've just got a good feeling about him. I think he would be a great face. He should go talk to somebody about sales." Those are the type of opportunities which you're never even going to see, but because you're presenting yourself better, you work on your mannerisms, you work on your posture, you work on your presentation that those things are going to be sending out that signal of a positive Halo Effect.

Now, there are a few other studies we're going to get into. There's a 1972 study out of University in Minnesota and they talked about attractiveness of photos. Basically, people make a perception. If you look successful, they assume you're successful. There's also a 1977 study that was Nisbett and Wilson where they talk about -- and this one is interesting -- is that people, based off of what they thought of a presenter, they would then attribute other characteristics to them. So he was a stern and not a very good presenter in one, and in the other one, he was a very relaxed, engaging presenter.

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The guy that was more relaxed and engaging, they thought "Oh, this is a good person" versus the other guy, and this is the same actor. He's just acting differently, presenting the same exact material. They assumed that this person, they didn't really like his personality, so same thing, and we've seen this again and again.

Mark Zuckerberg, the founder of Facebook, what are your thoughts? What are your impressions? What do you believe? How can you justify that? Let's think about Bill Gates. I'm

trying to use a lot of technology, people, because I know that many of us know them, but it gets even harsher when we go political.

Hillary Clinton -- I'm not going to say which side I'm on -- Barack Obama, JFK, Ronald Reagan, I say those names and people who never knew these human beings personally form very strong opinions oftentimes based off party line, based off of information they've read, which often comes from a very biased source, and it's one of those things that be aware that the Halo Effect is real.

Use it to your advantage. Understand that when you're putting yourself out there that people are going to make that snap judgment. You're presenting yourself in front of blue collar workers. You show up in a suit and tie. It may just be that that is not the impression that you want to make because they're going to look at you and say, "This guy, I can instantly tell he didn't connect with me. I don't even own a suit. How can I connect with this person?" So think about that when you're presenting. Think about your audience. Think about the effect that you're going to have on them with your presentation, your speech, your mannerisms.

All right. Gentlemen, we've got more coming. Take care.

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