

## STUDY GUIDE

### Don't Believe Everything You Think: The 6 Basic Mistakes We Make in Thinking

By Thomas E. Kida

These are six of the most common mistakes in thinking that people make -- these are not the only ones, but they are the mistakes which the author sees the most often and which he thinks leads to the most problems.

**Mistake #1:** We prefer stories to statistics. Even a bad story is preferred over great statistics. We're social animals, so whatever seems to connect us to others will have a bigger impact than cold, impersonal numbers. This leads us to making decisions based upon a single story which may not be representative of larger trends while ignoring the statistics that tell us about those trends.

**Mistake #2:** We seek to confirm, not to question, our ideas. Everyone wants to be right and no one wants to be wrong. When people look at neutral evidence, they usually focus on what seems to confirm what they already believe while ignoring what might count against their beliefs.

**Mistake #3:** We rarely appreciate the role of chance and coincidence in shaping events. We may have no idea how odds, chance, and randomness affect our lives. People think that unlikely events are very likely while likely events are very unlikely. For example, people forget how large the numbers around them are — an event where the odds are a million to one against it will happen given a million tries. In New York City alone, this means that several such events could happen every day.

**Mistake #4:** We sometimes misperceive the world around us. We don't perceive things accurately. We see things that aren't really there and we fail to see things that are. Even worse, our level of confidence in what we have perceived is no indication of just how likely we are to be right.

**Mistake #5:** We tend to oversimplify our thinking. Reality is more complicated than we realize — every analysis we make of what goes on must eliminate many factors. If we don't simplify, we'd never get anywhere in our thinking, but we often simplify too much and thus miss things we need to take into account.

**Mistake #6:** Our memories are often inaccurate. We can't help it that our memories are unreliable. The real mistake is in not realizing this, not understanding the ways in which our memories can go wrong, and then failing to do what we can to make up it.

The author wants us to become more skeptical and critical in our thinking in order to more consistently distinguish the things most likely to be true from those which aren't.