

Why it's hard to change your mind

It seems that advertisers, politicians, and even your loved ones are all trying to change your mind about something, be it what you buy, who you vote for, or where you should go on vacation. But generally speaking, changing people's minds is no easy feat. Most people view their opinions as **sacred**, as something that defines their moral code and who they are. However, researchers say there's more to it than that.

A large majority of us feel a deep connection to our beliefs, and we won't change them even if they may lead us to complete disaster. A part of this has to do with the instinctive desire to belong to a group, a mechanism that has enabled us to survive. You believe what others around you believe, and you are thus accepted by them. However, inertia also plays an undeniable role. If you learn things that should make you change your mind about something, like a person you deeply admire is blatantly dishonest, it's easier to deny or ignore that information than to change your entire opinion of that person.

This type of denial has to do with the inherent lack of objectivity in our opinions. One study that supports human subjectivity was conducted at Ohio State University. A group of people were given a choice of ten different cell phones to rate and then asked to choose one. The cell phone of their choice would be theirs. The next day they were asked to rate the phones again. In 82% of the cases, the evaluations of the phones that hadn't been chosen dropped. In other words, once the subjects had decided which phone they liked, the other phones appeared even less desirable. It seems that seeing things subjectively is a way to keep you happy with your decision, so it makes practical sense. Unfortunately, it also leads to people not changing their minds even when they are blatantly wrong.

But is there a limit to what extent people will stick to their guns, so to speak? Well, yes and no. Sometimes when people become aware that their previous opinions were terribly wrong, they get even more stubborn about holding their ground. In one study at Stanford University, it was proven that the less certain people were about an issue, the more passionate they were about convincing others about it.

So here's the thing: If doubt makes people more adamant about their own opinion rather than more willing to change it, is it completely useless to try to change their minds? Researchers say no, but you have to go about it the right way. If your sole purpose in engaging in conversation is to change someone's opinion, chances are you'll fail. However if you don't force your argument down their throat and just present it non-aggressively, a real exchange of ideas may **ensue** and they may actually reflect on it afterwards. In any case, seeds of doubt will be planted – that is, as long as people feel respected rather than threatened.

This is especially true when it comes to dealing with loved ones. Avoid at all costs behaviors such as eye-rolling or sarcastic comments, as these will only alienate your loved ones. It's as if you're saying they are too stupid to understand, and nothing good has ever come of insulting others. And while we're on the topic, be prepared to change your own opinion as well. Perhaps you need to accept that your view needs some fine-tuning or even a full turnaround. And if those opposite you see that you too are willing to open your mind to other possibilities, they may be encouraged to do the same. Now, if only it were that easy for powerful politicians to do the same.

81. According to the first paragraph, what is the writer's opinion about changing people's minds?
- It's immoral to try.
 - It's difficult to do.
 - It never really happens.
 - It's easy if you know how.
82. Which of the following is closest in meaning to **sacred** in the first paragraph?
- holy
 - impermanent
 - mysterious
 - current
83. What makes people reluctant to change their minds?
- They know that their opinions are correct.
 - They are afraid it will make them look weak.
 - They have stopped believing what others say.
 - They want to feel approval from others.
84. What does inertia make you do?
- stop reading newspapers
 - try to change others' opinions
 - refuse to change your image of someone
 - argue passionately with others
85. What were people expected to do in the Ohio State University study?
- choose several different phones and rate them
 - remember how they had rated a range of phones
 - rate phones, choose one, and then rate the phones again
 - explain why they preferred a certain phone
86. What did the Ohio State University study support?
- the fact that we shouldn't trust our first impressions
 - the process behind how people make choices
 - the way people's opinions change to suit their actions
 - the fact that reality can change overnight
87. What reason is given for the result of the Ohio State University study?
- the desire to be satisfied with what you have chosen
 - an inability to remember details you consider unimportant
 - the need for a group to stick together no matter what
 - an insecurity that people feel about future choices
88. When people are not sure about something, they tend to _____.
- avoid talking about it
 - try to persuade others it is true
 - ask questions about it
 - change their minds easily
89. Which is closest in meaning to the word **ensue** in the fifth paragraph?
- spread
 - deteriorate
 - end
 - follow
90. What point does the author make at the end of the article?
- Don't bother trying to change other people's minds.
 - Only people you love will be able to change your mind.
 - Changing your mind shows that you are insecure.
 - Be respectful if trying to change someone's mind.

The potato

I've always wanted to write a cookbook that had recipes based only on the potato, so after years of traveling, collecting, and testing, here it is. I have collected 180 of my favorite appetizers, main courses, and desserts that use potatoes or sweet potatoes as their main ingredient. Let's talk a bit about the potato, this starchy vegetable that has been getting a bad rap lately – and unjustifiably so, as long as it is cooked properly.

With their being so delicious and versatile, it is no wonder that potatoes are eaten all over the world. Their only inconvenience is that they need to be cooked (and should not be eaten raw). Potatoes have an amazing history. Believe it or not, they have been a staple crop in Peru and a number of other South American countries since 2500 BC. However, it wasn't until the mid-sixteenth century, when Spanish explorers brought potatoes back from the New World, that they began to catch on in Europe. They soon became a staple all over the continent, and the rest is history! Some historians even give them credit for being a major factor in the population growth and urbanization of Europe during the 1700s.

Amazingly, there are actually 5,000 potato varieties that are cultivated, plus another 200 wild species. This huge genetic diversity is largely due to cross-breeding carried out by scientists to create potato types that are resistant to disease. Personally, although I can see the necessity for such procedures, I prefer using the simplest and most traditional varieties available. However, never forget that over a million people died in the Irish Potato Famine, simply because the lack of genetic variation of the potato in Europe meant that it was very susceptible to disease.

Now, don't let the massive assortment of potatoes available in the USA overwhelm you. Find the potato varieties that speak to your taste buds, and stick with them. And always consider your method of cooking. Russet potatoes, one of my favorites, are ideal for

light, fluffy mashed potatoes, but I also love them for baking. Because of their small size, cutting them into quarters will give you perfect oven-roasted fries. Red potatoes are also fine for roasting or stewing, and are great because their flesh stays firm while being cooked, so they won't dissolve into mush. They are also my personal favorite for potato salad, with fresh dill and homemade mayonnaise. Consult the appendix at the back of the book for a full listing of the most popular potato types and what I recommend them for.

Of course, I have to mention my hero, the sweet potato. Technically, the South American sweet potato does not belong to the potato family, as it is not a nightshade vegetable. Tender, sweet, absolutely delicious any way you cook them, sweet potatoes are extremely popular worldwide, especially in Asia and the Caribbean. Recently, they have been elevated to the status of a superfood. This is mainly due to their beta-carotene, B vitamins and paradoxical ability to lower blood sugar when consumed in reasonable quantities. Of course, this only applies if you dry roast them. If you make my famous sweet potato pie, much of this nutritional value is lost. But the recipe is so delicious that I highly recommend you give it a try!

I'd be remiss if I didn't add one very important note about frying potatoes (or any other food, for that matter). Recent studies have shown that consuming fried foods (including fried potato favorites such as French fries, hash browns, and potato chips) can greatly increase one's risk of an early death. This is due to the fact that when potatoes and other foods turn dark brown as they are cooked in oil at high temperatures, a deadly chemical called acrylamide is formed - something that does not happen when the same foods are boiled or roasted. So my advice would be to avoid fried potatoes. Roasted and boiled potatoes have no known negative side effects and, in fact, within limits, are a healthy addition to your daily nutrition.

91. What is contained in this cookbook?
- recipes that use nothing but potatoes
 - both sweet and savory recipes
 - special diets based mainly on the potato
 - recipes from the author's mother and grandmother
92. What does the author mean by **getting a bad rap** in the first paragraph?
- being unfairly criticized
 - disappearing
 - becoming unhealthy
 - not selling well
93. According to the second paragraph, what is true about the potato?
- It is a relatively recent food in human history.
 - It was virtually unknown in Europe before the mid-1500s.
 - It helped to significantly increase ancient populations.
 - It used to be eaten uncooked in some countries.
94. Which of the following is closest in meaning to **catch on** in the second paragraph?
- be sold
 - experience difficulties
 - be understood
 - become popular
95. Why are there so many types of potatoes?
- They grow wild in many different countries.
 - They have a long history.
 - Experts are constantly creating new varieties.
 - They fulfill different needs.
96. What is the author's attitude toward the large number of potato varieties?
- She is shocked by it.
 - She is indifferent to it.
 - She is mystified by it.
 - She understands the reason for it.
97. What is true of russet potatoes?
- They are tastier than other varieties.
 - They are not very versatile.
 - They should not be overcooked.
 - They are not very large.
98. Red potatoes don't _____.
- have a strong flavor.
 - get soft when cooked.
 - mix well with other ingredients.
 - cost as much as other varieties.
99. Why does the author mention sweet potato pie?
- It is a recipe that shows the versatility of sweet potatoes.
 - It is one of her favorite recipes.
 - It is an exception to something she has said earlier.
 - It is a way to cook leftover sweet potatoes.
100. Where can you find acrylamide?
- only in certain potato varieties
 - in potatoes that are undercooked
 - in fried potatoes that are cooked until brown
 - in people who have serious diseases

The Barefoot College

Sanjit "Bunker" Roy is the founder of the Barefoot College in India, a school created by the poor for the poor in 1972. Like many, he wanted to address the terrible poverty and lack of education in India; but unlike others, he actually went ahead and made it his life's work to do so. He is an entrepreneur who makes a healthy living by assisting the community, and not just the local one. His recent recruits are brought in from all over Africa, South America, and Asia. The only requirement is that they are from a village struggling to survive, they are unemployed, and they are willing to learn new skills. In many cases, women are trained to do jobs traditionally done by men, and his students can be young or elderly – age is no barrier. The goal of Barefoot College is to train villagers, regardless of their literacy levels, to become empowered and skilled, and most importantly, to take their knowledge back to their villages.

At the time of the school's inception, the most pressing problem facing poor rural areas was the shortage of water, so at his school, students were taught how to build and maintain water pumps outside of their villages. As time has passed, there has been a shift in focus toward providing villages with solar power and better medical care.

The programs are based on the philosophy of political leader and pacifist, Mahatma Gandhi, who believed that every village must be autonomous. Despite the fact that many of the students are illiterate, they always leave the college fully capable of taking on a leadership role in their village. They must become ambassadors of the knowledge they have acquired.

One example of a Barefoot graduate is Florentine, a 42-year-old woman from a village in Latin America. She was illiterate, raising a child on her own and farming barely enough food to feed herself. Due to heavy rainfalls and a lack of paved roads and electricity, her village is largely secluded and, as a result, over eighty percent of the households there cannot afford the basic necessities of life. Florentine's son heard about the Barefoot College and convinced his mother to apply. According to Megan Fallone, a senior advisor at Barefoot College, "We want women who are willing to fight for survival. Women are incredible agents of change. The problem is they have been barred from participating in development as they didn't have knowledge, but they are also simultaneously blocked from access to literacy, education, and money. Once they get rid of these barriers, it all opens up." After six months of training, Florentine's world changed. Now she can fix a fuse, change a solar bulb, and in a few months she will bring electricity to her village. The residents are overjoyed.

Since 1972 the Barefoot College has spread to over 70 countries, with regional facilities in Africa, Latin America, and Southern Asia. Contrary to many people's expectations, water, electricity, and medical care have been brought to thousands of villages, changing the lives of hundreds of thousands. Bunker Roy has been named one of the world's 100 most influential people by *Time Magazine* as well as one of the 50 environmentalists who could save the planet by *The Guardian*. And it is no wonder. He has proven that there really are ways we can make a difference.

101. How does the author characterize Sanjit "Bunker" Roy?
- as a tough businessman
 - as an unrealistic idealist
 - as a determined problem solver
 - as a lonely philanthropist
102. Where do the students of the Barefoot College come from?
- the provinces of India
 - any country in the world
 - poverty-stricken communities
 - densely-populated urban centers
103. What quality must recruits for the Barefoot College have?
- They must be female.
 - They cannot be over a certain age.
 - They must be able to read and write.
 - They must be willing to help their village.
104. What are the main skills that Barefoot College graduates possess today?
- the ability to teach others
 - skills in health care and electrical power
 - knowledge of water supplies and agriculture
 - language and communication skills
105. Which of the following is closest in meaning to **autonomous** in the third paragraph?
- self-reliant
 - peace-loving
 - cooperative
 - powerful
106. What is the author's purpose in mentioning **ambassadors** in the third paragraph?
- to illustrate the political aspect of the graduates' role
 - to emphasize that graduates must spread their knowledge
 - to reinforce the seriousness of being a graduate
 - to demonstrate that being a graduate is a rare occurrence
107. Which of the following contributes to the poverty of Florentine's village?
- the lack of precipitation
 - the difficulty of access
 - the age of the inhabitants
 - political instability
108. What does Megan Fallone imply about women?
- They are often repressed by society.
 - They are naturally weaker than men.
 - They lack the desire to change their circumstances.
 - They are more difficult to educate than men.
109. Which of the following is closest in meaning to **barriers** in the fourth paragraph?
- misconceptions
 - obstacles
 - beliefs
 - behaviors
110. What is the author's main idea?
- Everyone should contribute to the efforts of the Barefoot College.
 - The Barefoot College has had an important global impact.
 - There is little we can do to really alleviate poverty.
 - Ultimately, women are more capable than men.

Parenting concerns in the 21st century

What is going on in the world of parenting? Nowadays we have an app or gadget that will do just about anything for us; and yet, in a recent survey, 88.8% of parents asked claimed that parenting is significantly more difficult now than it was in the past. In fact, if you read parenting blogs, it seems that today's moms and dads never have personal time, don't clean their houses, never eat a decent meal, and never shower.

Of course, this is hyperbolic, but how far off the mark is it? In her recent book, *Doing It All, Doing Nothing: Parenting in the 21st Century*, Jane Rogers states what she sees as the main reason for the difficulties today's parents are facing. According to her, raising children hasn't actually changed at all in the last five decades; children still need what children have always needed. Meanwhile, however, the world outside has changed drastically, with a plethora of opportunities, gratifications, and choices. This has made raising children seem far more **arduous** by comparison.

But this theory implies that parents are so titillated by the external world that they can't cope with their domestic situations. I would beg to differ. The parenting world has become so full of landmines and traps that it's hard to take a step forward. From the day of conception, we are told what vitamins to take and then, oops, they've changed their minds – not so safe after all. We are urged to give birth in a certain way, put our infants to sleep with a certain tactic (or not), feed them solids at four months – uh no, at *six* months – oops, no! – make it *four* months after all. You get my drift. There is such a flood of shifting information and advice online that most parents are drowning in it. Believe me – and I say this as the mother of four – I know.

And then there are the comparisons and criticisms. Children who are not talking, walking, or potty-trained

by a certain age clearly have issues. Parents cower in fear of giving their kids a not-so-healthy snack under the watchful eyes of other parents at the playground. Everything has to be organic, grass-fed, and hormone-free. The external world does not just confuse us, it comes down on us.

Finally, there is one other point that makes parenting even more difficult today in comparison with the past, and it has nothing to do with the children themselves. In our parents' and grandparents' day, having children was a given. One was born, went to school, got married, got a job (if male), and had kids (if female). No one questioned whether they wanted to have children or not. So, in this decade, where the decision to start a family is distinctly in the hands of each couple or individual, shouldn't parents be happier? After all, they *chose* to become parents. **Paradoxically, though, the opposite is more often true.** Since you were the one who chose to be a mom or dad, you need to constantly prove (to yourself and to others) that you did the right thing, that it is worth the sacrifice, and that your single, childless cousin who is backpacking around without a care in the world is not better off than you are. Since child rearing is not a cross to bear but a choice that you made, it's your job to make sure it is fulfilling and that you do a good job of it – two goals that should be a lot easier than they actually are, especially because of the disapproval around you.

My take on it? Chill out, concentrate more on your marriage and yourself, unplug your kids, and concentrate on loving them and teaching them to be decent people. Nothing you do will ever be good enough, so stop trying to gain the approval of the Internet or the parents around you. It will only make you feel overwhelmed and inadequate.

111. Why does the author say parenting should be easier nowadays?
- More technology is available to parents.
 - The quality of life is much better than in the past.
 - It is easier to find people to help you.
 - Fewer demands are made on parents.
112. What is the author's opinion of parenting blogs?
- They can be very useful.
 - They exaggerate reality.
 - They are not written by parents.
 - They should be avoided.
113. What does Jane Rogers say about parenting?
- It only seems harder because life has become more complex.
 - Parents are less qualified to raise children nowadays.
 - Children have different needs due to technology.
 - Only certain people are cut out to be parents.
114. Which of the following is closest in meaning to **arduous** in the second paragraph?
- interesting
 - popular
 - incomprehensible
 - difficult
115. According to the author, what is to blame for parenting being so difficult?
- too many people having children at the same time
 - manufacturers trying to sell their products
 - too much inconsistent information
 - parents not being firm in what they believe in
116. What gives the author insight into parenting problems?
- She has studied child psychology.
 - She has first-hand experience.
 - She is a well-known author.
 - She has participated in many studies.
117. What do parents fear from other parents?
- incorrect information
 - unwanted invitations
 - lack of sympathy
 - unsolicited criticism
118. What does the author say about parents of previous generations?
- They had more time for their children.
 - They didn't know much about childrearing.
 - They were expected to have children.
 - They weren't as happy as modern parents are.
119. Which of the following is closest in meaning to **paradoxically, though, the opposite is more often true** in the fourth paragraph?
- Choosing to be a parent makes parents less happy.
 - Fewer people choose to be parents nowadays.
 - People without children are happier.
 - Having children should not be a choice
120. Which of the following best expresses the main idea of the article?
- Successful parents do not use the Internet at all.
 - Having children is very hard in modern times so it should be avoided.
 - Parents should stop trying to gain the approval of those who are quick to criticize.
 - Parents need to learn to accept the help of others when raising their children.