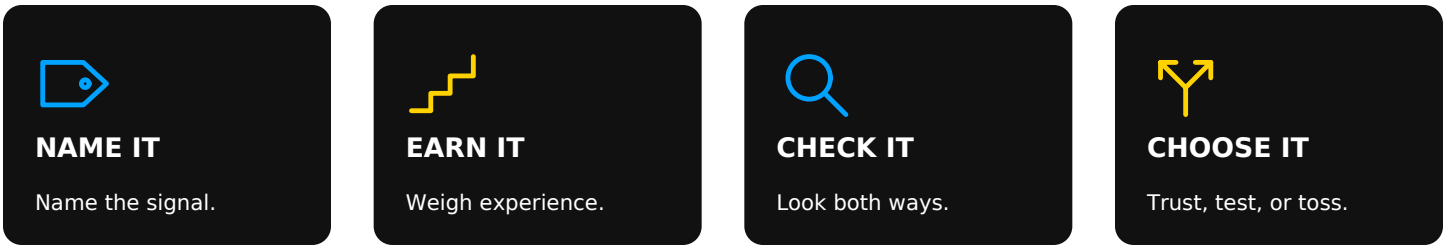
# Can I trust my gut?

It depends. Confidence tells you very little about whether a feeling deserves your trust.

Intuition can reflect hard-earned pattern recognition. It can also reflect assumptions, emotion, bias, or missing information. This guide helps you decide how much weight to give the signal.




## Your two-minute gut check

**Name it.** In one sentence, what am I sensing or feeling pulled to do?

**Earn it.** Patterns? Practice? Feedback? Three yeses, give it weight. Any gap, treat it as a hypothesis.

**Check it.** Inside: what am I assuming, and what is pulling me? Outside: what does this person or situation need, and what am I missing? Then ask.

**Choose it.** Trust it, test it, or toss it.

01 / NAME IT

## Start with one clear sentence.

Name the signal before you explain it. Explaining too soon turns a feeling into a story that is harder to question.

| INSTEAD OF | TRY |
| --- | --- |
| “Something feels off.” | “Everyone is agreeing, but I sense the team is not on board.” |

Use the worksheet on page 5 to capture your signal and work through all four steps.

02 / EARN IT

# Has my intuition earned weight?

Check the environment, your experience, and the quality of your feedback. [1]

Kahneman and Klein found common ground: intuition is more trustworthy when the setting offers learnable patterns and you have had enough practice with useful feedback. Confidence alone is not a reliable cue.

**PATTERNS**

Does this situation have stable patterns I can learn?

**PRACTICE**

Have I made this kind of judgment many times?

**FEEDBACK**

Did I learn quickly and honestly whether I was right?

**THREE YESES**

Give the signal more weight.

**ANY GAP**

Treat it as a hypothesis.

## Same feeling. Different trust level.

**Machine sounds wrong.** A maintenance lead hears something off. The machines run under recurring conditions, he has judged thousands of runs, and investigating quickly reveals whether he was right. Stable patterns, extensive practice, useful feedback. Three yeses. His intuition has earned weight.

**Candidate feels wrong.** You have hired fifty people, so the hunch feels earned. But hiring has less predictable patterns, and feedback takes months or years. Performance also depends on the manager, team, and role. You never learn how rejected candidates would have done. Experience alone is not enough. Treat the feeling as a hypothesis and test it. [3]

**Earned intuition deserves more weight, not blind trust. Check it before acting.**

03 / CHECK IT

# Look inside. Then look outside.

Insight reveals what is shaping your read. Outsight reveals what your read may be missing.

## INSIGHT

What is happening within me?

Every signal arrives through your experience, emotions, assumptions, desires, fears, and expertise. Notice what is in the way before you act.

1. What am I assuming that I have not verified?
2. What am I being pulled to do, and why?
3. What story am I telling myself?

**Try this:** You want to send the email now, then notice you are angry. Is the signal pointing to a real issue, a need for relief, or both?

## OUTSIGHT

What is happening beyond me?

Other people carry needs, pressures, and information you cannot see. Every decision also sits within relationships, timing, systems, and consequences.

1. What does this person or situation actually need?
2. What else is influencing what is happening here?
3. What could this choice create downstream?
4. Am I moving because it is right for them, or because I am ready to be done?

**Watch for:** Urgency • Fear • Ego • Fatigue • Defensiveness • Comfort • Approval • Avoidance

## Then check your read. Ask.

We mistake autobiography for empathy: we assume others need what we would need. Imagining their view can loosen your own, but it is still a guess. Asking and listening can help you understand another person more accurately. [4, 5]

**Try this:** An employee goes quiet. Before calling it disengagement, ask: “I’ve noticed you’ve been quieter, and I might be misreading it. What has it been like on your end?”

04 / CHOOSE IT

# Trust it. Test it. Toss it.

Choose what to do with the signal after you have checked it.

## 1 TRUST IT

**The signal has support.**

Your experience, the evidence, and what you now see point in the same direction. Give the signal weight while staying open to correction.

**IN PRACTICE** A sales leader senses unspoken concerns. She pauses the kickoff and asks what has not been discussed.

## 2 TEST IT

**Something may be there.**

You do not know enough yet. Ask a question, seek another perspective, or take a small, reversible step that will tell you more.

**IN PRACTICE** A finalist bothers you, but you cannot say why. Ask for specific examples of how she handles conflict, using the same criteria for every finalist.

## 3 TOSS IT

**The feeling does not hold up.**

The signal is driven mainly by an assumption, bias, emotion, or outdated pattern. Keep what you learned, then let the pull go.

**IN PRACTICE** You assume a colleague left you off an email to undermine you. You ask and learn they were trying to spare you an unnecessary message.

Your gut is an input, **not an instruction.**

Name it. Earn it. Check it. Then choose what to do with it.

# Turn the signal into a choice.

Use one real situation. Work through the four steps, then choose your next move.

## 01 / NAME IT

My signal, in one sentence:

## 02 / EARN IT

Has this intuition earned weight? Mark Yes, No, or Unsure for each.

| Patterns | Practice | Feedback |
|---|---|---|
| Yes / No / Unsure | Yes / No / Unsure | Yes / No / Unsure |

Three yeses: give it more weight. Any gap: treat it as a hypothesis.

## 03 / CHECK IT

Look inside, then outside. What do I need to examine or ask?

**Inside:** What might be shaping my gut?

**Outside:** What do I need to ask, and whom?

## 04 / CHOOSE IT

Circle one: TRUST IT / TEST IT / TOSS IT

**My next step, and when I will take it:**

## RESEARCH REFERENCES

[1] Kahneman, D., & Klein, G. (2009). Conditions for intuitive expertise: A failure to disagree. American Psychologist, 64(6), 515–526. Conditions behind the Earned Intuition Test.

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[3] Sackett, P. R., Zhang, C., Berry, C. M., & Lievens, F. (2022). Revisiting meta-analytic estimates of validity in personnel selection: Addressing systematic overcorrection for restriction of range. Journal of Applied Psychology, 107(11), 2040–2068.

[4] Epley, N., Keysar, B., Van Boven, L., & Gilovich, T. (2004). Perspective taking as egocentric anchoring and adjustment. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 87(3), 327–339. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.87.3.327.

[5] Eyal, T., Steffel, M., & Epley, N. (2018). Perspective mistaking: Accurately understanding the mind of another requires getting perspective, not taking perspective. Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 114(4), 547–571.