

Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

“Why Trying New Things Is So Hard to Do”

by Sendhil Mullainathan

- 1 I drink a lot of Diet Coke: two liters a day, almost six cans’ worth. I’m not proud of the habit, but I really like the taste of Diet Coke.
- 2 As a frugal economist, I’m well aware that switching to a generic brand would save me money, not just once but daily, for weeks and years to come. Yet I only drink Diet Coke. I’ve never even sampled generic soda.
- 3 Why not? I’ve certainly thought about it. And I tell myself that the dollars involved are inconsequential, really, that I’m happy with what I’m already drinking and that I can afford to be passive about this little extravagance.
- 4 Yet I’m clearly making an error, one that reveals a deeper decision-making bias whose cumulative cost is sizable: Like most people, I conduct relatively few experiments in my personal life, in both small and big things.
- 5 This is a pity because experimentation can produce outsize rewards. For example, I wouldn’t be risking much by trying a generic soda, and if I liked it enough to switch, the payout could be big: All my future sodas would be cheaper.
- 6 When the same choice is made over and over again, the downside of trying something different is limited and fixed — that one soda is unappealing — while the potential gains are disproportionately large. One study estimated that 47 percent of human behaviors are of this habitual variety.
- 7 Yet many people persist in buying branded products even when equivalent generics are available. These choices are noteworthy for drugs, when generics and branded options are chemically equivalent. Why continue to buy a name-brand aspirin when the same chemical compound sits nearby at a cheaper price? Scientists have already verified that the two forms of aspirin are identical. A little personal experimentation would presumably reassure you that the generic has the same effect.
- 8 Our common failure to experiment extends well past generics, as one recent study illustrates. On Feb. 5, 2014, London Underground workers went on a 48-hour strike, forcing the closings of several tube stops. The affected commuters had to find alternate routes.
- 9 When the strike ended, most people reverted to their old patterns. But roughly one in 20 stuck with the new route, shaving 6.7 minutes from what had been an average 32-minute commute.

- 10 The closings imposed by the strike forced experimentation with alternate routes, yielding valuable results. And if the strike had been longer, even more improvements would probably have been discovered.
- 11 Yet the fact that many people needed a strike to force them to experiment reveals the deep roots of a common reluctance to experiment. For example, when I think of my favorite restaurants, the ones I have visited many times, it is striking how few of the menu items I have tried. And when I think of all the lunch places near my workplace, I realize that I keep going to the same places again and again.
- 12 Habits are powerful. We persist with many of them because we tend to give undue emphasis to the present. Trying something new can be painful: I might not like what I get and must forgo something I already enjoy. That cost is immediate, while any benefits — even if they are large — will be enjoyed in a future that feels abstract and distant. Yes, I want to know what else my favorite restaurant does well, but today I just want my favorite dish.
- 13 Overconfidence also holds us back. I am unduly certain in my guesses of what the alternatives will be like, even though I haven't tried them.
- 14 Finally, many so-called choices are not really choices at all. Walking down the supermarket aisle, I do not make a considered decision about soda. I don't even pause at the generics. I act without thinking; I automatically grab bottles of Diet Coke as I wheel my cart by.
- 15 This is true not only in our personal lives. Executives and policymakers fail to experiment in their jobs, and these failures can be particularly costly. For example, in hiring, executives often apply their preconceived notions of which applicants will be a "good fit" as prospective employees. Yet those presumptions are nothing more than guesses and are rarely given the scrutiny of experimentation. . . .
- 16 For government policymakers, experimentation is a thorny issue. We are right to be wary of "experimenting" in the sense of playing with people's lives. Yet we should also be wary of an automatic bias in favor of the status quo¹. That can amount to a Panglossian² belief that the current policy is best, whereas the current policy may actually be a wobbly structure held together by overconfidence, historical accident and the power of precedent.
- 17 Experimentation is an act of humility, an acknowledgment that there is simply no way of knowing without trying something different.

¹**status quo:** the current state of things

²**Panglossian:** extremely optimistic

18 Understanding that truth is a first step, but it is important to act on it. Sticking with an old habit is comforting, but one of these days, maybe, I'll actually buy a bottle of generic soda.

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Excerpt from *The Invisible Man*

by H.G. Wells

- 1 The stranger came early in February one wintry day, through a biting wind and a driving snow, the last snowfall of the year, over the down, walking as it seemed from Bramblehurst railway station and carrying a little black portmanteau in his thickly gloved hand. He was wrapped up from head to foot, and the brim of his soft felt hat hid every inch of his face but the shiny tip of his nose; the snow had piled itself against his shoulders and chest, and added a white crest to the burden he carried. He staggered into the Coach and Horses, more dead than alive as it seemed, and flung his portmanteau down. "A fire," he cried, "in the name of human charity! A room and a fire!" He stamped and shook the snow from off himself in the bar, and followed Mrs. Hall into her guest parlour to strike his bargain. And with that much introduction, that and a ready acquiescence to terms and a couple of sovereigns¹ flung upon the table, he took up his quarters in the inn.
- 2 Mrs. Hall lit the fire and left him there while she went to prepare him a meal with her own hands. A guest to stop at Iping in the winter-time was an unheard-of piece of luck, let alone a guest who was no "haggler," and she was resolved to show herself worthy of her good fortune. As soon as the bacon was well under way, and Millie, her lymphatic aid, had been brisked up a bit by a few deftly chosen expressions of contempt, she carried the cloth, plates, and glasses into the parlour and began to lay them with the utmost eclat. Although the fire was burning up briskly, she was surprised to see that her visitor still wore his hat and coat, standing with his back to her and staring out of the window at the falling snow in the yard. His gloved hands were clasped behind him, and he seemed to be lost in thought. She noticed that the melted snow that still sprinkled his shoulders dripped upon her carpet. "Can I take your hat and coat, sir," she said, "and give them a good dry in the kitchen?"
- 3 "No," he said without turning.
- 4 She was not sure she had heard him, and was about to repeat her question.
- 5 He turned his head and looked at her over his shoulder. "I prefer to keep them on," he said with emphasis, and she noticed that he wore big blue spectacles with side-lights and had a bushy side-whisker over his coat-collar that completely hid his face.
- 6 "Very well, sir," she said. "As you like. In a bit the room will be warmer."

¹**sovereigns:** gold coins used as money in Britain prior to 1932.

7 He made no answer and had turned his face away from her again; and Mrs. Hall, feeling that her conversational advances were ill-timed, laid the rest of the table things in a quick staccato and whisked out of the room. When she returned he was still standing there like a man of stone, his back hunched, his collar turned up, his dripping hat-brim turned down, hiding his face and ears completely. She put down the eggs and bacon with considerable emphasis, and called rather than said to him, "Your lunch is served, sir."

8 "Thank you," he said at the same time, and did not stir until she was closing the door. Then he swung round and approached the table.

9 As she went behind the bar to the kitchen she heard a sound repeated at regular intervals. Chirk, chirk, chirk, it went, the sound of a spoon being rapidly whisked round a basin. "That girl!" she said. "There! I clean forgot it. It's her being so long!" And while she herself finished mixing the mustard, she gave Millie a few verbal stabs for excessive slowness. She had cooked the ham and eggs, laid the table, and done everything, while Millie (help indeed!) had only succeeded in delaying the mustard. And him a new guest and wanting to stay! Then she filled the mustard pot, and, putting it with a certain stateliness upon a gold and black tea-tray, carried it into the parlour.

10 She rapped and entered promptly. As she did so her visitor moved quickly, so that she got but a glimpse of a white object disappearing behind the table. It would seem he was picking something from the floor. She rapped down the mustard pot on the table, and then she noticed the overcoat and hat had been taken off and put over a chair in front of the fire. A pair of wet boots threatened rust to her steel fender. She went to these things resolutely. "I suppose I may have them to dry now," she said in a voice that brooked no denial.

11 "Leave the hat," said her visitor in a muffled voice, and turning she saw he had raised his head and was sitting looking at her.

12 For a moment she stood gaping at him, too surprised to speak.

13 He held a white cloth over the lower part of his face, so that his mouth and jaws were completely hidden, and that was the reason of his muffled voice. But it was not that which startled Mrs. Hall. It was the fact that all his forehead above his blue glasses was covered by a white bandage, and that another covered his ears, leaving not a scrap of his face exposed excepting only his pink, peaked nose. This muffled and bandaged head was so unlike what she had anticipated, that for a moment she was rigid.

14 Her nerves began to recover from the shock they had received. She placed the hat on the chair again by the fire. "I didn't know, sir," she began, "that — " and she stopped embarrassed.

15 “Thank you,” he said drily, glancing from her to the door and then at her again.

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