

Is difficult better? Study reveals we tend to ignore simple items while pursuing goals

February 20 2009

Try the following experiment with two young children. To one child, hold a toy out just beyond their grasp and watch them bounce all over the place trying to reach it. With the second child, just hand the toy over to them. Is the first child likely to find the toy more interesting than the other child? When we are pursuing a goal, we need to carefully consider the best ways of achieving it.

If we come across something very difficult, how will that affect our ability to meet our goal? University of Chicago psychologists Aparna A. Labroo and Sara Kim investigated the extent that subjective feelings of difficulty are associated with an increased appeal towards a product.

A group of students were assigned with the goals of feeling good or being kind. Then they were presented with ads for chocolate (the group who had the goal of feeling good) and a children's charity (the group who had the goal of being kind). The volunteers were shown one of two versions of the ads - a clear, easy to read ad or a blurry, difficult to read ad (the content in both of the ads was identical). The students then completed questionnaires about how much they desired the chocolates and their thoughts about the charity. The volunteers who were shown the charity advertisement were also given the option of donating money to the charity.

The results, described in *Psychological Science*, a journal of the Association for Psychological Science, were very interesting. The students who viewed the ads for chocolate were more likely to desire the

chocolates in the blurry ad than the ones in the clear, easy-to-read ad. In addition, the volunteers who watched the charity advertisement donated more money to the charity, but only after seeing the blurry, difficult to read ad.

These findings reveal that when something is difficult, we tend to believe that because it is difficult, it must be important in helping us achieve our goals. These results were surprising because they are counterintuitive to earlier studies which showed that objects are liked more when they are easy to process and understand. The authors suggest that when we have goals, we need to be careful as we consider just how useful certain actions and products will be in helping us meet those goals - and that difficult is not necessarily better.

Source: Association for Psychological Science

Citation: Is difficult better? Study reveals we tend to ignore simple items while pursuing goals (2009, February 20) retrieved 20 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2009-02-difficult-reveals-tend-simple-items.html>

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