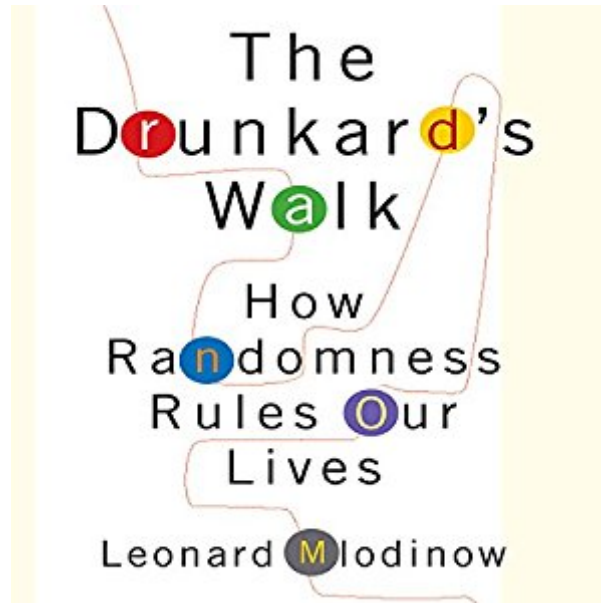


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The Drunkard's Walk: How Randomness Rules Our Lives



Synopsis

In this irreverent and illuminating audiobook, acclaimed writer and scientist Leonard Mlodinow shows us how randomness, chance, and probability reveal a tremendous amount about our daily lives, and how we misunderstand the significance of everything from a casual conversation to a major financial setback. As a result, successes and failures in life are often attributed to clear and obvious causes, when in actuality they are more profoundly influenced by chance. The rise and fall of your favorite movie star or the most reviled CEO - in fact, all our destinies - reflects chance as much as planning and innate abilities. Even Roger Maris, who beat Babe Ruth's single season home-run record, was in all likelihood not great but just lucky. How could it have happened that a wine was given five out of five stars by one journal and called the worst wine of the decade by another? Wine ratings, school grades, political polls, and many other things in daily life are less reliable than we believe. By showing us the true nature of chance and revealing the psychological illusions that cause us to misjudge the world around us, Mlodinow gives fresh insight into what is really meaningful and how we can make decisions based on a deeper truth. From the classroom to the courtroom, from financial markets to supermarkets, from the doctor's office to the Oval Office, Mlodinow's insights will intrigue, awe, and inspire. Offering listeners not only a tour of randomness, chance and probability but also a new way of looking at the world, this original, unexpected journey reminds us that much in our lives is about as predictable as the steps of a stumbling man afresh from a night at a bar.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I just love books like this - especially when they're as well-written as this one. The author, a physicist, proceeds to show the reader how randomness plays a much greater role in everyday life than one might think. As he discusses the basics of probability and statistics, he provides wonderful illustrations from fields as wide-ranging as sports, medicine, psychology, the stock market, etc., etc. He does an excellent job in driving home the fact that the true probability of events is not intuitive. Perhaps because of this anti-intuitiveness, I had to read a few paragraphs more than once to allow the point being made to sink in. One enigma that is particularly well explained is the Monty Hall (Let's Make a Deal) problem. The writing style is clear, accessible, very friendly, quite authoritative, engaging and often very witty. This book can be enjoyed by absolutely everyone, but I suspect that math and science buffs will savor it the most. By the way, the math-phobic need not fear: the book does not contain a single mathematical formula.

Promising prologue "... when chance is involved, people's thought processes are often seriously flawed [this book] is about the principles that govern chance, the development of those ideas, and the way they play out in business, medicine, economics, sports, ..." but a disappointing book. The book consists of a range of topics already well covered in a dozen previous popular science style books: history of probability (Cardano, Pascal, Bernoulli, Laplace, de Moivre) and of demographic and economic data; statistical logic (Bayes rule and false positives/negatives; Galton and the regression fallacy, normal curve and measurement error, mistaking random variation as being caused); overstating predictability in business affairs (past success doesn't ensure future success) and perennials such as Monty Hall, the gambler's fallacy, and hot hands. These topics are presented in a way that's easy to read -- historical stories, anecdotes and experiments, with almost no mathematics. So it's a perfectly acceptable read if you haven't seen any of this material before before, but it doesn't bring any novel content or viewpoint to the table. Other books are equally informative and well written but have more interesting individual focus and panache: *Dicing with Death: Chance, Risk and Health* shows how to add analysis to anecdote, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* has more intellectual discipline (staying focused on the current topic), *Struck by Lightning: The Curious World of Probabilities* gives a thorough treatment of implications of textbook theory, *The Jungles of Randomness: A Mathematical Safari* gives snippets of contemporary research, *Chances Are: Adventures in Probability* has less hackneyed history, and *Fooled by Randomness: The Hidden Role of Chance in Life and in the Markets* is an engagingly opinionated view of chance in the stock market and life.

This smart book will make you think. Academic yet easy to read, it explores how random events shape the world and how human intuition fights that fact. I found this point fascinating. It never occurred to me that our brains naturally want to see patterns and order, and life doesn't necessarily work like that. It's comforting to think of an orderly world, with everything in its place, running according to plan. It dovetails into our yearning for meaning and control, and the need to feel that we are important. The idea of randomness is frightening. If the world is shaped without conscious decision, it's a pretty chilly prospect. Author Leonard Mlodinow examines the importance of randomness in diverse situations, including Las Vegas roulette tables, "Let's Make a Deal," the career of Bruce Willis, and the Warsaw ghetto after Hitler invaded Poland. The author does a good job explaining how chance and luck are vital factors in how things turn out. The cover has a nice touch. On the dust jacket, several die-cut holes reveal letters on the hardback underneath. The letters are the R and D in "Drunkard's," the A in "Walk," the N in "Randomness," the O in "Our" and the M in Mlodinow. These letters are connected by a thin red line. They spell out "RANDOM." Here's the chapter list: 1. Peering through the Eyepiece of Randomness 2. The Laws of Truths and Half-Truths 3. Finding Your Way Through a Space of Possibilities 4. Tracking the Pathways to Success 5. The Dueling Laws of Large and Small Numbers 6. False Positives and Positive Fallacies 7. Measurement and the Law of Errors 8. The Order in Chaos 9. Illusions of Patterns and Patterns of Illusion 10. The Drunkard's Walk

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