



Fraser Institute researcher-recommended books
on free market policies and economics

THINK LIKE A FREAK

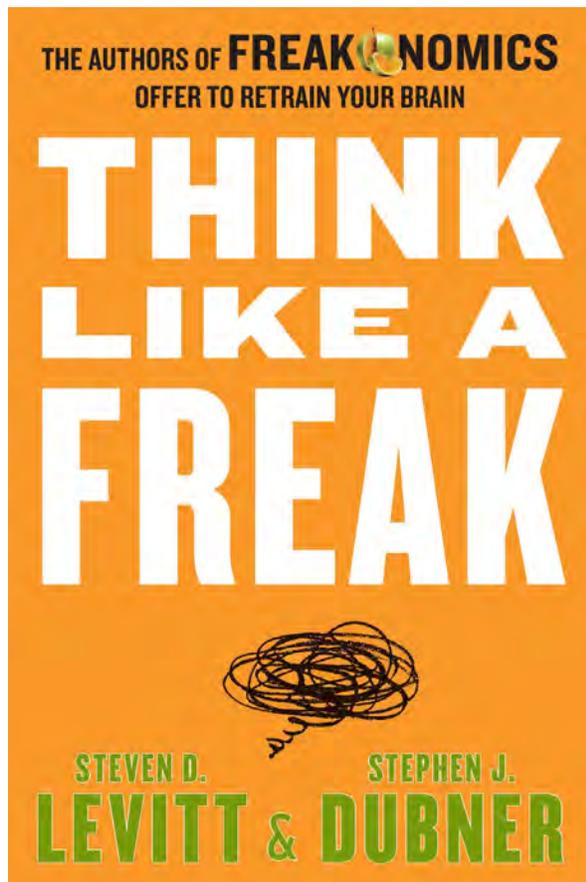
STEVEN D. LEVITT AND STEPHEN J. DUBNER

The bestselling book *Freakonomics* changed the way readers saw the world: a revelatory approach to everyday problems, and a straight-talking examination of conventional beliefs. Now, co-authors Steven D. Levitt (Professor of Economics at the University of Chicago) and journalist Stephen J. Dubner continue with their quest to get people to think in new ways in their latest book about decisions and problem solving. Using storytelling and their trademark quirky analysis, they take us inside their minds to show us how to retrain our brains to look at the world in a different way: in their words—to “think like a Freak.”

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The nine fast-paced chapters are full of nuggets of useful advice threaded together with catchy stories. They contain guidance such as: ignore conventional wisdom; focus on data; test theories with experiments; and don't be afraid to say, “I don't know.” The authors offer a blueprint for a new way to solve problems; they are enthused with a sense of curiosity and an almost revolutionary call to action. Most people, they argue, “seek out evidence that confirms what they already think,” so they urge us to consider evidence that may seem obvious, counterintuitive, or even childish. (Children, they assert, are much more likely than adults to focus on small, solvable problems, rather than complex issues.)

Levitt and Dubner include some interesting recent research, ranging from the secrets of a Japanese hot-dog-eating champion, to the reason an Australian



doctor swallowed a batch of dangerous stomach bacteria, to why Nigerian e-mail scammers make a point of saying they're from Nigeria. The Nigerian email scam story is particularly telling. Most people have received one of these emails at some point: a large sum of money needs to be transferred out of Nigeria, and the recipient will get a large portion of it if they supply their bank details. The book details why scammers still insist on specifying Nigeria in their correspondence, even though the mere mention of the country is enough to signal to (almost) everyone that the e-mail they have just received is a con. Sending out millions of emails has minimal financial cost, so having millions of people ignore them doesn't really matter. What would cost both time and money would be to set up a fake transfer with people who realize halfway through that

they are being tricked and call off the transaction. By choosing Nigeria as the source country, the scammers are adding an efficient testing device for naiveté into their email blast. Anyone who responds has clearly signaled that they are completely unaware of this email scam.

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Think Like a Freak is the third book in the Freakonomics series—a new compendium of arguments that are upbeat and nifty, categorized under the guise of “self-help.” Thinking “like a Freak” means being willing to think creatively, and while the problem-solving advice the authors include is fairly routine, Levitt and Dubner draw you in with their amusing and revelatory stories. Their mission—to help us think in different ways and enable us to see the world like they do—certainly makes for an enjoyable read. 