

## We're Always the Last to Know

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If you hold a slinky from one end so it can stretch down, and then you drop it, the slinky, as any kids knows, will fall to the ground. However, there is a surprising detail here: the *bottom* edge doesn't start to fall until the top comes down and bumps it. It's as if the bottom of the slinky didn't get the message right away; it just hung out where it was until the top came down and said, "We've been dropped! Get moving!" And then they fall the rest of the way together.

Recent studies of the brain have shown a similar point. When coming to a decision, the relevant area of your brain lights up with activity well in advance of when you consciously make your choice, so a lag time between when your decision is actually made and when you know you've made it. Like the bottom of the slinky, your conscious self gets the news when things are already rolling. It's like "deciding" that you won't go for another cookie just as you bite into it.

A man who worked in the inner core of a drug ring – protecting the boss and arranging an occasional murder – revealed in an interview how this all began for him. A group of men had come to his home and presented the job

opportunity. Stunned, at first, at the enormous implications of the choice before him, he then realized that the decision had already been made. He had been selected and, as they say, it was an offer he could not refuse. He was already in and was the last to get the news.

What do such findings mean for our daily conscious lives, we wonder. Our minds turn to the obvious – my husband is having an affair, all my friends know it, but I am still clueless. I'm going to work-out more, but – oops – I realize I've let my gym membership lapse. Debating whether to buy the car, I pull out my credit card.

These obvious surprises just hint at the many inner and outer events that set things in motion in our lives, effecting us long before we even know it. The problem, I guess, is that we don't know what these new events are. We'll find out at some point – but we may be the last to know.