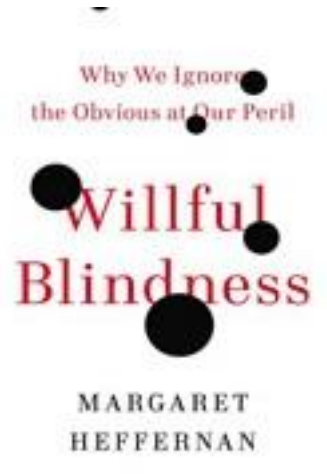


***Willful Blindness*** is a new book by entrepreneur and BBC producer, Margaret Heffernan.



Heffernan's first direct encounter with the state was in the Judge's instructions at the end of the Enron trial. "You may find that the defendant deliberately closed his eyes to what would otherwise have been obvious to him. Knowledge can be inferred if the defendant deliberately blinded himself to the existence of a fact."

Heffernan notes that many of the greatest crimes are not committed in the dark, but in full view of people who chose not to look and not to question. The Catholic Church, the SEC, Nazi Germany, Madoff's funds, the embers of British Petroleum's refinery, and the dog-eat-dog world of sub-prime lenders, all willfully blind.

It is not an invisible harm in any of these cases. It was a harm that many preferred to ignore.

The legal concept of willful blindness started in the 19th century. A judge in *Regina v. Sleep* ruled that the accused could not be convicted for possession of government property unless the jury found that he knew the property came from government ores or *willfully closed his eyes* to the fact.

Heffernan goes on to say that she is less interested in the fact that people do this than why they do.

Heffernan discusses what happened in the Madoff fund, how a group of like-minded people extended their good-fortune to others like them. She identifies Madoff's as an affinity crime, preying on people like him who know people like him, who didn't ask questions because they were comfortable with each other.

Entrepreneurs can run into this problem too. If they only go out and ask people like themselves for advice, they take shortcuts that end up cutting them off from the end goal.

Heffernan talks about a river winding its way deeper and deeper into its bed, its wall getting taller and taller. In conversation with Robert Burton, as neurologist, she discusses the brain's inclination to endlessly watch for matches.

We reject information that will widen our gaze and make us a little less certain. Burton says, "Neural networks do not give you a direct route from a flash of lights to you consciousness. There are committees that vote along the way. If there are enough yes votes you'll see the light. If there are too many nos you never do."

Theodore Cohn, a highly successful consultant, notes that he always considered his prime function in a group meeting to ask the question that was not being asked, to be the Devil's Advocate no matter how comfortable everyone was.

For an entrepreneur, stepping out with strangers and getting their reaction is not only important, it is crucial.

*Willful Blindness* is available from Barnes and Noble and Amazon.

W-T-W will present a series of articles based on the book.