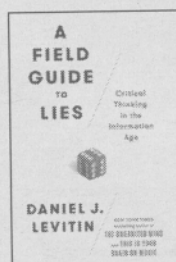


Think again

Daniel J. Levitin visits Portland this week to discuss his new book on critical thinking



PHOTO BY PETER PRATO



Daniel J. Levitin's new book is titled "A Field Guide to Lies." Levitin will be speaking at Powell's City of Books Sept. 11.

BY EMILY GREEN
STAFF WRITER

From click bait and sponsored content to misrepresented stats and cherry-picked data, there's a slew of not-quite-true to flat-out-false propaganda parading around as fact in this age of information sharing.

Before changing your diet in light of a new study or hitting that "share" button attached to a news story from an unknown source, you may want to ask yourself: Is this bit of information even plausible?

Daniel J. Levitin's new book, "A Field Guide to Lies: Critical Thinking in the Information Age," provides readers with valuable tools for deciphering the credible from incredible as they sift through the barrage of material thrown at them each day.

Levitin, 58, is a neuroscientist, cognitive psychologist, accomplished music producer and the author of three consecutive best-selling books including "This is Your Brain on Music." He's dean of the College of Social Sciences at Minerva Schools at KGI and a two-time graduate of University of Oregon, earning both his masters and doctorate degree in Eugene after graduating from Stanford with honors.

He will be at Powell's City of Books, 1005 W Burnside St., at 7:30 p.m. on Sunday, Sept. 11 for a book signing and discussion of his latest title, released this past week by Dutton publishing.

E.G.: *Is a book like "A Field Guide to Lies" increasingly important now that misinformation is so prevalent on the internet?*

D.J.L.: I think critical thinking is increasingly important, and my book is my attempt to convey that. But I think what's happened is educators, parents and grandparents, for so many generations, have focused on teaching kids what they need to know in terms of facts. You know, "In 1492 Columbus sailed the ocean blue. The sun is 93 million miles away and it takes 8 and half minutes for light to reach us from there." All this stuff we had to memorize: "9 times 5 is 45." But we've fallen behind in teaching kids how to think and to be critical thinkers. I think it's more urgent now than ever because there's so much misinformation. We have to be our own deciders of what's true and what's not, because there's nobody on the internet doing it for us.

E.G.: *If you had one piece of advice for someone who is about to click "share" on a piece of news or information - what should they think about before they decide to spread it?*

D.J.L.: I would take a close look at it and see if the claim is even plausible. If there are numbers involved, do the numbers work out? I'm not talking about dealing with a difficult equation, but just basic knowledge.

You can test plausibility when someone makes a claim about gas mileage or financial

matters or rate of return. There was a famous headline that said the cost of something went down by 1,200 percent. Whatever the cost of something is, if it goes down by 100 percent, it's at zero. So if it goes down 200 percent, somebody is now paying you what you used to pay for the product. If it goes down by 1,200 percent, that just doesn't seem plausible, that's somebody misunderstanding percentages. The second is: I would just do a quick search to see if it's a hoax. Snopes.com or other sites are helpful there, and then be willing to retract it later if it turns out you were wrong.

E.G.: *One of the things you brought up in your book that really got me, because I have one of these stories, and I think a lot of people do, is that scenario when you're overseas on vacation and you run into someone you know. It seems to be this incredible coincidence. Can you explain the error in thinking this way?*

D.J.L.: This is a brief excursion into probability theory, and you have to be careful in how you express surprise at an outcome. In particular, you have to be careful in how you describe the event.

So, you're overseas, you run into somebody that you haven't seen since college. You're surprised to see them, and you think, "Gee, what are the odds that I would run into Tony standing in front of the Mona Lisa in the Louvre?" That seems

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