

How to run a Who's Missing Check

What it is

We only see the winners who made it and copy their habits, while the far larger group who did the same things and failed stays invisible.

From World War Two: engineers almost reinforced the bullet holes on returning planes, until a statistician pointed out the real danger was the spots with no holes, because planes hit there never made it back.

When to use it

Whenever you're about to copy a success story or a piece of advice from someone who made it.

Steps

1. **Name the success story.** What advice or habit are you about to copy?
2. **Ask who's missing.** Everyone who did the same thing and failed or quit, and you never hear from.
3. **Ask what might be luck.** What part of their success could be timing or circumstance, not the habit they credit?

Common mistake

Only studying the winners. The losers who did the exact same thing are the data you're missing.

Pairs with

Confirmation Bias and Regret Minimization.

Example: a founder's advice to drop out

Date: Tue, Jun 3

The success story or advice

A tech founder says dropping out of college was the key to their success

Who's missing Everyone who tried this and failed or quit.

Thousands who dropped out and never built a successful company

Classmates who stayed in school and still succeeded

What might actually be luck or timing

They already had funding connections before dropping out

They already had a working prototype and early customers

Does the advice still hold? No, the network and product were the real cause

Who's Missing Check

Date: _____

The success story or advice

Who's missing Everyone who tried this and failed or quit.

What might actually be luck or timing

Does the advice still hold? _____