✦ IDEA · CHEAT CARD · MIND

Dunning-Kruger effect

The finding that people with little skill at a task overestimate their performance most, possibly because that lack of skill hides their mistakes.

How it works

1. Doing a task well and judging your own work need the same knowledge.
2. People with little skill lack that knowledge, so they miss many of their own mistakes.
3. Those unseen mistakes leave the weakest performers sure that their answers are right.
4. So the weakest performers overestimate their results most, and the best underestimate their rank.

Example

Kruger and Dunning's Cornell logic test, 1999

- 45 Cornell students took a logic test and guessed what share of classmates they had beaten.
- The weakest quarter scored at the 12th percentile but guessed their test score at the 62nd.

→ The weakest students expected about 14 right answers and got fewer than 10.

Use it for

- ✓ Testing yourself without notes before an exam instead of trusting how familiar notes feel
- ✓ Asking an experienced colleague to look for mistakes in a new plan
- ✓ Weighing a confident voice in the news against the speaker's record

Watch out

- ✗ Regression to the mean produces part of the pattern, so the real effect is smaller.
- ✗ The weakest students still rated themselves below the best, only far too high.

Remember Before trusting your confidence, ask what test or person could show you are wrong.