



Stanford eCorner

Boundary Rules for Lawbreakers and Moviemakers

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Stanford Professor Kathleen Eisenhardt, co-author of "Simple Rules: How to Thrive in a Complex World," describes the concept of "boundary rules," which aid decision-making in situations requiring a "yes" or "no," when options are mutually exclusive or too many alternatives exist. She shows how burglars and moviemakers alike use boundary rules to guide their decisions.



Transcript

Group of people who really need a boundary rule are burglar as it turns out because you know there are a lot of houses you can burgle but you really don't want to get caught. So what is a good burglar do? What's the Simple Rule? Never burgle a house with car in front. It turns out that it is extraordinarily good rule for knowing whether or not anybody is home. Moving on from burglars -- how about the Weinstein Company? The Weinstein Company is a movie company as I would think at least some of you know that in the background there that you can look at, that is, that is the Imitation Game, the movie, which is a Weinstein Company movie. If you are a movie company, you see a lot of scripts. There are a lot of would-be writers sending you scripts, sending you story ideas. How do you pick? Well, it turns out the Weinstein Company Pix has a couple of simple rules. One of them is always have flaw in sympathetic main characters and the second is have a story that's about a basic human condition. So if you saw the Imitation Game you know that Alan Turing is a truly annoying jerk but you know you like him - don't you? I mean you really do, you do kind of like the guy. So he is a flawed with sympathetic main character and then he is dealing with homosexuality which then adds sort of a social problem on top of it.

That's top of mind for at least some people. Another movie by them is The Silver Lining's Playbook again dealing with mental illness. The Artist, the King's Speech dealing with difficulties and you know in talking obviously. That's sort of their genre -- flawed with sympathetic main character, serious, common human condition.