

Chapter 1

Connecting Brain Science to Leadership Principles

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In this book you find out how your brain works and how to work it to improve your decision-making, training, and hiring so that you create a workplace where people are happy and productive.

In order to survive and thrive through humans' long history, the brain had to be social. Humans needed people around them to help them conquer whatever dangers they might face. Today's world looks a lot different from that of even a century ago, but you still need people to help you prosper. Being social means establishing relationships. Relationships often require leadership.

The leadership brain learns how to be self-aware and self-confident. This brain knows how to persuade and convince others that her idea is the best. At the same time, the leader takes others' feelings and ideas into consideration.

The good news from neuroscience is that you can learn how to be a leader. This book shows you how.

The Leadership Brain For Dummies helps you become the leader you want to be.

Defining Leadership

Leadership is the ability to bring like-minded people together to get remarkable things done. Because humans are a social species and natural hierarchies develop, the concept of leadership emerged. Someone has to be in charge, share a vision, and lead others toward the goals.



Leadership depends on relationship-building. A leader can lead only through her ability to build relationships between and among employees, customers, investors, and any other stakeholders.

Knowing and amending your leadership style

Different approaches to leadership give you the opportunity to be the leader you want to be when you want to be it. You can find your leadership style by reading Chapter 6. The style you naturally use or the one you cultivate may change according to circumstances, which is as it should be. When you need to take charge because you're dealing with new employees who need more guidance, you might adopt the authoritarian style. But perhaps in your heart you really favor group decision-making; you can then use that style in other situations, when it's a better fit.

As a leader, you are many different things to different people. You have a lot of hats to wear, but there's only one brain under those hats, and you get to know it better in Chapter 5, which shows you how leadership and the brain interact.

Providing feedback

As you find out in Chapter 4, feedback is food for thought. Feed the brains of your employees by providing the necessary information to keep them on task and keep your vision in sight. Without feedback, people lose self-confidence and motivation.

Feedback begins with the senior leadership team, but it goes much beyond that. Rather than relying on a trickle-down effect, leaders must provide feedback to each and every person in the organization. You find suggestions in Chapter 20 to communicate with employees throughout your organization.

Developing high emotional intelligence

Your ability to have good relationships with others gets you farther in business and in your personal life than your IQ. It's not how smart you are that counts, but rather how you are smart.

Leaders use their emotional intelligence to handle relationships. When leaders are aware of what they feel and how their feelings affect the work environment, they can choose to handle those emotions in such a way that they use their intuition but don't become overwhelmed by emotion. Emotional intelligence includes the ability to understand and work with what another person is feeling. For instance, the possibility of lay-offs looms in your organization. How are your people feeling? Stress levels must be high. As their leader, you have to let employees know how much you value their contributions, exactly how things stand, and what your decision-making process relies on.



Real power is the ability to control your own brain. You need to understand how the brain works, how powerful your emotions are, and how you can use your self-awareness to prevent reflexive actions.

Chapter 8 highlights the importance of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and social management.

Ensuring a safe working environment

One of the basic responsibilities of a leader is providing a safe and appealing work environment. Employees face stressors in their lives every day; relieving them of the stress that an unsafe environment may cause is imperative to having happy, productive employees.

Safety in the workplace includes both physical safety and emotional well-being. After you have the safety factor covered, making the work environment fun as well as inspirational invites cooperation. Caring enough to provide an attractive, safe working environment and put the needs of your staff ahead of your own needs is a key leadership quality.

Chapter 12 tells you how to create a safe and appealing work environment.

Communicating effectively

Effective communication is a hallmark of a great leader. You need to share your vision with passion and commitment. Creating a picture for all to see requires you to make your message simple enough for all to grasp and complex enough to make it interesting. When you paint your picture and employees or customers see it, their brains connect this vision to their own previously stored networks of information to reinforce your words.

But communication doesn't happen in just one direction. Listening to the needs, desires, and dreams of your employees is essential. And you listen and make connections between their statements and your dream.

Chapter 4 emphasizes good communication skills.

Making decisions with heart and head

Decision-making is based on prior experiences. Your brain asks, "What worked in the past?" or "In what similar situations was a decision made that was good? Or bad?"

Your emotions are very much involved in the decision-making process. The neurotransmitter dopamine is very active in your reward system. The dopamine neurons remember whether an experience or a decision made you feel good. Those chemical memories help you make every decision. If you made a bad decision, your amygdala, the raw emotional center in the brain that I discuss in Chapters 2 and 8, reacts immediately to the situation.



Good leaders make decisions based on what their emotions tell them as well as on the facts. The right hemisphere of your brain explores the challenges and possibilities in a novel situation in which you must make a decision. But your logical left hemisphere recalls routines and previously established processes that have worked in the past. Decision-making is a whole-brain activity. Good decision-making always takes into account both cognitive skills and emotional intelligence.

Chapter 9 discusses the art and science of decision-making.

Leadership on the Brain

Emerging science connects the brain to leadership: Promising leaders can access different levels of the brain in a conscious way in order to share their vision and achieve their goals. Understanding how the brain functions enables you not only to work within the bounds of your own brain but also understand and work with, rather than against, the brains of others. Leading in a brain-compatible manner helps you accomplish your goals much faster.

Balancing novelty and predictability

Both predictability and novelty make the brain happy. Knowing what is going to happen next lowers stress in the brain, but too much predictability leads to boredom. In Chapter 3, I show you how creating an environment that

contains enough predictability makes it easier for the brain to concentrate on such areas as creativity, problem-solving, and decision-making.

Because the brain remembers patterns and seeks patterns to make sense of its world, familiarity breeds security. If your teams are in an environment in which it is okay, actually encouraged, to ask “dumb” questions or make mistakes, then their brains can run wild with ideas. Some research suggests that solving problems in a more creative way may lead to better solutions, and so an atmosphere in which the brain can relax and wander may lead to more innovations.

Grasping the chemical element

If you want to understand human nature, you need to know something about neurotransmitters, the chemicals in your brain. For instance, serotonin has long been known as a neurotransmitter related to emotion. If your serotonin levels are low, you’re more likely to become angry or aggressive. What’s more, you’re less likely to be able to control your reactions.



Because serotonin is produced by the food you eat, eating right — and especially eating breakfast — helps you control emotional responses.

Your chemical levels can also be affected by social behavior, culture, and genetics. In Chapter 2, I share information about the functions of some of the chemicals in your brain, as well as ways to make the most of them.

Sculpting brains — yours and theirs

That three-pound lump of tissue in your skull is flexible and vulnerable. This is good news and one of the most promising research findings in neuroscience. This flexibility enables the brain to recover from some traumas and break old habits. It also means you can change your brain.

Chapter 4 shows you how to train your brain and explains that the brains of your current and future employees are indeed very trainable. You have to appreciate the fact that you *can* teach an old dog new tricks!

In Chapter 19, you discover the differences between training new employees and those who have been with you for awhile. Both brains respond to training, but they do so in different ways. Finding out how to address those differences goes a long way toward making training stick.

Do you want the leader's brain?

People often confuse the roles of leader and manager. After you understand the brain, you will see that there are cognitive skill differences between the two. If you look at the function of the left hemisphere as described in Chapter 2, you see that one of its responsibilities is to handle routine procedures that have been previously established. This is the role of the manager. The manager manages what has previously been set up.

The leader, on the other hand, delegates the established processes to managers. New challenges, new problems, and unidentified situations are handled by the right hemisphere of the brain. The leader and the leadership team deal with these novel situations and create procedures to handle them.

A manager can be a leader, of course, and a leader may also be a manager. But in talking

about the brain, the leadership role is much like the right hemisphere's role, and the manager's role is akin to the left hemisphere's role. To run efficiently both the productive brain and the productive organization utilize both roles.

If you develop a leadership brain, you learn to recognize situations using your sensory systems and your emotions. Then you use your brain's CEO, the prefrontal cortex, along with your gut feelings to respond. If the situation is novel, your right hemisphere, and the right hemispheres of your leadership team, use their creative, holistic, spatial approach to create the response. In familiar situations, your left hemisphere relies on previously established processes.

You can develop yourself into the kind of leader you want to be.

Different strokes for different brains

Move over IQ, new intelligences are in town, and their number keeps growing. In Chapter 7, I share information about nine different ways of being smart. If you have a brain, you have some of each of these kinds of intelligence:

- ✓ Verbal/linguistic
- ✓ Mathematical/logical
- ✓ Musical/rhythmic
- ✓ Visual/spatial
- ✓ Bodily kinesthetic
- ✓ Naturalist
- ✓ Interpersonal
- ✓ Intrapersonal
- ✓ Philosophical/moral/ethical

I find that leaders and employees alike enjoy finding out more about themselves. And so Chapter 7 not only offers you a definition and examples of these intelligences, it provides an assessment for you. Knowing your strengths and weaknesses and helping your followers learn theirs is part of good leadership. This information may help you understand why you like something and why you're uncomfortable with some people, tasks, and environments.

Using Brain Science to Build Your Team

Information on the brain suggests ways you can change the brains of those you train. The person others consider the best may not be the best choice for your particular situation. Knowledge and skills are important, but employees also need to know how to build and maintain those relationships that keep your company thriving.



When you need to add to your team, former General Electric CEO Jack Welch recommends that you look at the best employees you have and find people just like them.

As a leader, you are called on to make hiring decisions that affect the entire organization. Whether you promote current employees or hire new ones, understanding how the brain functions helps you make those decisions.

Understanding male and female brains

Definite variations exist in male and female brains. The brain is highly influenced by its experiences; therefore, some of the characteristics you see in males or females may be from environmental influences or in combination with the brain differences.

Chapter 13 helps you address the common differences between male and female brains. For example, knowing that females tend to prefer eye contact while males may not can affect the way you share your vision and the values of your company.

Women *can* read maps and men *do* ask for directions. But there are some differences that may affect how they perform at work — not how well they perform, but rather how they do things differently.

Bridging the generation gap

Several generations often are at work in one organization. Becoming familiar with the work ethic, needs, and expectations of each of these generations can make the climate of your workplace less stressful for all.

As a leader involved in business in this technological world, you must catch up and keep up with the challenges of working with several generations. Your organization can be part of a global economy and become more successful with the assistance of the younger generations and the loyalty and values of the older generations. Find out in Chapter 15 how to take advantage of the characteristics of all employees.

Goal setting and goal getting

Whether rewards are tangible (like bonuses) or intangible (good feelings of accomplishment), goals help the brain focus. Part of the leader's job is to keep people centered on the mission of the organization. As your teams go through developmental stages from infancy to wisdom, their goals keep them on track. Chapter 14 shows you how to create goals that intrigue the right hemisphere and the left hemisphere of the brain.



Celebrate each accomplishment! Every step along the way to reaching a goal is cause for celebration. As a leader, you must shift your focus from your success to the successes of your employees.

Training with the Brain in Mind

One of the goals of most organizations is to have a staff of highly trained employees. Brain science has effectively shown that the way information is presented, rehearsed, and reviewed influences the effectiveness of that training. For instance, using emotion in training helps trainees store information more effectively.

CEOs cringe at the thought of having employees away from the job for one to three weeks for training. They soon realize, however, that good training is worth it. The results of training include

- ✓ Brains that see the big picture.
- ✓ Brains that have changed to use a new process or product.

- ✓ Brains that can see and share your vision.
- ✓ Brains that can work together as training creates relationships.
- ✓ Brains that can see beyond their own jobs.

In Chapter 16, I talk about mental maps — pictures of how people see the world and how things should work. Training provides the opportunity to change the mental maps of your employees so that they more closely match your own vision.

Supporting trainees' bodies and brains

As a former educator I can tell you that I would have loved nothing more than to have a classroom full of students who were ready to learn. Their parents thought they were ready, and most of the students thought they were ready. But they weren't ready because their bodies and their brains weren't fit enough to learn. It takes proper nutrition, the right amount of sleep, and regular exercise to truly make the brain ready for learning or training.

In Chapter 17, I share information about how proper nutrition affects the brains of your trainees as well as your employees and yourself. The amount of sleep your people get each night has an impact on what and how much they remember from the previous day's training. And exercise is key to getting blood and oxygen to the brain for optimal work.

You can take steps to make your trainings more productive. Lowering your trainees' stress levels through proper nutrition, rest, and exercise is a beginning. Get the most out of your training dollars by ensuring that your people are fit to be trained.

Making training stick

The most memorable and productive trainings are those that engage your brain. This engagement can be through emotional connections, humor, fun, or through personal connections to your life.

If you can answer the following question for each of your employees and trainees, you can head them in the right direction: What's in it for me? Both the CEOs of major corporations and every classroom teacher knows that if employees and students can see a connection to their lives, they will buy in to the learning.



Motivation comes from a desire or a need. See to it that your vision and your training goals fit into one of these two categories.

In Chapter 18, I share with you ways to make trainings stick. The emotional component, the memory systems involved, and the climate of the training make a big difference in how much information employees retain.

Training must also involve the support of both leaders and managers. Employees and new hires need to feel that they're part of something bigger — that their contributions are appreciated and make a difference.