

# Do We Need Leaders Who Are Left-Brained, Right-Brained or Something in Between?

**By:** Jonathan Farrington

I have always known that the very best sales professionals are predominantly right-brained: I also suspected the Finance Directors and Technical Directors were predominantly left-brained – so where does that leave CEO's and Managing Directors?

My perception was that it would all depend on their background but in fact recent experimentation currently taking place in the USA, which I am following with great interest, suggests that the most successful business leaders are in fact "balanced" That is to say they have no predominance, so they can think logically and methodically but equally, they can be creative and not be confined by paradigms

In general the left and right hemispheres of our brains process information in different ways. We tend to process information using our dominant side. However, the learning and thinking process is enhanced when both sides of the brain participate in a balanced manner. This means strengthening your less dominate hemisphere of the brain.

## **Linear vs Holistic Processing**

The left side of the brain processes information in a linear manner. It processes from part to whole. It takes pieces, lines them up and arranges them in a logical order; then it draws conclusions. The right brain however, processes from whole to parts, holistically. It starts with the answer. It sees the big picture first, not the details. If you are right-brained, you may have difficulty following a presentation unless you are given the big picture first.

## **Sequential vs Random Processing**

In addition to thinking in a linear manner, the left brain processes in sequence. The left brained person is a list maker. If you are left brained, you would enjoy making master schedules and daily planning. You complete tasks in order and take pleasure in checking them off when they are accomplished. The left brain is also at work in the linear and sequential processing of maths and in following directions.

By, contrast, the approach of the right-brained individual is random. If you are right-brained, you may flit from one tack to another. You will get just as much done, but perhaps without having addressed priorities. An assignment may be late or incomplete, not because you weren't working but because you were working on something else. But because of the random nature of your dominant side, you must make lists and you must make schedules.

## **Symbolic vs Concrete Processing**

The left brain has no trouble processing symbols. Many academic pursuits deal with symbols-such as letters, words, and mathematical notations. The left brained person tends to be comfortable with linguistic and mathematical endeavors. Left-brained students will probably just memorise vocabulary words or math formulas. The right brain, on the other hand, wants things to be concrete. The right brain person wants to see, feel, or touch the real object. Right brain students may have had trouble learning to read using phonics. They prefer to see words in context, to see how the formula works. To use your right brain, create opportunities for hands-on activities, use something real whenever possible. You may also want to draw out a math problem or illustrate your notes.

## **Logical vs Intuitive Processing**

The left brain processes in a linear, sequential, logical manner. When you process on the left side, you use information piece by piece to solve a math problem or work out a science experiment. When you read and listen, you look for the pieces so that you can draw logical conclusions. If you process primarily on the right side of the brain, you use intuition. You may know the right answer to a math problem but not be sure how you got it. You may have to start with the answer and work backwards. On a quiz, you have a gut feeling as to which answers are correct, and you are usually right. In writing, it is the left brain that pays attention to mechanics such as spelling, agreement, and punctuation. But the right side pays attention to coherence and meaning; that is, your right brain tells you it "feels" right.

## **Verbal vs Nonverbal Processing**

Left brain students have little trouble expressing themselves in words. Right brain students may know what they mean, but often have trouble finding the right words. The best illustration of this is to listen to people give directions. The left brain person will say something like "From here, go west three blocks and turn north on Vine Street. Go three or four miles and then turn east onto Broad Street." The right brain person will sound something like this: "Turn right (pointing right), by the church over there (pointing again). Then you will pass a McDonalds and a Walmart. At the next light, turn right toward the BP station."

## **In Summary:**

So what, I hear you say, has this got to do with Leadership? My answer is simple – we need our leaders to be organised, disciplined, analytical strategists **but** we also need them to be creative visionaries who are unafraid to constantly challenge paradigms. We do not need predominantly Left- Brain or predominantly Right Brained Captains – we need "something in the middle"!