

Use Your Whole Brain: Leveraging Right-Brained Thinking in a Left-Brained World

By: Debra Jennings

Modern learning has done us a disservice. From kindergarten on, we've been taught to learn with primarily one side of our brain – the left one – where analytical skills, facts, rational thought and logic are housed. Primary schools with shrinking budgets have focused their efforts on reading, writing and arithmetic, cutting "superfluous" classes in art, music and physical education. Even the SAT exam has traditionally focused on left-brained verbal skills and math.

But what if we moved beyond thinking with just the left side of our brain, and started incorporating skills from the right side? Well, we might learn something new that would help us become even better at what we do everyday. After all, it's the right side of the brain that helps us strategize and see the big picture. It's also the place where we get key business and life skills such as intuition, empathy, creative thinking and pattern recognition. You may think you already use the right side of your brain. No doubt there have been times you've trusted your gut and have been right. But the brain is a muscle – the more you flex it, the stronger it will be.

For organizations, flexing the right side of the brain can dramatically improve decision making, team building and innovation, and ultimately drive greater organizational performance. In fact, whole brain thinking is a secret weapon that successful organizations are using to evolve their business to the next level, and stay ahead of the competition. When you combine left-brained data-driven decision making skills with non-linear right-brained thinking, the result is greater insight and more well-rounded experience that will ultimately help you arrive at better solutions to complex problems.

Don't think for a moment this shift toward the "fuzzy" right brain isn't based in metrics. In fact, it is the future of metrics. Witness the groundswell of interest in innovation from leading CEOs, perhaps driven by the ever-increasing pace and pressure from global competitors with access to the same data, tools and cheap labor. What CEOs now realize is that having data is less important than what you do with it.

As Daniel Pink writes in his book, "A Whole New Mind," the future belongs to a very different kind of person with a very different kind of mind. According to Pink, "The era of 'left-brain' dominance, and the information age that it engendered, is giving way to a new world in which creative and holistic 'right brain' abilities mark the fault line between who gets ahead and who falls behind." In his book, Pink looks at what it takes for organizations to excel now that having access to data is significantly less important than knowing how to create, inspire and drive purpose.

For those still wondering "where's the beef?", this new approach offers several benefits including:

- Improved working environments where more high-quality ideas are fostered and put to use.
- Stronger team performance through a greater understanding of how people operate.
- More informed decision making that takes into account all sides of an issue.
- Higher performing organizations as the troops rally behind the purpose of the company.

So what can you do to incorporate the two halves of your brain? To begin with, you can introduce more creative problem-solving tools. Instead of trying to develop rational, left-brain solutions to the next problem your team encounters, try using a technique such as brainstorming or random picture association to encourage ideas to surface from the right side of the brain.

In addition to more creative problem-solving sessions, you easily institute any number of right-brain activities, such as team-building exercises, sanctioned recreational areas or social lunchtime gatherings. You can paint drab white walls with bright colors, or even put up murals. The integration of music or movement also stimulates the right side of the brain. And, perhaps most importantly, an environment where ideas of all types are lauded, and where everyone is encouraged to think outside the box, can go a long way toward enabling employees to use their whole brain.