Leading With Your Brain
How to Harness the Power of Your Brain
to Be a Better Leader
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*Why do people do what they do?*

*What causes part of your team to follow through with direction while others fail time and time again?*

*Why do you lose your cool when you don’t mean to?*

*Why don’t your customers always respond the way you think they will?*

*What causes some people to excel and rise to the top of an organization and others to repeatedly fail to achieve their goals?*

In previous decades, one might have thought this had to do with personality or unique individual qualities, but the latest research in Neuroscience now leads us to understand it might have more to do with

1. the physical brain AND

2. the interface of the brain and the mysterious natured *mind*

When working well together, the brain and your mind determine any individual’s success or failure. That might sound far-fetched but imagine the implications....

**What if every member of your team could excel?**

**What if YOU could achieve any goal you set for yourself, obtain peak performance and enjoy those results more than you do right now?**

This guide is an introduction to Brain Health, Neuro Nutrition and Neuroscience AND how it affects your performance as a leader in your business, company, family, community and our world. (not to mention how your brain rubs off on your team)

Years ago, I was in sales management and somehow...I rose to a fairly high level. I say *somehow* because looking back I was functioning with a brain in *shock*, very depleted in neurotransmitter levels and completely internalizing stress to a point of rock bottom burn out. You could ask anyone who worked with me at the time and they would probably say that I worked hard and got results and maybe even that people liked me, but they would never describe me as a trail-blazing type of innovative leader. I did EVERTYING the hard way-emotionally and literally—which meant I eventually had to walk away from that career just to catch my breath. To anyone reading this who worked for me then...I didn’t know any better at the time! 😊 But I do now!!!

After the “break down” dust settled, I went on a 6-7 year journey to try to understand:
• why I felt soooo stressed EVEN when results were good
• what I could have done differently
• why I only saw a few “really cool” people I worked with and for who made success look easy...going with the flow

I went on to study Health & Wellness and eventually specialize in Neuro Nutrition and Neuroscience. My intention with this guide is to share some of my knowledge, give you a short cut to what I learned over 6-7 years and most of all to (bare minimum) create awareness around the notion that health and especially brain health MATTERS when it come to leadership skills.

**Leadership CAN Be Learned**

Despite our expression “They are a born leader”, most research agrees that leadership CAN in fact be learned.

Mark Sarner, President of Manifest Communications, Canada’s leading social-marketing agency spells out “leadership” for Fast Company Magazine as:

**Thinking:** gathering, sorting and structuring information while connecting it new ways
**Seeing:** seeing frontwards and backwards clearly and forming a vision from what you see
**Feeling:** realistic and genuine empathy for your team
**Listening:** the ability to listen vs hear, listening to your team, your competition, your customers and yourself
**Speaking:** informing, convincing, uniting, motivating, directing, persuading-solild communication
**Walking:** walking your talk

**Fitness:** physical, mental and moral strength and endurance to carry the responsibility

Every single one of those ability comes from good brain function, good brain care and good brain training. These skills also rely on a 3 way communication:

• You leading your mind
• Your mind instructing your brain
• Your brain running smoothly and communicating to your body

**A High Functioning Brain**

Let’s start with the physical brain because no amount of good direction or good training can compensate for an “out of shape” brain. In many ways, the brain is no different than other organs in your body. It needs hydration, nutrition, detoxification and blood flow. You may tend to focus on keeping your body in shape. I encourage you to take the same approach with your brain! Here’s some tips for keeping your brain fit and fabulous (and these REALLY do make a difference on your memory, quick decision making and emotional resilience)
Sleep - I’m going to state this as directly as I can. IF you only get 6 hours of sleep or more, it reduces the amount of blood flow to your brain and impairs your thinking in every way. Period.

Variety - the brain loves newness! Your mind might now be crazy about change, but the brain actually responds to a new pattern by “lighting up” and forming new neural pathways. Take a different route to work, talk to someone you don’t know, go to a new restaurant, travel or learn a new language. These are all super brain exercises!

Nutrients - I typically take an individual, specific approach to supplements. It is important, in general, to know exactly why you are taking a supplement and that your body needs it. I make some exception with the brain because science shows us almost any brain can benefit from certain nutrients in higher concentration than available in food. Here’s my top 3:

Fish Oil - the brain is 60% fats and needs omega 3’s for cellular structure and agility. Most people today are way out of balance with omega 6’s and 3’s and therefore Fish Oil supplements are necessary. Look for a Fish Oil with 2-1 ration between EPA and DHA. I like one from Infinity Health.

Glutathione - this is the brain’s master anti-oxidant and helps the brain from “rusting” (oxidation). In particular, glutathione helps detox heavy metals out of the brain which is considered a very good preventative measure against Alzheimer’s.

B Vitamins: B 12, B6 and Methylated Folate are critical for much of our brain function, but perhaps the most compelling reason to provide these nutrients to your brain is that they prevent brain shrinkage.

Limit Alcohol or Drugs - The consumptions of drugs and alcohol shrinks the frontal lobes of the brain. This is the part of the brain that processes information, makes decisions and solves problems. Your thinking skills WILL be diminished the more you consume these substances.

Exercise - Brain aging is shown to begin in some people as early as their 40’s - when the hippocampus can start shrinking by .5% each year. Exercise, even just a brisk walking routine, has shown to increase the size of the hippocampus and increase levels of BDNF (brain derived neurotrophic factor) which helps support the health, growth and survival of neurons which translates to... learning, memory and higher thinking. Strength training is also critical as, among many other things, it in particular reduces inflammation in the brain (and heart and other organs).

These are a few of the lifestyle choices that support your brain. At the end of the day...YOU are mainly the effect of your brain!

Neuro Nutrition

Feeling good and being a good leader, starts in your head, literally. Your brain produces four types of neurotransmitters that insure you have mood resilience, meaning the ability to experience true emotions and then bring yourself back to emotional balance. When these brain chemicals are deficient,
you can experience false moods. A well fed brain does not get “stuck” in a mood or produce a mood that is not based on an actual situation or trigger. You can think of it as four “gas tanks” in your brain. Each gas tank takes its own specific fuel and must be nourished properly to keep the tank full and your emotions in check.

A well-stocked brain will help you feel self confident, positive, flexible and alert. Sufficient neurotransmitters promote good sleep, the ability to relax, high energy, enthusiasm and the ability to tolerate stress. Even a good sense of humor is the result of balanced brain chemistry.

Neurotransmitter deficiency has risen as a result of increased stress, artificial addictives in our food, low calorie dieting, lack of exercise and reliance on processed sugar and carbohydrates. Even in the case of a genetic inheritance, these brain chemical imbalances are easily correctable. You are not destined to feel this way and it is not an inherent personality disorder that you have to learn to live with. A nutritional repair plan including the foods and target nutrients (amino acids) that quickly and simply repair neurotransmitter deficiency, eliminating problems including:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Low Self Esteem
- Weight Gain
- Unable to Relax/Panic
- Addiction
- Cravings for Sugar, Starch & Alcohol
- Winter blues, SAD
- Gi/Stomach Issues

- Negativity
- Irritability
- Hyper-Activity
- Obesity
- Phobias
- Compulsive Thoughts/Behaviors
- Add
- Worry
- Sensitivity/Crying

- Stress
- Tension
- Panic
- Guilt
- ADD
- Overwhelm
- Poor Focus, Concentration, Memory
As a leader, it is important to observe your own emotions and behavior as well as those of the people you lead. For the purpose of reinforcing this understanding that BRAIN FOOD can be the “cause” of emotions and habits that appear to be personality based, let me give you a few direct examples:

**Doubtfulness or negativiti**-results from low Serotonin

**Procrastination**-results from low Dopamine and other Catecholamines

**Anxiety**-results from low Serotonin

**Poor Stress Tolerance**-results from low GABA

**Panic**-results from low Serotonin

**Apathy**-results from low Catecholamine

**Poor Focus or Concentration** (i.e. follow through)-results from low Catecholamine

**Sensitivity** or getting emotional over small things-results from low Endorphin

Neuro Nutrition is my specialty. I have too much to say about it to cover it all in this guide. Neuro transmitter deficiency is a physical state of depletion that can be corrected through targeting and foundational nutrition. I liken it to running a marathon with a broken leg. I imagine some of you can do it (I’ve worked for and with these badge of honor types)....you drag yourself, hop, crawl.....wouldn’t it be much easier and more fun if you healed the leg?

Just like a broken leg, you can also heal neurotransmitter depletion and make the work you do easier and more fun. You could guide your team to heal these depletions in their brains and they would no longer display these “qualities.” In my years of helping people repair their brain chemistry depletion I’ve seen it cure addictions, repair relationships, prevent divorce, cause parents and children to communicate, allow people to excel at work and in their passion projects and heal medical conditions aggravated by a poor diet.

Seriously...check it out! I invite you to take this [Self Scoring Brain Chemistry Assessment](http://journal.onewholehealth.com/assessment/74) to see how Brain Chemical Depletion is Hi-jacking YOUR Awesomeness!

**Only a Calm Brain Can Lead**

**What is leadership if not problem solving?**

Only a CALM brain can learn, make decisions and problem solve.

I’m going to walk through a very simple explanation of how different parts of the brain interact and how to keep them calm, but first I want to share a very important fact that all leaders should know:

*Your energy and state of mind affects your team in 1/20th of a second*

*The state of your brain rubs off on the people around you in 1/20th of a second*

*You don’t even have to say A WORD and this happens.....in 1/20th of a second*
Meet Your Brain...

Prefrontal Cortex—here’s where present, mindful, conscious decisions are made. The PF makes decisions, does calculations, talks through a problem AND helps you stay focused on what you are doing. This part of the brain isn’t fully developed until age 25 or so. That’s why you can’t rent a car until you are that age. (Hmm...side bar...should a pre-mature brain be sent to war, drink alcohol, have a child, DATE or even get married? I’ll leave you to ponder that)

The PF gets its information from the Amygdala, but only when the Amygdala is calm.............................When all is good, the PF receives that calm information and passes anything worth remembering on to the Hippocampus.

The Amygdala—sends or blocks information based on the “state” it’s in. It’s most important job is protection, so if it believes there is any danger, it will block information from the PF so you go back to cave-man like reactions and don’t take time to think. This is the center of fight, flight or freeze. It’s REALLY helpful when a car swerves into your lane on the freeway. The response of your Amygdala has a big impact on emotions and the emotions that you attach to an experience “store” in the hippocampus.

The Hippocampus—creates, stores and processes important facts and memories. These memories can serve up automatic responses based on past (not present) events.

So...the short skinny is....your habits and reacations are driven by the amygdale or hippocampus and NOT by your prefrontal-cortex—which helps you stay in the CURRENT moment and make a fresh choice. If everyone could act from prefrontal-cortex all the time there would likely be no wars, no arguments, no accidents....total nirvana. Well, except for the fact that you wouldn’t move out of the way when a tree was about to fall on your head.

The key to good leadership is deeply rooted in your ability to BE and bring yourself back to the front of your brain.

How do you do this?

Here’s a great list of parasympathetic nervous enhancers that calm the Amygdala and bring your back to your best thinking mind...

Meditation
Deep Breathing
Laughter
Yoga
Laughter Yoga
Journaling
Petting your dog
Riding your horse
Orgasm
Hugs
Sunshine
Fresh Air

Granted….you can’t “do” all of these at work 😊

So what CAN YOU DO?

Deep Breaths

One of the simplest exercises I know is Ancient Yogic Breathing. I’ll share Andrew Weil’s description of how to do this breathing but know that “ancient” goes back a bit further than Andrew.

This exercise is utterly simple, takes almost no time, requires no equipment and can be done anywhere. Although you can do the exercise in any position, sit with your back straight while learning the exercise. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there through the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward.

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
- Hold your breath for a count of seven.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight.
- This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

Note that you always inhale quietly through your nose and exhale audibly through your mouth. The tip of your tongue stays in position the whole time. Exhalation takes twice as long as inhalation. The absolute time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed the exercise up but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8 for the three phases. With practice you can slow it all down and get used to inhaling and exhaling more and more deeply.

Try it…try it THE MINUTE something frustrates you on the job! Try it in 1/20th of a second BEFORE your stress becomes their stress!

One other tip I’ll share in regards to calming your Amygdala….the brain can’t differentiate between real laughter or fake laughter, real happiness or fake happiness or, unfortunately, real stress or perceived stress. So here’s where YOU must lead the mind to. Pretend you aren’t stressed. Pretend you are happy. My friend Robin Von Schwarz, an expert in Neuroplasticy, suggests a simple exercise…

Put a pen or pencil in your mouth. It might look like you are biting down on it out of frustration, but really you are turning the muscles around your mouth UP. This sends a signal to the brain that you are happy. You by-pass the mind and whatever it is thinking and direct the brain to make happy chemicals and hormones and form new neural pathways! SIMPLE!
This is the same principle we apply in Laughter Yoga and THE REASON I am a Laughter Yoga Leader!

The other SUPER important ritual to practice for your calm brain is TAKE DOWN TIME. Do it!!! End of story.

It’s True...Practice Makes Perfect

In the beginning of this guide, I mentioned that leading with your brain is a 3 Way Communication. I’ve shared about your physical brain and how YOU can lead the whole function.

What about the mind?
The mind is the piece that can interfere or derail YOUR best intentions and send the brain down the right path.

You can’t find the mind in your head, but we know it dictates who you are through thoughts and beliefs.

Just like any other habit, thought habits become automatic. At the core, a thought develops from a belief and a decision, but over time, thoughts run on auto-pilot. Most of your thoughts may be based on beliefs you created a long time ago, but have forgotten (at least consciously).

The thing to know about thoughts (especially automatic thoughts) is that they drive behavior and energy. Thoughts literally create. Thoughts create your mood, your day, your physical surroundings and even your physical body. On a physical level, Neuroscience and Quantum Physics show us that a thought literally changes the composition of your brain.

On an emotional level, your thoughts reveal your beliefs and your beliefs create your life’s experience-your perceived reality. Every single element of your life experience is birthed by these beliefs. Your beliefs lead to thoughts that lead to your perception of yourself and the world.

YOU have complete power of choice over your thoughts and can reprogram your thought habits to create the perceptions, energy and physicality that brings you the most joy! YOU are a powerful creator! Your thoughts are, after all, just a product of your mind and your mind is only ONE, small part of YOU! Even "outside" events or situations cannot control your thoughts or reality.

Life (and company, business) experiences are not created by what happens, they are created by what you THINK about what happens.

Events or situations are neutral until YOU attach a meaning.

Identify a thought that brings your energy down or makes you feel bad. Then ask yourself these questions:
1. What must my mind believe in order to have this thought?
2. How does this belief make me feel?
3. Do I want to keep feeling this way?
4. What upgraded thought CHOICE can I practice that would make me feel better?

**Bonus**: What happens when I practice thinking the exact opposite belief, just out of curiosity?

You can use physical laws of energy to help you create new beliefs that drive new thoughts and create new neural pathways in your brain.

**The laws of energy are:**

- Two opposing forms of energy cannot be in the same place at the same time
- Like attracts like

When you consider the beliefs behind your thoughts and behavior, you can exercise your freedom of choice and create any future you desire!

YOU, the leader, can also influence the thoughts of those you lead!
Help them acknowledge.....thoughts are just thoughts.

Here’s the last thing I will say about changing your thoughts. In order of for a new thought to actually affect a dendrite in your physical brain and form new neural pathway, you must have a FELT experience. In other words, you can’t just THINK about your new choice. This is why affirmation are limited in their effectiveness. The brain needs action, variety. ACT like you believe your new thought. Take on the dare. Travel on the new path. Stand up! Speak out! Practice and play with your new belief!

Obviously, this is has been a quick overview of your mind, your brain and YOU. Every single suggestion I’ve made with benefit you, your team indirectly through YOU AND, if you are a courage leader who incorporates these techniques into the time you spend with those you lead, can change the brains and the life of EVERY person you come in contact with.

Maybe you’ll start tomorrow’s meeting with a laugh?
I hope so. Your brain hopes so.