

Guest Blog for **CORPORATE REBELS**

Neuroscience Shows Us That The Way We Work Is Wrong

March 12, 2017



A guest blog by Danielle Freude-Hellebrand, executive coach at BetterBrains@Work.

Slowly we are waking up to realize that a lot we've been taught about management and leadership is wrong. Most of us grew up in the business world believing that a manager's principal job is to supervise and control team members. To assign work to and to evaluate and motivate with carrots and sticks. I always wondered why leadership training was often about telling employees something, instead of asking them what they think. Asking for something – rather than telling or directing people – builds a psychological place of equity.

While it has been popular in recent decades to focus on scientific thinking and to downplay the role of emotions, this is actually a strategic error. Emotions are an important and useful element of informational processing in the human brain. That's why an understanding of human behavior and neuroscience is necessary.

In essence, my goal is to make this complex information as practical and as easy to understand as possible. It's about enabling people with no neuroscientific background to understand and use some of the latest discoveries in their personal and business lives.

We are wired to connect

We humans are social beings that thrive when working in groups. Throughout history we have been enhanced our chances of survival by sharing resources, knowledge and workloads. Isolation from a group decreased our survival chances. As a result, our brain is highly aware

of our ongoing social status. Is there a threat or reward? Do I feel safe? Today, the workplace is the biggest social environment the brain experiences.

So our brains do not operate in isolation to one another. Everything continues to build on each other. We are incredibly social creatures, as research from Dr. Daniel Siegel shows in his book 'Interpersonal Neurobiology'. Our brain is not only connected to every cell in our body. A surprising, direct and subconscious connection exists with brains of other people via our senses. Whether we realize or not, we are constantly reading each other's facial expressions and body language. According to Giovanni Frazzetto our brain is constantly providing us with feedback in our social interactions with others and our environment. There are fluid borders between internal and external worlds. A workplace is an energy field. Good and bad energy – trust and fear – move in waves around us. We can feel them if we are paying attention.

Leadership matters

That is why leadership matters. Bringing brain science into the board room holds the key to long-term success, says Dr. Evian Gordon. Our brains control everything we do. Leaders set the culture and are responsible for overseeing the environment in which people are asked to work. Because people will act in accordance with their environment. So creating a place people want to work for matters. Every company is powered by humans. Nothing but human ingenuity and passion can make your company grow or thrive. The real value a company has are customers who are satisfied because of the people working in the company who are motivated. Customers are actually buying the interaction and the treatment and the feeling.

Trust

There is a universal hidden language; and that is called 'trust'. When we distrust, we activate our 'fear-network'. Fear locks all doors to the parts that we need to think and feel empathy. When we feel safe, the brain opens up. Only then we are able to listen and connect, to prime conversations for mutual success. Kindness creates a field of power. The trust level on a team is a far better indicator and predictor of results – according to Amy Edmondson at Harvard Business School – than the individual performance metrics of team members, which are only numeric representations of the good or bad energy swirling around. So it is crucial to create safe work-environments, where you can share failure and mistakes. We can only be innovative and successful when we can learn from failures and road blocks.

Purpose

Work plays an enormous role in determining people's self-worth. People want to go to work and feel valued. People want to go work alongside other caring people and feel great about what they have accomplished. When people feel good about themselves at work, they go home and treat their families and friends and communities better. Humans are motivated by their confidence in and momentum towards a purpose.

Tribe

Choose your 'tribe' carefully! You are the average of the 5 people you spend the most time with. It may be common sense, yet uncommon practice. In a tribe you have to contribute, you have to stay healthy, you have to learn, and you have to help people flourish. We have the

interpersonal neurobiological need to live, play and work together. We want to be liked and have a need to belong.

Life does not promise us stability. It gives us a laboratory where we can experiment. And we should. Because what is the point of being alive if you never get to do what you came to this planet to do? We are all people with finite lifespans. We do not earn power by being self-focused. But by consistently acting in ways that improves the lives of others. We have this deep cultural intuition that nice guys finish last. But nothing could be further from the truth.

Love

Someone asked Warren Buffet what his definition of success was. He said: ‘ Count the number of people who love you. And to be loved, you have to be lovable. You should hang around good people’.

Being more social is the key to get a more happy, healthy and productive and inspiring life. I love the work of Matthew Lieberman on this topic. Social connection is one of the best predictors of happiness in life. It is important to become smarter at navigating your social highway. Sometimes I forget and I have to remind myself of the importance of my limited time in this world.

Think of the mind’s eye as a flashlight. The flashlight can search for something positive or negative. We all can control the flashlight and look for the positive in this world. I am glad to meet people who are also aware of a deeper sense of purpose. Who are looking for companies and jobs that serves ‘life’. We need to reinvent, reorganize and reconfigure our ways of creating and delivering value. In our hearts and souls we know that our work can be meaningful, creating value for ourselves, each other and the world.

Sharing is caring

Nothing in nature lives for itself. Rivers don’t drink their own water. Trees don’t eat their own fruit. The sun doesn’t shine for itself. Living for each other with a purpose is the rule of nature.

As a kind of evangelist of ‘better brains at work’ I like to share my knowledge of translating science on the social brain to improve the way we work. To help improve the way organizations work around managing people. Purpose is the glue of the organization. With that I follow my ‘evolutionary purpose’ and feel how it benefits others doing something of value. Because impact is important to all of us.

When the time is ripe for certain things, these things appear in different places. There is consciousness and awareness on the planet. More and more company’s think about their ROS, their Return on Society.

Knowing about the social brain can give us a better and richer understanding of ourselves, of the world and of our relationships, says Dr. Louis Cozolino. And with that understanding comes wisdom, and confidence and the capacity to make a difference. Life is not a rehearsal, it’s a practice. And it’s a pleasure to create a more purposeful future with inspiring and smart people like The Corporate Rebels, with the wonderful people of MenschBank in Germany and

especially with my dear colleges of ECO-International. We think about which footprint we want to leave. We owe it to future generations, but we also owe it to ourselves.